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Youth Employment Initiative Process Evaluation: Assessment of Strategic Fit, Design and Implementation

October 2017

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Summary

The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is a European Commission funded intervention to support youth employment in regions particularly affected by youth unemployment. This report presents the findings of a process evaluation of the strategic fit, design and early implementation of the YEI in England, undertaken between July and November 2016.

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List of abbreviations

AME	Annually Managed Expenditure
BME	Black and minority ethnic
CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
CFO	Co-financing organisation
CIE	Counterfactual Impact Evaluation
CPP	Commission Position Paper
CSR	Country Specific Recommendation
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DEL	Departmental Expenditure Limits
DfE	Department for Education
DOB	Date of Birth
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EC	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
ESFD	European Social Fund Division
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ILR	Individualised Learner Records
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
IP	Investment priority
ITT	Invitation to Tender
LA	Local authority
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership

MA	Managing Authority
MI	Management Information
NEET	not in employment, education or training
NPD	National Pupil Database
NRP	National Reform Programme
NUTS	Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics
OP	Operational Programme
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
RTI	Real Time Information
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SROI	Social Return On Investment
ToC	Theory of Change
UK	United Kingdom
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
VfM	Value for Money
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative

Glossary of terms

Counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE)	CIE is a type of impact evaluation using a counterfactual analysis approach. Counterfactual analysis compares the real, observed outcomes of an intervention with the outcomes that would have been achieved had the intervention not been in place (the counterfactual).
Difference-in-differences	Difference-in-differences is a statistical technique used to estimate the impact of an intervention on a set of specified outcomes. It mimics an experimental research design by comparing the average change on these outcomes experienced by a treatment group with that experienced by a comparison group.
European Social Fund	The European Social Fund (ESF) is the European Union's (EU's) main financial instrument for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for EU citizens. The European Commission works with countries to set the ESF's priorities and determine how it spends its resources.
ESF Managing Authority	The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ESF Division is the ESF Managing Authority for England. It has overall responsibility for administering and managing the ESF and reporting to the European Commission.
ESF Operational Programme	Operational Programmes describe the priorities for ESF activities and their objectives at national or regional levels within the European Union.
Local Enterprise Partnerships	LEPs are voluntary partnerships of local authorities and businesses with responsibility for deciding on general economic priorities at the local level.
LEP Area European Structural and Investment Funds Sub-Committee	Each LEP area has a sub-committee that provides implementation advice to the Managing Authorities (MAs) for the ESIF Growth Programme in England. Their role is to advise MAs on local growth conditions and priorities with regard to project call specifications, funding applications and implementation.
Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics	NUTS areas are geographical territories identified through a standard developed and regulated by the EU in order to reference the sub-division of countries for statistical purposes.

Propensity score matching (PSM)	PSM is a statistical technique used to estimate the impact of an intervention on a set of specific outcomes. It mimics an experimental research design by comparing outcomes for a treatment group and a statistically generated comparison group, which is similar to the treatment group in its composition.
Theory of change	Theory of change is an evaluation methodology drawing on work developed in the United States to evaluate community and social programmes. The approach involves identifying the logic behind an intervention in terms of its rationale and aim, key objectives, inputs, activities and short, medium and long-term outcomes and testing this 'intervention logic' through a range of evaluative methods.

Executive summary

Introduction

This summary presents the findings from an evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in England, undertaken by Ecorys between July and November 2016. The YEI represents part of the European Commission's (EC's) policy response to the social and economic challenges stemming from the financial crisis of 2007-2008, and is implemented in England as part of the European Social Fund (ESF). The evaluation focused on assessing strategic fit, design and early implementation.

Methodology

The YEI was evaluated using a combination of primary and secondary data collection and analysis. A structured review of relevant documentation was undertaken at the outset of the study, followed by fieldwork undertaken between August and November 2016. Fieldwork involved a series of telephone interviews which formed the primary evaluation evidence source. Informed by a series of semi-structured topic guides, 56 interviews were undertaken as follows:

- five with ESF Managing Authority (MA) and EC representatives;
- 11 with European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) sub-committee representatives in YEI-eligible areas; and
- 40 with representatives of YEI providers.

The fieldwork results were integrated with the desk research to produce a series of key findings summarised under the sections that follow, each of which corresponds to a chapter in the main report. Following presentation of the key findings, this summary offers some issues for consideration arising from the evaluation.

Key findings

Strategic fit

There is a clear read across between YEI objectives at the European Union (EU), national and local levels, indicating a high degree of coherence in respect of the initiative's policy and operational intent. Likewise, the YEI projects developed at the local level all reflect the relevant EU and national guidance. While a few stakeholders questioned the YEI's relevance due to changes in the youth unemployment context between the initiative's inception and the start of delivery, most felt the YEI remained highly relevant. Statistical evidence concerning rising not in employment, education or training (NEET) levels in some YEI-eligible areas between 2013 and 2015, and levels of inactive young people not falling as fast as unemployed young people in the UK over the same timeframe, adds further weight to this view.

In England, the YEI complements a number of other policies and initiatives, including those relating to traineeships, apprenticeships and other mainstream employability provision delivered through Jobcentre Plus. In line with the ESF Operational Programme (OP), the YEI has been designed to complement and not duplicate existing provision, in particular through providing more tailored, intensive and wrap-around support for specific target groups further from the labour market.

Design and development of the YEI

Although only a few stakeholders interviewed had an awareness of the development of the YEI at the programme level, in particular in terms of partnership working between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as the ESF MA and the EC, those that did expressed positive views. It was noted that the Commission had been responsive in clarifying the potential for flexibilities within the regulations governing the YEI, and had sought to enable these where possible. Likewise, the general view was that partnership working between the ESF MA and local partners in designing the programme in the English context had functioned effectively.

The evaluation revealed a number of variations in relation to the involvement of local partners in project design. Local ESIF sub-committee representatives generally felt that they were able to substantially influence the calls for proposals developed, and hence impact on local project design from a strategic perspective. However, such representatives often felt that an ongoing role beyond this would have been beneficial to ensure that contracted provision met local needs. Conversely, the point was also made that such a role could constitute a conflict of interest where such representatives were from, or linked to, organisations with a role in YEI delivery. In addition, the restrictions on such a role stemming from the regulatory and governance arrangements for the ESF programme as a whole were also cited.

In general, the initial design phase was felt to have worked well. Collaboration between YEI project partners in developing their bids and projects was common, and was seen as a contributory factor to this perception. In several instances workshops were used to engage local partners, providing the opportunity to showcase provision as well as offering a forum to share lessons on what had worked well and less well with existing provision. Interviewees also emphasised the key role that good local relationships between the partners involved had played in initial YEI design.

Accepting this, some design challenges were encountered; in particular:

- the mismatch between the boundaries of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas and YEI-eligible areas;
- the perceived restrictiveness of the YEI guidance and eligibility rules; and
- the requirement to source local match funding.

While these were felt to have been overcome in many cases, restrictions on the ability to support those at risk of becoming NEET was felt to have compromised the potential impact of the YEI in some quarters. A combination of these challenges also represented the key reasons for two LEP areas not being able to take-up the YEI funding allocated.

In terms of factors influencing design, the localism agenda was widely seen as a key consideration. In particular this local focus was viewed as adding value to existing provision and helping to address gaps in services. Learning from partners' previous experience of working with the NEET target group was also described as a primary driver for the design of provision. Value for money (VfM) was also considered by providers. However, interviewees were generally clear that the main consideration was developing a set of provisions to meet the needs of the target group, rather than monetary concerns per se. Also, in terms of factors influencing design, interviewees generally felt that ESF cross-cutting themes (sustainable development, gender equality and equal opportunities) were taken into account in the design phase.

While some interviewees felt that YEI procurement processes had worked reasonably well, a notable theme was the length of time taken from launching calls for proposals to the signature of funding agreements. Many interviewees stated that this had significantly impacted on their delivery plans, and some providers mentioned that delays would lead to an underspend due to changes in the local match funding available in the time period concerned. Some interviewees also noted that they felt under pressure to start delivery as quickly as possible in order to achieve their targets and provide support to young people waiting for the provision.

Implementation I: YEI provision, governance and partnerships

In general, the provision examined closely mirrored that anticipated in the ESF OP. A good deal of commonality was also evident in terms of the delivery processes used to provide a framework for the provision. Typically this involved a number of actions being implemented at various points within the YEI 'participant journey'; for example, engagement, needs assessment and identification of support provision.

All YEI projects have adopted governance arrangements which seek to inform, oversee and guide provision at both strategic and operational levels. Providers were generally positive about the arrangements adopted. Local steering group meetings were typically reported to be regular and well-attended, and local operational groups to have high levels of engagement. Benefits noted included helping to ensure that all partners understand the provision available and can develop suggestions for improvement. While governance arrangements were seen as positive by provider staff, several local ESIF sub-committee representatives noted that they would like to see more feedback on the projects in their area. This was seen in some instances as reflecting a gap in governance arrangements in that some of these representatives felt they should have more of an influencing and oversight role as part of YEI implementation.

YEI delivery has often built on pre-existing partnerships, or at least relationships, between the local organisations involved, in some cases offering the opportunity to formalise these partnerships. In some cases the initiative offered the chance to reconsider previous arrangements and bring together different providers to meet the varying needs of NEET young people. It was also apparent that the partnerships developed had remained fairly stable from the design and procurement stages through to implementation. Where changes have occurred, this was mainly to add new partners to deliver a certain type of provision identified as being required.

In general, interviewees felt that it was too early to make strong judgements around how well delivery partnerships were functioning. Accepting this, some provider representatives cited that their partnerships seemed to be operating well, while others felt that fully cohesive partnership working was yet to emerge. The main challenges faced thus far were typically described as early 'teething issues' around getting processes and paperwork in place, and establishing effective working relationships, though representatives were confident these would be resolved.

There was little indication from the fieldwork that processes to identify and share good practice had been implemented. In part this related to delays in project implementation, and a perceived need to prioritise getting delivery up and running. Of those projects that have been sharing good practice, partnership meetings were the most commonly used forum for transferring learning. Generally, however, it was more common for provider representatives to feel that such good practice sharing would occur, but that implementation would have to bed in further first.

Implementation II: Engagement, delivery and overall implementation

In general, referral and engagement processes amongst the projects examined were reported to be functioning well. Engagement included referrals from Jobcentre Plus, housing authorities, other employment programmes, partner agencies and other local support organisations. Successful methods cited included targeting areas where young people gather, outreach activity outside of working hours, and co-location with relevant services.

Many provider representatives felt, however, that YEI eligibility criteria were contributing to lower-than-anticipated numbers being supported. A common theme was that eligibility evidence requirements were challenging in the context of the target group, some of whom may not have a permanent address and/or access to documentation such as a driving licence or passport. Despite there being some flexibility in these requirements, it appeared that such an understanding was not always present among provider staff.

Mixed feedback was offered more generally about whether or not the numbers engaged by the YEI projects to date are in line with expectations. Projects were variously reported to be exceeding targets, on track, or struggling to engage the number of young people anticipated. It was also noted, in some instances, that the targets set in relation to particular groups, for example by gender, did not reflect the actual demographic patterns on the ground.

Across the stakeholders interviewed, YEI delivery was described as going broadly to plan, though in many cases it was seen as being too early to offer a fully detailed assessment, or to comment significantly on what was working well or less well. However, many of the project staff interviewed felt that the case-worker function – involving building up a relationship with a young person to encourage sustained engagement – was proving effective in particular. The flexibility of the provision was also cited as important in implementation so far, with the ability to tailor support due the breadth of the YEI project partners being noted as key.

In terms of innovation, YEI projects were most likely to be building on or utilising provision already present. In general, projects were not adopting a completely innovative approach on the one hand, but neither were they completely transposing existing provision into the YEI context on the other.

Although it was a requirement at the YEI procurement stage for projects to identify how the ESF cross-cutting themes would be reflected in the provision, the fieldwork revealed that not much has been actively done to date to ensure these themes are reflected in delivery. It was common for provider representatives to note that the focus thus far has been on getting delivery up and running. From this perspective, while cross-cutting themes were seen as important, it was noted that more attention is likely to be paid to this aspect once project delivery is more advanced.

Although projects were generally affected by delays in procurement and contracting, provider representatives reported having positive experiences with DWP's contract managers. However, interviewees highlighted that queries took some time to be answered. In some cases such answers were also cited as unclear or ambiguous. A further issue for provider representatives was the widespread view that the YEI claims process is particularly onerous, with administrative processes being seen as extensive and time-consuming. A number of provider representatives thus felt that greater clarity and consistency in guidance would help to address some of these issues around contract management and compliance that had emerged to date.

At the time of the fieldwork, between August and November 2016, some provider representatives reported that their spending on the provision was not yet operating to profile. This was largely perceived as having been caused by delays in procurement and starting delivery. However, in most cases representatives were confident that spend would return to profile once projects were fully up to speed, and/or once contract variations to reflect underspend caused by delays were agreed.

Issues for consideration

Several issues for consideration arising from the evaluation are outlined in the conclusion to the main evaluation report. These encompass reviewing the scale of need for further provision in light of possible future procurement rounds, exploring how the length of time for procurement can be reduced, ensuring that all delivery providers are aware of flexibilities in eligibility evidence requirements and the location of provider guidance, and considering how local ESIF sub-committees can keep appraised of implementation progress.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in England. The evaluation focuses on assessing the strategic fit, design and early implementation of the YEI, and was undertaken by Ecorys between July and November 2016. The study also involved undertaking some preparatory work to inform a potential subsequent YEI evaluation focused on effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The impact evaluation feasibility study, development of a theory of change for the YEI, and cost-benefit analysis framework involved in this preparatory work are presented in the annexes to this report. To set the context for the evaluation findings around the YEI's strategic fit, design and early implementation, this opening chapter first provides an overview of the background to the YEI and its operation. The aims and objectives for the study are then detailed, prior to outlining the methodology adopted.

1.1 Background to the YEI

The YEI represents part of the European Commission's (EC's) policy response to the social and economic challenges stemming from the financial crisis of 2007-2008. The effects of this included a rise in unemployment across many parts of the European Union (EU), in particular youth unemployment. In response, the EC reacted with a number of initiatives including the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative (2010),[1] the Youth Opportunities Initiative (2011),[2] the Youth Employment Package (2012)[3] and the YEI (2013).[4] Together these initiatives aimed to support EU Member States to address the challenge of youth unemployment and support young people feeling its effects.

The YEI forms a key aspect of this policy response, providing targeted funding of €6.4 billion (in 2016 prices) to support young people in regions of the EU particularly affected by youth unemployment. Designed to complement other national and European Social Fund (ESF) provision, the YEI provides direct support to those under 25-years-old, or under 29 in some EU countries and regions. YEI provision typically includes support to access apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements and further education, amongst other forms of assistance intended to address the challenges faced by young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

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1 European Commission, (2010), *Youth on the Move – An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union*, COM (2010) 477 final, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

2 European Commission, (2011), *Youth opportunities initiative*, COM (2011) 933 final, Brussels.

3 European Commission, (2012), *Moving Youth into Employment*, COM (2012) 727 final, Brussels.

4 European Commission, (2013), *Youth employment initiative*, COM (2013) 144 final, Brussels.

In line with its geographically targeted nature, 90 per cent of all YEI funding is targeted at regions of the EU where the youth unemployment rate in 2012 was higher than 25 per cent, or where youth unemployment was more than 20 per cent, but had increased by more than 30 per cent in 2012. The 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programming period involved the development of the YEI within the framework of the ESF, and funding for the initiative is channelled to eligible regions through this route. EU Member States have been able to invest in YEI implementation from September 2013 onwards, as long as their ESF Operational Programmes (OPs)[5] had been formally adopted.

1.2 Overview of the YEI in England

In the context of the ESF OP 2014-2020 for England, overseen by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as the ESF Managing Authority (MA), the YEI is programmed under Priority Axis 1, 'Inclusive Labour Markets'. As set out in the OP, the overall objective of the YEI is to support the sustainable integration of young people into the labour market, in particular those NEET, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities. A set of specific objectives for the YEI are also detailed as follows:

- "support the rise in the participation age by providing additional traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities for 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas, with a particular focus on 15-19-year-old NEETs.
- engage marginalised 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas and support them to re-engage with education or training, with a particular focus on 15-19-year-olds.
- address the basic skills needs of 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas so that they can compete effectively in the labour market.
- provide additional work experience and pre-employment training opportunities to 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas, with a particular focus on those aged over 18.
- support 15-29-year-old lone parents who are NEET in YEI areas to overcome the barriers they face in participating in the labour market (including childcare)."[6]

The OP also emphasises that support for NEET young people is already available through a variety of other provision, and that the YEI should be additional and complementary to existing measures – for example, through providing more intensive support.[7]

5 ESF OPs set out the strategy and priorities for use of the fund in the EU Member States and regions they cover.

6 DWP (2015), European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020.

7 *Ibid*.

In terms of the nature of this, the OP specifies a range of provision anticipated under the YEI, including: customised training and support; volunteering activities; widening access to apprenticeships and traineeships; wrap-around support to improve access to such opportunities and outcomes for particular disadvantaged groups; enhancing local careers guidance services; and improving brokerage services with employers to provide disadvantaged groups with work experience and supported internships. The intention to target groups facing particular disadvantages is also cited, including: young lone parents; looked after children and care leavers; carers; ex-offenders; those involved in gangs; and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.[8]

Participants supported by the YEI must be NEET, aged 15-29 and be residing in an area eligible for the initiative (see below). The initiative aims to engage 112,000 NEET young people overall, 84,000 aged 15-24 and 28,000 aged 25-29.[9] The OP also sets a number of results indicators with associated target values that the initiative seeks to meet. Within these, specific target values include 70 per cent of those engaged completing their YEI supported-intervention and, of that 70 per cent, 48 per cent receiving an offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship, and 48 per cent of unemployed participants who are in education/training gaining a qualification, or being in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving the provision. A full list of results indicators and target values, including specific proportions for long-term unemployed and inactive participants, and for the sustainability of results at the six-month point, can be found in the ESF OP.[10]

In respect of YEI implementation, the ESF OP and approach taken to the YEI reflects the belief that local areas know their local needs best and that solutions to these needs should be developed locally.[11] Localism is a core element of this approach, with each of the 39 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas in England having a local ESIF sub-committee providing advice to the ESF MA at the whole-England level on local growth conditions and priorities. In the context of the YEI, the local ESIF sub-committees have the role of advising on Calls for Projects, often referred to as YEI specifications, through which ESF and YEI provision is procured.

In line with the geographical targeting of the YEI, 11 of the 39 English LEP areas include areas eligible for YEI funding.[12] To date 22 YEI projects have been funded across nine LEP areas. For several reasons explored later in this report, available YEI funding was not taken up in two of the LEP areas concerned, namely those covered by the London and the Leicester and Leicestershire LEP. Table 1.1 below summarises the eligible LEP areas receiving YEI funding and the number of projects funded at the time of writing in each area.

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8 *Ibid*.

9 *Ibid*.

10 See DWP (2015), European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020, p. 58-60.

11 DWP (2015), European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020.

12 YEI eligible areas are not necessarily coterminous with LEP boundaries due to eligibility being determined at the level of Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) areas, NUTS being a standard developed and regulated by the European Union in order to reference the sub-division of countries for statistical purposes.

Table 1.1 Number of projects by LEP area

Local Enterprise Partnership Area	Number of projects per area
Black Country	1
Coventry and Warwickshire	1
D2N2 (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire)	5
Greater Birmingham and Solihull	1
Humber	1
Liverpool City Region	7
North East	1
South East	1
Tees Valley	4

Source: DWP. Projects and Contract details.

Each YEI project has a lead organisation, sometimes referred to as a strategic lead, with provision commonly being delivered through a consortium of partner organisations, sometimes referred to as delivery partners. Across the projects commissioned to date, in a smaller number of cases the strategic lead delivers as a single organisation. Importantly, however, where a single organisation is implementing a project, other organisations may be engaged in elements of delivery, but are not formal project partners in the sense of those in YEI projects delivered by consortia. In such instances organisations are contracted to deliver, for example, specialist support and thus act as sub-contractors to the lead organisation.

In financial terms, YEI implementation in England is supported by up to a total of just over €461 million during the initiative's lifetime. This figure comprises a 'YEI-specific allocation' of c.€160 million matched by an equivalent amount of ESF funding. This ESF funding is increased through further match funding[13] in the English context by an additional c.€142 million. Initial allocations for each LEP area for the YEI, based on the overall YEI allocation as specified in the OP, are set out in Table 1.2 which also shows eligible areas within each LEP geography.

[13] Funding for the ESF comprises monies allocated from the fund at the European level which are then 'matched' by funding within Member States.

Table 1.2 YEI allocation per LEP area

Local Enterprise Partnership Area	Allocation (€m in 2015)			
	YEI-specific allocation	ESF allocation	Match for ESF part	Total YEI
Black Country (All)	23.0	23.0	23.0	69.0
Coventry and Warwickshire (Coventry)	4.9	4.9	4.9	14.7
D2N2 (Nottingham)	4.8	4.8	4.8	14.4
Greater Birmingham and Solihull (Birmingham and Solihull)	22.8	22.8	22.8	68.4
Humber (Kingston-upon-Hull)	4.5	4.5	3.0	12.0
Leicester and Leicestershire (Leicester)	4.9	4.9	4.9	14.7
Liverpool City Region (All)	26.6	26.6	17.7	70.9
London (Inner London)	42.8	42.8	42.8	128.4
North East (Durham)	9.0	9.0	6.0	24.0
South East (Thurrock)	1.8	1.8	1.8	5.4
Tees Valley (All)	14.7	14.7	9.8	39.2

Source: DWP (2015), Youth Employment Initiative, Information Note, February 2015, eligible areas shown in brackets.

It should be noted that the above figures are allocations only and that actual inputs at the LEP area level will be different subject to, for example, potential underspend of the allocations. Equally, as noted above, the London, and Leicester and Leicestershire LEP areas have not taken up their YEI allocation to date.

1.3 Study aims, objectives and research questions

The overall aim of the study was to undertake a first evaluation of the YEI in England, focusing on strategic fit, design and implementation, along with informing the development of a planned second evaluation of the YEI concentrating on assessing the initiative's efficiency, effectiveness and impact.

Within this, the key objectives of the study can be summarised as follows:

1 Gathering and analysing primary and secondary evidence through which to evaluate the strategic fit, design and implementation of the YEI.

2 Developing a theory of change model to inform the planned second YEI evaluation.

3 Conducting an impact evaluation feasibility study in order to inform a planned second YEI evaluation, including identifying variables that could be used to assess the value for money of the YEI.

1.3.1 Key research questions

The study specification also included a set of research questions corresponding to the three broad objectives highlighted above. The questions informed the development of an evaluation framework for the study (see section 1.4) and, in line with the above objectives, were as follows:

Strategic fit, design and implementation

- In which socio-economic context is YEI implemented?
- Were the most relevant groups targeted starting from the design stage?
- Did the YEI provide a quick response to address the urgency of the problem?
- In which ways does it complement other instruments supporting youth policies?
- What was the design and functioning of the delivery system? Were they adequate to ensure an effective implementation of the strategy of YEI?
- What types of actions were funded to implement the YEI? Were they individual support actions or were they part of pathways or packages of support?
- Did the implementation of the YEI make use of existing partnerships?
- How does YEI provision link to and interact with other initiatives?
- Were new partnerships developed to facilitate the implementation of the YEI? Were relevant stakeholders involved effectively?
- Did the implementation fund existing measures or trigger the introduction of new approaches?
- Was the implementation of the YEI according to plans (financially, milestones and targets achieved as planned)? If not, why?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the delivery systems?
- What lessons can be learnt for future delivery of YEI?
- Were there any mechanisms for sharing good practice across the different YEI LEP areas? What were these and can any lessons be learnt for future investment?

Development of the theory of change

- What is the overarching aim of the intervention?
- What is the logical framework for the intervention?
- What results are required by the end of the programme if the aim is to be met in the longer term? What are the outputs and short-term results that will help achieve the specified targets?
- What are the mechanisms through which the interventions can deliver continuing education, finding jobs or moving into apprenticeships/traineeships?

Impact evaluation feasibility study

- Based on the logical framework for the intervention what individual measures should be assessed through an impact evaluation?
- What approach and methodology is most appropriate to conduct an impact evaluation?
- What data is available across the programme at present and what else might need to be collected?
- What intervention(s) should be considered for an impact evaluation?
- Is a counterfactual impact evaluation feasible? What data and methodology should be used?
- What variables could be used to measure value for money of YEI provision?

1.4 Methodology

The study methodology comprised a combination of primary and secondary data collection and analysis in order to address the objectives of the first YEI evaluation, focused on strategic fit, design and implementation. This was supplemented by desk research and workshops specifically designed to support the development of a theory of change for the YEI and to conduct an impact evaluation feasibility study. The interlinked tasks developed to meet the study objectives outlined are summarised below.

1.4.1 Desk research

A structured review of YEI and other relevant policy documentation was undertaken at the outset of the study to inform the evaluation of the YEI's strategic fit, design and implementation, as well as informing the theory of change and impact evaluation feasibility study. Sources reviewed included: policy and implementation documents at the YEI programme level; other relevant EU and national policy documentation; YEI project contracts; YEI provider guidance; and, relevant local documentation relating to the initiative. A write-up of the desk research was produced which formed a key source for the development of an evaluation framework[14] and topic guides for use in the fieldwork,[15] along with informing both the development of a theory of change[16] and the impact feasibility study.[17]

[14] See Appendix D for the full evaluation framework guiding this first YEI evaluation.

[15] See Appendix E for copies of the topic guides.

[16] A full outline of the theory of change produced for the study is included at Appendix A.

[17] The impact feasibility study developed to inform the planned second YEI evaluation is included at Appendix B.

1.4.2 Fieldwork

A series of telephone interviews formed the primary evidence source for this first YEI evaluation, as well as being used to gather information to feed into the impact evaluation feasibility study produced to inform the planned second YEI evaluation. Fieldwork for the evaluation was undertaken between August and November 2016. Informed consent to participate in the study was gathered from all interviewees on the basis of a pre-prepared statement. As part of this process, all interviewees were informed that their participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and were assured that data collected would be treated as confidential and used solely for the purpose of the research study.

Informed by a series of semi-structured topic guides and production of a sampling strategy to cover the YEI projects (see below), a total of 56 interviews were undertaken. Interview numbers were split as follows:

- Five interviews with ESF MA and European Commission representatives, which were undertaken at the outset of the study and prior to interviews with other stakeholder groups.
- 11 interviews with LEP area ESIF sub-committee representatives in YEI eligible areas[18].
- 40 interviews with representatives of providers delivering the YEI.

The five interviews with MA/Commission representatives were selected on the basis of identifying the five most relevant individuals involved in the development and oversight of the YEI in terms of its implementation in England. To identify relevant interviewees at the ESIF sub-committee level, investigations were undertaken to identify those individuals most involved with the development of the YEI in each eligible area. In order to incorporate views from the two areas that have not taken up their YEI allocation, relevant individuals from the London, and Leicester and Leicestershire LEP areas were identified along with individuals from the nine participating YEI-eligible areas. The decision to include representation from all eligible areas was undertaken on the basis of reflecting the full range of geographies within which the YEI is being delivered.

To reflect the diversity of YEI providers, while covering all eligible areas, a decision was made to select a project within each of the nine participating areas to include in the evaluation. Projects were selected on the basis of four main criteria – geography, target group, types of provision being delivered, and project governance and delivery approaches – with the intention of producing a balanced sample reflecting the YEI as a whole. Having reviewed the selected projects and their relative size, it was decided that six interviews each should be allocated to two large projects in YEI eligible areas where only a single project has been commissioned (Black Country and Greater Birmingham and Solihull). To make up the remaining 28 interviews out of the target of 40, four interviews were allocated to each of the remaining seven projects sampled.

[18] Hereafter, 'LEP area ESIF sub-committee representatives' are referred to as 'ESIF sub-committee representatives' for reasons of brevity.

To gain a rounded view of each of the sampled projects, interviews were arranged with a representative of the lead partner for each project and a selection of managerial and delivery staff from lead and delivery partners. To ensure that the interviews gave a representative selection of views from delivery partners, the lead partner was requested to provide contact details for all formal partners involved in project delivery. A selection of these partners was then made for each project to avoid the potential for only the highest performing providers, or only those where delivery was progressing well, being suggested by lead partner representatives. A preferred and reserve list of target delivery partners was then drawn up, with interviews at the level of frontline staff being arranged through contact with the lead representative of each provider selected.

The findings included in the following chapters should be read bearing in mind the ordering of the interviews by stakeholder group; in particular, that the interviews with ESFD and Commission representatives were held prior to those of ESIF sub-committee and YEI provider representatives. The distribution of interviews by stakeholder group should also be borne in mind, given that greater numbers of provider interviews were undertaken relative to those with ESIF sub-committee representatives and, in particular, ESFD and Commission representatives. This distribution stemmed from a desire to explore YEI delivery at the provider level to as great an extent as possible, but does mean that there is a potential for YEI provider representatives' views to come through more strongly than the other stakeholder groups in the analysis that follows throughout the report.

1.4.3 Development of a YEI theory of change

Alongside the desk research and fieldwork, a theory of change workshop was held in September 2016 to provide an interactive forum wherein YEI stakeholders could discuss key elements of the theory of change and contribute to its development. The workshop involved 11 participants, including representatives from LEPs, YEI providers, and DWP. Attendees were provided with a document introducing the concept of a theory of change and its role in the evaluation in advance, along with a copy of slides to be used on the day which included a number of suggested issues and questions to consider.

At the workshop, participants were split into groups with discussions and feedback being facilitated around four key areas: the aims, objectives and rationale of the YEI; inputs and activities involved in implementing the YEI; short-term outputs and outcomes expected from the initiative; and, anticipated longer term outcomes and impacts. To provide a basis for discussion, each area was introduced and participants were given a series of questions, each designed to prompt relevant suggestions for the area being considered. Each group then fed back suggested elements for consideration in respect of the theory of change.

The results of the workshop were recorded and contributed, along with the desk research undertaken, to the development of the theory of change presented in Appendix A.

1.4.4 Impact evaluation feasibility study

In order to inform the planned second YEI evaluation, desk research and additional information gathered from the fieldwork were used as the basis to undertake an impact evaluation feasibility study. This involved reviewing the data being gathered by the YEI projects and for the initiative as a whole, considering what additional data might be available,

and examining the feasibility of conducting a counterfactual impact evaluation[19] through considering several possible evaluation designs. The feasibility study followed a series of steps to investigate the feasibility of an impact evaluation, scope out potential methodological options to support it, and develop recommendations on this basis. In summary these steps involved:

1 Definition of the impacts in scope for the evaluation (outcomes of interest).

2 Examination of possible data through which to put an evaluation design in place.

3 Consideration of potential designs in light of the defined outcomes of interest and data availability.

4 Production of an assessment of potential designs including strengths, weaknesses, risks and resource implications.

5 Making recommendations on the feasibility of conducting an impact evaluation and identification of a suggested preferred option from the designs examined.

Alongside the above steps, and linked to the exploration of a possible impact evaluation, the examination of available data was also used to investigate how the value for money of the YEI might be explored in a second evaluation. This process, and the high level framework for assessing value for money that was produced, is outlined in Appendix C, while a full description of the methodology used for the main impact evaluation feasibility study and its results are included in Appendix B.

1.4.5 Analysis

The research questions developed for the evaluation, both the high level questions outlined in section 1.3 above and included in the evaluation framework, and the sub-questions reflected in the study topic guides, formed the focus of the analysis of qualitative fieldwork data and information collated through the desk review. Data gathered from the fieldwork phase was written up and entered in analysis grids derived from the evaluation framework and topic guides. In addition to thematic analysis focused on addressing the research questions, where relevant and applicable the data gathered was also analysed by several dimensions, namely:

1 Analysis by stakeholder group – comparing and contrasting perspectives across the key stakeholder groups interviewed (ESFD/Commission stakeholders, ESIF sub-committee representatives, strategic leads/main providers, delivery partners/sub-contractors).

2 Analysis between the projects sampled – comparing and contrasting similarities and differences, including:

a any apparent variations according to the size of projects;

b any apparent variations according to whether projects adopted a specific focus on particular target groups or addressed NEET young people in general;

c any apparent variations linked to the types of support being provided; and

[19] A counterfactual impact evaluation compares the outcomes of an intervention with the outcomes that would have been achieved had the intervention not been in place, typically by comparing outcomes for those receiving an intervention with a ‘comparison group’ of similar individuals not subject to that intervention.

d any apparent variations according to project governance and delivery structures, in particular between projects (largely) implemented by a single organisation and more consortia based approaches.

3 Analysis across YEI-eligible areas – comparing and contrasting similarities and differences, including any apparent, according to areas implementing multiple projects and those implementing a single project.

Analysis of the fieldwork data, and integration with findings from the desk research, form the basis for the evaluation of the YEI's strategic fit, design and implementation presented in the remainder of the report.

1.5 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 examines the strategic fit of the YEI intervention, principally in terms of the extent the initiative's implementation reflects EU and national guidance and is complementary to existing provision.
- Chapter 3 assesses the design of the YEI, considering issues such as factors influencing the approach taken, the development of the initiative and its component projects, and procurement of the provision.
- Chapter 4 examines early implementation of the YEI in terms of the nature of the provision developed along with governance and partnership arrangements.
- Chapter 5 considers early implementation from the perspective of engagement onto the provision, its delivery, contract management processes, financial implementation and overall implementation progress to date.
- Chapter 6 concludes the report by providing overall reflections on the YEI's strategic fit, design and implementation, in addition to providing some issues for consideration arising from the analysis.
  - Appendix A presents the theory of change developed as part of the study.
  - Appendix B presents the impact evaluation feasibility study undertaken to inform the planned second YEI evaluation.
  - Appendix C presents high level guidance on assessing the YEI's value for money.
  - Appendix D presents the evaluation framework guiding the study.
  - Appendix E presents the research tools used for the evaluation fieldwork.

2 Strategic fit

This chapter assesses the strategic fit of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in England. It first reviews the context in which the YEI was designed and implemented by way of assessing the relevance of, and rationale for, the initiative. The way the YEI was programmed in the European Social Fund Operational Programme for England (ESF OP) is then considered, principally from the perspective to which implementation at the local level reflects national and European guidance. The chapter then examines the degree to which the YEI is complementary to other policies and initiatives nationally and locally. A summary of the preceding analysis is provided at the end of the chapter.

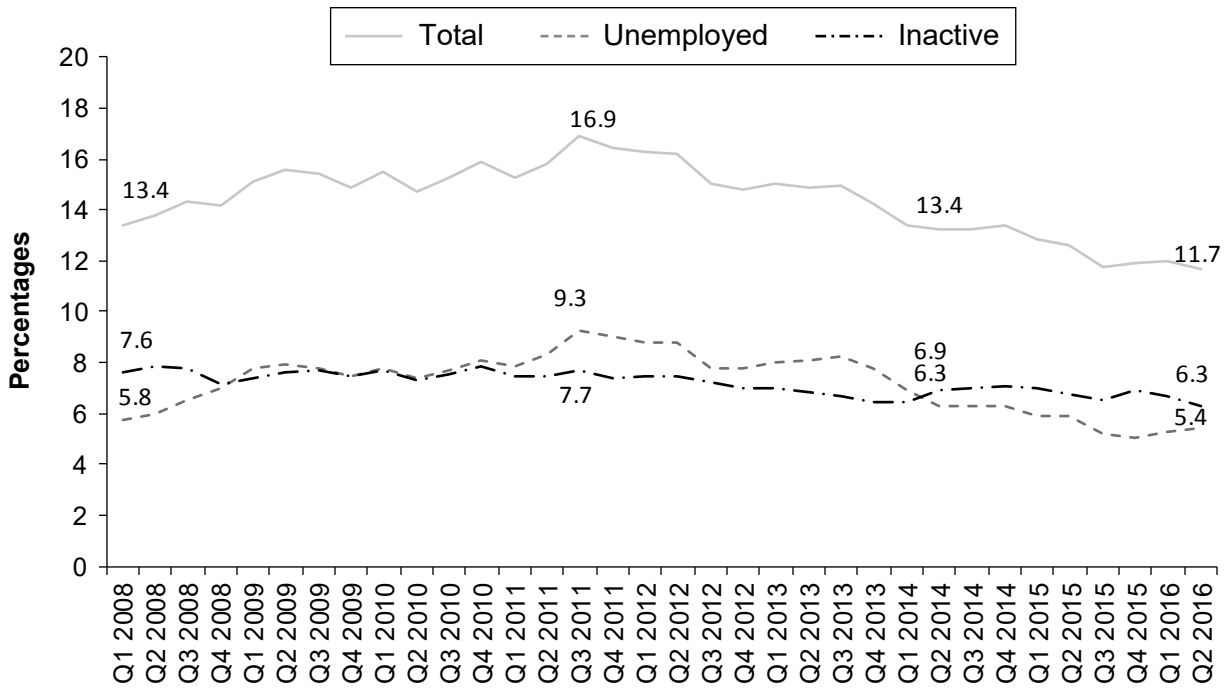
2.1 Operational context

The YEI was launched by the European Commission (EC) in March 2013 following a significant increase of the EU-28 unemployment rate in the 15-24 age group from 15.0% in the first quarter of 2008 to a peak five years later of 24.3% in the first quarter of 2013.[20] As elsewhere in Europe, in the context of the economic crisis, the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) also increased in the United Kingdom (UK). While 13.4% of young people aged 16-24 were NEET in the first quarter of 2008, this share peaked at 16.9% in the third quarter of 2013 (see Figure 2.1). This is equivalent to an increase of 282,000 NEET young people in this period. However, when the YEI formally launched in the UK in April 2014, the 16-24 NEET rate in the UK had returned to pre-crisis levels and the economy was experiencing sustained positive quarter-on-quarter growth rates.

This change in circumstances, and ongoing falls in youth unemployment and inactivity through 2015 and into 2016, meant that the scenario in which the YEI was designed was different in the English context by the time the initiative commenced delivery. While this led some of the higher level stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation to suggest that the relevance, or at least importance, of the initiative had perhaps lessened since its inception, the perspective of those interviewed at the local level (both ESIF sub-committee and provider representatives) was that the issue of NEET young people remained, as did the importance of supporting them in YEI-eligible areas.

[20] Eurostat data, European Labour Force Survey, Indicator: lfsq_urgan (accessed 04.11.2016).

Figure 2.1 NEET, unemployment and inactivity rate for the age group 16-24



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS.

To some extent these diverging views may reflect the fact while figures on the share of unemployed young people have improved significantly, this improvement has been less pronounced for inactive young people who are further from the labour market and more likely to be disengaged. The number of inactive young people in the UK has only dropped by around 60,000 since the inception of the YEI in early 2013 and stood at 453,000 in the second quarter of 2016.

Furthermore, the policy relevance of supporting NEET young people into employment, education or training may be considered to have increased in some areas. Analysing Eurostat data on NEET young people aged 15-24 for the NUTS 2 areas eligible for YEI funding shows that rates have even increased in some areas since 2013, including in Tees Valley and Durham, Merseyside and Inner London (West), although the reliability of data for Inner London is low (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 NEET young people 15-24 in YEI-eligible NUTS2 areas

	2013		2014		2015	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Tees Valley and Durham	24,552	15.8	24,171	15.7	28,912	18.9
Merseyside	27,243	13	28,025	13.6	30,849	15.2
West Midlands[21]	88,647	21.9	71,398	17.6	55,020	13.5
Inner London – West	n/a	5.9	10,038	7.6	10,125	7.6
Inner London – East	n/a	12.2	29,377	9.7	29,361	9.7

Source: Eurostat, European Labour Force Survey, indicator: edat_lfse_22 and own calculations based on demo_r_pjangroup, extracted 06.12.2016 and 05.01.2017, no population data available for London for 2013.

No data for the NUTS 3 areas eligible for the YEI is available on this indicator. Although NEET rates have declined in England as a whole, the employment rates of young people have recovered more slowly. This context can be partially explained by the raising of the compulsory school leaving age. However, as noted by the Parliamentary Research Briefing on young people in the labour market from 2015, inactivity has also risen amongst those over 18, this being a possible indicator of young people choosing to 'sit out' of the labour market during turbulent times by undertaking additional education.[22] The same briefing also points out that there has been a rise in skills mismatches and precarious employment for young people in particular. Likewise, there has been an upward trend in the proportion of graduates working in non-graduate roles, an increase in non-standard forms of employment, including part-time work, and slower wage growth for young people.

Overall, this suggests a context wherein the YEI has the potential to offer important support for NEET young people, and adds weight to the view that the initiative is relevant and that there is an evident rationale for such an intervention. Evidence on the nature of the NEET group in England can be interpreted as adding further weight to this. For example, the literature[23] shows that NEET young people in England have lower educational qualifications than their peers, come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, often have a history of fixed or long-term school exclusions, and are more likely to have caring responsibilities, to have a disability and be under the supervision of a youth offending team. In addition, those who have experienced NEET status before are more likely to be NEET than their peers.

21 Including the YEI-eligible area of Birmingham and Solihull.

22 https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-parliament-2015/work/young-people-in-the-labour-market/

23 See e.g. House of Commons (2016), Briefing Paper 06705 based on an analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, June 2016 and Audit Commission (2010), Against the odds, July 2010.

2.2 Consistency of YEI programming

Evidence from the desk research and stakeholder interviews suggests that there is a clear logical read-across between YEI objectives at the EU level and their translation into the England ESF OP and national guidance on the YEI. Likewise, a review of YEI project plans, allied to the fieldwork undertaken, suggests that this consistency and read-across continues down to the YEI-eligible area and provider level.

At the programme level, the YEI is designed to complement other national and ESF provision. According to EC guidance, provision funded under the YEI should aim to target young people directly and typically include the provision of apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements and further education leading to a qualification.[24] As outlined in the introductory chapter to this report (section 1.2), the overall and specific YEI objectives set out in the England ESF OP closely mirror those set out at the European Union (EU) level.

While at the level of YEI-eligible areas, not all European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) strategies include an elaboration of the aims and use of the YEI, it should be noted that these strategies were developed in parallel to the development of the initiative at the whole-England level. In some cases it was noted by ESIF sub-committee representatives that this meant that local ESIF strategies did not include explicit discussion of the YEI, whereas otherwise they might have done. Of those ESIF strategies that do reference the YEI, the relevant objectives set reflect those at the EU and national level. Whether or not YEI objectives are set out in local strategies, ESIF sub-committee representatives interviewed were confident of the read across between national and local level objectives as regards the YEI. The perspective of interviewees from European Social Fund Division (ESFD) and the Commission was similar.

It is also evident that the aims and specific objectives of the YEI are reflected in the type of provision commissioned at the local YEI project level (see section 4.1 on the nature of YEI provision for more detail on this). Provider representatives interviewed were generally confident that their provision reflected YEI guidance, as it had been developed with this in mind and assessed at the procurement stage. However, in a small number of cases it was noted that the guidance could be unclear, with one interviewee stating that complementarity between different levels was assured using:

> *'Our best judgement … The guidance that we've found tends to be quite broad brush, so we've had to fill those gaps ourselves.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

[24] EC (2014), *Guidance on implementing the Youth Employment Initiative*, European Social Fund thematic paper, September 2014.

2.3 Complementarity of the YEI

As set out in the ESF OP, ESF and YEI funding is intended to be additional and complementary to existing provision and to avoid the duplication of other policy approaches.[25] Such existing provision includes a range of initiatives, some of which are explicitly mentioned in the OP, such as:

- **Apprenticeships**, which combine studying and work-based training towards a qualification for young people over 16 years of age in line with the Apprenticeship Framework or standard.[26]
- **Traineeships**, which provide education, training and work experience for young people aged 16 to 24[27] with little work experience, but with the perspective of being ready for employment or an apprenticeship within six-months of starting a traineeship. Traineeship provision focuses on those young people in the 'middle tier of need'; that is, those who may not have the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to join the labour market immediately, but are not in need of intensive support.[28]
- **Programmes delivered by Jobcentre Plus** including 'mainstream' employability support through initiatives such as the Work Programme.

The ESF OP emphasises the possibility of the YEI being used to support some of these initiatives so long as it does not replace existing provision and adheres to existing regulations and standards. For apprenticeship and traineeship provision in particular, the YEI is programmed to provide 'wrap-around support'[29] additional to the core elements of this provision, including support for disadvantaged young people with regards to work-preparation, transport subsidies and basic skills training. In addition apprenticeship provision can be complemented with additional support for recruitment, assessment and training for apprentices. In such a way the YEI is intended to blend with existing provision by, for example, enhancing access to it and improving the chances of young people being successful through it.

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25 DWP (2015), European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020, September 2015: p. 15, accessible here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461596/ESF_Operational_Programme_2014_-_2020_V.01.pdf (accessed 04.11.2016).

26 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/558940/Apps_standards_list_071016.pdf

27 or up to the academic age of 25 for those young people with a Learning Difficulty Assessment.

28 DFE/BIS (2015), Traineeships. Supporting young people to develop the skills for apprenticeships and sustainable employment, Framework for delivery 2015-2016, March 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/410737/Framework_for_delivery_2015-2016.pdf (accessed 07.11.2016).

29 In this context, 'wrap-around support' refers to additional ongoing support to assist individuals in accessing and being successful with apprenticeships and traineeships separate to the direct delivery of provision within those apprenticeships and traineeships.

Further policies and initiatives with potential complementarity and/or relevance to the YEI include:

- The Cabinet Office's Innovation Fund (in two procurement rounds) and Youth Engagement Fund, which aims to support the most disadvantaged young NEETs and those at risk of becoming NEET through a range of innovative social investment projects (social impact bonds).
- Other ESF funding programmed under Investment Priority 8 ii – sustainable integration into the labour market of young people[30].
- The expansion of the school-leaving age to 18.
- A range of voluntary sector initiatives, including the Big Lottery Fund's Talent Match and Building Better Opportunities programmes, the latter funded through the ESF.

The available YEI documentation reviewed suggests that the initiative has indeed been designed to complement the above initiatives with more tailored, intensive and wrap-around support for specific target groups further from the labour market. Several Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas, such as Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (D2N2)[31] and Greater Birmingham and Solihull (GBS)[32] explicitly place the objectives of the YEI programme in the context of existing support in the area, stating that the aim of the programme is to add value to – and intensify – existing provision. In addition, it is apparent that the YEI frequently provides additional funding to implement aspects of comprehensive local youth strategies.

Interviewees also emphasised the added value of the YEI with regards to being able to fill gaps in ESF-funded and other mainstream provision locally, at the same time as ensuring more comprehensive wrap-around support for young people. As one interviewee commented of the YEI:

> *'This is something we have never had in the region … If the issue* [facing NEET young people] *needs three solutions – we can deliver three solutions.'*
>
> (ESIF sub-committee representative)

Some areas have also added to existing resources and expanded existing provision by, for example, delivering to wider target groups or increasing the number of young people included in support. In such a way the YEI has been used to 'boost' other initiatives and provision at the local level, as is reflected in the title of one of the YEI projects, 'Talent Match Plus'[33] Added to the evidence from the document review, such examples further suggest a high degree of complementarity between the YEI and existing provision in the English context.

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30 Note: The ESF OP uses the references of 8ii and 1.2 interchangeably to refer to this priority.

31 http://www.d2n2lep.org/write/Documents/ESIF/Final_YEI_Presentation_22_4_15v1.pptx

32 http://centreofenterprise.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/GBSLEP_A4_070214_v8.pdf

33 This provision being an expansion of the Big Lottery funded Talent Match programme which aims to offer support to NEET young people.

By way of assessing the complementarity and strategic fit of the YEI, it is also worth examining how the initiative relates to the UK's National Reform Programme (NRP) in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy.[34] There is a clear read across between the objectives of the YEI in the UK context and key elements of the 2016 NRP,[35] most directly in terms of the Country-specific Recommendation (CSR) to '*Address skills mismatches by increasing employers' engagement in the delivery of apprenticeships. Take action to further reduce the number of young people with low basic skills …*'.

As highlighted in the outline of the YEI in section 1.3, a key focus of the initiative is widening access to apprenticeships and traineeships, in addition to offering wrap-around support to improve access to such opportunities and outcomes for particular disadvantaged groups. Alongside efforts to enhance the employer role in apprenticeships, set out in the UK's NRP,[36] this focus of the YEI explicitly aims, in part, to support the Government's apprenticeship plans in terms of 'widening access', with the 'wrap-around support' anticipated being a key element in ensuring that greater numbers of young people, including those with low basic skills, are able to access apprenticeships and traineeships. Likewise, one of the specific YEI objectives set out in the OP is to 'address the basic skills needs of 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas so that they can compete effectively in the labour market.'[37]

While the YEI appears complementary to the Europe 2020 NRP for the UK, it should be noted that another key European initiative which the YEI was designed to support, that of the Youth Guarantee, is not being implemented in the UK context. There are several reasons for the UK Government's decision not to implement the Youth Guarantee. These include considerations of subsidiarity, the view that most young people claiming unemployment benefits do so for six months or less (so it would be inappropriate to intervene earlier along the timescale of four months set by the Youth Guarantee), and the presence until early 2016 of the Youth Contract[38] in the UK which had related aims to those of the Youth Guarantee.

Given that the Youth Guarantee is not being implemented in the UK, it does not, therefore, make sense to assess strategic fit in respect of linkages between this and the YEI. However, in the period when the Youth Contract was operating (up until the end of March 2016), there were shared aims between this and the YEI in terms of promoting activity to support young people into education, training and work. By the time that the majority of YEI provision had commenced, however, the Youth Contract had ended. Therefore, there is clear complementarity between the aims of the Youth Contract and the YEI, albeit the latter targets group 15-29-year-olds as opposed to 16 and 17-year-olds in the case of the Youth Contract.

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34 Europe 2020 is the European Union's growth strategy. Member States, including the UK, are required to produce annual NRPs outlining what they are doing to move closer to the Europe 2020 national targets and to respond to Country Specific Recommendations endorsed by the European Council.

35 HM Government (2016), Europe 2020: UK National Reform Programme 2016, March 2016.

36 *Ibid*.

37 DWP (2015), European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020.

38 See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-contract-16-and-17-year-olds/youth-contract-provision-16-and-17-year-olds (accessed 05.12.2016) for further details of the Youth Contract.

However, while there is a close relationship between the aims of two initiatives, and the provision within them, this is not one of duplication given that timings essentially mean that the YEI follows on from the Youth Contract.

2.4 Summary of key findings

Key findings from the above analysis are as follows:

- There is a clear read across between the objectives of the YEI at the EU level and the translation of these at the national and local levels, indicating a high degree of coherence in respect of the initiative's policy and operational intent.
- YEI projects developed at the local level all reflect and closely mirror the relevant EU level and national guidance.
- While a few stakeholders questioned YEI's relevance due to changes in the youth unemployment context since its inception, most interviewees felt that the initiative remained highly relevant.
- Statistical evidence concerning rising NEET levels in some YEI-eligible areas between 2013 and 2015, and levels of inactivity falling less than unemployment for young people over the same period, adds to the view of YEI's relevance.
- The YEI complements a number of other policies and initiatives, including those relating to traineeships, apprenticeships and other mainstream employability provision delivered through Jobcentre Plus.
- The YEI can be considered to add to and complement existing provision, in particular through providing more tailored, intensive and wrap-around support for specific target groups further from the labour market.

3 Design

This chapter discusses the design and initial development of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). It first discusses the design and development of the YEI at the whole-England programme level, before examining its development locally, including the role of key stakeholders in this. The chapter then assesses the factors influencing programme design, before discussing the procurement and contracting of the YEI. A summary of key findings is provided at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Partnership working and the overall design of the YEI at the programme level

Although only a small number of stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation had an awareness of the development of the YEI at the programme level, in particular in terms of partnership working between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as the European Social Fund (ESF) Managing Authority (MA) and the European Commission (EC), those that did expressed positive views concerning this. It was noted that the Commission had been responsive in clarifying the potential for flexibilities within the regulations governing the YEI, and had sought to enable these where possible. While stakeholders acknowledged that delays to YEI implementation had been caused by the time taken to agree the ESF Operational Programme (OP), this was seen as relating to higher level issues beyond the YEI itself.

Likewise, the general view of interviewees was that partnership working between the ESF MA and local partners in designing the programme in the English context had functioned effectively. For their part, European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) sub-committee representatives interviewed commonly felt that they were able to shape the design of the programme, in particular through inputting to ESIF strategies and specifications for calls for proposals at the local area level. Equally, both European Social Fund Division (ESFD) stakeholders and ESIF sub-committee representatives felt that the consultation events held in part to inform the development of the YEI had offered a suitable and effective forum for co-development of the programme.

While the extent to which local partners worked in cooperation with DWP to design the YEI locally varied between areas, in a number of cases positive perceptions of this process were offered. As one ESIF sub-committee representative outlined:

> *'We had very good experiences and valued our conversations with* [DWP]. *They were very responsive and we were able to have frank conversations … We were able to test our ideas to understand if this was what DWP was looking for.'*
>
> (ESIF sub-committee representative)

However, a few ESIF sub-committee representatives did note that they sometimes struggled with the guidance for the YEI provided when developing elements of the local specifications. This was seen as being due to a number of reasons, including a perceived lack of clarity in the guidance (in particular around eligibility), frequent revisions and releases of non-finalised guidance at the YEI procurement stage, and perceived delays from the ESF MA in terms of answering clarification questions on the guidance (see also section 3.5 on procurement). On balance, however, the view of most stakeholders was broadly positive around the initial development of the YEI at the whole-England level.

3.2 Design of the YEI at the local level

3.2.1 Involvement of local partners

The fieldwork undertaken for the evaluation revealed a number of variations in relation to the involvement of local partners, including Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), at the local level. As noted, local stakeholders generally felt that they were able to substantially influence the specifications drawn up for the calls for proposals, and hence impact on local project design from a strategic perspective. However, local representatives often felt that an ongoing role would be beneficial to ensure that contracted provision met local needs to the greatest extent possible. This issue is dealt with in more detail in section 3.4.

The extent to which LEPs, acting within their local ESIF sub-committee remit, were specifically involved in actual project design locally appears to have differed between areas. In a number of cases provider representatives cited that such involvement was limited, with the perception of some interviewees being that this related to constrained resources on the part of the LEP to play such a role. Equally, the point was made in several cases that LEP inputs, as with those of the ESIF sub-committees more generally, were always intended to be more strategic, rather than directly influencing operational design.

Interviewees did generally state that LEPs had been consulted during the bid development phase, and that those putting together bids ensured that they aligned with ESIF strategies. However, in several cases interviewees noted that there was little further involvement by the LEP, in part due to the more strategic nature of their role noted above. As one provider representative commented:

> *'*[The role of LEPs] *is much more strategic, as it ought to be. So they were on board, but not involved – their response was yes, that's fine, carry on. It was always going to fit with their plans for youth unemployment so there was no reason for them not to be behind it.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

In addition, it was evident in some cases that those developing the bids for local projects did not necessarily require, or want, additional support from the LEP concerned. One interviewee noted, for example, that they had a clear vision in their partnership for how to develop the project and did not want LEP intervention in this process. Involvement of the LEPs also appeared to have been less pronounced where only some geographical areas within the LEP area boundaries were eligible for YEI funding. As one provider representative commented in relation to such an area:

> *'*[The LEP] *knew what they were doing, they were supportive of the direction of travel, but it wasn't an LEP-wide bid or project so for them it wasn't a particular priority.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

However, in some cases it was evident that LEPs did play a more active role beyond inputting to the design of local YEI specifications. For example, one provider representative outlined how the LEP had played a useful role in relaying queries between the delivery partnership and the DWP, stating that as information from DWP had initially been limited, the LEP had been good at obtaining information on their behalf as the project developed. In general, it appeared that more active LEP involvement worked best where it built on previous relationships. As one interviewee in such an area commented:

'The process of working with the LEP worked quite well, because we already have a lot of engagement with them, having been involved in other projects before.'

(Lead partner representative)

For their part, it was also common for ESIF sub-committee representatives to note that they had worked with other organisations locally on the development of the programme. Where this was the case such partnership working was primarily with the local authority (LA), though one interviewee described putting together a 'technical officer group' for the programme which included Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) locally as well as the LA. On balance, however, it is clear that LEP contributions at the local level primarily came in the form of inputs to local specifications through the local ESIF sub-committee, rather than more thoroughgoing or direct engagement in local YEI project development.

3.2.2 Involvement of YEI providers in local project design

Interviews undertaken for the evaluation revealed that collaboration between YEI project partners in developing their YEI bids and projects was common in most instances, though in a small minority of cases lead providers were principally responsible for this. Where partnership approaches to project development were cited, interviewees reported high levels of face-to-face interaction and discussions in designing their project and putting together a bid for YEI funding.

While it was common for partner organisations to be involved in the development of the projects and in putting together the bids, this was typically at managerial level only. Frontline delivery staff interviewed commented in some cases that they had been involved in the design of their own provision, but none took part in the development of the wider YEI project at area or partnership level. The interviews also revealed that communication between DWP and local delivery partnerships was mediated by the lead partners in the design phase. Similarly, there was little direct communication between delivery partners and the LEPs, other than through the lead partner, and no communication between such partners and DWP.

In several instances workshops were organised by those leading bids to involve potential project partners locally, providing the opportunity to show-case provision as well as offering a forum to share lessons on what had worked well and less well with existing interventions. The opportunity to make links with other local stakeholders working with the same target group was described as vital in several cases, not least to avoid duplication of provision within an area and to ensure additionality in accordance with the YEI guidance. While such meetings or workshops were often perceived to be intensive, the consensus was that they were highly useful and an important part of the YEI development process locally. This perspective was expressed both in regard to being able to draw on each others strengths and experiences, but also in respect of sharing information from DWP with the wider partnership. As stated by one interviewee:

'While it's taken a long time to have all those meetings, it's actually moved us along quicker.'

(Delivery partner representative)

While the long lead in time for the programme was noted as being problematic in some respects, as covered in more detail later in the report, interviewees often commented that this had allowed time for those involved in delivery to gain a fuller understanding of their roles. It was also seen as contributing to the general perception that the design of projects at the local level had worked well, although as covered in the following section some challenges were encountered.

In terms of other factors contributing to this initial design phase working well, interviewees also strongly emphasised the key role that good relationships had played in the initial YEI design process at the local level. As most projects built on existing provision at least to some extent, lead partners were generally working alongside trusted, existing delivery partners. This was commonly seen as an important factor in effective project development, as reflected in the comment of one provider representative:

> *'The councils have all worked together on a number of similar projects over the years – we are known to each other and we know our similarities and differences.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

The broad involvement of a range of organisations was similarly seen as positive, though some interviewees (particularly in larger projects) reported an element of 'jostling' for their ideas and priorities to be taken into account. For example, in a partnership made up of multiple local authorities, interviewees noted that some discussions were shaped by political priorities within the LAs involved. However, in general a wide range of partner involvement was cited as a strength and, as noted, a contributory factor in many cases to a positive impression of the initial design phase locally.

3.2.3 Positive local design aspects and challenges encountered

Interviewees often found it difficult to pinpoint any particular difficulties or challenges with the design phase of the YEI projects locally. The ability to apply a high level of flexibility to the design of the provision meant that those consulted were generally satisfied with the provision developed in their local areas. Likewise, this flexibility was seen as facilitating an approach whereby projects could design provision reflective of specific needs of target groups and individuals, rather than attempting to apply a generic approach to meet a unique need. Equally, the ability to design provision to enable providers to work holistically with participants was highly praised by interviewees. As one commented in respect of this:

> *'I'm yet to come across a young person where we haven't got the flexibility to work around any issues or concerns that they've got … the fact it's so tailored and so adaptable … It's so brilliant; I don't know why it hasn't been done before.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

In terms of challenges concerning the design of the YEI provision, interviewees would more commonly refer to issues relating to the procurement of the projects, rather than the development of the projects themselves (see section 3.5 for more detail on this). Accepting this, three design challenges stood out from those highlighted by interviewees: firstly, the geographical mismatch between the boundaries of LEP areas and YEI-eligible areas; secondly, the perceived restrictiveness of the YEI guidance and eligibility rules; and, thirdly, the requirement to source local match funding.

The fact that in some cases the YEI was only available for part of the geography of the LEP areas was seen as posing substantial design challenges in some instances. In all such cases local stakeholders emphasised that they felt it was important that delivery was consistent across the whole LEP geography, including areas within the LEP boundary which were not eligible for YEI funding. While this was cited as a challenge in the YEI development phase, it was also evident that in most cases YEI funding had typically been complemented by other funding, including through the ESF, to address this issue. However, one ESIF sub-committee representative felt that this issue had left the area concerned with a 'divided provision' and that ensuring equal access to support across the geography involved had not proved possible.

In terms of the second challenge noted, while many interviewees emphasised the flexibility of the design of the YEI locally, some ESIF sub-committee and provider representatives felt that the YEI guidelines impacted negatively on the flexibility of the approach. There was particular frustration amongst some local stakeholders that the 'at risk of becoming NEET' group could not be supported with preventative measures in the context of the YEI, due to their not meeting the eligibility criteria of actually being NEET. Equally, one smaller provider new to ESF felt constrained by what they saw as a lack of flexibility around, for example, changing aspects of their delivery without documenting this through a series of change requests.[39]

Thirdly, several interviewees mentioned the particular design and development challenge of having to source YEI match funding locally. ESFD stakeholders recognised this issue in terms of national co-financing organisations (CFOs), specifically the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and DWP, being unable to be brought into the development of the YEI as CFOs due to the non-eligibility of national programmes to act as match funding for the YEI. As such there had been concern that sufficient match funding might not be available at the local level. While local stakeholders noted that this had been a challenge, in most cases it was seen as something that could be, and was, overcome. However, it was also noted that this did affect the nature of provision locally, in that in some cases there was little option other than expanding existing provision to provide the match required.

A combination of the above challenges also reflected the key reasons for two LEP areas not being able to take-up the YEI funding allocated. While both areas concerned initially felt that the YEI was very timely and helpful, issues around the geographical restrictions on YEI eligibility, the lack of availability of match funding, and the perceived (lack of) fit with existing local strategic plans prevented these 'non-participating' areas from taking up their allocation. In the case of London, for example, the key issues were the restriction of YEI eligibility to Inner London only and to NEET young people exclusively (as opposed to those at risk of being NEET), allied to the inability of DWP and the SFA to provide match funding for the YEI as part of their co-financing activity as noted above.

[39] A 'change request' is a formal process by which a YEI grant recipient can request approval for proposed changes to their funding agreement.

3.3 Factors influencing programme and project design

3.3.1 The localism agenda and establishing local needs

The localism agenda was widely seen by stakeholders as a key factor shaping the design of the YEI at the whole-programme and project levels, with localism being viewed as a key strategic influence on the development of the initiative in the English context. The involvement of LEPs in the design of the programme through the development of local ESIF strategies and ESIF sub-committees was widely seen by all stakeholder groups consulted as reflecting this. Interviews with ESIF sub-committee representatives similarly underlined that localism was perceived as an important driver for the development of the YEI.

Examples given of how localism was influential in practice included the approach of one area wherein needs were analysed down to ward level to take account of variations between very small geographical areas. As one of the representatives concerned outlined:

> *'The city is diverse in its prosperity and identifying target wards was critical. While the YEI would be delivered across the city, a certain percentage of the YEI provision would have to be delivered in the target wards.'*
>
> (ESIF sub-committee representative)

Localism was also seen as an important driver in designing provision which was delivered in a decentralised way; as one interviewee described it, 'at the door step' of young people. The approach taken in this area involved locality-based contracts for delivery, the development of local partnerships to address the needs of particular areas, and co-location of services. As the interviewee concerned outlined:

> *'Although this is a coordinated area, with very similar needs throughout, NEET young people or those at risk want to be helped locally. They need provision at their door-step.'*
>
> (ESIF sub-committee representative)

In light of the importance of localism, local stakeholders generally drew on what was often described as 'a strong local evidence base' for the design of the programme. This commonly involved consultations with local partners and those accessing support, reviewing existing evidence on working with the NEET group, including evaluations, and taking other data such as labour market intelligence into account. Such intelligence was also taken from ESIF strategies and strategic economic plans.

As a result of these approaches, the flexibility to design the programme around local needs was seen as a key selling point and strength amongst all the stakeholder groups engaged in the fieldwork. In particular this local focus was seen as adding value to existing provision and helping to address gaps in services in a targeted way. This was particularly the case for interviewees from smaller LEP areas, who noted that the YEI allowed them to address areas and needs frequently overlooked by programmes developed at a national level. As one such interviewee noted:

'The YEI is more of a wrap-around support that was needed in the region. There were lots of disparate programmes with different target groups, which operated as a silo. But the young people we were coming across needed handholding from start to finish … This is something we have never had in the region.'

(ESIF sub-committee representative)

3.3.2 Choice of provision

The design of the specific provision implemented through the YEI at the project level was described by several interviewees as being influenced by their belief that the YEI offered an opportunity to provide significant support to not in employment, education and training (NEET) young people. Reflecting this, learning from partners' previous experience of working with the target group was commonly described as a primary driver for the design and development of YEI provision. Most delivery organisations involved with developing provision had a track record of working with NEET young people, and had built on this by spending time amassing local knowledge in the design phase. As one interviewee noted:

'What we wanted to do was develop a programme that really picked up on what our staff had been telling us for years about some of the barriers to engagement and some of the barriers for young people being able to access education, employment or training.'

(Lead partner representative)

In another case an interviewee explained that their project had previously developed the approach of using mentors on a smaller scale, and had good results, which was used to inform the role of such mentors in their YEI project. As they outlined:

'In the design phase it was recognised that this approach seemed to make a difference so there was little point reinventing the wheel; going out to colleges and requesting new courses etc. – we've been doing that for years and while it has some impact, it doesn't have the same impact [relative to mentoring]*.'*

(Lead partner representative)

As well as building on existing experience, the design of specific provision was also often influenced by what stakeholders saw as the flexibility and additional resources offered by the YEI. Interviewees variously described how the initiative had enabled them to trial new provision and expand the nature or types of support offered. Examples offered included providing what were described as 'extra' support mechanisms such as subsidised travel for YEI activities and additional intensive support for the hardest to reach young people, including gang members. To some extent innovation was thus seen as another driver for the development of particular approaches, accepting that in many cases existing provision and knowledge offered a basis for this.

Interviewees from some delivery organisations also cited that the YEI had encouraged a greater focus on employer engagement in their provision, with a desire to match activities for young people with real progression routes locally. However, in a number of cases skills mismatches and the nature of local labour markets were cited as a challenge in developing such an approach. In one area, for example, it was noted how the focus locally was on developing the high level manufacturing industry, leaving a gap in the development of entry level jobs. As a result, a number of partnerships had created strands of provision focusing on self employment and enterprise. As one interviewee explained:

> *'Because* [our area] *doesn't have any industries left that young people can go into … it almost makes a very open market for young people to be enterprising. There isn't actually a channel for them to go down.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

3.3.3 Value for money considerations

A number of lead partner representatives engaged in the research outlined that they had previous experience of delivering ESF provision and this influenced their consideration of value for money in designing their projects. They understood that unit costs would be assessed as part of procurement and often noted that they could approximate where the threshold for 'acceptable costs' would lie. However, interviewees were generally clear that the main consideration influencing project design was putting together a programme of activity that would meet the needs of the target group.

In this context the view was often advanced from the provider perspective that those targeted by the YEI were likely to have potentially complex barriers to entering or re-entering work and education, and that consequently costs would be higher than they might be with other training or employability programmes. This was similarly recognised on the part of the ESF MA which set expected unit costs at a higher level than would be likely to be the case in mainstream employability provision.

Interviewees also often outlined how they had worked to keep overheads low in their pricing structures, but were also keen to be realistic in their approach to working out unit costs. For a number of interviewees, this meant not over-committing in terms of their output targets. As one provider representative noted:

> *'We didn't just want a cheap and cheerful programme, we want a programme that can actually meet the needs of the individual.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

3.3.4 ESF cross-cutting themes

Interviewees from all stakeholder groups generally felt that ESF cross-cutting themes, namely sustainable development, gender equality and equal opportunities, were addressed in the design of the YEI programme. Generally, ESIF sub-committee representatives were keen to emphasise that the adherence to these themes had played a significant role in the procurement phase. However, some representatives felt that responding to the cross-cutting themes questions in the grant application form was somewhat of a 'tick box exercise' which put bidders with ESF experience, or those using professional bid writers, at an advantage.

At the project level, evidence from the interviews suggests that most organisations sought to specifically address issues of equal opportunities and creating equal access to their provision in the design stage, for example through targeted recruitment of specific groups (for example, black and minority ethnic (BME) young people and women). One example offered was of sports-related provision, wherein using a female coach/mentor model was part of the design approach so as to encourage female participation in the provision. It was also common for interviewees to state that they had integrated monitoring of demographic trends in terms of engagement into their project design, so as to ensure they could review adherence to the equalities aspects of the cross-cutting themes on an ongoing basis.

Of the three cross-cutting themes, sustainability generally appeared to be given a lesser focus in terms of project design and some interviewees commented that this was the hardest theme to evidence in their bid. Across the interviews there were examples of this theme being integrated into project processes, however, with one project establishing working groups for each of the different themes including sustainability. Another delivery partner explained how an element of their project design involved engaging young people in visiting different delivery partners and undertaking an assessment of their environmental sustainability. In general, however, evidence of sustainability being integrated into project design was less than in respect of the other themes involved.

3.4 Procurement and contracting

3.4.1 Role of LEPs

While LEPs had an active role in shaping the specifications for the programme, they were not directly involved in the procurement of the projects. Reasons for this include the need to avoid any potential conflicts of interest where organisations involved with the LEP are also engaged in YEI delivery, allied to regulations and governance arrangements relating to the ESF (including the fact that LEPs are not recognised as a 'responsible authority' in respect of these). Accepting this, ESIF sub-committee representatives commonly expressed their perception that an ongoing role in the procurement process – for example, in assessing bids – would have been beneficial to ensure that contracted provision met local needs to the greatest extent possible.

While some LEPs did seek to remain engaged in the procurement phase for the YEI, for the reasons noted above opportunities to do so were limited beyond acting in an advisory capacity for those developing bids. In one area a provider representative noted that their LEP hosted briefing sessions for bidders, but that they were only able to offer limited technical information and, in the absence of DWP representation, the utility of these events was questioned. In addition, as reflected above, some stakeholders noted that a perceived or actual conflict of interest could arise if LEP representatives were more involved at the procurement stage, given that some local authorities involved with the LEP are also acting as YEI providers.

3.4.2 Duration and timing of the procurement process

A notable theme that emerged through the interviews with different stakeholder groups concerned the length of time taken from launching the YEI calls for proposals to the signature of funding agreements. Many interviewees stated that this had significantly impacted on their plans for delivery. In addition, some provider representatives mentioned that the delays would lead to an underspend due to changes in the local match available in the time period and shortened delivery period. As one interviewee outlined:

> *'We had a genuine expectation of being able to deliver the outcomes we put in our application for the money available. Now the baseline has changed … it's a shame, we thought this would put a big dent in local youth unemployment. It will still have an impact but less of an impact.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

However, it is worth noting that not all interviewees voiced concerns about meeting their anticipated output and result targets in the context of the procurement timescale experienced. Some felt that it would be possible to accelerate delivery now that the appropriate processes were in place and make up any time that had been lost.

It was also noted that what were perceived at the project level as significant procurement delays had other effects on delivery organisations. Some interviewees noted that they felt under pressure to start delivery as quickly as possible in order to achieve their targets and provide support to the young people waiting for the provision. Equally, in some instances a scenario was described wherein some providers felt that as a result they needed to begin delivery, as they saw it, 'at risk' before the funding agreements were signed off or guidance on delivery was fully finalised. A number of interviewees also commented that they would like to see an extension to the programme to allow providers to 'catch up', utilise the funds originally allocated and achieve the targets that were set at the outset.

3.4.3 Lessons learnt for future procurement

As described above, a number of interviewees felt that they faced challenges in relation to the procurement process for the YEI. Perceived issues included inconsistent and frequently revised guidance; delays from DWP side in answering clarification questions on the guidance; the duration of the process; and a perceived failure on the part of the MA to identify some aspects of provision which were not eligible for funding during the assessment phase. While some respondents were frustrated by the delays in particular, it was also common for interviewees to recognise that the DWP staff they had direct contact with were doing their best and had been confronted with a challenging situation.

In response to this context a number of interviewees reflected on lessons for future procurement, with suggestions including:

- The provision of more explicit and clearer guidance, particularly around financial processes. It was also noted that ideally such guidance should be collated into a single source and publicised more effectively. In this context some interviewees also felt that clearer guidance would have avoided some of the early need for change requests[40] and contract variations experienced.
- Interviewees also often cited that they would have liked local DWP contacts to be more responsive. As such, it was felt that adequate resources need to be put in place at the MA in order to be able to respond to provider queries in a clear and timely way.
- More widely, it was felt that future calls for proposals would have to be implemented in a more timely fashion, allowing for the adequate balance between the duration of the procurement phase and the time left for delivery.

[40] A 'change request' is a formal process by which a YEI grant recipient can request approval for proposed changes to their funding agreement.

3.5 Summary of key findings

Key findings from the above analysis are as follows:

- Positive views on partnership working between DWP as the ESF MA and the EC were expressed by stakeholders with knowledge of this.
- Likewise, the general view was that partnership working between the ESF MA and local partners in designing the programme had functioned effectively.
- The Commission was viewed as responsive in clarifying the potential for flexibilities within the YEI regulations, and in seeking to enable these where possible.
- Local ESIF sub-committee representatives generally felt that they were able to substantially influence the YEI calls for proposals developed, and hence impact on local project design from a strategic perspective.
- Such representatives, however, often felt that an ongoing role beyond this would be beneficial to ensure that contracted provision met local needs, though the point was also made that such a role could constitute a conflict of interest where such representatives were from, or linked to, organisations with a role in YEI delivery.
- In general the initial design phase of the YEI was felt to have worked well, in part due to collaboration between YEI project partners in developing their bids and also strong pre-existing relationships at the local level.
- Some design challenges were encountered however; in particular:
  - the mismatch between the boundaries of LEP areas and YEI-eligible areas;
  - the perceived restrictiveness of the YEI guidance and eligibility rules; and
  - the requirement to source local match funding.
- While these challenges were felt to have been overcome in many cases, restrictions on the ability to support those at risk of becoming NEET was felt to have compromised the potential impact of the YEI in some quarters.
- A combination of the above challenges also represented the key reasons for two LEP areas not being able to take-up the YEI funding allocated.
- The localism agenda was widely seen as a key factor influencing the design of the YEI, adding value to existing provision and helping to address gaps in services.
- Value for money was considered by providers in the design stage; however, provider representatives were generally clear that the main consideration was developing a set of provision to meet the needs of the target group, rather than monetary concerns per se.
- Interviewees generally felt that ESF cross-cutting themes were taken into account in the design phase.
- While some interviewees felt that YEI procurement processes had worked reasonably well, a notable theme was the length of time taken from launching calls for proposals to the signature of funding agreements.

- Many interviewees stated that this had significantly impacted on their delivery plans, and some providers mentioned that delays would lead to an underspend due to changes in the local match funding available in the time period concerned.
- Some interviewees also noted that they felt under pressure to start delivery as quickly as possible in order to achieve their targets and provide support to young people waiting for the provision.

4 Implementation I: YEI provision, governance and partnerships

This chapter considers the early implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). It first examines the nature of the provision procured under the initiative, before considering issues relating to its governance. The partnerships and delivery structures involved in YEI implementation are then examined, before considering the extent and nature of any transfers of learning and good practice occurring as part of delivery. Key findings from the preceding analysis are presented at the end of the chapter.

4.1 Nature of the YEI provision

In general, the provision examined by the evaluation, both through the desk review and fieldwork with selected projects, closely mirrored the types of activities anticipated in the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programme (OP) as detailed in the introduction to this report. A range of measures and provisions were apparent within the initiative as a whole. While there was some variation in the nature of provision between and within YEI projects that could be observed, a number of commonalities were also apparent. The most frequently implemented provision includes: employability skills (such as CV-writing, applications and interview preparation), functional skills, volunteering, accredited and non-accredited training, networking skills, and confidence-building tasks.

There appeared to be few variations in the types of actions or measures being implemented for larger projects as against smaller ones, with most provision within the former simply being upscaled to meet the target numbers. Only one of the projects sampled that targets a specific sub-set of the not in employment, education and training (NEET) population (such as unemployed graduates) has implemented distinctly different provision from those delivered more generally under the YEI, in this case placing unemployed graduates into internships.

A good deal of commonality was evident in terms of the broad delivery processes and structure used to provide a framework for the support being delivered. Typically this involved a number of actions being implemented at various points within what might be termed the YEI participant journey. These generally progressed through outreach and engagement to action planning, information and guidance, and on to interventions and follow-up support.

Within this, the main variation apparent was between those projects mainly delivering ‘individual support actions’ and those delivering ‘packages of support’ arranged in a more formal pathway. For the former, key-workers are commonly used to co-ordinate support for young people by, for example, developing action plans, providing information and guidance and signposting them to relevant intervention or support. The rationale for implementing actions in this way was often described in terms of the need to address the complex and multiple needs that the target group might have, in some cases to break down entrenched barriers:

> *'In our world, that flexibility is critical, because some peoples' lives are chaotic and what we're looking to do is to remove those barriers, thus enabling them to engage in the programme.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

For the latter approach, oriented around a support pathway, there was some variation evident in terms of the types of actions being implemented, with some providers offering courses with pre-determined provision and others offering fixed stages of support, within which provision can be shaped to a young person's needs. This finding is consistent with that gained from the review of project outlines undertaken at the outset of the evaluation. This indicated that there were three main approaches to delivery: a prescriptive staged approach with pre-set provision; a flexible staged approach with set stages but enabling flexibility within this; and individualised support built around a needs assessment and key worker model.

In a smaller number of cases, more specific provision is being implemented that relates to the particular approaches taken by individual projects. These include the purchasing of specific support dependent on identified needs, a dedicated 'hub' being established to source employment or training opportunities, and the provision of loans to support enterprise or self-employment ideas.

4.2 Governance

It is evident that all of YEI projects have adopted governance arrangements which seek to inform, oversee and guide provision at both strategic and operational levels. These arrangements are relatively consistent and do not vary significantly according to the size of projects, whether the target group(s) are specific or more generic, by LEP area, or by the delivery approach adopted. At the strategic level, most projects have established a dedicated YEI steering group, with only a handful of projects using existing governance arrangements – for example, local skills boards or education boards. Amongst the projects reviewed, the steering groups typically consist of key strategic stakeholders, commonly including project leads, leads for other youth employment programmes or provision operating locally, Jobcentre Plus, local colleges, relevant voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.

In a few cases there was also representation from LEPs and occasionally a selection of delivery partners on such groups. However, most of the delivery partner staff interviewed had no engagement in strategic-level groups. Similarly, around half of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) sub-committee representatives consulted stated that they are not involved in project governance. The reasons for this varied, with such interviewees sometimes citing that either there was no specific role developed for them, or that for reasons concerning possible conflicts of interest they could not be involved in this way. This was particularly the case in the LEP areas where there is more than one YEI project.

Alongside more strategic steering groups, many projects also have operational steering groups that tend to meet monthly or bi-monthly, often representing all of the partners involved. The purpose of these groups was generally described as providing forums to identify what is working well or less well, to establish relationships between delivery partners, to raise awareness of the provision on offer amongst partners, and to improve joint working across the project. Within the operational groups, some projects have developed sub-groups, where partners meet to talk about a certain theme, such as marketing or compliance, and to share knowledge or good practice around these areas.

At the project level, lead and delivery partner staff were generally positive about the governance arrangements adopted. Steering group meetings were typically reported to be regular and well-attended, and operational groups to have high levels of engagement and attendance. Operational steering groups in particular were often reported as strengthening partners' working relationships. Interviewees generally reported that the groups were very effective mechanisms for sharing information, with benefits cited including helping to ensure that all partners understand the provision available and can develop suggestions able to be fed back up to the strategic level. In addition, operational-level 'subgroups' in areas such as marketing or compliance were viewed as being important for tackling specific issues that a partner might have during the implementation and delivery. As a lead partner representative noted:

> *'It feels like a support group … when you're trying to unpick a piece of guidance it's really helpful to be able to have a discussion about that,* [for example] *we can agree what we want to ask DWP and go back with that.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

While governance arrangements were seen as positive and effective by provider staff, several ESIF sub-committee representatives noted that they would like to see more feedback on the projects in their area so they have a better understanding of which provision is functioning well. This was seen in some instances as reflecting a gap in governance arrangements in that some ESIF sub-committee representatives felt that they should have more of an influencing and oversight role as part of YEI implementation, rather than this role having been largely focused on the design and development stage of the initiative. However, as discussed above and in the preceding chapter, other stakeholders interviewed equally recognised the potential for conflicts of interest in such a role, particularly if it extended beyond ESIF sub-committees being kept appraised of progress and any issues through agreed governance arrangements in the context of the ESIF regulations.

Few challenges were reported as having arisen to date in respect of YEI governance arrangements, though it should be noted that many of the projects consulted have only had a small number of steering group meetings thus far. Those challenges that were noted included issues such as strategic groups not meeting due to project delays, operational groups getting too large and potentially unwieldy, and meetings happening too frequently so there are not enough agenda items. Generally these were felt to be initial issues that would be addressed as implementation progressed.

4.3 Partnerships and delivery structures

4.3.1 Nature of the YEI delivery partnerships

The majority of YEI delivery is being implemented through consortium-based approaches, with a minority of projects being delivered, in formal delivery terms,[41] through a single organisation. Delivery arrangements thus range from projects with one formal delivery organisation to a project with 20 delivery partners in a consortium. Those interviewed from projects adopting a consortium approach often commented that this should support effective implementation in terms of offering a range of partners able to collectively address all the needs that young people on the YEI have. As one interviewee commented:

> *'We have developed a partnership that can cover everything that we thought would be needed.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

It is evident that delivery partnerships often built on pre-existing partnerships, or at least relationships, between the organisations involved. In some cases the YEI offered the opportunity to formalise these partnerships, while in others partnerships that had been used to deliver other provision remained largely intact with the addition or removal of a partner or two. It was also noted that in some cases the YEI offered the opportunity to reconsider previous arrangements and bring together different providers to meet the varying needs of NEET young people. Depending on the needs identified in the design stage, this sometimes meant bringing in new providers to existing partnerships, though it was apparent that these providers were often well known locally as outlined by one lead partner representative:

> *'They* [partners] *tend to be trusted organisations or have known delivery capability or would deliver to a particular group, such as mental health or those working with the black and minority ethnic groups.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

In cases where new providers were brought in, interviewees from these organisations were often aware of the other organisations involved, but had not directly worked with them. This may have been as the organisations in question had previously delivered in different geographical areas, or delivered a niche category of provision not commonly used in employability interventions. In a smaller number of cases, provider representatives interviewed had not really been involved in employability support before, so they were unfamiliar with other providers in their partnership.

[41] In the case of delivery by a single partner, this does not necessarily mean that other organisations are not involved in the support provided to young people, but rather that those organisations are not a formal part of a delivery partnership or structure as in the case of consortia-based approaches.

There was no clear pattern in terms of whether different types of projects – depending on the target group, type of intervention, delivery structure or LEP area – had established new delivery partnerships for the YEI. However, the larger projects involved in the fieldwork generally had well-established partnerships that had operated for several years before the YEI, with a limited number of new partners being brought in to deliver in a certain area of provision. In contrast, there was more variation in respect of the smaller projects consulted; while many had worked with their partners before in some format, often these relationships had not been formalised or the combination of partners was new.

It was also apparent that the partnerships developed had remained fairly stable from the design and procurement stages through to implementation. As such most of the projects engaged through the fieldwork had not experienced any changes to their partnership. Where changes have occurred, this was mainly to add new partners to deliver a certain type of provision which was identified as being needed in the course of moving from design to implementation. Only one of the sampled projects reported losing partners from the initial bidding stage. This was in part because the target group was revised, thus making the provision of two partners redundant, but also because of external issues, such as a lack of capacity of one provider to deliver to the revised plans and another going bankrupt before delivery began.

While partnerships have remained largely stable to date, in the case of some projects representatives noted that they anticipate that their partnership could continue to expand as YEI delivery progresses. Several reasons were cited for this, including the possibility of engaging new partners based on client need through a 'spot-purchasing' approach, and the potential to bring in new partners if particular forms of support emerged as being needed or likely to be beneficial.

4.3.2 Functioning of delivery partnerships

In general, interviewees felt that it was too early to make any strong judgements around how well delivery partnerships were functioning. However, there was some variation in early perceptions, with some provider representatives citing that their partnerships seemed to be operating well, while others felt that fully cohesive partnership working was yet to emerge. This latter view was particularly evident in relation to the larger projects engaged through the fieldwork. In some instances it was felt that this reflected the fact that not all delivery staff are in position yet, with the projects in question thus being limited in the extent to which all partners can work together effectively and efficiently.

For the smaller projects within the fieldwork sample, although views were generally positive one project representative felt that their partners have become 'quite stretched' during the early delivery phase. In this case it was noted that all partners involved are struggling to find the capacity to come together as a partnership. Conversely, in other cases having a relatively small-scale project was felt to be helping the partnership to function well, with interviewees noting that this helped keep things relatively simple and manageable. As one such interviewee noted:

> *'We are lucky in that we have a small partnership – I think if we had any more then it would start to get difficult. As a team we work well.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

Although it was seen as too early for many interviewees to comment on the overall success of delivery partnerships, some were able to identify specific aspects that had worked well or less well, alongside key challenges that they had faced and overcome. Stakeholders generally agreed that regular reviews or operational-level meetings were important to help the partnerships to flourish: in particular, through offering opportunities to share knowledge and understand how they can improve joined-up working. Some representatives of lead partners also highlighted the benefits of reviewing their partnerships on an ongoing basis, in particular in terms of informing how YEI delivery can best complement – and be complemented by – other local provision. As one interviewee commented:

> *'All the time we're reviewing the ambition of our project but also reviewing the deliverability. We're reviewing how successfully we're working with existing strategic partners … and looking to strengthen the network all the time.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

In addition to regular reviews and meetings, data sharing and partnership agreements were identified as key mechanisms in helping to formalise working relationships and ensuring that partners know their roles and responsibilities.

Alongside successful mechanisms implemented at the project-level, feedback was also provided around how the design of the YEI intervention has supported successful partnership working. For example, one lead partner representative commented that the YEI's use of payments based on expenditure, rather than outcome-based payments, has supported an environment where partners work collaboratively to deliver the best support for the young person, without worrying about 'keeping young people for themselves'.

Some delivery partner staff also commented that being part of a specific branded intervention, with a formalised partnership structure, helped to facilitate successful joined-up working, as the following comment illustrates:

> *'Anything that enables one group of people to understand the workings of another to make the road smoother for the customer has got to be good. Because this programme is under a banner, we seem to have become more intertwined more quickly than if it were just a policy decision. We seem to have got our flag or our target, and it seems to have worked well – we all seem to be part of it, there's no partner that seems to think "it's nothing to do with me".'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

In terms of aspects working less well, delays in recruitment, staff turnover, and a lack of meetings thus far were cited in some cases as leading to delivery partners not always working together in the most effective and efficient way. This was particularly evident in respect of the larger projects engaged in the fieldwork. In addition, in some cases it was noted that partners will take time to fully trust each other and not seek to, for example, hold on to young people they have engaged who might be better supported by a different organisation. Nonetheless, interviewees were generally optimistic that the aforementioned successful mechanisms, such as operational group meetings or partnership agreements, will address these issues successfully as implementation beds in. As one interviewee noted of these issues:

> *'I think there is still a slight tendency to work with your own young people … but at these meetings* [for the YEI project]*, partners are sharing a lot of information and they're taking information from each other.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

The main challenges that partnerships have faced thus far were typically described as early 'teething issues' around getting processes and paperwork into place and establishing effective working relationships. Of the projects that felt they have largely already overcome these issues, the use of a central information hub (such as an online management system, directories or newsletters) was seen as beneficial for all partners in ensuring that staff are knowledgeable about processes and any changes occurring in real time. In the larger projects, delays with getting staff into place has meant that some partners have started delivering before others, thus resulting in the implementation and delivery being undertaken on a staged basis. This was seen as having some negative effects on the extent to which partners can work together effectively, because they are still trying to 'catch-up' on their own provision.

In addition, working together cohesively and ensuring awareness of partners' provision was something that appeared to be a particular challenge for the YEI projects that are delivering individual support actions as opposed to packages of support. This was seen as relating to the greater difficulty and longer period needed to ensure that such an approach worked seamlessly relative to forms of delivery with more structured pathways. Again, however, such projects were actively working to address these issues through the kind of mechanisms outlined above.

For most stakeholders interviewed, it was too early to say if there had been any lessons learned around partnership working to date. The main piece of learning was around lead and partner organisations being open and willing to try new ideas, to help understand what works well and less well around partnership working.

4.4 Transfer of learning and good practice

4.4.1 Mechanisms for sharing good practice

The document review undertaken at the outset of the evaluation indicated that most YEI projects intended to implement processes to identify and share good practice. However, there was little indication from the fieldwork that such processes or mechanisms had been implemented across delivery partners. In part this appeared to relate to delays in project implementation, and a perceived need to prioritise getting delivery up and running, rather than focus on good practice sharing as yet. However, most provider representatives cited that they are planning to implement processes for sharing such practice as the project progresses. In addition, despite the lack of formal mechanisms for sharing good practice to date, a number of provider representatives cited that their organisations already have processes for identifying such practice and other issues internally, and that the basis for sharing practice was thus in place.

Of the projects that have been sharing good practice across delivery partners so far, partnership meetings were the most commonly used forum for transferring learning, though it was noted that this is often done informally. The larger projects engaged in the fieldwork were more likely to use partnership meetings in this way, though such activity was also evident within some smaller projects. Only a small proportion of provider representatives, whether from larger or smaller projects, cited the use of more formalised mechanisms, such as online portals and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, to share insights about delivery.

In general, as might be expected from the above findings, interviewees generally felt that it was too early to tell if mechanisms for sharing good practice were functioning well. The comment of one interviewee was typical in this sense:

> *'It's not so much about sharing good practice but more about embedding awareness at the moment.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

There was also some concern that the need to ensure that delivery progressed quickly, in light of tighter timescales than initially anticipated, could mean that it would be difficult to fully engage in sharing good practice without using too much staff resource. Generally, however, it was more common for provider representatives to feel that such good practice sharing would occur but that implementation would have to bed in further first.

4.4.2 Sharing good practice across YEI projects and between Local Enterprise Partnership areas

In terms of sharing good practice across the YEI areas, some lead partner representatives noted that they have come together for national steering group meetings to learn about the projects and what could be improved about their systems and processes. In addition, an email exchange has also been set up, to enable representatives to ask queries and post responses to other YEI providers. Although there has been just one national provider meeting to date, stakeholders also highlighted that they would like to see someone from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) attend future meetings so that they can directly ask queries and have issues addressed as a group.

There is also evidence to suggest that in Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas where more than one YEI project is being delivered, projects are interested in meeting with other YEI providers to transfer learning and share good practice. However, it was noted that many such projects are still in the process of adjusting their own provision; as one representative commented:

> *'It's an evolving relationship* [with the other YEI provider in the LEP area] *… we don't have in place any sharing protocols … I think that will come in time.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

In general, stakeholders felt that it was too early to comment on the effectiveness of any developing mechanisms for sharing good practice between YEI projects, given the stage of development outlined above. However, it was also clear that the potential benefits of such mechanisms were recognised. As one lead provider representative noted:

'I think the more we learn about how these programmes [other YEI projects] *operate, the more difference we can make to young peoples' lives.'*

(Lead partner representative)

4.5 Summary of key findings

Key findings from the preceding analysis can be summarised as follows:

- In general, the provision examined closely mirrored that anticipated in the ESF OP.
- Delivery processes used to provide a framework for the provision typically involved actions being implemented at various points within the YEI 'participant journey'; for example, engagement, needs assessment and identification of support provision.
- All YEI projects have adopted local governance arrangements which seek to inform, oversee and guide provision at both strategic and operational levels.
- Providers were generally positive about the local governance arrangements adopted; steering group meetings were typically reported to be regular and well-attended, and local operational groups to have high levels of engagement.
- YEI delivery has often built on pre-existing partnerships, or at least relationships, between the local organisations involved, in some cases offering the opportunity to formalise these partnerships.
- The YEI partnerships developed have remained fairly stable from the design and procurement stages through to implementation; where changes have occurred, this was mainly to add new partners to deliver provision identified as being required.
- In general, interviewees felt that it was too early to make strong judgements around the functioning of delivery partnerships, and tentative assessments were mixed.
- The main partnership challenges faced to date were typically described as early 'teething issues' around getting processes in place, and establishing effective working relationships, though there was confidence this would be resolved.
- There was little indication that processes to identify and share good practice between YEI projects and eligible areas had been implemented.
- In part this related to delays in project implementation, and a perceived need to prioritise getting delivery up and running.

5 Implementation II: Engagement, delivery and overall implementation

This second chapter on the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) to date first focuses on the engagement of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) onto the provision, examining how well processes are functioning. The chapter then looks at the delivery of provision so far in terms of what has worked well or less well, the extent of innovation evident, and how far European Social Fund (ESF) cross-cutting themes are reflected in delivery. Processes around contract management and financial implementation are then examined, prior to making an assessment of overall implementation to date. Key findings from these areas are summarised at the end of the chapter.

5.1 Engagement onto the YEI

5.1.1 Targeting, referral and engagement processes

On the whole, referral processes and engagement routes onto the YEI projects examined appeared to be functioning well. A relatively diverse range of routes was evident, including through Jobcentre Plus, housing authorities, other employment programmes,[42] partner agencies and other local organisations that target support at specific groups. Project-level stakeholders highlighted their use of existing relationships and networks to recruit individuals, but also commonly noted that a key feature of YEI provision involves expanding existing referral routes and focusing on outreach work.

Successful engagement methods cited included targeting groups in specific areas where young people gather, and outreach activity outside of working hours, with these seen as enabling staff to access harder-to-reach young people in particular. Similarly, co-location with relevant services was identified as a successful way to maximise engagement. For example, one provider has case workers co-located in early help/intervention and family centres, along with Jobcentre Plus offices. It was noted that such co-location, and the relationships developed through it, facilitate regular contact with key target groups such as lone parents or those experiencing homelessness. Such arrangements were also cited as enabling staff to build up trust with a young person over time to encourage them to engage with the YEI.

Although most stakeholders felt that the targeting of young people was working well, many provider representatives felt that the eligibility criteria for the YEI and what they perceived as the significant burden of collecting the evidence had a negative impact on engagement. In particular, evidence requirements to confirm eligibility were seen as challenging and as contributing to lower-than-anticipated numbers of individuals being supported. A common theme was that the requirements in place were unsuited to the target group, some of whom may not have a permanent address and/or access to documentation such as a driving licence, passport or birth certificate.

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42 Including, for example, those leaving the Government's Work Programme.

While the guidance for YEI providers allows some flexibility in this area, meaning that such documentation may not necessarily be required, it was clear that at the provider level there was uncertainty over this flexibility and/or that such messages were not necessarily being transmitted to delivery staff. As such, at the time the fieldwork was undertaken this issue was noted as causing frustration by delivery staff who felt that they had little guidance on how they might overcome it. As one interviewee outlined:

> *'To get a 16-year-old to come in, prove that they've got a right to work in this country, that they are aged 16-29, that they do live in* [the YEI area]*, and that they aren't in work or education … that's very hard to prove. If they're inactive – which a lot of them are – how do you evidence that they're inactive? We've been asked how to do this by the delivery partners and we've been back to DWP* [Department for Work and Pensions] *and asked them and we've scratched our head … this is the eligibility criteria, yes, but we have no idea how to evidence it. There is no evidence.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

Stakeholders also voiced their concerns about the impact of what they saw as a YEI administrative burden on young peoples' engagement, commenting that some of their young people have lost interest in the programme during the time it has taken to source all of the relevant documentation. As one provider representative explained:

> *'You find these young people who need help desperately, and you've got a programme there to help them, but then you have to jump through god knows how many hoops to prove that they're eligible. They'll just walk away. And I don't think that's been taken into account for this particular client group, especially the younger ones. They don't have this kind of ID.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

While clearly causing issues in some cases, in other cases stakeholders did not feel that the eligibility criteria had impacted on engagement, and there was no clear pattern according to the size, type or location of the projects concerned as to the extent to which eligibility criteria emerged as an issue. As noted above, this might again suggest that clearer guidance is required around this issue, along with instruction to lead partners to disseminate this across their delivery partnerships.

5.1.2 Progress on engagement to date

Provider representatives provided mixed feedback about whether or not the numbers engaged by their projects and organisations to date are in line with expectations. There was no distinguishable pattern between the views of those from lead and delivery partners, with both types of interviewee reporting that their projects were variously exceeding targets, on track, or struggling to engage the number of young people anticipated. In addition, although some projects reported that they have identified the number of young people anticipated, and/or that referral rates were good, the aforementioned issues with eligibility were seen as casting doubt on whether or not they will be able to actually engage these numbers.

Likewise, the projects facing these issues cited that they have had to spend more time than expected on the engagement process, ensuring that they can maintain the young person's interest while they source their documents. For example, one stakeholder commented that they aim to contact the young person 3-4 times between their initial expression of interest in

participation and the start date of provision, to ensure that engagement can be maintained. Another issue that providers noted regarding recruitment is that delays in getting contracts signed have caused delays in implementation and delivery. Therefore, several projects are no longer operating to their original recruitment plan and are in the process of submitting a contract variation to reduce target numbers.

Alongside these perceived barriers to recruiting the anticipated numbers, other issues also affected a smaller number of providers, including: delays to the implementation of marketing campaigns; a general slowdown in recruitment during the summer months; and a reduction in the number of people unemployed and fitting the target group since the targets were originally agreed for the YEI, thus narrowing the pool of potential participants.

Interestingly, of the projects that could ascertain whether or not their target numbers were on track, those delivering individual support actions as opposed to packages of support were much more likely to be on track with their engagement numbers (and in one case, to have 'too many referrals'). However, there was no clear evidence for why this might be the case.

5.1.3 Engagement of particular sub-groups

Provider representatives were also asked whether they had experienced any difficulty in identifying and engaging particular sub-groups within the NEET population. While most interviewees felt that they have not had any such issues, some commented that the targets set in relation to particular groups, such as lone parents, did not reflect the actual patterns on the ground. For example, one representative of a lead provider highlighted that each element of the target has a male/female split but that, from their perspective, this bore little relation to the NEET population in the area, which in their experience were predominately male.

Accepting this, it was clear that in several cases projects were putting processes in place to ensure that their projects recruited the correct numbers from the target groups specified. Such processes included, for example, using compliance teams to monitor the recruitment demographics and to alert recruitment or outreach teams so that recruitment processes could be adjusted if necessary to target a specific group. It was generally noted in such cases, however, that given the early point in delivery such adjustments had not yet been made, and hence judging their effectiveness was not yet possible.

5.2 Delivery of provision

5.2.1 Functioning of delivery to date

Across the stakeholders interviewed, delivery was described as going broadly to plan, though in many cases it was seen as being too early to offer a fully detailed assessment, or to comment significantly on what was working well or less well in terms of specific types of activity. However, in several instances the delays outlined elsewhere in the report were seen as leading to implementation being behind where projects had hoped to be, and/or that the start of delivery was being staggered in terms of the involvement of different partners.

In terms of what had worked well or less well in general, a reasonable proportion of provider representatives felt able to provide detail on specific mechanisms or aspects of delivery that fell into these categories. Conversely, those ESIF sub-committee representatives interviewed felt that it was too early to say what was working well or otherwise, or that they were not

working closely enough with the projects to ascertain positive or negative aspects of the delivery. This view of being too far from delivery to offer an assessment was also shared by the ESFD/Commission stakeholders consulted.

Many of the project staff interviewed felt that the case-worker function – involving building up a relationship with a young person to encourage sustained engagement – was proving effective. This function was cited as being particularly useful for starting to break down the barriers that young people with the most entrenched issues face. Engaging young people at risk of social exclusion is one of the goals of YEI, with the main objective being integration into the labour market. Already some delivery staff reported seeing significant 'distance travelled' on the part of some young people although it was too early to say whether this would lead to the young person entering employment. As one commented:

> *'We are getting some real, positive progressions, and by positive progressions I don't necessarily mean that they've gone into work, or a traineeship or a job, but sometimes just somebody being able to come out of the house can be a massive step for them.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

The flexibility of the provision was also cited as a key success factor in the delivery of projects so far, with staff reporting that they can really tailor the support to the young person depending on their needs due to the range of provision available. This ability to tailor support was often noted as resulting from the breadth of the YEI partnership involved and/or through projects' ability to 'spot-purchase'[43] specific provision. As one interviewee commented:

> *'Now when we have partners sitting in front of Joe Bloggs who needs x, y and z and* [they] *can't help, now they have somewhere to go, which is fantastic.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

This flexibility and ability to tailor support was seen as important both in terms of facilitating access to particular provision and also in a geographical sense, given that partners in different localities could be accessed and young people signposted to them where this was more appropriate.

Similar to aspects of delivery seen as working well so far, many stakeholders – especially at higher, more strategic levels – felt that it was too early to say what has worked less well with delivery to date. The main challenge facing projects identified by lead provider representatives, and reflected by those from delivery partners, was the issue around evidencing eligibility criteria outlined above. In terms of delivery, this issue was widely seen as raising the proportion of time spent on administrative requirements as opposed to directly supporting young people. As one delivery staff member noted:

> *'It* [the identification check] *just takes you from the job because you spend your time filling in loads of forms and you're asking young people to sign this, that and the other when it's just totally unnecessary.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

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[43] Spot purchasing in this context refers to a proportion of YEI funding being reserved to commission specific provision as and when required to meet the needs of those being supported.

Equally, one member of staff from a delivery partner commented that dealing with a backlog of eligibility checks had meant that they had to cease working on their other provision outside of YEI in order to have the capacity to deliver the initiative.

In contrast to lead partner representatives, delivery partner staff provided more detail about other issues seen as affecting the delivery of YEI provision to date, although these issues were not raised as widely as those concerning eligibility. Delays in contracting, and the start of delivery being staggered across partners in YEI projects as a result, was seen as preventing some of the young people engaged early from accessing the range of provision envisaged. Similarly, contracting delays were cited as resulting in some projects facing delays with staff recruitment, meaning that they have not been able to engage with – and provide support to – as many young people as envisaged.

Finally, for some of the geographically large or more rural projects engaged in the evaluation, delivery staff commented that there have been occasions where young people are reluctant to travel to access support, thus limiting the range of provision they can access. While some providers have aimed to bring provision to young people, it was noted that with some of the small delivery partners this is just not possible. To overcome this issue, in such cases it was cited that staff will spend more time breaking down barriers that may be discouraging young people from travelling further to access provision.

5.2.2 LEP involvement in delivery to date

Evidence gathered through the fieldwork suggests that Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have had limited direct involvement in monitoring, supporting or guiding the delivery of YEI projects so far. Of the small number of projects engaged in the fieldwork that have worked with their LEP during delivery, this has mainly been what was described by one provider representative as a 'hands-off' relationship. The comment of one lead partner representative of the role of the LEP was fairly typical:

> *'They have been there, they have made us aware of their priorities and we've had consultations with them when we were developing the project … but it's not been much over and above that.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

It should be noted, however, that LEPs are intended to play a more strategic role in respect of the ESF through the local European Structural and Investment Funds' (ESIF) sub-committees rather than directly engaging in operational delivery as such. In line with this, in some areas it was noted that progress was planned to be reported to, and discussed at, ESIF sub-committee meetings, but that their role in any direct support was not anticipated to develop far beyond this. Equally, it is worth commenting that at the provider level there did not seem to be much concern about the lack of guidance and support from LEPs during the delivery phase of the project. Most of those projects that had worked with their LEPs in the initial design and development phase of the YEI felt that they could always consult their LEP if they needed support, but that this has thus far not been necessary.

Accepting this scenario, as discussed in section 4.2 on governance arrangements, some ESIF sub-committee representatives did note that they were keen to have an ongoing role in at least monitoring project delivery. In particular, this was often cast in terms of helping to ensure that the YEI was meeting local priorities and contributing to local ESIF strategies as intended.

5.2.3 Level of innovation evident in YEI delivery

In general, all groups of stakeholders interviewed noted that YEI projects were most likely to be building on or utilising provision that was already present. Evidence from the fieldwork suggested that, in general, projects were not adopting a completely innovative approach on the one hand, but neither were they completely transposing existing provision into the YEI context on the other. Typically, therefore, specific aspects of projects can be considered relatively new and innovative, whereas other elements can be described as tried and tested to a greater or lesser extent.

For some projects, the 'innovative' aspect of the YEI involved delivering to new areas or new target groups, but the actual provision itself was felt to be less innovative per se. In others, it was noted that YEI was allowing delivery partners to try out new approaches to engagement that as organisations they had not used before, or had used in a smaller scale or more restricted way. For several of the projects engaged in the evaluation, therefore, the YEI has given the opportunity to develop what they already have and works well, but also take risks and try new or innovative provision in some areas. As one interviewee outlined:

> *'I think we need a bit of both, you need to be able to run some things that are well established and have a proven track record and that you know are going to hit the mark. You also need to be able to run things that are a bit more innovative and that we haven't done before to test whether they do work or not.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

Although not widespread, some of the examples of innovative provision cited included: having funding available to support employers or training providers to offer opportunities (work placements, apprenticeships, training, equipment) to young people to help get them into employment, education or training; being able to commission bespoke provision through a 'spot purchasing approach'[44] depending on the needs of young people; working out of normal hours on outreach and delivery activity to work with hard-to-reach young people in particular; and providing wrap-around, bespoke support (which was seen as new for one area in particular).

Provider representatives also highlighted examples where, although the overall provision in the area is not particularly new or innovative, delivery of the provision might be new for the partners involved. For example, one lead partner representative highlighted that a housing provider that has not delivered employment support before is part of their partnership. It was noted that the organisation in question is introducing such support at an important time, where changes in legislation around housing (around getting their residents into employment) have meant that there is greater incentive for these organisations to be involved in initiatives such as the YEI.

While there was some evidence of innovation as outlined above, it was equally common for provider and ESIF sub-committee representatives to note that there was not necessarily any need to develop innovative provision when they already had a tried-and-tested model with a successful track record of supporting the target group concerned. The views of the following delivery partner staff were typical of this perspective:

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[44] Spot purchasing in this context refers to a proportion of YEI funding being reserved to commission specific provision as and when required to meet the needs of those being supported.

> *'There's only so much innovation you can actually do in a programme where you are helping* [NEET young people] *with often very similar problems and issues back into work. Often it's really a lack of functional skills, English or Maths, lack of ICT, lack of workplace behaviours … So innovation, yes, so we will trial innovative ways, but it's ultimately doing what we know works and it might not be very innovative but it has proven to be very successful in the past.'*
>
> *'In the design phase it was recognised that this approach seemed to make a difference so there was little point reinventing the wheel; going out to colleges and requesting new courses – we've been doing that for years and while it has some impact it doesn't have the same impact.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representatives)

Looking across the projects engaged in the fieldwork as a whole, the larger projects in our sample were most likely to be building on existing provision, while also expanding to new areas and introducing some more flexibility to address the needs of young people. There was more variation within the smaller projects, with some just expanding their existing provision, whereas others had introduced newer and more innovative aspects of delivery.

5.2.4 ESF cross-cutting themes within YEI delivery

Although it was a requirement at the YEI procurement stage for projects to identify how the ESF cross-cutting themes of sustainable development, gender equality and equal opportunities would be reflected in the provision, the fieldwork revealed that not much has been actively done by projects thus far to ensure these themes are reflected in delivery. There was also a feeling amongst a few interviewees that such considerations were secondary to delivery, or were viewed more as what one ESIF sub-committee representative described as a 'tick-box exercise'.

Accepting the above, it was common for representatives at the provider level to note that the focus of implementation thus far has been on getting delivery up and running in a context where delays have affected progress. From this perspective, while cross-cutting themes were seen as important, it was noted that more attention is likely to be paid to this aspect once project delivery is more advanced. The comment of one lead partner representative was typical of this perspective:

> *'I think the cross-cutting themes are probably taking a bit of a backseat but they are built into the programme to be dealt with as part of the partner review structure.'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

Only a few provider representatives from the sample interviewed highlighted their proactive attempts of implementing provision to reflect the ESF cross-cutting themes. One project, for example, has set up working groups around each of the themes, and one of the project's partners has been involved in sourcing some level 2 training in environmental sustainability for some of their young people, as part of their work around the sustainable development theme. Other examples of reflecting the cross-cutting themes in delivery included discussions on the themes within operational groups, and actively monitoring recruitment data to ensure that engagement targets relevant to the equal opportunities and gender equality themes are being met.

Equally, it should be noted that many provider representatives commented that most aspects relevant to the cross-cutting themes are already embedded in the provision they deliver and generally underpin the ethos of their organisation. As one interviewee commented:

> *'Equal opportunities and gender opportunities are delivered as of right – they are part of what we do.'*
>
> (Delivery partner representative)

While this perspective was strongly advanced in some cases, it is fair to note that, in general, provider representatives found it difficult to offer specific examples of how the cross-cutting themes were actually being reflected in, or influencing, delivery. This scenario of the themes being described as providing an underpinning ethos, alongside a lack of more concrete examples of how themes were influencing delivery, was the most common across the interviews conducted.

5.3 Contract management and financial implementation

5.3.1 Functioning of contract management processes

Although projects were generally affected by delays in procurement and contracting, provider representatives reported having positive experiences with DWP's contract managers. Given the delivery arrangements for the YEI, representatives of lead partners provided the main perspectives on this aspect of implementation given that they have direct contact with DWP. Delivery partner representatives, meanwhile, tended to offer views, if they had any, on the contractual relationships between their organisation and the lead partner for the project they are involved with. Only a few such interviewees commented on this but were positive in all cases.

Although DWP's contract managers were typically viewed as 'friendly, helpful and approachable' as one lead partner representative put it, some representatives did offer the perception that the contract managers they had dealt with sometimes appeared relatively inexperienced, or that they seemed to be supported by inadequate infrastructure and systems. In particular, interviewees highlighted that queries took some time to be answered. In some cases such answers were also cited as being unclear or ambiguous when they arrived.

Where such a scenario was outlined, provider representatives commented that this has resulted in projects being unsure about the correct processes to take and the paperwork they should fill in. One interviewee – involved in YEI delivery across two LEP areas – also felt that information given to providers from DWP has on occasion been different in different areas, which was felt to be causing confusion. More generally, a number of provider representatives felt that greater clarity and consistency in guidance would help to address some of the issues around contract management and compliance that had emerged to date. The idea of codifying the guidance in a single place, and clearly communicating this to all delivery organisations, was also raised as a suggestion.

A related issue raised was that during the early implementation of the YEI, some required documents and templates had not been created and not all definitions had been clarified by DWP. As a result, provider representatives described how projects had to develop their own paperwork and templates in the early stages of delivery, and then adapt their records to documents later issued by DWP. A further issue identified by provider representatives was the widespread view that the YEI claims process is particularly onerous, with the administrative processes being seen as extensive and time-consuming. As one interviewee commented:

> *'It feels like admin work for the sake of admin work!'*
>
> (Lead partner representative)

The perceived administrative burden involved in these processes was also cited in some cases as taking frontline staff away from the time they spend directly with young people who are NEET. In addition, some representatives raised their concerns about delays with claims and payments from DWP, and several providers felt that they were delivering 'at risk' as they have not been paid for the provision implemented to date.

Overall, while issues such as those highlighted were clearly causing some concern amongst interviewees, this should be balanced by the more general view given of processes working satisfactorily overall and the contract managers directly working with providers being friendly and helpful.

5.3.2 Progress on financial implementation

At the time of the fieldwork, some provider representatives reported that their allocation of spending on the provision was not yet operating to profile. The underspend cited was largely perceived as having been caused by delays in procurement and starting delivery, although several projects also reported delays in staff recruitment due to a lack of suitable candidates. In turn, this was cited as impacting on the level of spend on staff salaries where this had emerged as an issue. However, in most cases provider representatives were confident that spend would return to profile once projects were fully up to speed, and/or once contract variations to reflect underspend caused by delays were agreed. Lead partner representatives also commonly noted that they were addressing these issues during discussions with DWP.

An additional issue raised in a small number of cases related to concerns over eligibility evidence requirements as outlined in the previous chapter. Some representatives noted that their understanding of the need to gather formal identification documents, which clients did not always have, had led to some individuals not engaging with the projects in question due to difficulties in sourcing these and/or the delays in registering people that this entailed. This was seen as causing knock-on effects in terms of reduced numbers being engaged and hence an underspend of allocated YEI funding. However, it should be noted that this scenario was only described in respect of a few projects engaged in the fieldwork.

5.4 Overall implementation to date

At the overall programme level, stakeholders able to comment on implementation progress were broadly positive, while acknowledging that delays in agreeing the United Kingdom's ESIF Partnership Agreement and the England ESF Operational Programme (OP) at European level had led to knock-on delays for YEI implementation locally. Collaboration

between DWP as the ESF Managing Authority (MA) and ESIF sub-committees, including LEP inputs, around procurement and early implementation were cited as a key positive factor in helping the initiative to commence delivery. Equally, high level stakeholders from European Social Fund Division (ESFD) noted that the commitment of local stakeholders, including those leading and delivering projects, meant that implementation had generally proceeded well despite the aforementioned challenges.

The perspective of interviewees at the YEI-eligible area and project levels was very similar to this, though as noted earlier a number of ESIF sub-committee representatives felt that they did not have enough information on project level implementation to be able to comment fully. At the project level, despite some of the issues noted around delays and eligibility evidence requirements, provider representatives generally reported that the implementation of their project was going well to date. However, some were hesitant to identify what had worked well or not in terms of overall implementation as they felt it was too early to say.

Where provider representatives did comment on this, the partnership structures established to support YEI delivery were generally viewed as the most successful aspect of implementation, particularly in terms of how partners have been able to mobilise together successfully to implement projects. These structures were cited as having led to successful, joined-up working and to have provided some initial opportunities to share good practice. The following comments by provider representatives were typical of this perspective:

> *'Conversations are very open … there's a lot of joint learning going on …'*
>
> *'We have gelled well as a partnership'*
>
> (Delivery partner representatives)

Another key positive aspect of implementation commented on at the project level concerned the referral routes established and the buy-in from a range of key stakeholders to refer young people onto the provision. In particular, provider representatives commented on the successful relationships established with Jobcentre Plus, which was noted as becoming a key referral mechanism onto the YEI. Co-location of services, including providers being co-located with Jobcentre Plus staff in some instances, was similarly cited by several interviewees as a key positive aspect of YEI implementation to date.

In terms of less positive aspects of YEI implementation so far, the issues outlined at several points earlier in the report around delays with contracting and procurement, eligibility evidence requirements, what was perceived as unclear guidance, and the time taken to have queries addressed, were most commonly cited at the provider level. However, provider representatives were equally positive that issues around these areas could and would be resolved, and ongoing discussions between YEI providers and DWP were noted as being in progress to develop solutions to these issues.

As with perspectives on what had worked well and less well, most interviewees across the stakeholder groups consulted felt it was too early to identify lessons learned in respect of YEI implementation on the ground. Those lessons that were cited largely related to the issue noted earlier around the importance of developing a central codified set of guidance to assist providers with implementation.

5.5 Summary of key findings

The key findings from the above analysis are as follows:

- Referral and engagement processes amongst the projects examined were reported to be functioning well.
- Engagement onto the YEI included referrals from Jobcentre Plus, housing authorities, other employment programmes, partner agencies and other local support organisations.
- Successful engagement methods cited included targeting areas where young people gather, outreach activity outside of working hours, and co-location with relevant services.
- Many provider representatives felt, however, that YEI eligibility criteria were contributing to lower-than-anticipated numbers being supported. Despite there being some flexibility in the evidence requirements around eligibility, it appeared that such an understanding was not always present amongst provider staff.
- Mixed feedback was offered about whether or not the numbers engaged by the YEI projects to date are in line with expectations. Projects were variously reported to be exceeding targets, on track, or struggling to engage the numbers anticipated.
- YEI delivery was described as going broadly to plan, though in many cases it was seen as being too early to offer a fully detailed assessment, or to comment significantly on what was working well or less well.
- However, many of the project staff interviewed felt that the case-worker function – involving building up a relationship with a young person to encourage sustained engagement – was proving effective in particular.
- The flexibility of YEI provision was also cited as important, with the ability to tailor support due the breadth of the YEI project partners being noted as key.
- In terms of innovation, YEI projects were most likely to be building on or utilising provision already present; in general, projects were not adopting a completely innovative approach on the one hand, but neither were they completely transposing existing provision into the YEI context on the other.
- Although it was a requirement for YEI projects to identify how the ESF cross-cutting themes would be reflected in provision, not much has been actively done to date to ensure these themes are reflected in delivery.
- It was common for provider representatives to note that the focus thus far has been on getting delivery up and running and that more attention is likely to be paid to cross-cutting themes once project delivery is more advanced.
- Although projects were generally affected by delays in procurement and contracting, provider representatives reported having positive experiences with DWP's contract managers.
- An issue for provider representatives, however, was the widespread view that the YEI claims process is particularly onerous, with administrative processes being seen as extensive and time-consuming.

- A number of provider representatives felt that greater clarity and consistency in guidance would help to address some of the issues around contract management and compliance that had emerged to date.
- At the time of the fieldwork, some provider representatives reported that their spending on the provision was not yet operating to profile; this was largely perceived as having been caused by delays in procurement and starting delivery.
- However, in most cases representatives were confident that spend would return to profile once projects were fully up to speed, and/or once contract variations to reflect underspend caused by delays were agreed.

6 Conclusion

This concluding chapter presents some overall reflections on the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) at this first evaluation point relating to the key evaluation themes of strategic fit, design and implementation. Some issues for consideration arising from the analysis in the preceding chapters are also offered by way of potentially informing the provision as delivery continues.

6.1 Concluding reflections

The design, development and implementation of the YEI has faced a number of challenges in the English context since its inception. While delays in agreeing the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programme (OP) and the UK's European Investment and Structural Funds (ESIF) Partnership Agreement have caused knock-on effects for the initiative, early indications are that implementation is progressing well in general. In particular, those delivering YEI provision are convinced that there is a need for such support, and that the flexibility offered by the initiative provides an opportunity to address some of the deep-rooted challenges faced by young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Partnership working at various levels has evidently been key in the progress made to date and in addressing the early implementation challenges encountered. These arrangements have also been central in ensuring that the design of the initiative has been able to combine insights from current and previous provision alongside some innovative elements. Localism has also been a central influence on the YEI's design in the English context, as has the desire to develop provision tailored to individual needs as well as being responsive to local conditions. While the effectiveness and impact of the initiative will be considered in subsequent evaluative work, early signs are that the YEI at least has the potential to have a positive effect on the NEET population.

By way of contributing to this potential, this first YEI evaluation concludes by presenting some issues for consideration that arise from the key findings developed in respect of strategic fit, design and implementation. These issues are not recommendations per se, but are designed to inform the thinking of those involved with the ongoing implementation and delivery of the YEI.

6.2 Issues for consideration

The key issues for consideration arising from the evaluation can be summarised as follows:

1 In light of potential additional YEI calls for proposals, it is important to review the existing position in eligible areas to ensure that there is a need for additional funding (i.e. numbers requiring support and able to be engaged are sufficient, and that projects are not currently struggling to spend existing allocation of funding).

2 To avoid delays and knock-on issues for providers, it is worth exploring any ways to reduce the time needed from the submission of bids through their award to the signing of contracts.

3 There is a potential need to review evidence requirements for eligibility in light of the nature of the YEI target group, and/or ensure that provider staff are aware of any potential flexibilities in the evidence required where these exist.

4 There could be possible benefits in reviewing the guidance for providers, ensuring this is consistent across areas, and ensuring that the guidance is collated together in a single, easily accessible place.

5 It may be worth considering how further engagement with local partners, including LEPs and other ESIF sub-committee members, can be facilitated on the part of the ESF MA, accepting the need to take note of any conflict of interest in situations where organisations – for example local authorities – are involved with the ESIF sub-committee as well as acting as YEI providers.

6 Consideration should be given to the stakeholder request that a representative from DWP should attend any future national provider meetings.

7 Ongoing monitoring and contractual oversight should be used to ensure that the YEI projects are taking as full an account as possible of the ESF cross-cutting themes in their delivery.

Appendix A
Theory of change

This appendix presents a draft theory of change (ToC) for the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), developed in the context of an evaluation of the programme. The ToC has been developed through a combination of an interactive workshop with YEI stakeholders and a review of programme documentation. The sections that follow:

1 Explain what a ToC is and detail its role in the evaluation (1.1).

2 Outline the results of the ToC workshop (1.2).

3 Detail key elements of a ToC derived from the document review (1.3).

4 Combine these elements into a ToC for use in the evaluation, along with offering some high level guidance on this use (1.4).

A.1 Theory of change and its role in the study

In recent years ToC has become widely used in evaluating interventions, whether at policy, programme or project levels. While it can inform the development of such interventions, underpinning an appraisal of the likely effects of a policy or programme, in evaluations it is commonly used to offer a structured mechanism through which to test the implicit or explicit logic behind an intervention. This 'intervention logic' can vary in its components, but will typically describe the rationale for an intervention, the inputs used to implement it, and the activities involved, prior to setting out how these inputs and activities are presumed to lead to outputs, outcomes and impacts (hence providing a 'theory of change').

In the context of the YEI, development of a ToC was one of the research objectives articulated in the Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the first YEI evaluation,[45] covering the strategic fit, design and implementation of the initiative. The intention in developing the ToC model was that it would then inform a planned second evaluation of the YEI which will focus on effectiveness, efficiency and impact.[46] In response to this requirement, as part of this current first YEI evaluation, an approach was designed to develop a ToC through a combination of holding a ToC workshop with relevant stakeholders and reviewing documentation on the YEI.

45 DWP (2016) Invitation to tender for SO17805 – Research Services YEI evaluation.

46 *Ibid*.

A.2 Theory of change workshop

A.2.1 Outline of the workshop

A ToC workshop was held in September 2016 involving 11 participants, including representatives from Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), YEI providers, and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The workshop was designed to provide an interactive forum wherein YEI stakeholders could discuss key elements of the ToC and hence contribute to its development. Attendees were provided with a document introducing the concept of a ToC and its role in the evaluation in advance, along with a copy of slides to be used on the day which included a number of suggested issues and questions to consider.

At the workshop, participants were split into two groups with discussions and feedback being facilitated around the following four key areas of relevance to the ToC being developed:

- Aims, objectives and rationale of the YEI.
- Inputs and activities involved in implementing the YEI.
- Short-term outputs and outcomes expected from the initiative.
- Anticipated longer-term outcomes and impacts.

To provide a basis for discussion, each area was introduced and participants were given a series of questions, each designed to prompt relevant suggestions for the area being considered, to discuss in their groups. Each group then fed back suggested elements for consideration in respect of the ToC, which were then recorded. The results of this exercise are outlined in the following section.

A.2.2 Results of the workshop

Discussions and suggestions gathered in respect of the four areas of the ToC under consideration are presented in turn below.

In terms of the **aims and objectives** of the YEI, and its **rationale**, participants stressed the initiative's role in providing support to those with complex needs and who may face multiple disadvantages. This was viewed in the context of YEI seeking to provide 'direction and hope' to not in employment, education or training (NEET) young people with the aim of supporting them back into learning, or towards and into employment. The concept of the initiative providing 'sustained progression' for those supported was also raised, as was the objective of accessing and supporting groups which might be considered 'hard to reach'.

Participants also felt that the aims and objectives of the YEI went beyond those relating to the individuals receiving support, in that seeking to have a positive impact on households and helping to support wider local strategic objectives were also cited. A related aim was also seen as utilising and linking up with other local provision, so as to effectively engage local stakeholders in a partnership approach and hence offer 'wrap-around' support to the individuals engaged by the YEI. The concept of using the initiative to enable organisational and policy learning, hence helping to inform future approaches was also discussed in this context.

The discussion around **inputs and activities** in respect of the YEI covered the need to include financial inputs, in terms of programme funding, but also to capture other inputs such as partnership working, local knowledge and expertise brought by delivery partners, existing infrastructure to support delivery, and 'in-kind contributions' in terms of time and good will. In particular, partnership working, networking between partners, and the infrastructure facilitating this, were seen as important inputs to capture within the approach.

In terms of activities, stakeholders discussed a range of types of provision being delivered, hence reflecting the scope of the initiative and the different activities being taken forward by local partnerships. Accepting this range of provision, it was also noted that there are a range of core activities commonly undertaken as part of delivering the YEI. The point was thus made that these types of provision may be called different things in different areas, but that they are often similar or related. A distinction was also made between provision directly supporting participants, such as mentoring, and more structural activities intended to facilitate delivery such as referral processes.

Examples of the former included mentoring, buddying, peer learning, provision of advice and guidance, training, and the delivery of apprenticeship and traineeship support. Activity aimed at facilitating the delivery of these forms of support included eligibility checking, referral processes, co-location of support services (e.g. in Jobcentres or community venues), community outreach, and activities internal to the partnerships such as structures and mechanisms to share learning.

Discussion on short term outputs and outcomes focused first on outputs and outcomes relating to individuals. In addition to the outputs being collected and recorded as management information (MI), outcomes included a change to displaying more positive behaviours, which it was noted could manifest in a wide range of ways, along with improved understanding of options and additional support services available on the part of individuals. It was noted that these more immediate effects could be evident on both individuals directly supported, but also their peers. The need to incorporate outputs and immediate outcomes stemming from specific provision on the individuals receiving support were also seen as important to include, though it was noted that the nature of these outputs and outcomes will depend very much on the provision concerned.

In addition to short-term outputs and outcomes concerning participants, there was also some discussion of such effects on delivery organisations and partnerships. Key amongst the aspects mentioned was the idea that 'organisational knowledge' might be expected to be built/developed on an ongoing basis throughout delivery, for example, in terms of improved knowledge and understanding of 'what works'. In addition, a potential short-term outcome cited was that, in some instances, more effective joined up services might be expected to emerge from the partnership working involved in YEI delivery. The other aspect noted was that the process of project set-up and delivery might be expected to provide partners with information by which to identify and address gaps in provision.

When asked to consider **medium and longer-term outcomes and impacts**, workshop participants cited positive health and social benefits (e.g. quality of life and wellbeing), and economic outcomes (e.g. earning power and financial security), that they expected to accrue to those benefiting from support. In the case of economic and, to some extent, social benefits, these outcomes were also presumed to potentially have an effect on wider households/families beyond those directly receiving support. Greater self-sufficiency and empowerment on the part of young people supported were also cited as likely longer-term outcomes, as were sustained behaviour change and greater proactivity.

As with shorter-term outcomes, medium and longer-terms outcomes and impacts were also seen as being likely to accrue in ways beyond those relating to individuals. Wider economic benefits to local communities and the Exchequer, stemming from reduced NEET status and spending power, were cited in this context, as were more intangible outcomes around community benefits including, for example, greater inter-generational understanding and awareness. Potential longer-term organisational and policy learning benefits were also cited, resulting from learning gathered over the course of delivery, the sharing of practice, and from partnership working.

A.3 Relevant findings from the desk review

Rationale for the YEI

The parts of the European Social Fund Operational Programme (ESF OP) 2014-2020 for England concerning the YEI can be used to gain an understanding of the rationale for the initiative. In particular, the justification for the selection of the thematic objective and investment priority (IP) relating to the YEI can be used as a proxy for the rationale justifying intervention. The following aspects are included in the OP as a justification for this selection:

- The UK has a specific YEI allocation in order to tackle high youth unemployment in specific regions.
- Commission Position Paper (CPP) highlights need to tackle high levels of youth unemployment.
- Supports Country Specific Recommendation (CSR) 2014: maintain commitment to the Youth Contract, especially by improving skills that meet employer needs; reduce the number of young people with low basic skills.
- Youth unemployment still too high, with concentrations in particular local areas.
- UK Partnership Agreement identifies need to focus on young people NEET.
- Lack of skills, especially basic skills (English, maths and ICT) is a key barrier for many young people who are NEET.
- Most marginalised and disadvantaged (e.g. care leavers) require more intensive, specialised support.
- YEI projects can enhance and complement local services, increasing provision of careers advice and strengthening engagement with local employers.[47]

Drawing on the above, the rationale for the YEI as drawn from the OP can be summarised as the intervention being required to address ‘a need to tackle high levels of youth unemployment, particularly where there are geographical concentrations of NEET young people, through addressing low skills levels, improving skills needed by employers, and providing the type of intensive and specialised support required by the most marginalised and disadvantaged individuals in particular’. Alongside this rationale focused on individuals, the last bullet point above also suggests that part of YEI’s rationale is to ‘better develop the support available for NEET young people by enhancing and complementing local services, increasing the provision of careers advice and strengthening employer engagement’.

47 DWP (2015), European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020, p. 26.

Aims and objectives of the YEI

In England the YEI is programmed under Investment Priority (IP) 1.3 of the European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020.[48] The IP can be seen as providing an overall objective for the initiative, namely to support the *'… sustainable integration of young people into the labour market, in particular those not in employment, education or training (NEET) including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities …'*. Under IP 1.3, the OP sets out several specific objectives of the initiative, these being:

- To support the rise in the participation age by providing additional traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities for 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas, with a particular focus on 15-19-year-old NEETs.
- To engage marginalised 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas and support them to re-engage with education or training, with a particular focus on 15-19-year-olds.
- To address the basic skills needs of 15-29-year-old NEETS in YEI areas so that they can compete effectively in the labour market.
- To provide additional work experience and pre-employment training opportunities to 15-29-year-old NEETs in YEI areas, with a particular focus on those aged over 18.
- To support 15-29-year-old lone parents who are NEET in YEI areas to overcome the barriers they face in participating in the labour market (including childcare)."[49]

Importantly, the OP emphasises that support for NEET young people or those at risk of being NEET is already available through a variety of other provision, so that YEI activity should aim to be additional and complementary to existing measures; for example, through providing more intensive support.[50]

The nature of the YEI, in terms of enabling local flexibility in delivery, also suggests that specific aims and objectives set at the local level should be at least referenced in any ToC. At the LEP level, several LEPs such as Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire[51] (D2N2) LEP and Greater Birmingham and Solihull[52] (GBS) view the objectives of the YEI programme in relation to the context of existing support in the area, stating that the aim of the programme is to add value to – and intensify – existing provision in the area to support those young people furthest from the labour market.

At the level of implementation, although the YEI projects vary slightly in terms of their aims, depending on their target group and delivery structure, all providers ultimately aim to support young people towards or into sustainable employment, education or training. Again, a prominent theme across the projects is the aim of adding value to existing service provision, often by providing tailored, innovative and creative support to ensure individuals are engaged onto a positive progression route. A number of projects, including On Track Thurrock (South

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48 *Ibid*., p. 56.

49 *Ibid*., p. 56-57.

50 *Ibid*., p.15 and p. 61.

51 http://www.d2n2lep.org/write/Documents/ESIF/Final_YEI_Presentation_22_4_15v1.pptx, accessed 29.07.16

52 http://centreofenterprise.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/GBSLEP_A4_070214_v8.pdf, accessed 29.07.16

East LEP), Hope Internship Programme (LCR LEP) and Tees Valley Routeways (Tees Valley LEP), also have the specific aim of supporting young people to progress into employment opportunities within the LEPs' priority local employment areas.

In such a way, at both LEP area and project levels, aims around supporting and adding to local provision, in a manner that fits the local context and strategic objectives, can be viewed as important objectives to reference.

Inputs and activities

In terms of funding for the YEI, the main specific and quantifiable input, in England the YEI specific allocation amounts to approximately €160 million. This is matched by the equivalent amount of ESF funding. Additionally, the ESF funded part is co-financed with €142 million amounting to a total of €461 million allocated for YEI interventions.[53] While the actual amount of funding will not be able to be calculated until the end of the programme, for the purposes of the ToC these figures can be expressed in terms of 'funding up to €461 million'. This funding will be channelled through 22 funded projects across nine areas.

It is also worth noting that the ESF OP, and some LEP strategies, anticipate that the LEPs covering YEI implementation areas will, through the ESIF sub-committees, provide strategic input to support and guide YEI implementation locally. In terms of inputs from a ToC perspective, the role of the Managing Authority (MA) in overseeing the programme also needs accounting for, as do the governance arrangements and delivery partnerships (where applicable) for the projects. In terms of the latter some differences are apparent, though the projects broadly divide into those delivered through a consortium approach, with consortia members frequently being involved in project governance, and those principally led by a single partner who may (though not always) draw on other partners for specific aspects of delivery.

Anticipated YEI provision is specified in the YEI guidance at the European level, in the ESF OP and in project documentation. At the European level, the guidance covering the initiative specifies that the YEI should support individual young people directly, and cannot be used to fund structural or systemic reform processes.[54] While the ESF regulation does not prescribe the types of provision to be implemented under the YEI, it provides a clear link between the YEI and the Youth Guarantee in recital 11 of the ESF regulation. Consequently, the YEI can support those aspects of the Youth Guarantee, which are directly addressed at young people. This includes activities such as:[55]

- provision of traineeships and apprenticeships;
- provision of first job experience;
- reduction of non-wage labour costs;
- targeted and well-designed wage and recruitment subsidies;
- job and training mobility measures;

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53 Source: European Commission Shared Fund Management Common System, extracted 29.07.16.

54 EC (2014), Guidance on implementing the Youth Employment Initiative, European Social Fund Thematic Paper, September 2014.

55 EC (2014), Guidance on implementing the Youth Employment Initiative, European Social Fund Thematic Paper, September 2014: p. 10.

- start-up support for young entrepreneurs;
- quality vocational education and training courses; and
- second chance programmes for Early School Leavers.

In the English context, the ESF OP provides a more specific account of the provision anticipated, though still at a relatively broad level in terms of the type of provision the YEI can, and is expected to, deliver. Importantly, there is a focus on provision that complements, and does not duplicate, existing provision. With this in mind the OP specifies the following types of provision:[56]

- customised training and support and volunteering activities;
- widening access to apprenticeships and traineeships;
- wrap-around support to improve access to such opportunities and outcomes for particular disadvantaged groups (e.g. extra support with Maths, English and other core skills for apprentices); and
- careers guidance and brokerage, including that leading to work experience and internships.

In turn, a review of project documentation illustrates some variety in the type of provision planned, but also with a common core of types of provision and supporting activities anticipated. The approach of all projects is to begin with the engagement, outreach and recruitment of young people, with a variety of specific actions used to support these processes depending on the delivery structure and approach adopted. These include partners' existing engagement work in communities, (new) outreach work in the locality, marketing, taster sessions, and engagement events. Eligibility check processes are another supporting process/activity common across all projects, as are initial needs assessments at the point of recruitment.

In terms of provision delivered to those engaged, common activities include:

- information, advice and guidance (IAG);
- training (e.g. functional skills, ICT/digital skills, interpersonal skills and vocational skills);
- counselling and support to address barriers to engagement;
- support to identify, provide and/or access work placements, internships, apprenticeships or volunteering opportunities;
- support for enterprise/self-employment;
- individualised mentoring and key worker support;
- provision of financial support to address barriers to engagement in work/education/training etc.; and
- post entry to employment/education/training support (often for a specified period).

[56] DWP (2015), European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020.

Outputs, outcomes and impacts

In line with the ESF regulations and YEI implementation guidance, the initiative in England sets a series of results indicators. These indicators focus on what in ToC terms are generally considered to be medium or longer-term outcomes and impacts, as opposed to immediate outputs such as numbers of training sessions delivered. While some more immediate outcomes are specified at the level of the individual YEI projects, including, for example, numbers of individuals engaged/supported, in the main the indicators/targets at this level tend to mirror those set for the initiative as a whole. Table 7.1 specifies the YEI result indicators and targets set for the initiative at the whole-England level.

Table A.1 Specific result indicators for the YEI in England

Result Indicator	Target value	Reference population of the result indicator (only for the result indicator targets expressed in percentages)
Unemployed participants who complete the YEI supported intervention	70%	Project participants
Unemployed participants who receive an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship upon leaving	48%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Unemployed participants who are in education/training, gaining a qualification, or in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving	48%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Long-term unemployed participants who complete the YEI supported intervention	60%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Long-term unemployed participants who receive an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship upon leaving	38%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Long-term unemployed participants who are in education/training, gaining a qualification, or are in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving	38%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Inactive participants not in education or training who complete the YEI supported intervention	60%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Inactive participants not in education or training who receive an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship upon leaving	33%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Inactive participants not in education or training who are in education/training, gaining a qualification, or are in employment, including self-employment, upon leaving	33%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Participants in continued education, training programmes leading to a qualification, an apprenticeship or a traineeship six months after leaving	15%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Participants in employment six months after leaving	34%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project
Participants in self-employment six months after leaving	3%	Project participants who successfully completed participation in the project

Source: DWP (2015), European Social Fund Programme for England 2014-2020.

Beyond these specific and quantifiable anticipated outcomes, intended outcomes and impacts from the initiative within the programme documentation are largely implicitly suggested rather than being explicitly stated. However, the rationale, objectives and activities relating to the intervention discussed earlier can be used to add some further detail to this aspect of the ToC.

For example, through having a rationale around addressing high NEET levels and youth unemployment, it logically follows that part of the presumed outcomes of the YEI would involve contributing to a reduction of NEET levels and youth unemployment. Similarly, in light of the objectives and YEI provision discussed above, a series of likely outcomes and impacts can be derived, including:

- improved interpersonal and basic skills amongst the targeted population for YEI support;
- reduced barriers to re-engagement in work and learning amongst those supported;
- increased numbers accessing apprenticeships and traineeships through support provided by the YEI; and
- enhanced access to, and competitiveness in respect of, the labour market amongst disadvantaged groups.

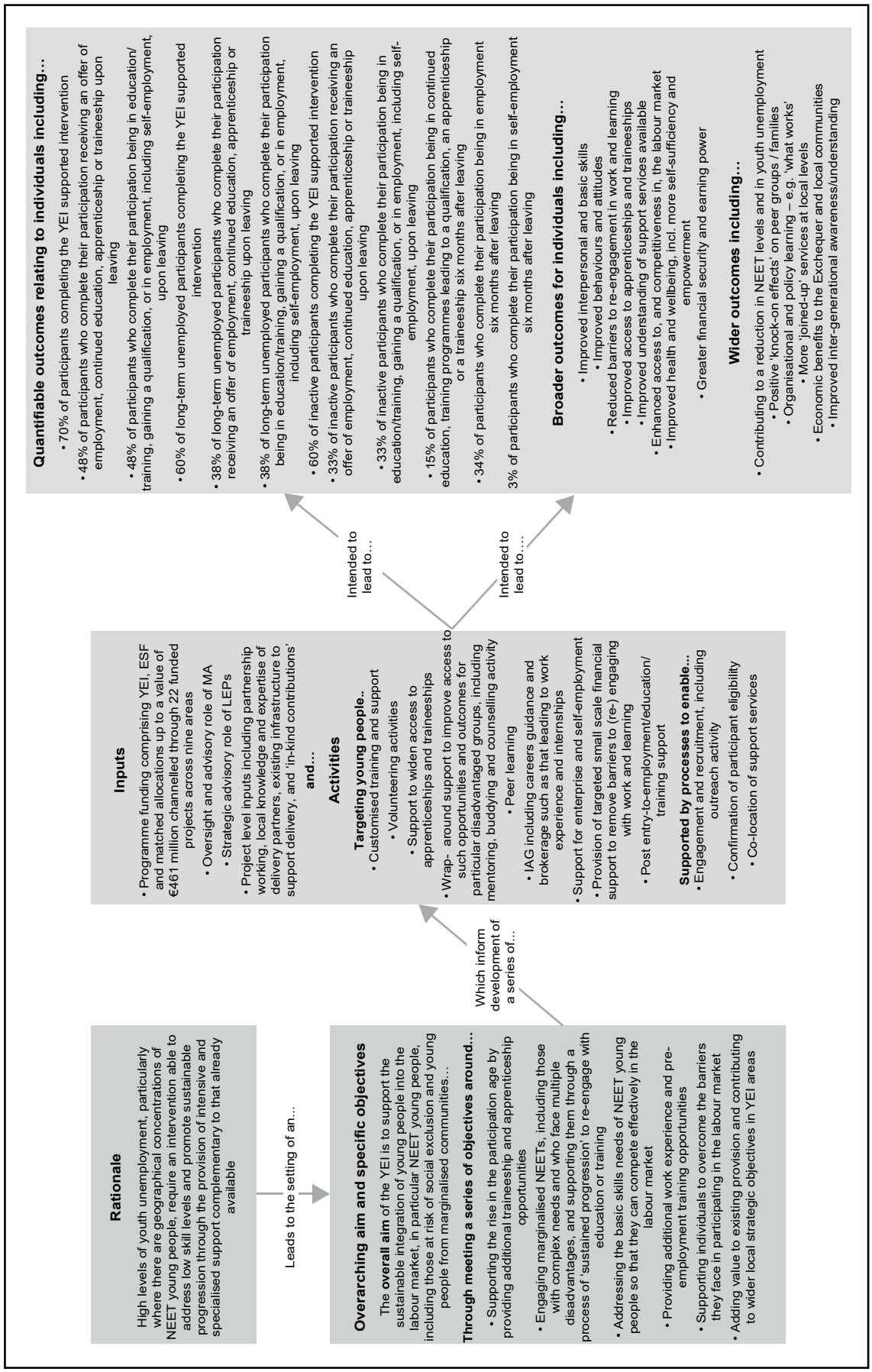
A.4 Draft theory of change

This final section presents a draft unified ToC for the YEI, combining insights and contributions from the ToC workshop with elements derived from the document review. The ToC is presented in a summarised diagrammatic form in Figure 7.1. Drawing on the above discussion, this captures the broad rationale for the intervention, as well as articulating its overall aim and key objectives. The diagram also indicates the inputs and activities developed in response to the YEI's rationale, aims and objectives, with the arrows indicating how these inputs and activities are intended to lead to a series of short, medium and longer-term outcomes.[57]

Following presentation of the diagram, a high level approach to implementing the ToC as part of the planned second YEI evaluation is sketched out. This seeks to consider some of the likely approaches that will be required in operationalising the ToC as part of evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the YEI.

[57] Please note that all quantifiable outcomes included in the ToC are target values and not achieved outcomes.

Figure A.1 Theory of change for the Youth Employment Initiative in England



A.4.1 Operationalising the Theory of Change in the second YEI evaluation

The ToC outlined above identifies the outcomes and impacts the planned second YEI evaluation will need to assess. Through doing so, the second evaluation will address the 'impact' evaluation criterion within the European Commission's guidance. While the impact evaluation feasibility study, presented in Appendix B, seeks to identify how the YEI's impact can be assessed through a counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) design, the range of outcomes and impacts captured in the ToC are much broader than those the CIE will concentrate on. Therefore, the broader evaluation of 'impact' will require a wider set of approaches than those discussed in the impact evaluation feasibility study.

The MI being collected from the YEI projects should enable the relative achievement of the initiative against the 'quantifiable' outcomes included in the above diagram to be assessed. Parts of the broader outcomes identified, including specific aspects of those relating to employment, education and training, will form the basis of the intended CIE, which will focus on entry to, and the sustainability of, employment, education and training on the part of YEI participants. However, 'distance travelled' aspects of these outcomes such as reduced barriers to engagement in work or training, or how access to apprenticeships has been enhanced, will require additional approaches. The same is true of the 'softer' outcomes captured in the ToC – for example, those around interpersonal skills and behaviours – and some of the wider outcomes specified such as more joined-up services and policy learning.

For these latter aspects, a range of methodological approaches are likely to be required and, in most cases, the outcomes concerned are likely to be most amenable to testing through a 'mixed-methods' evaluation approach. Therefore, while it might be possible to capture evidence on distance travelled measures, and some aspects such as improved health and wellbeing, through a pre- and post-survey of participants at baseline and follow-up points, other aspects are likely to require more qualitative approaches to inform their assessment. This is particularly true of those outcomes around organisational and policy learning, which may require in-depth input from stakeholders only likely to be captured through depth interviews.

Such qualitative approaches are equally likely to be necessary to explore a second YEI evaluation criterion – that of effectiveness. As the subsequent YEI evaluation will focus on effectiveness, efficiency **and** impact, a mixed-methods approach would again appear to be well suited. In particular, the ToC will be important in addressing effectiveness by providing a framework to examine whether, how, why and in what ways the YEI inputs and activities in the above diagram lead to the anticipated outcomes and impacts specified. Gathering evidence for this is thus likely to necessitate qualitative research to explore the 'whether, how, why and in what ways' elements of the ToC as they relate to the effectiveness of implementation.

The ToC will also have a role to play in terms of the efficiency criterion, for example in respect of the outcome specified in the above diagram around economic benefits. Assessing the benefits accruing from the YEI intervention against the costs specified in the diagram in terms of 'inputs' will require some form of value for money or cost-benefit analysis. Appendix C presents an initial high level framework to inform such an approach. Efficiency will also need to be assessed in terms of the extent to which the financial inputs specified were used to procure provision efficiently. While the ToC again provides a framework for this,

the evidence to inform such an assessment is likely to come in part from the type of qualitative research envisaged and/or through a survey-based methodology. Again therefore, testing the ToC in the second evaluation implies a mixed-method approach.

In summary, using the ToC to inform the planned assessment of effectiveness, efficiency and impact implies the need for a mixed-method evaluation. This is likely to comprise a number of elements which may include some or all of: qualitative depth interviews and/or focus groups, surveys, a CIE based on specific elements of the YEI's intended impact, and analysis of YEI MI.

Appendix B
Impact evaluation feasibility study

This appendix summarizes the findings of the impact evaluation feasibility study, conducted in the context of the first Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) evaluation. The feasibility study was developed through a combination of a document review and an interactive workshop with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Department for Education (DfE) and European Social Fund Division (ESFD) staff. The following sections are structured as follows:

1 Provides an introduction to counterfactual impact evaluations (CIE) (1.1).

2 Outlines the methodology of the feasibility study (1.2).

3 Presents the evidence collected (1.3).

4 Provides an assessment of potential impact evaluation designs (1.4).

5 Develops recommendations and key issues for consideration (1.5).

B.1 Introduction to counterfactual impact evaluations

Impact evaluations are used to determine the causal effect of a specific programme, policy or intervention on an observed outcome of the population. They aim to answer two questions:

- 'Do we see a change in the programme participants' outcomes after programme participation?'; and
- 'Is the programme responsible for this change?'[58]

[58] HM Treasury, (2011). *The Magenta Book. Guidance for Evaluation*, April 2011:98.

In the context of European Social Fund (ESF) interventions, we often measure outcomes of programme participants after programme participation. However, these outcomes can be affected by many factors other than the programme itself. We might observe positive 'outcomes' which are mainly driven by the selection of people into the programme (i.e. cream-skimming[59] or self-selection in the case of voluntary programmes), or we might observe positive 'outcomes' which have nothing to do with programme participation itself, but are mainly driven by contextual factors – for example, an improving labour market. Impact evaluations aim to exclude those alternative explanations and identify net effects of interventions.[60] The better the design is at excluding alternative explanations, the more robust the results will be.

To ensure robustness, impact evaluations typically apply counterfactual analysis. Counterfactual analysis compares the real observed outcomes of programme participants with the outcomes of an alternative reality – the outcomes programme participants would have achieved had the programme not been in place. Unfortunately, we can never observe a counterfactual directly (the participants cannot participate and not participate at the same time), but have to approximate it using comparison groups and statistical techniques.[61] The choice of an appropriate and comparable comparison group is at the heart of every impact evaluation of this type.

Different research designs use a variety of statistical techniques to estimate this counterfactual, with the goal being to choose participant (treatment) and comparison (control)[62] groups which are as similar as possible with regards to all other factors; that is, factors relevant for the outcome such as socioeconomic background, motivation etc. The choice of impact evaluation design will depend on the design of the programme, the available data, and the mechanism by which people can be assigned to a treatment and control group (i.e. potential selection bias).[63] Below we present an overview of different impact evaluation designs.

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59 Cream-skimming is in this context understood as the process of selecting those people into the programme who have the highest chance of achieving the desired results of the programme, while disregarding those who may be in need of the programme but less likely to achieve the desired results.

60 EC, (2013). *Design and Commissioning of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations. A Practical Guidance for ESF Managing Authorities*, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union: p. 5.

61 Please see also HM Treasury, (2011). *The Magenta Book. Guidance for Evaluation*, April 2011.

62 The term 'control group' is typically used for randomised control trials only, while the term 'comparison group' is used for quasi-experimental designs.

63 Selection bias occurs when the selection/assignment into the treatment or control group depends on individual factors, for example, personal or socio-economic characteristics. Thus, the groups are not randomly selected. Characteristics can be observed (e.g. ethnicity as collected in administrative data) or unobserved (e.g. self-motivation in many cases of administrative data, where no survey instrument to collect such information is employed).

Table B.1 Potential impact evaluation designs

Design	Description
Randomised Control Trial, RCT (Experimental design)	Randomly assigns individuals to a treatment and control group via a lottery. As allocation process is random, there will be no selection bias. Any outcome difference between treatment and control group can be attributed to the programme, if there is no impact on the control group.
Regression Discontinuity design (Quasi-experimental design)	Mimics an experiment by exploiting an existing strict assignment rule into the programme, e.g. all NEETs aged 16+ participate, but no NEETs aged 15 and below do. If the selection into the programme is exclusively driven by this assignment rule and all other things being equal before and after the cut-off point, an 'experiment' around the cut-off point has taken place, i.e. a young person just falling short of the threshold should not differ from a young person just above the threshold.
Difference-in-Differences design (Quasi-experimental design)	Limits differences between the participant and comparison group by comparing their outcomes at two points in time – before and after programme participation. Any additional outcome improvement of the participant group compared to the comparison group can be attributed to participation, under the assumption that outcomes of both groups have historically developed in parallel.
Propensity Score Matching design (PSM) (Quasi-experimental design)	Identifies a statistically comparable group[64] of participants in an existing administrative or survey dataset and compares their outcomes to the one of the participant group. Can be combined with Difference-in-Differences design.

Source: Ecorys' own illustration.

It is important to note that not all programmes, policies or interventions are suitable for a Counterfactual Impact Evaluations (CIE). Whether such an approach is possible is a case by case decision that is dependent upon the design of the measure, the type of outcomes it aims to achieve, and crucially on data availability. Ideally, counterfactual analysis is applied when we are dealing with a well defined intervention targeted at a specified population with the aim of inducing a clear change in the status and/or behaviour of participants. Further it should be noted that conducting CIEs can only provide evidence on the quantitative impact of an intervention. Impact evaluation can typically neither provide estimates of all intended impacts of a programme, nor does it provide answers to 'how' an intervention has achieved these impacts. It should, therefore, be embedded in a wider mixed-method evaluation design (see also section A.4.1).[65]

64 Taking into account background characteristics, which could impact the outcome.

65 See also EC, (2013). *Design and Commissioning of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations. A Practical Guidance for ESF Managing Authorities*, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union.

B.1.1 The application of CIE for the YEI

Impact evaluations play an important role in evaluating public policies in the UK and more widely. In line with HM Treasury's Magenta Book Guidance on Evaluations[66], feasibility studies on impact evaluations and their actual implementation have been increasingly requested by UK Government departments. Equally, the European Commission (EC) has shown increased interest in the application of CIEs for European Union (EU) co-funded interventions in recent years, in particular in the context of the ESF. This interest is reflected in the publication of practical guidance[67] for ESF Managing Authorities on how to design and commission these types of evaluations in 2013. While evaluations conducted on ESF-funded measures in the previous ESF programming period 2007-2013 saw only limited application of CIE,[68] the current funding period (which includes the YEI) encourages Member States more strongly to explore and implement such methodologies. First evaluations of the YEI in other Member States submitted by the end of 2015 have already applied CIE, for example in Italy.[69]

In this context, conducting a CIE in the planned second evaluation of the YEI in 2017/2018 could provide important insights on the impact of the programme on its beneficiaries and the size of this impact (or the lack thereof). More widely, and beyond the YEI, it could add to the evidence base on what works to support not in employment, education or training (NEETs) into employment, education or training in England. This is particularly important in a context of financial resource constraints faced by the public sector, and also in respect of the plans of YEI projects to use lessons learned to inform future programmes and strategies in their local areas.[70]

B.2 The feasibility study – aims and methodology

B.2.1 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the impact evaluation feasibility study is to inform a planned second evaluation of the YEI intervention, focused on assessing its effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The specific objective of the study is to identify the most robust, feasible and cost-effective impact evaluation design to implement in this second evaluation, given the nature of the YEI intervention and the data available.

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66 Please see also HM Treasury, (2011). *The Magenta Book. Guidance for Evaluation*, April 2011.

67 EC, (2013). *Design and Commissioning of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations. A Practical Guidance for ESF Managing Authorities*, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union.

68 EC (2015). *Synthesis report on the 'Pilot projects to carry out ESF related counterfactual impact evaluations*, CRIE: p. 9.

69 For an overview of the methodologies applied in other Member States' YEI evaluations, please see EC (2016): *First Results of the Implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative*, Appendix B – key points from the evaluations, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7931 (accessed 1.11.2016).

70 See also EC, (2013). *Design and Commissioning of Counterfactual Impact Evaluations. A Practical Guidance for ESF Managing Authorities*, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union: p. 7.

B.2.2 Methodology

In order to meet these aims and objectives, evidence was collected against a detailed assessment framework. The framework was developed to collect comprehensive evidence across a number of dimensions to determine the most feasible impact evaluation design. Table B.2 provides detailed information on the dimensions included, key questions for the assessment, and their relevance to the impact evaluation design.

Table B.2 Assessment framework for the impact feasibility study

Key questions for the assessment	Relevance to impact evaluation design
Outcomes Which outcomes is the programme/are the projects trying to achieve? What indicators are being used to measure outcomes?	Explores options for statistical analysis; identifies which admin data sources are likely to be useful
Assignment How are young people referred and/or assigned to the programme? Is assignment based on observed characteristics or unobserved characteristics? Are changes to assignment processes anticipated?	Crucial for identifying a comparison group; identifies potential (self-) selection biases
Existing participant data Which and how is background information being collected? Is it based on subjective reporting or on administrative data sources? How is outcomes data collected? Is all data available electronically to facilitate statistical analysis?	Explores options for statistical analysis; where data is supplied by administrative data sources, this may also be available/accessible for a potential comparison group
Existing comparison group data Who is being offered the chance to participate? Are there young people with similar characteristics not offered this? Are there similar provisions locally? Are there good links with provisions in other localities, which follow a 'business as usual approach'? How likely is access to primary or secondary data from other provisions? Is there any historical data prior to the introduction of the delivery model?	Explores options for a potential comparison group, the existence of administrative data on the comparison group and the potential to collect primary data on the comparison group
Access to administrative data Which national datasets contain the outcomes the programme/projects are trying to achieve? Can this be accessed for the participant and comparison group and linked across different datasets? Is data on relevant outcomes locally available and can be accessed?	Scopes options for an impact evaluation design based on PSM administrative data
Sample sizes How many young people have participated to date? Is take-up in line with expectations? How is take-up expected to develop?	Crucial for the statistical identification of impact; scopes feasibility of project level evaluations

Source: Ecorys' own illustration.

Evidence against the assessment framework was collected through a document review and an interactive impact evaluation workshop with relevant stakeholders in the areas of data relating to NEET young people and policy evaluation. Additional evidence from the qualitative interviews conducted in the context of the process evaluation was also included in the evidence base.

B.3 Relevant findings from the feasibility study

The following summarises the key findings against the questions set out in the assessment framework discussed in section 8.2.2.

B.3.1 Outcomes

The overall objective of the YEI is to integrate young people sustainably into employment, education or training. The YEI in England has set corresponding results indicators in line with Annex II of the European Social Fund Regulation. At a project level, most projects have set their own targets in line with this. Some projects focus on one outcome (i.e. employment, education or training) only, e.g. the 'Hope internship programme' project in Liverpool City region, which aims to help graduates into full-time employment, or the 'Nottingham Enterprise Works' project in the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area which focuses on supporting young people into self-employment. Both programme and project indicators differentiate between immediate results (measured right after completion of intervention) and medium/long-term results measured six months after the completion. Thus, we can summarise the expected outcomes of the YEI overall as follows:

Table B.3 Results to be achieved by the YEI

Immediate results	Medium-/longer-term results[71]
Young person in employment after completion of programme	Young person in employment six months after completion of programme
Young person in education after completion of programme	Young person in education six months after completion of programme
Young person in training after completion of programme	Young person in training six months after completion of programme

Source: European Social Fund regulation, Annex II.

This implies that the key outcomes anticipated from the YEI are clearly measureable, 'hard' outcomes, evidence for which could either be collected through a survey or national administrative datasets. This focus on 'hard' outcomes is positive concerning the feasibility of an impact evaluation.

[71] Outcomes six months after leaving are considered 'longer-term' in line with the ESF regulation.

The above outcomes can be measured as 'point-in-time' calculations, e.g. being in employment six months after the intervention, or as duration variables, e.g. the number of months in employment in the 12 months after finishing the programme. Stakeholders during the impact evaluation workshop advised that a duration variable approach is good practice. According to workshop participants, it should be possible to construct duration variables for the employment outcomes to be achieved through the YEI using national administrative datasets. A notable exception is self-employment outcomes for which Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) data, in particular Real Time Information (RTI) data on income and employment, is continuously available. Employment status would have to be approximated using benefits data. In contrast, education and training outcomes are typically point in time measures, i.e. having a specific qualification level or not.

It should be noted, that the EC result indicators are set as point-in-time indicators and the evaluation guidance for the YEI generally refers to the assessment of impact in line with this. However, evaluation questions related to impact in the evaluation guidance are sufficiently generic and do not make reference to specific types of variables to be used for assessing the 'impact of the YEI support for young unemployed people on their future employment chances'.[72] It may, therefore, be possible to implement a duration-variables approach for the second YEI evaluation in line with good practice for DWP interventions in England.

Participants at the workshop also pointed to the difficulties of capturing people in self-employment and people employed in the informal economy. It was suggested that it may be possible to test the extent to which young people are employed in the informal economy by comparing the impact of an intervention on benefit receipt and employment status

B.3.2 Assignment process

Most projects use existing pathways to engage young people with the programme and take advantage of partners' experience of working with the target group (16 out of 22 projects). In several projects, the key aim is to engage the hardest to reach young people; that is, those who are furthest from the labour market, do not engage in services and are economically inactive. Examples are the 'Access to Work' and 'Ways to Work' projects in Liverpool City region. Some projects collaborate with outreach workers to go into communities and talk to young people and/or community leaders to get access to hard-to-reach young people. Once young people have been identified and referred, all projects conduct eligibility checks in line with the YEI guidance.

Evidence from the field-work reveals that young people go through a strict eligibility check, involving the need to provide pieces of evidence to their fit against the YEI eligibility criteria. It should be noted, however, that these eligibility criteria are very broad, e.g. all NEETs are targeted, and the group of young people meeting the eligibility criteria is likely to be very heterogeneous.

Moreover, from the desk review and experience with previous programmes addressing NEET issues, it is evident that young people are commonly selected based on their perceived level of need and potential to benefit from the intervention. This makes it more difficult to identify a comparison group with a similar level of perceived need or motivation to take part in the programme in the same locality.

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[72] EC (2015), *Guidance on Evaluation of the Youth Employment Initiative*, September 2015: p. 19 f.

It may be possible that the bias introduced due to this subjective selection can be partly controlled by gathering detailed information about the background characteristics and employment history of participants, which can for example serve as a proxy for motivation. It may thus be possible to control for these biases in a potential CIE for the YEI, if a large enough proportion of participants are in the 25+ age group (and, therefore, have an employment history)

B.3.3 Existing participant data

All projects should collect MI data in line with the ESFD template, which includes background characteristics (gender, ethnicity, disability status and household composition) as well as outcome variables (employment status, education status and level) measured at the start and end of the programme. These characteristics are likely to be collected by case workers and based on self-reporting rather than administrative records. Regarding outcome data, in addition to MI data collection on the results indicators outlined in section B.3.1, the vast majority of projects highlighted their intention to implement monitoring and evaluation tools to measure progress and learn lessons about programme design and delivery.

This implies that the MI provides a potential basis for an impact evaluation in the available data, as background characteristics and before-and-after outcomes are systematically collected. If comparable data can be feasibly collected for a comparison group, this could in theory form a basis for an impact evaluation.

It should be noted that results from the fieldwork show that due to the fast introduction of the YEI, not all MI collection processes were in place when delivery started in some localities. The impact evaluation will have to take into account that data may be missing or inconsistent for these early participants.

B.3.4 Exploring potential (existing) comparison groups

No data on comparison groups is regularly collected by the projects and there are no obvious existing comparison groups within each YEI project area. Possible approaches explored included:

- Wait-list approach, where a comparison group is formed of young people who are willing and eligible for participation, but are waitlisted for several months. As the YEI is in its early stages of implementation, it is currently not clear if there will be limits to delivery capacity, so that young people could feasibly be wait-listed. Further, impacts can only be assessed for as long as people are waiting, i.e. young people who have to be waitlisted for at least six months to assess impact on medium/longer-term results. Given the timeframe available for YEI implementation, it is unlikely that a wait-listing approach would be feasible. This is due to a number of reasons including that a potential impact evaluation of the YEI will only be tendered in early 2017, leaving limited time for wait-listing and delivery to those wait-listed until the end of delivery of the YEI in 2018.
- Historical approach, where a comparison group would be formed of those taking part before/after the introduction of the YEI. As the YEI is a continuation and/or expansion of previous delivery in many locations, this approach would not be feasible as previous delivery was not sufficiently different to detect impacts.

- Similar young people in the geographical area could form a comparison group to the NEET young people on YEI provision. However, in many localities, NEET young people who do not take part in the YEI will take part in other similar provision, raising questions about their inclusion in a comparison group. These young people could form a comparison group if YEI was to be compared to 'business as usual provision', but differences between the impact of such provision and YEI may be small and difficult to detect.

Based on the exploration of potential comparison groups above, remaining feasible options include the generation of a statistically generated comparison group using PSM, or the identification of a comparison group in other localities where YEI provision is not offered (for caveats of this approach please see B.5.2). It should be noted that sub-groups of comparison groups may have to be generated given that the NEET cohort itself is heterogeneous. If the YEI overall, for example, targets and involves a significant number of young people with caring responsibilities, or young offenders, then a separate analysis should be conducted for these relevant sub-groups where possible. This also implies that specific comparison groups must be determined for each of these relevant sub-groups, each with sufficient sample sizes to facilitate robust analysis (see also section B.3.6 below).

B.3.5 Access to administrative data

Based on the assessment of relevant outcomes of young people taking part in the programme, administrative data which could be useful to this evaluation is likely to come from two key sources: the DfE (National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individualised Learner Records (ILR) data) and the DWP (DWP benefits and HMRC RTI data).

Education data

The **NPD** contains detailed information about pupils in schools and colleges in England, including:

- test and exam results, prior attainment and progression at different key stages for pupils in the state sector;
- attainment data for students in non-maintained special schools, sixth-form and further education colleges;
- information on pupils in independent schools, where available; and
- pupil absence and exclusions.

It also includes limited information about pupils' characteristics (Free School Meals, Special Educational Needs, ethnicity, gender, age and first language).

The **ILR** is the primary data collection mechanism concerning further education and work-based learning in England. It is requested from learning providers in England's Further Education (FE) system. The data is used widely, most notably by the Government to monitor policy implementation and the performance of the sector, and by organisations that allocate FE funding.

Traditionally, a third DfE-held dataset contained data on NEET young people: **NCCIS**, a database that provides local authorities (LAs) with the information they need to support young people to engage in education and training, to identify those who are not participating,

and to plan services that meet young people's needs. However, the NCCIS methodology of counting NEETs has been replaced by a revised DfE methodology the 'Linked Longitudinal Outcomes (LEO) dataset', which is based on the linking of DWP, HMRC/RTI and DfE data. This replaces the previous reporting of NEET young people using NCCIS data.[73]

The datasets outlined above imply that data on young people's educational outcomes is in principle available in administrative datasets, and accessible for the purpose of a counterfactual impact evaluation. In order to access data from the DfE, data sharing agreements and a memorandum of understanding would have to be signed. There are standard procedures in place to access this data (the most up to date processes would have to be assessed at the point of implementation of the second YEI evaluation, should a CIE be conducted); where data linkage is to take place, the data sharing agreement could be modelled on that used for the Troubled Families evaluation[74] or the evaluation of the Cabinet Office's Innovation Fund.

The process of setting up and signing data sharing agreements can take substantial amounts of time, in particular when data is to be matched to other data-sets, depending on the sensitivity and quantity of the data requested. Complications for the memorandum of understanding can arise where the DfE is only the data processor for data owned by other government departments. This is the case for the ILR data, for example.

Further, it will be important to assess how far the consent form signed by participants meets the data sharing requirements of the DfE.

Employment data

The DWP holds both benefit claim information of individuals and some HMRC data including RTI data on income and employment, both of which could provide evidence towards the employment status of a young person.

Given that the second YEI evaluation is to be commissioned by the DWP, data on participants should in principle be accessible, including benefits and simplified HMRC data, which is held by DWP. Previous impact evaluations, including that of the Cabinet Office's Innovation Fund, have accessed the relevant DWP data. It should be noted, however, that there is no set guidance on how to access these datasets and the buy-in of data-holders within DWP will be key to any implementation of such an impact evaluation. Learning from other evaluations has shown that procedures to access data can be lengthy.

Further, learning from the Fair Chance Fund evaluation showed that there may be an important gap in the data with regards to capturing the employment status of young people. While those on benefits will be captured through the DWP benefits database, and those in employment in receipt of a taxable income will be captured through the HMRC/RTI data, young people who are in employment, but receiving incomes under the tax threshold, may not be captured in either data set. However, workshop participants felt that this will only affect a small proportion of the population of interest.

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[73] For an example of analysis using the LEO data, please see the first statistical working paper from August 2016 here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/improvements-to-destinations-of-key-stage-5-students-2014 (accessed 01.11.2016).

[74] The full evaluation is available under: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-first-troubled-families-programme (accessed 01.11.2016).

In summary, the above discussion of available education and employment data implies that national administrative data should in principle allow the obtaining of consistent data both for participants and the comparison group. A comparison group could be statistically generated using administrative data on background characteristics through PSM. There are some challenges, however, around accessing administrative datasets and cross-departmental collaboration must be ensured.

B.3.6 Sample sizes

Comprehensive participant data was not available due to the early stage of implementation of the programme and only a limited number of claims had been made by providers at the time of reporting. Current estimates suggest that the programme could engage 75,000 young people across England. Anticipated target outputs vary significantly between projects, from just over 100 participants to 16,610 participants in Birmingham and Solihull Youth Promise Plus (in Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership).

This implies that sample sizes should be sufficient to implement a robust impact evaluation design at programme level, subject to achieving successful take-up of the programme.

In addition to estimating the overall impact of the programme, the second evaluation may want to include an assessment of the impact of the YEI: i.) by LEP area; ii.) for each implemented project; iii.) for different types of interventions (e.g. employment subsidies, work placements); and/or iv.) specific target groups (e.g. women, those furthest from the labour market, young people with care responsibilities). Conducting this more detailed analysis can provide additional insights on which interventions are effective and for whom.

It should be noted that such detailed impact evaluations would only be robust and meaningful if sufficient sample sizes for each analysis can be achieved. In line with the benchmark stated above, an analysis of the impact of YEI participation on young people with care responsibilities would have to identify at least 400 YEI participants with care responsibilities and 400 comparable young people to produce robust and meaningful results.

B.4 Assessment of impact evaluation designs

Returning to the different impact evaluation designs discussed in section B.1 above, the findings from the impact evaluation feasibility study provide evidence for the feasibility of the different impact evaluation approaches outlined. Table B.4 below summarises data requirements, strengths, weaknesses, risks and resource implications of the different impact evaluation approaches highlighted at the outset of the discussion in the light of this evidence and our previous experience with CIE evaluations.

Table B.4 Assessment of impact evaluation design options

Design 1 – Randomised Control Trial (RCT)
Description: Randomly assign young people to participate in a YEI-funded programme or to be part of the control group via a lottery. As the allocation process is random, there should be no selection bias. Any outcome difference between treatment and control group can be attributed to the programme.
Comparison group: The comparison group would be randomly generated via a lottery from the eligible target group (NEET young people) and would be statistically identical to the treatment group.
Strengths: If the randomisation has been done properly, there would be no selection bias and the impact could be entirely attributed to the YEI intervention.
Weaknesses: The ethics of an RCT must be carefully considered, given that group of people in need would not have the opportunity to benefit from the service. RCTs must be embedded in the design of any intervention.
Data requirements: Access to data on outcomes of the eligible population, i.e. both treatment and comparison group. Data should be collected at entry, exit and follow-up points after the intervention. Despite the randomisation of participants, data collected at entry is important to assess the balance of the treatment and comparison group.
Feasibility: This approach is not feasible for the second YEI evaluation, since the programme has already started and an RCT needs to be built in from the start.
Design 2 – Regression Discontinuity design
Description: Mimics an experiment by exploiting an existing strict assignment rule into the programme, e.g. all NEETs aged 18+ participate, but no NEETs aged 17 and below do. If the selection into the programme was exclusively driven by this assignment rule, an 'experiment' around the cut-off point takes place all other things remaining equal, i.e. a young person just falling short of the threshold should not differ from a young person just above the threshold.
Comparison group: The comparison group would be composed by those young people eligible to participate in the programme and standing just across the threshold. For example, if the admission rule to participate is to be aged 18+ at the time of registration, all those who will turn 18 in the following months would be part of the comparison group. A limit on the distance to the threshold should be consistently set.
Strengths: Robust design with strong internal validity, comparable group is identified based on observed variables.
Weaknesses: Results can not be generalised to those not close to the cut-off point, without making additional strong assumptions (weak external validity).
Data requirements: Outcome data for the participant and comparison group must be accessed/collected. A clear cut-off point for eligibility must exist.
Feasibility: Unlikely, as assignment of young people to the YEI is based on a range of strict selection criteria, but ultimately based on the subjective decision of the responsible case worker and not based on observed characteristics as needed for this impact evaluation design.
Continued

Table B.4 Continued

Design 3 – Difference-in-Differences design
Description: Limits the bias created by differences between the participant and comparison group by comparing their outcomes at two points in time – before and after programme participation. Any additional outcome improvement of the participant group compared to the comparison group can be attributed to participation.
Comparison group: The comparison group would consist of young people who did not take part of the project and have similar characteristics, but are not identical to participants. Outcomes of participants and the comparison group would have to have traditionally developed in parallel over time.
Strengths: Does not require as much data as other methods: data on other factors and characteristics that affect the outcome are not necessarily required.
Weaknesses: Requires fulfilling the assumption that outcomes of both groups have traditionally developed in parallel. To test this assumption measurements have to be available for more than two points in time.
Data requirements: Data on both the participant and comparison group outcomes must be collected at least at two points in time.
Feasibility: If a comparison group can be identified and data on both groups can be collected and/or accessed at least at two points in time.
Design 4: Propensity Score Matching (PSM) design
Description: Identifies 'statistical twins'[75] of participants in an existing administrative or survey dataset and compares their outcomes to the one of the participant group. Can be combined with Difference-in-Differences design.
Comparison group: The comparison group will be generated using PSM on background variables relevant to the outcome; it could further be limited to relevant LAs or similar geographic areas. The comparison group would be all other young people with similar background factors that did not take part in the project.
Strengths: Robust and comparable measurement of outcomes and comparison group based on observed factors.
Weaknesses: Cannot control for differences between the treatment and comparison group with regards to non-observed factors, e.g. motivation or perceived level of need; outcomes are limited to those available in national datasets; some data is only available with time-lag.
Data requirements: Comparable background and outcomes data on both treatment and comparison group
Feasibility: Participants and non-participant can be identified in the dataset, Non-participant data can be accessed. Data across datasets can be linked, data access is granted in a timely fashion and sample sizes in the treatment group are sufficiently large.

Source: Ecorys' own illustration.

Based on the above assessment of the different impact evaluation designs, we conclude that an impact evaluation design following a Difference-in-Differences or PSM approach is most suitable to evaluate the impact of the YEI intervention. Both options can be combined to obtain more robust results, with the PSM design controlling for initial observed differences between the participant and comparison group, and the Difference-in-Differences design controlling for initial unobserved differences between both groups (assuming that these are stable over time).

[75] Taking into account background characteristics, which could impact the outcome.

B.5 Recommendations and key issues for consideration

This section discusses the most feasible designs based on the previous assessment of the different impact evaluation approaches considered, as well as their practical implications.

B.5.1 Recommended impact evaluation designs

According to the assessment in section B.4, the implementation of a CIE for the second evaluation of the YEI in 2017/2018 should be feasible in principle, and a combination of a PSM and a Difference-in-Differences approach will be the most appropriate design, based on the current evidence base.

In Table B.5, we discuss three different practical approaches to implement this approach in more detail, including the advantages, disadvantages and resource implications of different options. These approaches vary with regards to the sources of the data used for the PSM Difference-in-differences analysis.

Table B.5 Suggested impact evaluation approaches

Approach 1: PSM Difference-in-Differences design using national administrative data-sets
Description: This involves the use and potentially linkage of different national administrative datasets (i.e. NPD, ILR, DWP datasets) which contain outcomes relevant to the YEI, as well as relevant background characteristics to conduct the PSM. Participants will be identified in these datasets based on identifiers available in the YEI monitoring information (e.g. name, DOB, address). A comparison group will be identified statistically (through PSM) in a specified extract of the full data-set (e.g. limited geography, age group, years). Outcomes for participants and the comparison group will be compared before and after the intervention, to assess the net impact of the provision. The expectation is that DWP and DfE will support this process and provide anonymised data for participants and a comparison group in line with data protection regulations. Data sharing agreements will have to be signed. **Comparison group:** The comparison group will be all other NEET young people with similar background characteristics that did not take part in the project. This group will be generated using PSM on background variables relevant to the outcome, such as socio-demographic, employment and education variables. Variables used for the PSM will also include characteristics of young people's geography, e.g. local unemployment rates. To facilitate the analysis, the comparison group can further be limited to similar geographic areas or in some cases the area of YEI implementation where the YEI does not engage with all NEET young people in the area.
Continued

Table B.5 Continued

Feasible if: Participants can be identified in the datasets; data access for participants and non-participants will be granted; data across datasets can be linked; sample sizes in the treatment group are sufficient.

Advantages: Robust and comparable measurement of outcomes; programme level evaluation is possible; non-invasive and cost-effective data collection method; robust comparison group based on observed characteristics.

Disadvantages: Cannot control for differences between the treatment and comparison group in non-observed factors, e.g. motivation; outcome and background variables are limited to those available in national datasets; some data is only available with time-lag

Resource implications: The practical implementation of this design will require both internal (DWP) and external (contractor with experience in implementing PSM using administrative datasets; DfE) resources.

Depending on who acts as the trusted 'data processor'[76] different inputs from departments and contractors would be required. In scenario II the contractor only holds anonymised information on participants and the comparison group, which is the preferred scenario.

Scenario I: The contractor is trusted data processor:

- DWP provides non-anonymised MI data to the contractor.
- The contractor gives every individual an individual identifier. He supplies DWP and DfE with the individual identifiers and relevant characteristics for the matching, i.e. name, DOB, postcode.
- DWP matches participants in their benefit and HMRC/RTI datasets using identifiers from the MI data and extract data on a comparison as specified by the contractor. This data is supplied to the contractor as anonymised files with unique identifiers in line with data protection regulations.
- DfE equally matches participants and the comparison group identified by DWP in the NPD and supplies this to the contractor as anonymised files with unique identifiers in line with data protection regulations.
- The contractor links different datasets and conducts the PSM Difference-in-differences analysis. The analysis requires the cleaning of the dataset and variable construction, design of the final model and evaluation of results.

Continued

[76] The trust data processor is the organisation/individual holding and processing non-anonymised data.

Table B.5 Continued

Scenario II: DWP is trusted data processor:

- DWP gives every participant and individual in the comparison group (as specified by the contractor) an individual identifier. It supplies DfE with the individual identifiers and relevant characteristics for the matching, i.e. name, Date of Birth (DOB), postcode.
- DWP matches participants in their benefit and HMRC/RTI datasets using identifiers from the Management Information (MI) data and extract data on a comparison as specified by the contractor. This data is supplied to the contractor as anonymised files with unique identifiers in line with data protection regulations.
- DfE equally matches participants and the comparison group identified by DWP in the NPD and supplies this to the contractor as anonymised files with unique identifiers in line with data protection regulations.
- The contractor links different datasets and conducts the PSM Difference-in-Differences analysis. The analysis requires the cleaning of the dataset and variable construction, designing the final model and evaluation of results.

Approach 2: PSM Difference-in-Differences design using local administrative data-sets

Description: This approach involves the use and potential linkage of locally held datasets, i.e. data held by delivery organisations and/or LAs, which contain outcomes relevant to the YEI, as well as relevant background characteristics to conduct the PSM.

As in 'approach 1' participants will be identified in these datasets based on identifiers available in the YEI monitoring information (e.g. name, DOB, address). A comparison group will be identified statistically (through PSM) in a specified extract of the full data-set (e.g. limited geography, age group, years).

The expectation is that the local data holders, i.e. delivery organisations and LAs, will support the process and provide anonymised data for participants and a comparison group in line with data protection regulations. Data sharing agreements will have to be signed.

Comparison group: The comparison group will be locally identified and consist of NEET young people who are included in the available local datasets, have similar characteristics, but are currently not taking part in the provision. Where collaboration can be assured, the comparison group can also be composed of similar young people in other localities.

Feasible if: Collaboration of local data holders can be ensured; a comparison group can be locally identified and non-participant data can be accessed; data is structured sufficiently similar that it can be merged; variables are measured in a comparable way; sufficient sample sizes in treatment and comparison group.

Continued

Table B.5 Continued

Advantages: Data may be available on a larger number of outcomes of interest, including soft outcomes; similarly, there may be a larger variety of background characteristics available; real time data is more likely to be available; likely smaller biases, where comparison group can be locally identified.

Disadvantages: A sufficiently similar local comparison group may not exist; data may not be sufficiently similar to be merged so that an estimation of the programme level impact would be difficult; time-intensive to engage with a large range of local data holders, clean and merge the data.

Resource implications: This approach is more resource intensive for the potential contractor than the preferred approach 1, as it will involve close collaboration with a large number of local data holders. Time resources for the potential contractor would also be higher as datasets are less likely to be inconsistent and significantly more time would be spent merging and cleaning the data.

This option will also require significant time and resource input from local data holders, who will provide data either in data collection templates (spreadsheets) or as raw local datasets.

If implemented as a stand alone option, the resource inputs from government departments will be lower than in approach 1.

Approach 3: PSM Difference-in-differences using survey data

Description: This approach involves the collection of longitudinal survey data of YEI participants and a comparison group. The survey would collect information on both observed and unobserved characteristics (e.g. motivation and attitudes) to control for self-selection bias, as well as information on outcomes.

As the YEI provision has already started, the monitoring information data collected could serve as a starting point for further follow-up data collection and the collection of data on the comparison group.

The expectation is that local holders of contact information for participants and the comparison group, i.e. delivery organisations and LAs, will support the survey through the provision of such contact information in line with data protection regulations. Data sharing agreements will have to be signed.

Comparison group: The comparison group would be locally identified in collaboration with local holders of contact information on NEET young people, i.e. delivery organisations and LAs. It would consist of NEET young people with similar background characteristics to those on the provision but who did not take part of the programme. In the case that the programme engages with all NEET young people in a local area, a comparison group in another similar locality will have to be identified and contact details will have to be provided, for which buy-in of data holders in other localities has to be ensured.

Continued

Table B.5 Continued

Advantages: Can better control for some self-selection biases by collecting more detailed baseline information; outcomes to be assessed can be defined and are not limited to what is available in administrative datasets; no time-lag.
Disadvantages: A sufficiently similar local comparison group may not exist; costly as primary data collection is required; challenging to engage the comparison group in longitudinal data collection; may encounter difficulties in accessing contact data for the comparison group in particular; attrition for the longitudinal design; reliance on self-reported outcomes; reliance on retrospectively reported background characteristics for those young people who have already started the YEI provision.
Resource implications: This approach requires that local data holders provide contact information for YEI participants and a comparison group. Different to approach 1 and 2, this approach requires resources for primary data collection.

Source: Ecorys' own illustration.

B.5.2 Key considerations

Independent from the chosen impact evaluation design, there are a number of **key considerations** for the feasibility of a CIE for the second evaluation of the YEI:

- The practical feasibility of any approach will crucially depend on **cross-departmental cooperation** and/or cooperation between national government departments and local data holders. In all cases, buy-in of the relevant data holders must be ensured as soon as possible, as the establishment of data sharing agreements will typically take one year or longer (in particular when data linkage is involved).
- Linked to this, the feasibility of implementing a CIE will crucially depend on the **timeframe for the second evaluation** and when this is due to be contracted, independent from the CIE design selected. When implementing a CIE which uses administrative data, sufficient duration for the second evaluation is important both for the time needed to set up data sharing agreements and access data and also to be able to access relevant data for the participant group. The time-lag for accessing national administrative datasets is typically about one year for NPD data for example; that is, the impact of any intervention would only show up in the data-set at least one year after participation in the intervention, if not longer, depending on when data is collected. When implementing a CIE which uses longitudinal survey data, the timetable should provide for sufficient time between the collection of baseline and follow-up data. It will also have to take into consideration that most participants will already have started and/or finalised their participation in the intervention by the time the second evaluation is contracted. This will have to be reflected in the survey design, e.g. by using data collected through the monitoring information as baseline and collecting retrospective information on additional background characteristics.

- **Consent of participants and the comparison group** is key both for accessing administrative and survey datasets. Consent from participants and a potential comparison group to share their information has to be in place to access the data. A key point will be to clarify how consent in respect of a comparison group can be obtained and/or how data from a comparison can be legitimately used for research purposes. The specific consent requirements of different data holders including the national government departments would have to be assessed at the time of the second evaluation to take into account any recent developments with regards to consent and data sharing. Previous experience with impact evaluations using administrative data and feedback from the workshop suggests that it should be in principle possible to access comparison group data from the DfE and DWP, but also that decisions are made on a case-by-base basis and are subject to changes in departmental data sharing policies. The same challenges arise for a survey-based approach to the CIE, as contact information on participants and a comparison group will be accessed. The level of consent required will also depend on who will access non-anonymised data in the context of the CIE ('trusted data processor').
- It should be noted that any comparison group will most likely also be exposed to some type of provision given the nature of the target group, inducing a potential bias in the analysis. To reduce this bias, qualitative information on available provision in the locations of the comparison group should be collected to contextualise the findings. Any impact is likely to relate to the impact of the YEI compared to business as usual provision rather than 'no provision at all'.

Finally, any CIE reduces only part of the differences between the participant and comparison group, in particular when selection is based on non-observed factors. Any results of the CIE should, therefore, be accompanied by an appropriate qualitative narrative explaining the findings and discussing the robustness of the results. This in turn implies that the CIE should be imbedded in a wider mixed-method evaluation of the YEI, assessing the different elements of the TOC as outlined in Appendix A.

Appendix C Cost-benefit analysis framework

C.1 Introduction

Cost-benefit analysis (CBA) involves a systematic approach to identifying and valuing the costs and benefits associated with an intervention. The European Commission's *Guide to Cost Benefit Analysis of Investment Projects*[77] states that CBA is often used to appraise an investment decision in order to assess its contribution to European policy objectives. The CBA plays a key role in facilitating more efficient resource allocation of a particular intervention when considered alongside possible alternatives. The same guidance requires projects funded by the Commission to demonstrate desirability from a socio-economic perspective, and CBA can play an important role in achieving this.

As reflected in Her Majesty's (HM) Treasury's *Green Book*,[78] CBA is distinct from other forms of economic analysis (such as cost effectiveness analysis and cost consequences analysis) in that a monetary value is assigned to the costs and benefits identified in the CBA framework. CBA is also an umbrella term for approaches that assign monetary values to economic analysis including Social Return On Investment (SROI).

This CBA framework has been presented in line with **recognised CBA guidance**, including, as mentioned, the *Green Book* and the *Guide to Cost Benefit Analysis of Investment Projects*, plus the YEI evaluation guidance. In the English context, additional considerations shaping the approach are provided in the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) Public Value Programme, which tested programme value for money (VfM) against Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) and Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) and the Cabinet Office's four savings types: specification, price, demand and operating model.

Findings from desk research and insights from the interviews have also informed the development of the CBA framework.

In this case, and in line with the aforementioned guidance, the proposed CBA will involve, where possible:

- Collecting quantifiable data on the **costs** of the initiative and its implementation.
- Quantifying estimated **benefits** using indicators or the evidence gathered on the outcomes and impacts of the initiative.
- **Monetising** the costs and benefits specified in the CBA framework using primary data gathered and proxies derived from secondary literature where required.

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77 http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2014/guide-to-cost-benefit-analysis-of-investment-projects-for-cohesion-policy-2014-2020

78 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-governent

Indirect costs and benefits will be considered in addition to direct ones, as well as unintended effects (positive and negative), as mentioned in the recognised CBA guidance.

To assess value for money, the proposed CBA will culminate in the aggregation and comparison of total costs and benefits, including measurement of the net benefit (ratio of benefits to costs).

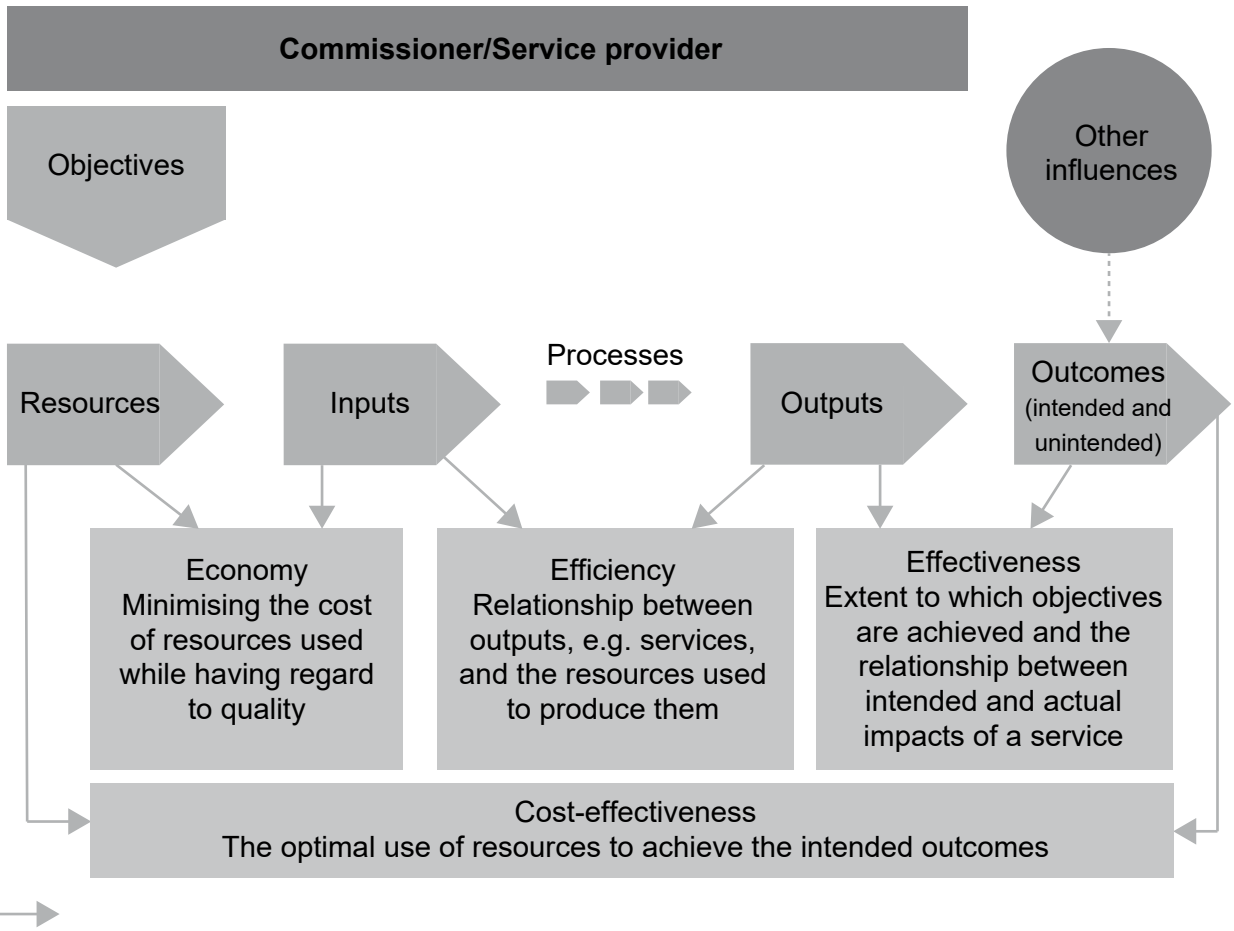
C.2 VFM and its role in the study

The CBA will form the basis for assessing VfM. VfM is commonly applied to public projects and is a worthwhile approach to assess if the YEI is an optimal use of public spending and benefit to society as a whole. The intention is to enable VfM to be assessed on the basis of the extent to which the costs of the YEI deliver additional benefit or value, over and above what would have been delivered in the absence of the funding ('additionality'). **Additionality** may relate to increased income for the Exchequer, economic benefits to individuals, and wider gains such as increased health and wellbeing.

In line with the requirements of the planned second YEI evaluation, **efficiency** will also be important to consider in the context of this study as part of the VfM assessment. In these terms, efficiency concerns the degree to which inputs were secured at a reasonable cost, in terms of unit costs for individuals supported and outcomes observed (e.g. cost per individual supported; cost per outcome secured, etc.). Efficiency is one of the three criteria that the National Audit Office use to assess the VfM of government spending, alongside **economy** and **effectiveness**.[79] These three criteria will be important considerations for this study, alongside the programme's logic model, as illustrated in the National Audit Office's VfM flow diagram below.

[79] Source: https://www.nao.org.uk/successful-commissioning/general-principles/value-for-money/assessing-value-for-money/

Figure C.1 Value for money flow diagram



Source: https://www.nao.org.uk/successful-commissioning/general-principles/value-for-money/assessing-value-for-money/

C.3 High level framework for CBA analysis

The proposed CBA framework is provided below. The framework will guide data collection and analysis, using the programme's intervention logic as a starting point. It establishes the YEI's inputs (direct and indirect costs), and the potential environmental, social and economic outcomes or benefits resulting from the initiative.

Table C.1 High level CBA framework

Type	Description	Notes	How data could be collected
Costs			
Direct	Cost of implementation/ delivery of provision implemented under the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) (for example, staff costs, overheads and payments to individuals).	Analysis will also be undertaken to determine who bears this implementation cost (YEI allocation, Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) European Social Fund (ESF) funding and associated private and public match funding). It should be noted that actual spending may be different from funds allocated.	Review of programme and project level data.
	Costs to individual participants (specific expenses where relevant such as travel expenses, books and materials, clothing and uniforms, childcare).	Reimbursable expenses will be excluded to avoid double counting with the cost of implementation.	Review of project level data, with refinement from qualitative research with participants.
	Costs to participating employers/ organisations/services (for example the cost to employers of providing traineeships and apprenticeships).	Reimbursable expenses will be excluded to avoid double counting with the cost of implementation. As YEI will utilise partners' existing experience and engagement work to target beneficiaries, only new activity brought about through YEI can be considered.	Review of project level data, with refinement from qualitative research with employers/organisations/ services.
	Administrative burdens.	To include any costs to organisations which can be defined as administrative burdens such as project governance, information obligation and reporting requirements which are over and above those which are incurred in a business-as-usual context.	Review of programme and project level data, with refinement from qualitative research with stakeholders.
Monitoring	Costs of monitoring.	To include any costs to DWP or other organisation associated with monitoring the intervention.	Review of programme and project level data, with refinement from qualitative research with stakeholders

Continued

Table C.1 Continued

Type	Description	Notes	How data could be collected
Indirect[80]	Costs from referrals to other organisations or support networks.	Commentary will be provided based on qualitative research.	Review of project level data (if collected), with refinement from qualitative research with organisations making referrals
	Any further costs to stakeholders not funded directly.	For example, costs to DWP from programme management. Commentary will be provided based on qualitative research.	Qualitative research with stakeholders.
	Costs from integration of young people into education after finishing the programme.	Avoiding any double-counting with the direct costs of education, employment and training funded through the programme.	Literature review and qualitative research with stakeholders.
	Environmental impacts of education, employment and training (for example, increased demand for transport resulting in emissions of greenhouse gases and air pollutants).	Commentary will be provided based on evidence from the existing research literature. This is likely to only be an issue for increased demand for private transport (cars).	Literature review.
Benefits			
Direct	Economic benefits for individuals (income/ earnings associated with securing a job, skills development).	Analysis and assumptions about the scale and nature of education, employment and training will be used based on Management Information (MI) available (e.g. the participant's characteristics and situation on leaving), along with appropriate salary data, to quantify the economic benefits for individuals.	Literature review and review of programme level data, including salary data.
	Social benefits for individuals – specifically personal development (confidence, self esteem) and the effect on wellbeing of being in employment (avoiding unemployment).	Commentary will be provided based on evidence from the existing research literature on social benefits arising from education, employment and training for individuals (including confidence and self-esteem).	
	Literature review and qualitative research with participants.		

Continued

Table C.1 Continued

Type	Description	Notes	How data could be collected
Direct (continued)	Economic benefits for employers through employment of skilled labour.	Analysis and assumptions about the scale and nature of vacancies will be used, along with appropriate output data, to quantify economic benefits for employers.	Literature review and qualitative research with employers.
	Cost savings to public services (primarily the reduced need for welfare payments or support with job search for individuals who move into work)[81].	Analysis and assumptions about the reduced need for welfare payments/other support will be used, along with appropriate statistical data and research evidence, to quantify savings to the public sector.	Literature review.
Indirect	Spillover effects on third parties – for example, the extent to which the intervention provides a catalyst for other (young) people to look for work or other employers to hire workers.	Commentary will be provided based on evidence from the existing research literature.	Literature review and qualitative research.
	Economic benefits of the improved functioning of the labour market (employment and productivity/GDP).	Analysis and assumptions about the wider trends in labour market functioning will be used.	Literature review and qualitative research.
	Social benefits of education, employment and training (community cohesion, reduced antisocial behaviour and integration).	Commentary will be provided based on evidence from the existing research literature on social benefits arising from education, employment and training for individuals.	Literature review and qualitative research.

80 Only costs that are not reimbursed directly through YEI funding will be considered to avoid double-counting with direct costs.

81 'Any reduction in benefit payments or increases in tax receipts due to this increase in employment should subsequently be acknowledged in Social CBA as further benefits (to the Exchequer).' Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214384/WP86.pdf (p.17).

C.4 Key issues for consideration

In accord with the principle of transparency, the CBA should outline clearly all **assumptions, limitations and areas of uncertainty** which need to be considered in the interpretation of findings. **Sensitivity analysis** (variation of the assumptions and values underlying critical variables) will be undertaken where required as outlined in the *Green Book*.

Experience of CBA studies suggests that consideration should be given to the **practical implications of the framework**, including the feasibility of collecting data to conduct the analysis. This process will be undertaken from the perspective of the likely need to develop an approach that is not overly burdensome on project deliverers and can feasibly be implemented (i.e. the required data can relatively easily be collected). Data that might be available at the level of the overall initiative should also be considered.

The nature of the ESF and YEI means that both '**hard outcomes**' (typically the economic benefits reflected in the CBA framework table) and '**softer outcomes**' (typically the wider social benefits reflected in the CBA framework table) should be considered. Social benefits are typically more difficult to quantify and monetise, and require special consideration for any study where social benefits are likely to play a part.

Where benefits cannot be quantified, a narrative will present the qualitative evidence of less tangible effects. **Contextual qualitative information** should be used to allow for local differences in approaches. This might also consider commentary on **local differences in unit costs and unit benefits** where appropriate, which will be absorbed within the aggregate analysis. This might include local pay rates, capital/building costs, etc.

Consideration should also be given to **timescales** that the costs and benefits pertain to, particularly with regard to the benefits of youth employment, which can relate to most of an individual's working life. A discount rate (time preference) should be applied to future impacts, based on VfM guidance. For example, the *Green Book* recommends a discount rate to be applied of 3.5 per cent per year, which converts future costs and benefits to 'present values' and so enables them to be compared more accurately. The EC's guidance similarly proposes taking a long-term perspective of between 10 and 30 years, to take account of the effect that future costs and benefits have an the overall viability of the programme.

Appendix D
Evaluation framework

Table D.1 Evaluation framework

	Research questions	Operational questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC workshop
Strategic Fit								
Needs	In which socio-economic context is the YEI implemented?	• What is the economic context in which the YEI was designed and is implemented? • How has the labour market situation for young people changed since the conception of the YEI? • What are the characteristics of the NEET population?	• Economic indicators • Youth unemployment and NEET indicators in eligible areas • NEET population by age, gender, educational level, socio-economic background (including proportion of disadvantaged persons, those from marginalised communities and those leaving education without qualifications), economic activity etc.	X	X	X		X
	In which political context is the YEI implemented?	• What was the political context at the inception of the YEI? • To what extent was localism an important driver or consideration in the design and development of the YEI programme? • What is the likely effect of the result of the EU referendum (if any)?	• Political agenda in which context the YEI is implemented • Any changes to programming and implemented following the EU referendum	X	X	X	X	

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC Workshop
Aims and objectives	What is the aim of the intervention?	• What is the overarching aim and objective of the YEI at EU level? • What is the overarching aim of the YEI in England? What are the specific objectives of the YEI in England? • Which aims are set by the LEPs for the YEI? • How are these translated by individual YEI providers? • Is there a logical link between the aims at different levels – EU, national, LEPs, projects?	• Definition of overarching objectives as outlined in the OP • Definition and number of specific objectives as outlined in the OP • Rationale of specific objectives as outlined in the OP • Aims and objectives as outlined in the LEP strategies • Aims and objectives as stated by projects	X	X	X	X	X

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC Workshop
Comple-mentarity	In which way does the YEI complement other instruments which support youth policies?	• What other youth employment policies exist/have existed in the recent past? • How does the YEI provision link to and interact with these other initiatives? • What is the contribution of the YEI to relevant national and EU policy objectives? • How does the YEI contribute to wider LEP objectives around EU funding?	• Benchmark of aims and objectives of other relevant youth employment policy • Possible complementarities with regards to actions, target groups, geography	X	X	X	X	X

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC Workshop
Design (including Theory of Change questions, i.e. what is the logical framework?)								
Programming	How is the YEI programmed in England?	• How is the YEI programmed within the OP? • How are other ESF funded activities programmed under IP 8ii programmed in the OP (if any)? • Did the YEI provide a quick response to address the urgency to the problem? • Were the most relevant groups targeted from the design stage?	• Name of the OP, • Priority axis in which the YEI is programmed	X				

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC Workshop
Delivery system	What is the design of the delivery system? What is the role of partnerships in the delivery system?	• What is the design of the delivery system at national level? • How many projects are there, overall and per LEP? • What is the design of the delivery systems in the LEPs? • What is the role of LEPs in guiding and supporting implementation? • What is the design of delivery systems at project level? Are there any patterns, types of delivery structures? • Did the YEI make use of existing partnerships? • To what degree were new partnerships developed to facilitate YEI implementation? • Are there any mechanisms to share good practice across LEP areas?	• Way of contracting projects • Nature and effectiveness of delivery models of projects at local levels: incl. delivery chains, consortia • Type of referral systems in place • Use of partnerships for project governance, delivery, referrals • Evidence for established versus new partnerships • Quality of partnerships • Evidence for systems of good practice sharing	X	X	X	X	

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC Workshop
Activities	What types of actions are planned to implement the YEI? What are the mechanisms through which the intervention can deliver continuing education, finding jobs or moving into apprenticeships/ traineeships?	• What types of actions/measures are planned? • Are they individual support actions or are they part of pathways or packages of support? • Did the implementation fund existing initiatives or trigger the introduction of new approaches?	• Possible actions: provision of traineeships and apprenticeships; provision of first job experience; reduction of non-wage labour costs; targeted and well-designed wage and recruitment subsidies; job and training mobility measures; start-up support for young entrepreneurs; quality vocational education and training courses; second chance programmes for early school leavers; other • Extent to which activities offer a suitable menu of support and are effectively combined into a support package • Evidence for innovation with regards to type of action, delivery mode, partnership working etc. • Extent to which the actions reflect the needs of the target group and overall aims and objectives • Extent to which the actions are internally coherent with the rationale and objectives articulated for it	X	X	X	X	X

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	Qualitative phone interviews: LEPs	Qualitative phone interviews: Providers	ToC Workshop
Outputs	What outputs is the programme trying to achieve?	• What type of young people does YEI target? • To which extent disadvantaged persons, those from marginalised communities and those leaving education without qualifications have been targeted? What are the eligibility and selection criteria applied for the NEET target group? • What outputs are expected for the NEET target group according to the measures? • Do they seem ambitious compared to other/ previous youth interventions?	• Targeted NEET population by age, gender, educational level, socio-economic background (incl. % of disadvantaged persons, those from marginalised communities and leaving education without qualifications), economic activity . • Evidence of specific methods foreseen and implemented among general targeting strategy or specific actions/ measures.	X		X	X	X

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

				Sources of evidence				
				Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews			ToC Workshop
	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations		ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	
Results	What results is the programme trying to achieve? What results are required by the end of the programme is the aim is to be met in the longer term? What are the outputs and short-term results that will help achieve the specified target	• What are immediate result indicators and their target values? What is the reference population? • What are the longer-term indicators and their target values (6 months after participation)? What is the reference population? • Are there any other results YEI interventions are trying to achieve?	• Common immediate and longer-term YEI result indicators in line with the ESF regulation	X		X	X	X

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC Workshop
Early implementation progress								
Delivery system	How well is the delivery system functioning to date? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the delivery system?	• How effective was the process of involving the LEPs in design and initial development of the YEI? • How well does the performance management of contracts work? • How well does the interaction between different delivery partners work? • Were stakeholders involved effectively? • Are some delivery structures at LEP/ project level more effective than others?	• Perceptions of stakeholders of the functioning of the delivery system • Speed and quality of set up, cooperation within and coordination across projects		X	X	X	

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	LEPs	Providers	ToC Workshop
Inputs	Does the financial implementation of the YEI go according to plans?	• How much money has been committed/ contracted out to date? • How much money has been paid to beneficiaries? • Is there likely to be underspend? If so, why?	• Achievement against financial planning • Perceptions of stakeholders on reasons for potential underspent		X	X	X	
Actions	Does the implementation of the actions go according to plans?	• Is the implementation of actions going according to plans? If not, why? • How is personalised support provided in practice? Is personalised support provided as individual support action or part of more generic pathways/ packages of support? • In how far are the implemented approaches innovative?	• Perceptions of stakeholders of implementation of the actions • Innovation with regards to actions, delivery models, target groups		X	X	X	

Continued

Table D.1 Continued

	Research questions	Operational Questions	Indicators/considerations	Sources of evidence: Desk review	Qualitative phone interviews: ESFD/EC	Qualitative phone interviews: LEPs	Qualitative phone interviews: Providers	ToC Workshop
Outputs and result achieved	Are outputs and results achieved to date according to plans?	• Are outputs and results achieved to date according to plans? If not, why? • How well does the referral process and engagement of the target group work? • Are there any projects, which are more effective than others?	• Target achievement at project and programme level (%) • Numbers achieved against output and results indicators		X	X	X	
Learning	What lessons can be learnt for future delivery of the YEI?	• What has worked well to date? • What has worked less well to date? • Which actions should be taken to reach the aims and objectives of the YEI?			X	X	X	

Appendix E
Research tools

The following topic guides were used during the fieldwork with each of the stakeholder groups that formed the primary data source for the evaluation. The guides that follow thus cover:

- European Social Fund Division (ESFD)/Commission representatives;
- European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) sub-committee representatives;
- Non-participating Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) representatives (i.e. from those areas eligible for but not participating in the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI));
- Lead partner/YEI ‘strategic lead’ representatives; and
- Delivery partner representatives.

ESFD/Commission topic guide

Interviewer Notes

Outline the aims of the evaluation and the objectives of the interview.

Inform the interviewee of the likely duration of the interview.

Provide a brief overview of the scope of the issues the interview will be looking to explore.

Outline our treatment of data gathered and the approach to confidentiality.

Gain explicit consent for the interview based on this.

Check if the interviewee has any questions prior to commencing the interview.

Tailor the interview to the role of the interviewee.

Part One: Introduction/background information on the YEI

1. Please outline how you have been involved in the development and implementation of the YEI in England.
    - *Cover main elements of role in relation to YEI: period, timing and nature of involvement*.
2. Can you briefly describe the main aspects of your involvement with the **design and initial development** of the YEI in England?
    - *Seek to gain brief overview of involvement to inform later questions.*
3. Please briefly describe the main aspects of your involvement with the **implementation and delivery** of the YEI in England to date.
    - *Seek to gain brief overview of involvement to inform later questions.*

Part Two: Initial design and development of the YEI in England

4. How was the overall approach to delivery of the YEI designed and developed?
    - *Probe on who was involved and their roles (e.g. LEPs).*
    - What worked well/less well in terms of developing the overall approach to implementing the YEI?
    - What challenges were encountered and how were these addressed/to what effect?
5. To what extent was localism an important driver or consideration in the design and development of the YEI programme?
    - How did localism inform the design and development of the YEI?
6. (*if not covered above*) How well did the process of engaging with the Local Enterprise Partnerships work as part of the design and initial development of the YEI?
    - What worked well in respect of this relationship and why?
    - What worked less well and why?

- Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed?
- Are there any lessons for future ESF programmes/projects involving LEPs?

7. What were the key socio-economic/contextual and policy considerations that informed the approach taken to the YEI in England?
   - *Probe on how these factors influenced the thinking behind the initiative and its initial design and development, their relative importance, selection of actions/measures, identification of target groups etc.*
8. In what ways and to what extent does the approach taken/design of the YEI reflect the socio-economic needs of the areas benefiting from YEI funding?
   - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response (e.g. do actions/measures reflect the needs of their respective areas, do the groups being targeted reflect this etc.)*
9. In terms of its design and intended implementation, in what ways and to what extent does the YEI complement and support wider UK policy around youth employment?
   - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response (e.g. do actions/measures complement existing policy and activity to tackle youth unemployment, do groups being targeted complement existing activity etc.)*
10. In terms of its design and intended implementation, to what extent does the YEI in England complement and reflect the intentions set for the initiative at EU level?
    - Do the overarching aim and specific objectives reflect those at EU level?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response.*
11. How far would you say that the ESF cross-cutting themes of sustainable development, equal opportunities and gender equality have formed part of the development of YEI, both for:
    a) DWP as the ESF Managing Authority?
    b) YEI providers?
12. What would you say are the key positive aspects to the overall design of the YEI and why?
13. Equally, are there any less positive elements to the overall design of the YEI?

Part Three: Implementation and delivery of the YEI

14. In general, how well would you say implementation has gone to date and why?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.

Procurement

15. What considerations informed the approach taken to procurement of YEI provision and how did this influence the actual approach taken?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the procurement approach*.

16. How well has the procurement of YEI provision worked and why?
    - What worked well and why?
    - What worked less well and why?
    - Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed?
    - Are there any lessons for procuring future ESF provision?
17. (*if not covered*) How well did partnership working with the LEPs function in designing and launching the YEI specifications?
    - *Probe on what worked well/less well and challenges*.

Governance and partnerships

18. To what extent have effective delivery partnerships been established to implement the initiative within the different LEP areas?
    - *Probe on governance and delivery chains established if interviewee has a sense of these*.
    - Are there any differences between LEP areas or approaches taken and why (e.g. more effective partnerships and/or governance in some areas than others)?
19. How effective have the LEPs been to date in supporting and guiding implementation?
20. In general, to what extent would you say YEI has encouraged the development of new delivery partnerships, or has built on pre-existing partnerships?
21. Have any mechanisms been established to share good practice across LEP areas?
    - What is the nature of these?
    - Are such mechanisms appropriate and do they have the potential to share good practice effectively?
    - (*If applicable*) How well are these mechanisms working to date?

Provision and delivery

22. Does the provision being delivered by YEI providers reflect the YEI objectives set at the national and LEP level?
    - To what degree is there read across between YEI objectives for England, LEP objectives and provision at the provider level?
23. In general, to what extent would you say YEI has encouraged the development of new or innovative provision or approaches, as opposed to building on or utilising provision that is already present?
    - What is this new or innovative provision or approaches and how are they evident?
24. Do you have a view on how effective the design, development and implementation of support packages has been at the project level?
    - E.g. are all needs likely to be/being met by the menus of provision?
    - E.g. are activities effectively blended together to form an overall package of support?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.

25. Overall, to what extent would you say delivery at the project level is going to plan and why?

Oversight and financial implementation

26. How well is DWP's contract management/oversight of providers functioning to date and why?
    - Have there been any challenges and how have these been addressed?
    - Are there any ways in which this could be improved/is intended to be improved?
27. To what extent is the contracting out of funding working as planned?
    - E.g. have there been any delays and why?
    - Is YEI allocation spend operating to its anticipated profile and why/why not
28. Is there likely to be any underspend and, if so, what are the plans for this?

Part Four: Closing/overall reflections

29. In general, what are the main things you would say have worked well to date and why?
30. Equally, what are the main things that have worked less well to date and why?
31. What would you say are the main lessons learned from the experience of designing and implementing the YEI to date?
    - Are there any specific actions that should be considered for the remainder of the funding period in response to these lessons?
32. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Thank the interviewee for their participation and contribution to the research. Make arrangements for any future liaison/collection of materials and additional evidence.

ESIF sub-committee representatives topic guide

Interviewer notes

Outline the aims of the evaluation and the objectives of the interview.

Inform the interviewee of the likely duration of the interview.

Provide a brief overview of the scope of the issues the interview will be looking to explore.

Read out the verbal consent statement, ask interviewee to read out their agreement to this, and record the consent obtained on the verbal consent form.

Check whether the interviewee is content for the interview to be recorded and explain how the data will be held, used and subsequently deleted.

Check if the interviewee has any questions prior to commencing the interview.

Part One: Introduction/background information on the YEI

1. Please outline how you have been involved in the development and implementation of the YEI within the **[insert LEP name]** area.
    - *Cover main elements of role in relation to YEI: period, timing and nature of involvement*.
    - *Clarify whether interviewee/the LEP was largely just involved in development of the approach and project(s) locally or has an ongoing role regarding implementation*.
    - *Seek to gain brief overview of involvement to inform later questions*.

Part Two: Initial design and development of the YEI in the local area

2. How was the overall approach to delivery of the YEI within the local area developed?
    - *Probe on who was involved and their roles (e.g. within the LEP, other partners?*)
    - What worked well/less well in terms of developing the overall approach to the YEI?
    - What challenges were encountered and how were these addressed/to what effect?
3. What were the key strategic considerations that informed the approach taken to designing and developing the YEI approach in the local area?
    - *Probe on how these considerations influenced the thinking behind the initiative and the approach taken, their relative importance, identification of target groups etc*.
4. To what extent was localism an important driver or consideration in the design and development of YEI in the **[insert LEP name]** area?
    - How did localism inform the design and development of the YEI?

5. In what ways and to what extent does the approach taken/design of the YEI reflect the socio-economic needs of the local area?
    - How did local considerations inform the design and development of the YEI?
    - How did you ensure that the project meets the socio-economic needs of your area?
    - *Probe on whether/how the type of provision designed and groups being targeted reflects the needs of the local area*.
6. (if not covered above) To what extent do you feel the YEI complements other related provision available locally?
    - *Probe on reasons/evidence for the viewpoint*.
    - *Probe on complementarity with other local provision and national provision delivered locally*.
7. In terms of design and intended implementation, to what extent does the approach taken locally reflect the intentions set for the initiative at the England and EU levels?
    - Do the local objectives reflect those at the England and EU levels?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.
8. What consideration was given to value for money in the design and development of projects?
    - How did value for money influence the approach being taken?
9. To what extent do you feel the LEP was able to influence the specifications for YEI provision that were drawn up and launched locally?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.
    - *Probe on any challenges to such engagement/strategic influencing, how these were addressed, and any lessons learned*.
10. How well did the phase of developing YEI bid(s) locally and the overall procurement process work from your perspective?
    - Was the guidance provided by the ESF Managing Authority clear?
    - What role (if any) did the LEP play in encouraging partnerships to bid and in supporting this?
    - Did you attend any bidder events and if so, how useful were these?
    - Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed?
    - Are there any lessons for the procurement of future ESF provision and LEP roles in this?
11. How far would you say that the ESF cross-cutting themes of sustainable development, equal opportunities and gender equality were considered in developing the YEI locally?
    - To what extent are these themes reflected in the provision being delivered?

12. What would you say are the key positive aspects to the overall design of the YEI locally and why?
13. Equally, are there any less positive elements to the overall design of the YEI locally?

Part Three: Implementation and delivery of the YEI

14. In general, how well would you say implementation has gone to date locally and why?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.

Governance and partnerships

15. What governance arrangements are in place for the YEI locally and what role did the LEP play in establishing these?
16. To what extent have effective delivery partnerships been established to implement the initiative locally?
    - *Probe on governance and delivery chains established if interviewee has a sense of these*.
    - What role, if any, did the LEP play in supporting the development of delivery partnerships?
17. What role has the LEP played in supporting and guiding implementation to date?
    - How well would you say this role has worked and why?
    - Have there been any challenges so far and, if so, how have these been addressed?
18. In general, to what extent would you say YEI has encouraged the development of new delivery partnerships locally, or has built on pre-existing partnerships?
19. Have any mechanisms been established to share good practice across the LEP area?
    - What is the nature of these?
    - How well are these mechanisms working?
    - How well have they functioned in terms of sharing good practice to date?
20. Have any mechanisms been established to share good practice between the LEP areas across England that are involved in the implementation of the YEI?
    - What is the nature of these?
    - How well are these mechanisms working?
    - How well have they functioned in terms of sharing good practice to date?

Provision and delivery

21. In general, how well would you say the delivery of provision has functioned to date in the local area and why?
    - *Probe on reasons for the interviewee's response*.

22. To what extent would you say the project(s) locally is/are delivering new or innovative provision, as opposed to building on or utilising provision that was already present?
    - What is this new or innovative provision or approaches and how are they evident?
23. Do you have a view on how effective the design, development and implementation of support packages has been at the project level?
    - Are all needs likely to be/being met by the menus of provision?
    - Are activities effectively blended together to form an overall package of support?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.
24. Overall, to what extent would you say delivery is going to plan locally and why?
    - *Probe on whether there are any issues and whether any actions are planned to address these*.

Oversight and financial implementation

25. Do you have a sense of how well DWP's contract management/oversight of providers is functioning to date and why?
    - Have there been any challenges and how have these been addressed?
    - Are there any ways in which this could be improved?
26. To what extent is the allocation of spending on the provision locally operating to profile?
    - Have there been any delays and why?
    - If there are any variations from anticipated spend why is this and what implications does this have, if any?
27. Is there likely to be any underspend and, if so, how will this be managed?

Part Four: Closing/overall reflections

28. In general, what are the main things you would say have worked well to date and why?
29. Equally, what are the main things that have worked less well to date and why?
30. What would you say are the main lessons learned from the experience of designing and implementing the YEI to date?
    - Are there any specific actions that should be considered for the remainder of the funding period in response to these lessons?
31. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Thank the interviewee for their participation and contribution to the research. Make arrangements for any future liaison/collection of materials and additional evidence.

Non-participating LEP representatives topic guide

Interviewer notes

Outline the aims of the evaluation and the objectives of the interview.

Inform the interviewee of the likely duration of the interview.

Provide a brief overview of the scope of the issues the interview will be looking to explore.

Read out the verbal consent statement, ask interviewee to read out their agreement to this, and record the consent obtained on the verbal consent form.

Check whether the interviewee is content for the interview to be recorded and explain how the data will be held, used and subsequently deleted.

Check if the interviewee has any questions prior to commencing the interview.

Part One: Introduction/background information

1. Please outline your involvement in relation to the YEI within the **[insert LEP name/ area]**.
    - *Cover main elements of involvement with YEI: period, timing and nature of involvement*.
    - *Seek to gain brief overview of involvement to inform later questions*.

Part Two: Initial considerations concerning the YEI in the local area

2. What was your perspective on the YEI when it was first announced and the LEP became aware of it?
3. At this stage, what were the key strategic considerations that informed how the LEP hoped or intended to use the YEI?
    - *Probe on how these considerations influenced the thinking in respect of the initiative and the potential use of it*.
    - *Probe on who was involved and their roles/views (e.g. within the LEP, other partners?*)
4. (if not covered) How did the needs of the local area influence these considerations?
    - How did localism inform initial thinking around the YEI?
5. At this early stage, to what extent did you feel that the YEI had the potential to meet local needs?
    - *Probe on reasons/evidence for the viewpoint*.
6. Equally, at this stage, to what extent did you feel that the YEI had the potential to contribute to and complement other related provision available locally?
    - *Probe on reasons/evidence for the viewpoint*.
7. What was the nature of any initial planning and development work undertaken in respect of the YEI and how far did this progress?

8. What worked well in relation to this initial planning and development work?
9. Were there any challenges or things that worked less well in terms of this initial planning and development work?
10. To what extent do you feel the LEP was able to influence the approach taken to the planned implementation of the YEI locally?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.
    - *Probe on any challenges to such engagement/strategic influencing, and any lessons learned*.

Part Three: Reasons for the approach taken in relation to the YEI

11. At what stage and how did it become apparent that there might be challenges in using the YEI funding locally?
    - *Probe sensitively on what the main issues or concerns were and how they emerged*.
12. What were the main issues that meant that **[insert LEP name]** area was unable to take up the LEP allocation?
    - *Probe sensitively around issues with securing match funding, concerns over the YEI regulations, issues around geographical restrictions, other local factors etc*.
13. In what ways did the actors involved including the LEP, Managing Authority and European Commission seek to address these issues and what was the result?
14. How were decisions on the final approach taken to the YEI determined locally and what were the key elements of these decisions?
    - *Probe on who was involved and their roles/views (e.g. within the LEP, other partners?*)
15. Once it became clear that **[insert LEP name/area]** would be unable to take up the LEP allocation, what alternative approaches or strategies were already in place/were put in place to address challenges around youth unemployment and NEET levels?
    - *Probe on the approach taken instead of using YEI funding – e.g. using ESF for similar provision or activities, use of other funding streams*.
    - *Probe on the types of support being provided instead to help NEET young people or to address youth unemployment*.

Part Four: Overall reflections and lessons learned

16. Taking the issues we have discussed into account, what is your view on the YEI now?
17. What are the key lessons that you feel can be learned from the experience in **[insert LEP name]** area?
18. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Thank the interviewee for their participation and contribution to the research. Make arrangements for any future liaison/collection of materials and additional evidence.

Lead partner topic guide

Interviewer Notes

Outline the aims of the evaluation and the objectives of the interview.

Inform the interviewee of the likely duration of the interview.

Provide a brief overview of the scope of the issues the interview will be looking to explore.

Read out the verbal consent statement, ask interviewee to read out their agreement to this, and record the consent obtained on the verbal consent form.

Check whether the interviewee is content for the interview to be recorded and explain how the data will be held, used and subsequently deleted.

Check if the interviewee has any questions prior to commencing the interview.

Part One: Introduction/background information on the YEI

1. Please briefly outline your role in the development and implementation of your YEI project.
    - *Cover main elements of role in relation to the project: period, timing, scope of involvement*.
    - *Confirm the role of the interviewee in terms of managing/overseeing the delivery chain*.
2. Please provide an overview of how delivery of your project is structured and the key aspects of its planned implementation.
    - *Check understanding of governance arrangements, partnership and delivery structure*.
    - *Check understanding of key elements of the provision/activities*.

Part Two: Design and development of the project

3. How was your YEI project designed and developed?
    - *Probe on who was involved and their roles (e.g. LEPs, other partners)*.
    - What worked well/less well in terms of developing the overall approach to implementing the YEI?
    - What challenges were encountered and how were these addressed/to what effect?
4. How well did the process of working with the Local Enterprise Partnership work as part of the design and initial development of the project?
    - What worked well in respect of this relationship and why?
    - What worked less well and why?
    - Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed?
    - Are there any lessons for future ESF programmes/projects involving LEPs?

5. To what extent was designing the project in response to local needs an important driver or consideration in its design and development?
    - How did local considerations inform the design and development of the YEI?
    - How did you ensure that the project meets the socio-economic needs of your area?
    - *Probe on whether/how the type of provision designed and groups being targeted reflects the needs of the local area*.
6. (if not covered above) To what extent do you feel the project complements other related provision available locally?
    - *Probe on reasons/evidence for the viewpoint*.
    - *Probe on complementarity both with other local provision and national provision delivered locally*.
7. What consideration was given to value for money in the design and development of projects?
    - *How did value for money influence the approach being taken*?
8. How well would you say the design of your project reflects the guidance established for YEI at the England and EU levels and why?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.
9. How well did the phase of developing your bid and the overall procurement process work from your perspective?
    - Was the guidance on developing provision and submitting a bid clear?
    - Did you attend any bidder events and if so, how useful were these?
    - Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed?
    - Are there any lessons for the procurement of future ESF provision?
10. How far would you say that the ESF cross-cutting themes of sustainable development, equal opportunities and gender equality are reflected in your project:
    - *Probe on how the partnership design and overall approach to implementation reflect these themes (e.g. are all partners committed to the themes, are responsibilities formalised etc*.)
    - *Probe on how and to what extent the specific provision being delivered has been developed with these themes in mind (e.g. ensuring equality of access, monitoring etc*.)
11. What would you say are the key positive aspects to the overall design of your YEI project and why?
12. Equally, are there any less positive elements to the overall design of your YEI project?
    - Were there any things you hoped to be able to include but weren't able to and why?
    - Are there any things related to the design of the project that have caused issues so far and why?

Part Three: Implementation of the project to date

13. In general, how well would you say implementation and delivery of the project has gone to date and why?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.

Governance and partnerships

14. How well have the governance arrangements for your project worked to date and why?
    - *Probe on the nature of the arrangements, whether there have been any challenges and how these have been addressed, what has worked well/less well and why*.
15. To what extent was a new delivery partnership established for the project?
    - *Probe on whether new partners, new combinations of partners were established or whether provision was largely built on pre-existing partnerships*?
16. How well has the delivery structure and partnership established for your project worked to date and why?
    - Have there been any changes to the planned delivery structure and partnership and why?
    - Are all partners included at the bid stage involved in delivery? If not, why?
    - Have you had to deal with any issues within the delivery chain? If so, what were these and what action have you taken?
17. (*if not covered*) What has worked well in terms of the delivery structure/partnership to date?
18. (*if not covered*) Equally, what has worked less well and have any lessons emerged from this?
19. How effective has the LEP been to date in supporting and guiding implementation?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.
20. Are there any mechanisms for sharing good practice across delivery partners?
    - What is the nature of these?
    - How well are these mechanisms working?
    - How well have they functioned in terms of sharing good practice to date?
21. Are there any mechanisms for sharing good practice across YEI projects and between the LEP areas involved in delivering YEI provision?
    - What is the nature of these?
    - How well are these mechanisms working?
    - How well have they functioned in terms of sharing good practice to date?

Provision and delivery

22. In general, how well would you say the delivery of provision has functioned to date and why?
    - *Probe on reasons for the interviewee's response*.

23. To what extent is the recruitment of participants onto the provision going according to plan?
    - Have the numbers engaged so far been in line with expectations?
    - Have there been any delays in recruiting participants and why? How is this being addressed?
    - Have there been any difficulties in engaging particular target groups? How is this being addressed?
24. Has there been anything that has worked particularly well so far in terms of delivery, either in terms of how provision is being delivered or specific types of provision?
25. Equally, is there anything that has worked less well or have there been any challenges so far? If so, what were these and how were they addressed?
26. To what extent would you say your project is delivering new or innovative provision, as opposed to building on or utilising provision that is already present?
    - What is this new or innovative provision or approaches and how are they evident?

Contract management and financial implementation

27. How well is DWP's contract management/oversight of providers functioning to date and why?
    - Have there been any challenges and how have these been addressed?
    - Are there any ways in which this could be improved?
28. To what extent is the allocation of spending on the provision operating to profile?
    - E.g. have there been any delays and why?
    - If there are any variations from anticipated spend why is this and what implications does this have, if any?
29. Is there likely to be any underspend and, if so, how will this be managed?

Part Four: Closing/overall reflections

30. In general, what are the main things you would say have worked well to date and why?
31. Equally, what are the main things that have worked less well to date and why?
32. What would you say are the main lessons learned from the experience of designing and implementing the YEI to date?
    - Are there any specific actions that should be considered for the remainder of the funding period in response to these lessons?
33. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Thank the interviewee for their participation and contribution to the research. Make arrangements for any future liaison/collection of materials and additional evidence.

Delivery partner topic guide

Interviewer notes

Outline the aims of the evaluation and the objectives of the interview.

Inform the interviewee of the likely duration of the interview.

Provide a brief overview of the scope of the issues the interview will be looking to explore.

Read out the verbal consent statement, ask interviewee to read out their agreement to this, and record the consent obtained on the verbal consent form.

Check whether the interviewee is content for the interview to be recorded and explain how the data will be held, used and subsequently deleted.

Check if the interviewee has any questions prior to commencing the interview.

Tailor questions to interviewee's role, in particular re involvement in design and delivery or just delivery.

Part One: Introduction/background information

1. Please briefly outline your role in the development and delivery of the YEI project.
    - *Cover main elements of role in relation to the project: period, timing, scope of involvement*.
    - *Probe in particular on whether the interviewee had a role in the design of provision or is only involved in its delivery and tailor the questions below accordingly*.
2. Please provide an overview your organisation's role in delivering YEI provision.
    - *Probe on the key elements of the provision/activities involved and how they are delivered*.
    - *Clarify whether the organisation delivers all aspects of the provision (e.g. on a geographical basis) or is only involved in a specific part of it (e.g. delivering a particular type of specialist support)*.

Part Two: Design and development of the project

3. How was the YEI provision you are delivering designed and developed?
    - *Probe on who was involved and their roles (e.g. just their organisation, lead partner, LEP*?)
    - What worked well/less well in terms of developing the overall approach to the provision?
    - What challenges were encountered and how were these addressed/to what effect?
4. Did you work with the lead partner for your YEI project in designing and developing the provision your organisation is delivering? If, so what did this involve?

    (*As applicable*)
    - What worked well in respect of this and why?

- What worked less well and why?
- Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed?
- Are there any lessons for developing future ESF provision?

5. Have you worked with the Local Enterprise Partnership as part of the design and initial development of the provision? If, so what did this involve?

   (*As applicable*)

   - What worked well in respect of this and why?
   - What worked less well and why?
   - Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed?
   - Are there any lessons for future ESF programmes/projects involving LEPs?

6. To what extent was designing the provision in response to local needs an important driver or consideration in its design and development?

   - How did local considerations inform the design and development of the YEI?
   - How did you ensure that the provision meets the socio-economic needs of your area?
   - *Probe on whether/how the type of provision designed and groups being targeted reflects the needs of the local area*.

7. (if not covered above) To what extent do you feel the project complements other related provision available locally?

   - *Probe on reasons/evidence for the viewpoint*.
   - *Probe on complementarity both with other local provision and national provision delivered locally*.

8. Were you involved in developing the bid for the YEI project you are involved in? If so, how well did this element and the overall procurement process work from your perspective?

   - *Was the guidance on developing provision and submitting a bid clear*?
   - *Did you attend any bidder events and if so, how useful were these*?
   - *Were any particular challenges encountered and how were they addressed*?
   - *Are there any lessons for the procurement of future ESF provision*?

9. What consideration was given to value for money in the design and development of projects?

   - *How did value for money influence the approach being taken*?

10. How far would you say that the ESF cross-cutting themes of sustainable development, equal opportunities and gender equality are reflected in the provision you are delivering:

    - *Probe on how and to what extent the specific provision being delivered has been developed with these themes in mind (e.g. ensuring equality of access, monitoring etc*.)

(*If applicable*) – *Probe on how the partnership design and overall approach to implementation reflect these themes (e.g. are responsibilities formalised by the lead organisation etc*.)

11. What would you say are the key positive aspects to the overall design of the YEI provision and why?
12. Equally, are there any less positive elements to the overall design of the provision?
    - Were there any things you hoped to be able to deliver but weren't able to and why?
    - Are there any things related to the design of the provision that have caused issues so far and why?

Part Three: Implementation of the provision to date

13. In general, how well would you say implementation and delivery of the provision has gone to date and why?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.

Governance and partnerships

14. Do you have any engagement with the governance arrangements for the YEI project you are involved with? If so, how would you say these arrangements have worked to date and why?
    - *Probe on what has worked well/less well and why*.
    - *Probe on whether there have been any challenges and how these have been addressed*.
15. How well has the relationship functioned to date between your organisation and the lead partner organisation for your YEI project?
    - *Probe on what has worked well/less well and why*.
    - *Probe on whether there have been any challenges and how these have been addressed*.
16. To what extent was a new delivery partnership established for the project?
    - *Probe on whether the interviewee's organisation is working with new partners, whether the project involves new combinations of partners or largely builds on pre-existing partnerships*?
17. How well has the delivery partnership established for your project worked to date and why?
    - Have there been any changes to the planned delivery partnership and why?
    - As far as you're aware, are all partners from the bid stage involved in delivery? If not, why?
18. (*if not covered*) What has worked well in terms of the delivery structure/partnership to date?
19. (*if not covered*) Equally, what has worked less well and have any lessons emerged from this?

20. How effective has the LEP been to date in supporting and guiding implementation?
    - *Probe on the reasons for the interviewee's response*.
21. Are there any mechanisms for sharing good practice across delivery partners?
    - What is the nature of these?
    - How well are these mechanisms working?
    - How well have they functioned in terms of sharing good practice to date?
22. Are there any mechanisms for sharing good practice across YEI projects and between the LEP areas involved in delivering YEI provision?
    - What is the nature of these?
    - How well are these mechanisms working?
    - How well have they functioned in terms of sharing good practice to date?

Delivery of provision

23. In general, how well would you say the delivery of provision has functioned to date and why?
    - *Probe on reasons for the interviewee's response*.
24. To what extent is the recruitment of participants onto the provision going according to plan?
    - Have the numbers engaged so far been in line with expectations?
    - Have there been any delays in recruiting participants and why? How is this being addressed?
    - Have there been any difficulties in engaging particular target groups? How is this being addressed?
25. Has there been anything that has worked particularly well so far in terms of delivery, either in terms of how provision is being delivered or specific types of provision?
26. Equally, is there anything that has worked less well or have there been any challenges so far? If so, what were these and how were they addressed?
27. To what extent would you say your organisation is delivering new or innovative provision, as opposed to building on or utilising provision that was already present?
    - What is this new or innovative provision or approaches and how are they evident?

Contract management and financial implementation

28. How well is the management and oversight of your organisation as a YEI delivery partner functioning to date and why?
    - *Clarify whether the organisation reports to the lead partner organisation and how this works*.
    - Have there been any challenges and how have these been addressed?
    - Are there any ways in which this could be improved?

29. To what extent your organisation's budget allocation operating to profile so far?
    - E.g. have there been any delays in spending the allocation and why?
    - If there are any variations from anticipated spend, why is this and what implications does this have, if any?
30. Is there likely to be any underspend and, if so, how will this be managed?

Part Four: Closing/overall reflections

31. In general, what are the main things you would say have worked well to date and why?
32. Equally, what are the main things that have worked less well to date and why?
33. What would you say are the main lessons learned from the experience of delivering the YEI to date?
    - Are there any specific actions that should be considered for the remainder of the funding period in response to these lessons?
34. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Thank the interviewee for their participation and contribution to the research. Make arrangements for any future liaison/collection of materials and additional evidence.