Aiming High for Young People: Evaluation Feasibility Study

Final report

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This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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Introduction

DFE (then DCSF) commissioned NatCen and Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR), in collaboration with the National Youth Agency (NYA) and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), to carry out a feasibility study to produce a set of recommendations for an evaluation of the Aiming High for Young People (AHYP) strategy.

The aims of the feasibility study were to –
- assess the information needs of central AHYP stakeholders and thereby identify the key research questions to be addressed by an evaluation of the strategy;
- propose evaluation design(s) which are practically feasible to address these research questions.

The main elements of the study were a consultation exercise with stakeholders and a desk based review of the existing data sources on provision and participation and sampling frames of young people.

Key issues arising from the consultation and desk research

From our consultation with stakeholders, the first priority for an evaluation is to generate an understanding of how local activity under the AH banner relates to participation in positive activities by young people (both overall, but particularly amongst the hard to reach groups). To do this, **essential** elements of an evaluation would -
- Provide systematic evidence about the activities going on under AH at a local level, and the extent to which the strategy has influenced LA work around young people's participation in positive activities.
- Test whether *increased participation* is related to AH activity, and that AH is successful in encouraging participation amongst the harder to reach groups.
- Provide evidence about what a successful, cost-effective local model of delivery looks like.

In addition an evaluation should -
- Test the link between increased participation and improved subsequent education and employment outcomes for young people.

The question of whether the strategy is having an impact on local community perceptions is also important but of lower priority than the other elements.

In the sections below, we summarise potential evaluation designs to address these research questions.

Establishing what LAs are doing under the AHYP banner

In order to address the question of whether LA activity under AHYP impacts on participation it is clearly necessary to establish what LAs are in fact doing – and, ideally how this has changed since the strategy's introduction. Although there are various sources of data about LA spend on and provision of positive activities for young people, and data are available on the ring-fenced elements of the AHYP allocations, aggregating these data is unlikely to give a very clear and comprehensive picture of LA activity under AHYP. In principle it appears that what is needed is information per LA on their activity, organised within each of the six AHYP objectives.

Probably the simplest and least expensive way of collecting data on LA activity would be an LA survey, used in conjunction with the existing data. The questionnaire would include a series of factual questions about activity (and how it has changed since the launch of AHYP), but would also include some self-assessment of how well the LA is doing towards meeting the objectives of the strategy.

Measuring the impact of LA activity on youth participation

In order to establish whether LA activity under AHYP does help to increase participation levels amongst young people, it is necessary to relate local data on participation to LA activity (with the latter coming from the survey above and administrative sources). There are two possible routes to obtaining data on participation: firstly some data are available from existing sources, and secondly, new data could potentially be collected by a survey.

The TellUs and Taking Part surveys are the two major sources of existing data on participation over time. Since 2009/2010, the TellUs questions are asked of Year 11 pupils for the Client Caseload Information System CCIS, providing a further source of data on these variables. However, the available measures on both these surveys on participation and on participants' demographics are relatively crude (eg there is nothing on frequency of participation, access; similarly there is insufficient information to test whether the strategy is reaching several of the 'disadvantaged' groups). While it would be possible with this data to go some way to establishing the link between young people's participation levels and different models of LA activity around AHYP, such analysis could only go so far. For instance, it would not be possible to establish which strands of the strategy are contributing most to changing participation or whether some models of delivery are more effective than others.

To gain a much better understanding of how the strategy is influencing LA decision making, and how LA activity subsequently affects young people's participation, we recommend that the LA survey and secondary analysis described above be supplemented by two additional pieces of work:

- In-depth case studies with a sub-set of 20 or 30 LAs, providing a better understanding of how the strategy is being implemented. These would involve interviewing a range of staff and young people and possibly some quality assessment of the provision.
- A bespoke survey of 4k to 6k young people, drawn from the case study LAs, to test how different LA models are associated with patterns of participation and provide an evaluation of AH against the six objectives from the young people's perspectives.

Adding these two elements to the evaluation inevitably increases the evaluation cost very considerably, but for an evaluation that aims to get inside the 'black box' they are crucial.

In these two elements, it is probably sensible to concentrate attention on just two types of LAs: those LAs who had relatively low levels of youth participation prior to AHYP in 2007 and relatively low levels of investment at that time, but who have since invested significantly into AHYP style activities; and those LAs who had relatively low levels of youth participation in 2007 and who have continued to invest less. Restricting this element of the evaluation to these two groups would focus attention (with the first group) on those LAs for which the strategy has most likely to have been a trigger for change, while the second group would act as a comparison group, and as case studies around the barriers to LA activity. Similarly, there is an argument that the young people's survey should focus on relatively disadvantaged young people, on the grounds that this is the group the strategy is primarily targeted at.

Measuring the link between participation and longer term outcomes

The AHYP strategy is predicated on the assumption that increased participation will improve subsequent outcomes for young people, but that there is relatively little evidence to support that link. The local surveys of young people would provide a very good base for a prospective cohort study to look at the link between participation and subsequent outcomes. Having been surveyed about their participation, young people could be tracked for a number of years to collect data on their outcomes. There are two options for tracking the young people over time – follow-up surveys (potentially over the phone), and administrative records such as the National Pupil Database, the ILR, and DWP/HMRC data. Fuller information - both on continued participation and on factors that influence hard education and employment outcomes (eg socio-emotional competency, networks into work) – would be available if young people are followed up via interview. The administrative data alternative is obviously the much cheaper option, but would only track hard outcomes around education and employment. Our recommendation would be to use a mixture of the two. Of course, one difficulty with this design is that it will take a relatively long time to generate results.

Measuring the impact of AHYP on community perceptions of young people

A further element of the evaluation is measurement of the extent to which the strategy has met its objective to change local community perceptions of young people. Here, our suggestion is to draw on existing surveys such as the British Crime Survey, the Place Survey and the Citizenship Survey. Using these sources, it would be possible to look for associations between trends in community perceptions and LA activity. However, despite recommending this as the most feasible approach given the likely overall evaluation budget, we should note that under this approach it would be hard to disentangle the separate effect of AH from other initiatives (such as crime initiatives).

Assessing whether LA activity under AHYP is cost effective

Central to the evaluation is an assessment of value for money. In order to address the question of whether the benefits associated with local level activity around youth participation outweigh the costs, clearly some comparison between the impacts of local activity and costs is needed. For the AHYP a cost-effectiveness approach is likely to be most appropriate in the short term, as the main short-term outcome measures for the evaluation will be around participation which does not have a defined monetary value. For a cost-effectiveness analysis the cost per extra 'unit of participation' will need to be estimated (where 'unit of participation' might be defined as an extra young person doing any positive activity within a defined period, or might be a 'participation' session.) Based on the evaluation design options we set out, this estimate could potentially be derived by comparing the change in spend on youth participation either collected as part of an LA survey with the local increase in participation as measured by TellUs[1] or, more likely, via the case study design.

If the evaluation was to be extended to include a follow-up study to establish the links between participation and education and employment outcomes, a cost-*benefit* analysis would then be feasible (since many education and employment outcomes have established monetary values).

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[1] The TellUs series was significantly revised between TellUs2 and TellUs3 so data prior to 2008 may be of lower quality than later data.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Aiming High for Young People strategy

DFE (then DCSF) commissioned NatCen and Bryson Purdon Social Research, in collaboration with the National Youth Agency (NYA) and the Institute for Fiscal Studies, to carry out a feasibility study to produce a set of recommendations for an evaluation of the Aiming High for Young People (AHYP) strategy.

Launched in 2007, the AHYP strategy had an overall remit to improve the provision of positive activities and support services for young people, especially those deemed as 'disadvantaged' across a number of indicators. There were several drivers behind the development of the strategy, which are reflected in diversity of both its aims and the strands of work. At one level, the government was acting on empirical evidence – from the UK and the US – on the positive impacts on young people of being engaged in out of school activities (see Section 1.2), coupled with evidence that participation rates are lower within many 'disadvantaged' groups. At another level, government was attempting to counter the growing negative stereotyping of young people, by promoting young people's participation in the local community and facilitating raising the profile of young people's achievements. Its focus on involving young people in the design and delivery of the strands is part of a wider agenda on empowering young people (as, for example, discussed in the 2004: Every Child Matters: change for children paper).

1.2 Purpose and aims of the feasibility study

The AHYP strategy was introduced with the intention of increasing young people's (particularly hard to reach young people's) participation in positive activities and, in turn, improving their life chances across a range of measures. The strategy is guided by three basic principles:
- **Empowerment:** involving young people in decision-making over local youth service provision;
- **Access and inclusion:** ensuring equal access to service provision for all young people and removing barriers to participation for those who are disadvantaged;
- **Capacity and quality:** ensuring that youth service provision matches demand and is of high quality.

Since the strategy's introduction, there have been a wide number of universal initiatives and pilot programmes. These are described in the paper *'Aiming High for Young People: three years on'* (DCSF, 2010a). While a number of individual initiatives under its banner have been evaluated, no evidence has been collected about how well the AHYP strategy as a whole has been implemented and, in turn, what effect it has had on its two key aims

of increasing participation and improving outcomes. The broad parameters of the strategy and the level of local autonomy in its implementation make its evaluation complex.

So, the aims of the feasibility study were to -

- assess the information needs of central AHYP stakeholders (eg DFE (then DCSF), Treasury) and thereby identify the key research questions to be addressed by an evaluation of the strategy;
- propose evaluation design(s) which are practically feasible to address these research questions.

1.3   Report structure

This report sets out our conclusions on the relative priorities for the evaluation (what *needs* to be tested – or needs to be tested first - and what might be desirable but is of lower priority), and how the various elements of AHYP might realistically be evaluated.

In the following sub-sections, we briefly place the evaluation within the context of the existing research in the area and provide some detail of the stages of our study. Section 2 articulates the issues arising from our consultation and research, and sets out what emerged as the research priorities for the evaluation. Sections 3 to 7 describes research designs to meet each of the evaluation objectives.

1.4   Putting the evaluation in context

During the early stages of the study, we looked at other evaluations of initiatives and programmes around positive activities for young people. The primary purpose of this exercise was to look for parallels with any evaluation of the AHYP strategy, to see if we could learn from the methods adopted and outcome measures used. We were helped in this by an internal government review of the evidence done in 2006 (DCSF, 2006). It highlighted the lack of robust evaluation evidence, particularly UK evidence. Although citing more high quality research from the US, it rightly pointed to potential problems of transferability to the UK context. Its key findings focused on the elements that might contribute to 'good quality' provision or provision most likely to lead to improved outcomes for young people. The Evidence Annex for 'Aiming High for Young People: three years on' (DCSF, 2010b) provides detail of more recent UK evidence, particularly around the link between young people's social and emotional skills and educational achievement and between the activities that they engage in and the likelihood of them being engaging in 'risky behaviours'. This newer evidence is coming from some of the more recent cohorts, such as the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.   Also, within the UK, a number of AHYP strands have been

or are being evaluated (eg Positive Activities for Young People; Youth Opportunities/Youth Capital Fund; Youth Sector Development Fund; Youth Leadership). And related is the five year evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Extended Services Agenda, which is providing a range of support centred around schools, including out of school activities. There are also a range of related programmes being evaluated around young people's volunteering (eg the Youth Community Action Programme and the V initiative).

Probably the closest example for AHYP is the Extended Services (ES) evaluation, given it is looking at the take-up and impact of a range of services (while others are looking at very specific and sometimes targeted interventions). The ES evaluation is tracking cohorts of students, looking at both take-up of services and resulting outcomes. That said, the parallels between the ES evaluation and an evaluation of AHYP are limited, given more clear parameters and tangible activities within ES. For instance, the task of collecting data on the range of activities going on under the AHYP banner will be much more complicated. Nonetheless, any evaluation of AHYP would do well to look for synergies with the ES evaluation, potentially in terms of the outcome measures used to measure impact.

Outside of the UK context, the key study of relevance is the Harvard Family Research Project Out of School Time Program Evaluation in the US (see Harvard Family Research Project 2003 for a review). While providing a wealth of evidence about links between positive activities (notably around their intensity and quality) and young people's outcomes, the evaluation draws on a number of evaluations of specific initiatives, sometimes small scale, and often with a specific target population of young people. This makes it of limited use when considering how best to evaluate the AHYP strategy, with its broad ranging strategy focusing on the whole young people population.

While the primary purpose of this stage was to look at methodologies and not to look for evidence about the impact of positive activities on young people, it is important to note the lack of robust evidence in this area. Within the UK, the work of Feinstein and Robson using LSYPE is cited as evidence of the link between positive activities and later outcomes (Feinstein and Robson, 2007).   In terms of recommendations around an evaluation of the AHYP strategy, this paucity of evidence perhaps points to the importance of testing the link between taking part in positive activities and positive outcomes. If this link had already been established, one may have suggested that an evaluation of AHYP could have had its primary focus to measure the link between the implementation of the strategy at the local level and increasing young people's participation levels. Given the UK and US evidence that – to be effective – activities need to be structured and of high quality, again, this highlights that good markers of the quality of provision and skills of the workforce are important to include in the AHYP evaluation.

Finally, the focus of our feasibility study was the AHYP strategy as a whole, rather than its composite parts. It is unusual to attempt to evaluate the impact of an entire strategy,

particularly one with such wide-ranging activities and objectives. Therefore, as part of our early work, we also sought examples of other strategy evaluations. Despite consultation across government on this, we found no similar examples.

1.5   Stages of the feasibility study

The feasibility study included the following initial three stages -
- A consultation exercise with stakeholders in DFE (then DCSF) and the Treasury (for a full list see Appendix B);
- A focus group of young people, from NYA's Young Researchers Network. The findings from this are summarised in Appendix C;
- Desk based research reviewing the methodology and findings of relevant evaluations; large scale surveys from which the data could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of AHYP; local level administrative data on activity and spend under AHYP; potential sampling frames of young people.

During each of these first three stages, we broadly considered –
- What are the priorities for an evaluation of AHYP? In terms of the needs of central government policy leads, and in terms of adding to, and not duplicating, the existing evidence base.
- What data are currently available that could be used within an evaluation of AHYP?
- How might we be able to track a representative sample of young people, matching their activities against local provision?

And then the final stages involved -
- A workshop with DFE (then DCSF) and Treasury stakeholders, where we fed back and discussed what we had learnt from the initial three stages.
- A small scale consultation with LAs to assess the feasibility of our proposed approach to collecting data from LAs.

In the next section, we articulate the issues arising from the work in the first stage, and set out what emerged as the research priorities for the evaluation.

2 KEY ISSUES ARISING FROM THE CONSULTATION AND DESK RESEARCH

In broad terms, the consultation and desk research raised five key issues pertinent to what an evaluation of AHYP should look like, and what evidence and/or data an evaluation team could draw on.

1. **There is little systematic evidence about the activities going on under the Aiming High banner at a local level, and the extent to which the strategy has influenced LA work around young people's participation in positive activities. A greater understanding of this would be central to any evaluation. This needs to include the activities of third sector and private organisations working in partnership or independently of local government.** What is currently known centrally is fairly piecemeal, especially for elements of the strategy that do not have ring-fenced money associated with them. Under Section 52 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, each LA submits an annual budget, and later, annual account of spending, which identifies spending on 'Youth and Community' using a small number of broad headings. However, apart from the Section 52 spend data, very little is known about LA spend on provision. NYA until relatively recently carried out a survey of LAs that collected data on expenditure, workforce provision, levels of youth participation and accredited outcomes, but this has now been discontinued. However, a new DFE survey or audit of local authorities took place in February 2010 which collected some information from local authorities on number of sessions provided locally by time of day and week, type of activity, and type of provider. Our understanding is that is very likely to be repeated. So, the picture of provision in 2010 will become more complete than it is at the time of writing. In addition the new Family Information Directory (on which LAs should document all the family services, including youth provision, available in its local area) may become a good source of data on local provision. However, it is hard to judge how useful or comprehensive this will be until it is launched and bedded in, or the extent to which it will include third sector and privately led activities. In terms of young people's participation, the only additional source of data at a local level is the TellUs[2] survey series (and the equivalent questions that were asked of Year 11 students for the Connexion's database, the Client Caseload Information System CCIS), which has a large enough sample size to allow for local level analysis. DCMS's Taking Part survey also collects a range of information on participation (and includes children) but is not large enough for local area analysis. However, in summary, these surveys provide some very general information about young people's participation in positive activities.

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[2] At least since 2008 when the TellUs series was significantly revised.

2. From the perspective of all of those consulted, **a key objective of AHYP is to generate increased participation amongst young people**, especially amongst those young people who are at most risk of having poor educational, employment or behavioural outcomes. So an evaluation of the strategy would need to test whether *increased participation* is indeed related to AHYP activity, and that AHYP is successful in encouraging participation amongst the harder to reach groups.

3. Assuming that the strategy does lead to increased participation, **there is a need to understand what a successful local model of delivery looks like**. That is, what types of activity adopted by LAs are most successful in increasing participation amongst the hard to reach groups? How much provision is needed locally to generate a 'reasonable' level of participation? What 'package' of provision is most effective? What are the best models for working in partnership with third sector and private organisations? What are the best ways of overcoming barriers to participation? What are the effects of differential qualities of provision or workforce compositions? And so on.

4. **The strategy is predicated on the assumption that increased participation will improve subsequent education and employment outcomes for young people.** And that the mechanism for doing this is that participation affects a range of outcomes around social and emotional competence, which in turn improve education and employment outcomes. Yet there is only limited evidence for this causal pathway, with most of the research being done in the US and based on the evaluation of specific, and often intensive, programmes. There is also some evidence that certain types of participation can worsen outcomes. So, **ideally an evaluation of AHYP would include a test of this link**. Views were mixed about the relative importance of testing this link. Some felt that it was key and, indeed, felt that the outcomes to be measured should extend beyond employment and education outcomes (eg reduction in anti-social behaviour). Others consulted felt that the key aim of the evaluation should be to seek evidence around the strategy's effects on participation, rather than measure the additional step of whether participation, in turn, improved outcomes. Given a paucity of (UK) evidence on the effect of positive participation on young people's outcomes, evidence from an evaluation which does not seek to answer this will be more limited in value when assessing how policies around young people's participations could or should be developed. Those who placed less priority on the outcome data may have done so because of (a) the increased cost of the evaluation (b) the longer time scales required to track outcomes or (c) because it was seen as being a wider research question than the AHYP strategy, and therefore, in evaluation terms, viewed as a separate exercise. However, we have described how an evaluation of AHYP could include measures of short to medium term outcomes for young people.

5. **There is interest in the impact that the strategy is having on local community perceptions.** However, for most this was seen as a lower priority for the evaluation than the other issues discussed above (although, among the young people consulted, this appeared to be a more important issue). Wanting to change perceptions about young people disengaged from positive activities and youth crime were the key measures cited.

In summary, a definite remit of an evaluation is to:
Generate an understanding of how local activity under the Aiming High banner relates to participation in positive activities by young people (both overall, but particularly amongst the hard to reach groups). It is important that this provides some understanding of what profile of LA activity is most cost-effective, since this will provide lessons on how LAs should prioritise spend on positive activities.

And for some of those consulted, an evaluation of AHYP would include an assessment of whether increased participation improves subsequent outcomes. The question of whether AHYP activities improve community perceptions of young people is important, but rather less so, and should be included in an evaluation if it could be measured cost-effectively.

It is important to note that the evaluation questions raised above does not include a direct question as to whether LA activity would have been different, and participation of young people been different, had the strategy not been launched. This is a valid evaluation question, but in the absence of any non-strategy comparison group would be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to address empirically. It would require some assessment to be made as to what local areas might have done locally if the strategy (and the associated money) had not been introduced. The closest one can hope to get to addressing that question is an assessment of historical trends in LA provision for young people (so that any rapid change in provision since the launch of the strategy might then plausibly be partly attributed to the strategy) coupled with self-reports by LA staff on the degree to which their actions changed after 2007 because of the strategy. An evaluation that tests whether the activities promoted under AHYP are effective in encouraging participation is, arguably, not an evaluation of the strategy per se. But by evaluating the efficacy of the activities that the strategy promotes, it should be possible to test whether the monies invested are worthwhile.

There are a couple of overarching issues which need to be taken into consideration when finalising the design of an evaluation of AHYP. The first is how to define what activities fall within the AHYP banner. In particular, no consensus was reached about the relationship between extended services and AHYP. The second is how to ensure that an evaluation captures all activities that fall within the AHYP banner, regardless of whether they are being facilitated in some way by LAs. Thus, it must include centrally funded activities (eg MyPlace) and activities organised by third sector and private organisations.

During the course of the consultation and desk research, we have considered how best to measure the success or otherwise of the AHYP strategy within LAs. Many potential measures suffered from being either too blunt (eg studying the correlation between participation and spend measures) or too intangible (eg studying models of management at a local level as a measure of the success of local implementation of the strategy). Our proposal is to try to monitor success against the six objectives set out in the AHYP strategy (rebalance the public narrative; empower young people; etc – see Box 1 below for the complete list). Evaluators could use these as measures in a variety of ways. As well as using them as measures against which to rate the success or failure of the strategy at a local level, they can be used to rate and/or divide LAs into typologies according to how well they are doing against these objectives. This issue comes up again in the discussions below.

In the sections that follow we address each of the research questions in turn, starting with how to establish what is happening at a local level under the AHYP banner (Section 3). Section 4 then looks at the link between local activity and participation. Section 5 moves on to the question of how to establish the link between participation and longer-term outcomes. Section 6 focuses on how the impact of AHYP on community perceptions might plausibly be measured, and Section 7 addresses the issue of cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit. Section 8 summarises our recommendations.

3 ESTABLISHING WHAT LOCAL AREAS ARE DOING UNDER THE AHYP BANNER

In order to address the question of whether LA activity under AHYP impacts on participation it is clearly necessary to establish what LAs are in fact doing – and, ideally how this has changed since the strategy's introduction.

As was noted earlier, although there are various sources of data about LA spend on and provision of positive activities for young people, and data are available on the ring-fenced elements of the AHYP allocations, aggregating these data is unlikely to give a very clear and comprehensive picture of LA activity under AHYP. In principle it appears that what is needed is information per LA on their activity, organised within each of the six AHYP objectives.

Probably the simplest and least expensive way of collecting data on LA activity would be an LA survey addressed to the head of youth services (or closest equivalent), used in conjunction with the existing data. We have consulted with a small number of LAs whose views have been incorporated within our recommended approach. The questionnaire would include a series of factual questions about activity (and how it has changed since the launch of AHYP), but would also include some self-assessment of how well the LA is doing towards meeting the objectives of the strategy. Ideally it would also include more detail of spend than is provided under Section 52, and the LAs we spoke to thought this was feasible, at least to a degree. However, realistically, detailed information might better be collected from a smaller number of case-study LAs (see below).

Initial thoughts about what data the survey might collect about each of the strategy objectives are shown in Box 1. Note that, given the limited nature of the survey, these all rely on LAs providing information it already knows or is easily accessible and, in some instances, their subjective review. For quantifiable measures, it will be important to design questions that ensure comparability across LAs (despite the fact that there is variation in the structure and organisations of services across LAs). A more detailed look at how LAs are doing against each of these objectives would involve the more in-depth work with LAs and a bespoke survey of young people proposed in sub-section 4.2, and analysis or gathering of local perception data discussed in Section 6.

BOX 1: COLLECTING INFORMATION ON LA PERFORMANCE AGAINST AH OBJECTIVES

Objective 1 'Rebalancing the public narrative about young people': What activity has the LA engaged in to influence how young people are presented within their communities? How, and how often, do these activities get reported by local media? What targets do they have in this area, and (how) do they monitor public perceptions? How has this activity changed in recent years? How much has been spent on this?

Objective 2 'Empowering young people to increase their influence over the design and delivery of services for them': How much spending has been decided by young people, both within and outside of the ring-fenced funds? How many young people have been involved in decision making and in what ways? How has their involvement changed the shape of provision? What targets do they have in this area? How has this changed in recent years? How much has been spent on the process of empowering young people?

Objective 3 'Increasing the number of local places for young people to go': What is available for young people in the local area? How has this changed, including spend – in total, for different groups and/or locations, by type of provision? What targets do they have in this area? To what extent have the LA been working in partnership with other organisations to achieve this? How much provision is provided by the third sector and by private organisations, and how has this changed with AH?

Objective 4 'Removing barriers and supporting young people to access local opportunities and services for them': What efforts are made to include all – and especially hard to reach – young people? Probe on costs, transport, appreciation of religious and cultural factors, location, times of day/week? What efforts have they made to increase young people's awareness of what is on offer? What targets to do they have in this area? How has this changed in recent years? To what extent have the LA been working in partnership with other organisations to achieve this?

Objective 5 'Improving capacity and quality of services for young people': Building on the previous OFSTED inspections in their area and using similar criteria, how would they rate the quality of provision in their area? What efforts have they made to improve the quality of the services in recent years, including across third sector and private organisations? What is the spending on this element? To what extent has the LA been working in partnerships with other organisations on this, and what practical and financial support do they provide to third sector organisations in this respect?

Objective 6 'Supporting and developing the youth workforce to employ the very best practice in working with young people': What are the qualifications of the youth workforce working within the LA (including third sector and private organisations)? What criteria does the LA have about the proportion of qualified staff? What training and support (or funding towards) is provided for those people, and how much is spent on this? What are their targets about improving workforce quality? How has this changed in recent years?

The exact details of such a survey would need further development and thorough piloting among a wider group of LAs than those we have consulted with. However, at this stage, we are envisaging this as an iterative process of self-completion and telephone interviewing (using researchers rather than field interviewers). It should be feasible to design a system which can be accessed by both the LA and the research organisation. Providing the information in advance will allow Heads of Youth Services to consult with colleagues and look up information. Following up via the telephone will allow researchers to probe for full information and encourage participation. Feasibly it will take a month for LAs to complete the information.

Clearly, it is key that a high level of cooperation is secured among LAs. And what would be asked is not an unsubstantial amount of work. So thought should be given by the evaluation team to conducting personal briefings of heads of youth services – say, at regional meetings, and to ensuring that the data collected for the evaluation purposes is useful for the LA itself – for instance in terms of benchmarking. The instrument will need careful design and piloting - although the LAs we spoke to think it is feasible to collect these data, even from our small number of LA interviews, it is clear that the internal processes for collecting the data will differ widely between LAs.

As mentioned above, collecting overall spending on AHYP activities appears feasible. This may also be feasible for a number of the individual objectives. The more difficult objectives to 'cost' (which may in turn lead to differing quality of information across LAs) appear to be Objective 1 (rebalancing the public narrative) and Objective 6 (workforce training). The latter links to the more ambiguous role that LAs have in this area, compared to work being undertaken by CWDC. The capacity to link spend with funding sources is likely to vary across LAs. It may be that the survey collects spend data in all cases, and information on where monies come from where possible.

It should be possible for LAs to draw on data collected as part of other (local or central) strategies and assessment processes (eg Children and Young People's Strategy, Targeted Youth Support Strategy, Quality Assurance Framework, NYA Kitemark accreditation), reducing the need for new data trawling. For instance, service quality ratings, targeting hard to reach groups, and information on local provision were all mentioned in this respect. The recent returns on activities available in the first week of February mean that LAs have had to collect data on provision, including from third sector organisations. As with spend data, Objectives 1 and 6 may be the hardest to collect hard data on, although some quantitative data on media coverage should be possible in some areas. Where objective data may not be possible, LAs cited ways of providing 'softer' data on their activities in a particular area. Confidence about whether the LA will know everything about what is being provided by third sector and private organisations varied, as did knowledge about issues such as staff qualifications and training.

LAs varied in their ability to provide similar hard data retrospectively (including on spending), although it will be possible to obtain at least their subjective assessment.

4 MEASURING THE IMPACT OF LOCAL AREA ACTIVITY ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The central research question for the evaluation is whether local area efforts to increase youth participation are successful in doing so. Of course this means that it is necessary to relate local data on participation to LA-level activity. There are two possible routes to obtaining data on participation: firstly there are existing sources, such as TellUs, and secondly, new data could potentially be collected by a survey. Below we set out what these two alternative approaches offer, what their advantages are, and what potential problems there might be.

4.1 Using existing survey data on participation

There appear to be just two major sources of existing data on participation by YP: the TellUs series of surveys and DCMS's annual Taking Part survey.

The TellUs survey series includes a number of questions on participation addressed to pupils in Years 6, 8 and 10. This series has a large enough sample size for LA-level analysis, so is a potentially very rich source of data. And it is repeated every year so generates trends over time in participation (although only since 2008 so there is relatively little pre-AH data, and the data from TellUs2 (2007) is not considered to be as reliable as later TellUs data).

However it is by no means perfect for an evaluation of AHYP:

- It only involves three year groups of pupils: 6, 8 and 10 (with only years 8 and 10 being directly targeted by the strategy) and, in particular, gives no data on participation for older young people.
- There are only a very small number of questions on participation. Although these have been expanded for TellUs4 they are still not broad enough to give a detailed picture of participation locally. For instance there are no data on frequency of participation and on issues around accessibility (awareness, location, cost, etc).
- The questions themselves are potentially problematic. Because TellUs is self-completion, there is very little opportunity to explain what young people are to include or exclude in their responses. So there is inevitably ambiguity about what the responses given mean and it is unclear whether TellUs statistics are sensitive to genuine changes in participation rates.
- The background information on respondents is relatively limited, and would not allow for the hard to reach to be readily identified. Having said that, postcodes are collected, so young people from deprived areas can be identified, and this may well be sufficient to test whether AHYP is successful in reaching harder to reach groups. Free school meal take up is also recorded (pupil self-report).

Starting in 2009/10 the same set of questions as in TellUs4 is to be asked of Year 11 pupils, with the data being recorded on the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS). So, although there are no historical LA-level data on participation for this age-group, this does remove some of the problems associated with a reliance on TellUs data for an evaluation. In addition the CCIS has one very significant benefit over TellUs in that it records other YP level data (such as educational and employment outcomes) over time. So the CCIS is potentially a very powerful longitudinal dataset from which the links between participation and outcomes might be explored. We return to this in Section 5.

The other major existing source of data on YP participation is DCMS's Taking Part survey. Taking Part has been running since 2005 and is a face to face continuous survey of adults aged 16 and over and (since 2006) children aged 5-15. The interview lasts around 45 minutes, with information being collected on participation in sport, arts, museums and galleries, libraries, archives, and heritage. Its key objectives are to provide a robust measurement for the Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets (specifically PSA21: Indicator 6 'to increase the percentage of adults participating in culture and sport'), and Departmental Strategic Objective (DSO) targets. The sample size fluctuates year on year, but in both 2008/09 and 2010/11 the sample is over 16,000, giving an estimated 1500 interviews with 13-19 year olds in each of these years across England. The background information collected on each family would allow for children from disadvantaged families to be identified.

A third potential, albeit much narrower, source is SportEngland's Active People Survey. This telephone survey collects data for each of the 356 lower-tier LAs on sports participation amongst adults aged 16 and over, so could be used as a data source on sports activity for the 16-19 age group. The target sample size per LA per year is around 500, and the number in the 16-19 age-group will only be a fraction of this (perhaps around 30-40), so the survey would not be a good source of LA-level youth statistics each year. But combining LAs would be an option, given that the overall sample size within the age group will be around 10,000 per year.

The question that needs to be addressed is whether existing TellUs, Taking Part and Active People data could be used in combination with LA level survey data to generate estimates of the impact of LA activity on participation. The simplest way to pose the evaluation question might be as 'do the LAs that report doing much more activity around encouraging participation since the introduction of the strategy show greater improvements in participation than LAs who have changed their activity levels far less (either because they have always done a lot, or because they have chosen to keep their activity levels low)'? Arguably what would be *reasonable* evidence that AHYP is effective is if those LAs who self-assess as doing a lot of AHYP activity – or particular types or models of activity around the six objectives (in the LA survey described earlier) - also demonstrate better than average improvements in participation both overall and within the harder-to-reach groups.

There is a risk however, that if no such association is shown, it may be difficult to establish whether AHYP is failing or whether the survey data is simply too crude to identify the impact. (As an illustration of the problem, analysis of the relationship between the spend per head on youth services for those aged 13-19 (as measured in the 2007/08 NYA audit) and the TellUs3 survey results suggests there is, in fact, a *negative*, albeit small, correlation between participation and spend. That is, as spend increases, participation tends to slightly decrease. It is very probable that this is partly because spend is high in areas where there is a perceived need to improve participation. So having good evidence on which LAs are spending more so as to 'catch up' would be absolutely vital for the analysis. Hence the need to combine the analysis of YP survey data with an LA management survey.)

One way to make the analysis reasonably robust would be to use the LA-level survey data to divide LAs into four (or possibly more) main groups (with some LAs perhaps falling outside the grouping):

- Group A: Those LAs who had relatively low levels of youth participation prior to AHYP in 2007 (based on self-report by the LA but supported by the survey evidence) and relatively low levels of investment at that time, but who have since invested significant time, money and effort into AHYP style activities;
- Group B: Those LAs who had relatively low levels of youth participation in 2007 and who have continued to invest less than Group A;
- Group C: Those LAs with higher than average levels of youth participation in 2007 and higher than average spend, who have continued to spend at a high rate;
- Group D: Those LAs with higher than average levels of youth participation in 2007 and higher than average spend, who have reduced their spend since the introduction of the AHYP strategy.

Assuming that the LA survey data supports such a typology, it would then be possible to test whether trends in youth participation across the four groups follow the predicted pattern. So that, for instance, there should be a greater improvement in youth participation in Group A than Group B. And one might expect Group D (assuming that some LAs fall into Group D) to have lost ground over time relative to Group C. This is essentially a difference-in-differences analysis approach, but with multiple comparisons rather than the traditional two.

An analysis of this type depends crucially on being able to divide LAs into reasonably sized groups, which means that there has to be some diversity in LA behaviours around youth participation (which our consultation suggested was likely to be true), but also that this diversity is not entirely concentrated within a small minority of LAs. The analysis is likely to fail, for instance, if the vast majority of LAs fell into, say, Groups A and C and very few fell into Group B. It is also likely to fail if the assignment to group is incorrect – which

suggests that supplementing what LAs report on their change over time with as much other supporting evidence (such as Ofsted reports) as possible would be advisable.

Another factor is statistical power. For an analysis that relied on TellUs data, the total sample size to work with each year would be around 150,000, which is extremely large. Assuming the LA groups being compared are fairly large, a sample of this size would allow for relatively small differences in participation changes between LA groups to be detected even if LAs with low TellUs response rates were excluded from the analysis[3]. (For example comparing two groups of LAs each with just 5,000 TellUs respondents per year, would allow for a divergence in participation rates of around 3.5 percentage points to be detected.) An analysis that relied on Taking Part survey data however, would only involve a total sample per year of around 1,500. Very large (perhaps implausibly large) impacts on participation would be needed for this survey to detect them (a divergence of around 10 percentage points between groups being detectable but nothing much smaller).

What this would suggest is that for an evaluation that is based on secondary analysis of existing survey data, for statistical power reasons the main data source used should be TellUs. However this does mean the analysis will be based on the short battery of questions that is included in that survey, and this is the issue that causes us most concern. We have no information on how accurately pupils answer the participation questions and it could well be that these questions are very insensitive to real change in participation rates. To rely on these questions for the evaluation of an expensive strategy would be a high risk approach.

We should also stress that relying on existing survey sources for participation data would not address all the identified priority research questions for AHYP. In particular, with such a design it will be very difficult to establish which of the strands/objectives of AHYP are achieving their aims, or whether some models of LA delivery are more effective than others. Again, the available survey data from young people on participation is very general in nature and only provides 'user' data on one or two of the AHYP objectives. It does not include information on frequency of participation or on issues around accessibility etc. The LA survey data will also be limited by nature of the proposed data collection method, and sometimes subjective.

4.2 Supplementing the basic evaluation model with LA case studies and YP surveys

To gain a much better understanding of how the strategy is influencing LA decision making, and how LA activity subsequently affects YP participation, we recommend that

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[3] LAs with low school-level TellUs response rates may need to be excluded from any analysis if the accuracy of their results is questionable.

the LA survey and secondary analysis described in the previous sections be supplemented by two additional pieces of work:

1. **Case studies with a sub-set of LAs:** As described above, a survey of all LAs will generate a certain amount of information on LA activity for all (responding) LAs. More in-depth work, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection, would be needed to gain a better understanding of what is really happening. This might be similar to the 'deep-dives' done by the Department. Given the cost of such a research exercise it would necessarily have to be carried out on a sub-sample of LAs.

2. **A bespoke survey of young people:** Using existing surveys to capture participation gives no information about most of the AHYP objectives from the perspectives of young people. For this, data would be needed on young people's perceptions of local provision (and their view on how that affects their participation), their barriers to participation, the degree to which they feel empowered, their knowledge of what is available, and so on. Without this perspective it will be very difficult to generate lessons for other LAs on what they could most effectively concentrate their resources on. But perhaps the strongest argument in favour of collecting data from young people themselves, is that *if* in those LAs that invest heavily in AHYP activity, young people in those areas are aware of the provision <u>and</u> react favourably to that provision then this is very strong evidence that investment in AHYP is effective. (This is especially the case if young people in areas where there is relatively little investment in youth activities react less favourably to local provision.)

Adding these two elements to the evaluation inevitably increases the evaluation cost very considerably, but for an evaluation that aims to get inside the 'black box' they are crucial. Adding them also reduces the risks set out in an over-reliance on the short battery of TellUs questions.

For the LA case studies, a research design that would generate this more in-depth look at AHYP might be one where a sub-sample of, say, 20 to 30 LAs are selected that between them (from the LA survey data) cover a broad range of AHYP activity/investment. One option would be to concentrate attention on just two types of LAs: those identified as Group A and B in the previous section. That is:

- Group A: Those LAs who had relatively low levels of youth participation in 2007 (self-report by the LA but supported by the survey evidence) and relatively low levels of investment at that time, but who have since invested significant time, money and effort into AHYP style activities; and

- Group B: Those LAs who had relatively low levels of youth participation in 2007 and who have continued to invest less than Group A.

Restricting this element of the evaluation to these two groups would focus attention on those LAs (Group A) for which the strategy has most likely been a trigger for change. (LAs that were always doing a lot of youth participation activity arguably will be less affected by the strategy.) Whereas Group B would act as a comparison group for Group A, and as case studies around the barriers to LA activity.

Were this approach to be adopted we would recommend statistically matching Group A and Group B LAs, so that the LAs selected from the two groups are as well matched on baseline characteristics as possible (including early TellUs participation rates).

More details of the methods that might be employed within case study LAs are given in Box 2.

BOX 2: IN-DEPTH CASE STUDIES OF 20 TO 30 LAs

Within each selected LA an in-depth study of how AH is being delivered would be undertaken, employing a range of research methods. Researchers would visit each LA for around three days, and take a primarily qualitative approach, but also collecting some quantifiable data (eg around details of workforce makeup, participation and spend). They would interview a range of LA staff, as well as young people involved in the empowerment work, the youth workforce and third sector providers to supplement the picture given by the LA. Unless it is thought later that some qualitative work among a wider range of young people would add value, we currently assume that young people perspectives would be collected via the young people survey.

The case studies might also include some assessments of quality of provision (the nature of which might be sensibly based on the previous OFSTED approach), and perhaps a study of local media coverage of young people. The case studies would also give a better opportunity for collecting cost data for the elements of AH.

To maximise the value of the case study approach, a survey of young people would be undertaken in the same 20 to 30 LAs. This would need to be fairly large (perhaps 200 young people per LA). The rationale for the large sample size is two-fold:
- firstly so that the responses given per area could be analysed against their corresponding LA data. This will help to establish whether LA activities are known to local YP, and how they rate them, and what YP see as the barriers to further participation. As noted earlier, the evidence sought is that in LAs doing a lot around YP participation, the YP in those areas are aware of that work. This should

be in contrast to the responses given by young people in the areas doing less activity around youth participation;

- secondly, aggregating the survey data, a survey of around 2-3000 young people in two contrasting groups of LAs will allow for relatively small differences in participation rates to be detected statistically. (A difference of around six percentage points should be detectable.)

It was suggested at the consultation stage that these surveys should perhaps focus entirely on relatively disadvantaged young people, on the grounds that this is the group the strategy is primarily targeted at. This seems a very reasonable suggestion, and on balance we would favour it, even though it would mean that questions over the impact on non-disadvantaged young people are not recorded. To make the survey procedures reasonably simple, we suggest that the survey be restricted to YP living in relatively deprived areas rather than using doorstep screening to identify the relevant young people. The survey would also need to ensure a reasonable spread of YP in terms of distance to facilities. Approximately equal sample sizes by gender and age would be appropriate.

An outline of the survey is given in Box 3.

BOX 3: YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEY

We recommend that this survey is conducted face-to-face because:

- the likely required interview length (30 to 40 minutes) and level of detail required;
- the sensitivities of contacting at least the younger age groups by phone;
- (depending on the sample frame) the availability or otherwise of telephone numbers.

We assume that YP would be selected from the National Pupil Database (for those below school leaving age) and CCIS (for those above). For the latter, LAs would need to carry out an opt-out.

This design could be strengthened yet further by repeating the in-depth LA research and the survey after an interval (perhaps, but not necessarily, by re-interviewing a cohort of young people). The benefit would be that if change at a LA level translates to change in the perceptions and/or behaviours of young people then this will add further evidence of effectiveness. What this would add is an opportunity to observe how 'real time' change on the ground translates into changes in youth participation. In terms of learning what works well and how this may add rather less value.

5 MEASURING THE LINK BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND LONGER TERM OUTCOMES

As we noted in Section 2, the strategy is predicated on the assumption that increased participation will improve subsequent behavioural, education and employment outcomes for young people, but that there is relatively little evidence to support that link.

If the evaluation design described in Section 4 was to be adopted, the local surveys of young people would provide a very good base for a prospective cohort study to look at the link between participation and subsequent outcomes. Having been surveyed about their participation, young people could be tracked for a number of years to collect data on their outcomes. If 'participators' are found to have better outcomes than non-participators, *after controlling for other potential predictors of good outcomes*, then this would be at least partial evidence that participation impacts on outcomes. In order to do this, the initial survey would have to collect very good data on confounders (ie the predictors of outcomes other than participation) [4], and some would argue that this is an impossible task – which may well account for the lack of available evidence in this area. However there is more opportunity to collect data that are directly relevant in a bespoke survey and this would allow for a far more theory-driven analysis than would be possible through secondary analysis of surveys designed for other purposes.

There are two options for tracking the young people over time – follow-up surveys (potentially over the phone), and administrative records such as the National Pupil Database, the ILR, and DWP/HMRC data. Fuller information - both on continued participation and on factors that influence hard education and employment outcomes – would be available if young people are followed up via interview. However, the administrative data alternative is obviously the much cheaper option, but would only track hard outcomes around education and employment. Our recommendation would be to use a mixture of the two, although the Department would still obtain valuable information from using only administrative data.

A survey could assess the impact of the AHYP strategy from a number of angles: in terms of academic and employment outcomes; social and emotional development; and prevention of risky or anti-social behaviours. Academic and employment outcomes would include not only hard measures of achievement and attendance, but also measures around educational and work aspirations, and networks into employment opportunities. Measurements of young people's social and emotional development would cover a range of attitudes and skills, including social skills such as the ability to communicate and to work as a team; self-regulation skills such as motivation, application, confidence, self-esteem and control over achieving goals ('locus of control'). It would also include

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[4] This is why this approach would not work using TellUs – because family influences on educational and employment outcomes are largely uncaptured. Another very obvious obstacle is that TellUs respondents are not linked to the NPD and are not tracked over time.

community involvement and attitudes towards active participation in society. Preventative outcomes involve issues such as drug and alcohol use, anti-social behaviour, criminal behaviour and teenage pregnancy.

These are all issues which have been covered in previous surveys, notably in cohort studies such as LSYPE and the 1970 British Cohort Study. The evaluation team would want to assess the appropriateness of these existing measures for an evaluation of the impact of AHYP.

In terms of statistical power, if 4,000 young people were followed by interview, and, say, 2,800 responded, then a comparison of outcomes for those above the median in terms of participation level with those below the median, would allow for an approximate 5.3 percentage point difference in education or employment outcomes to be detected[5]. That is, if participation improves subsequent outcomes for around 1 in 20 'participating' young people then a study of this size would be large enough to generate statistically significant impacts. If instead, 6,000 young people were followed, then an impact of around 4.3 percentage points would be detectable.

Whether impacts of this size can be expected is unclear. It is certainly not inconceivable that the impacts will be rather smaller than this (although whether this would automatically rule AHYP out as cost-effective is also unclear[6]). But it is worth noting in this context that to detect small impacts, of, say, 2 percentage points then extremely large follow-up studies would be needed (of around 20,000 young people). So if small impacts are expected then the only feasible way to measure the link between participation and subsequent outcomes may be to include participation measures in administrative datasets such as the NPD. Or, alternatively, to administer a large self-completion survey to pupils within schools (along the TellUs model) and then to track the respondents over time via NPD and ILR. This, however, would not allow for the collection of such rich data on confounders as could be collected in a face-to-face survey. So there is a risk that even if a small impact was to be detected, it would be disputed because of the reduced ability to control for confounders.

Of course, one difficulty with any follow-up design is that it will take a relatively long time to generate results (depending on the research questions). Nevertheless prospective follow-up currently seems the most robust and feasible of the options for evaluating the influence of AHYP on young people's outcomes. There are two alternative design options in the literature that might be used, in principle, for measuring the link between

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[5] Based on an 80% power calculation, 5% significance levels, and for an outcome measure that is close to 50%. For outcomes much larger or smaller than this, smaller impacts would be detectable.

[6] For AYHP to be cost-effective the strategy would need to generate extra participation which in turn would need to generate improved subsequent outcomes. It is possible that AHYP may be a cost-effective means of improving participation, but this does not rule out it being less cost-effective than other methods for improving outcomes for young people.

participation and subsequent education and employment outcomes. But, we do not feel either are viable options –

1. A randomised controlled trial where some young people are offered participation in a programme of positive activities and some are not, with the allocation to either of these two groups be done being random. The members of the two groups are then tracked over time and their outcomes measured and compared. This is perhaps feasible for some particular AH-style interventions but is certainly not feasible for a test of 'participation' per se (simply because of the ethical and practical problems of refusing access to positive activities to a group of young people). So this can be ruled out.

2. A retrospective case-control study, where samples of young adults are selected based on their outcome data. For example a sample of those with high educational qualifications might be selected, and a sample with low educational qualifications. These two samples would then be tracked backwards to establish their earlier levels of participation in positive activities. As with the (recommended) prospective design, data would also need to be captured on other known correlates of outcomes so that they can be controlled for. The benefit of a retrospective design is that it generates information quickly. But the main problem of course, is the difficulty of collecting all the participation and confounder data retrospectively. Whilst we would not rule this design out, we are not hopeful it can be made to work.

Another longitudinal dataset that might be used to assess the link between participation and subsequent outcomes is the CCIS data, for which data on participation are now collected in Year 11 (using the TellUs questions). The CCIS data are very rich so many of the confounders that a survey would need to capture would already be included in this dataset. The main problem is that the participation questions asked are very limited, and won't address, for instance, questions around the type and frequency of participation. Essentially the participation data are likely to be measured with a degree of error, and predictors with measurement error tend to lead to bias towards zero in regression coefficients – which means (all else being equal) that the impact of participation may well be underestimated in this analysis[7]. Nevertheless, we would suggest that an evaluation that looks at the link between participation and outcomes includes analysis of this data.

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[7] However it could be argued that the greater threat of bias is that of unobserved confounders which will lead to the correlation between participation and subsequent outcomes to be exaggerated.

6 MEASURING THE IMPACT OF AHYP ON COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As with all the other evaluation questions we have identified, there are a number of options for measuring how AHYP impacts on community perceptions that vary in robustness. Perhaps the most robust means of generating understanding of how AHYP activity relates to community perceptions would be bespoke surveys of residents in the LAs selected for the in-depth evaluation study (assuming the in-depth approach is adopted). But this would be expensive, and is probably not the best use of a limited evaluation budget.

The other option would be to generate as much understanding of the impact on community perceptions as possible using existing survey data. National surveys that include questions about attitudes to young people include the British Crime Survey and the Citizenship Survey. In addition, there is the local Place Survey (which is a DCLG postal survey of residents that is to take place every two years, the first year being 2008, with the aim of generating data to support the National Indicator Sets). Although the Place Survey has only a few questions on perceptions of young people, it does include the same question as the British Crime Survey question on whether 'teenagers hanging around the streets' is a problem. And it has a question on whether activities for teenagers are 'important in making somewhere a good place to live' and 'needs improving in this local area'. An analysis that seeks to measure the association between trends in these responses with LA activity around youth participation would be worthwhile (and an inexpensive add-on to the main evaluation). But it would be important that any such analysis tries to take account of other local initiatives that might influence community perceptions (such as crime initiatives), and this will inevitably complicate the analysis quite considerably. Nevertheless if AHYP activity is not too strongly correlated with activity under other initiatives then identifying an 'AH effect' is potentially possible. (Arguably, the complication of trying to isolate out the AHYP effect from the effect of other initiatives is another reason why devoting evaluation resources to a bespoke resident survey would be inappropriate[8].)

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[8] The arguments for local surveys of young people are different to the arguments for local surveys of residents. It will be possible to relate young people's reported participation directly to AHYP activity, but it would be much more difficult to relate a resident's perceptions of young people directly to AHYP. So a resident survey would inevitably generate findings that are difficult to attribute to LA activity around AHYP.

7 ASSESSING WHETHER LA ACTIVITY UNDER AHYP IS COST-EFFECTIVE

Central to the evaluation is an assessment of value for money. In order to address the question of whether the benefits associated with local level activity around youth participation outweigh the costs, clearly some comparison between the impacts of local activity and costs is needed. This is usually done in a formal way either using cost-benefit analysis when benefits can be valued in monetary units, or using cost-effectiveness when the assignment of monetary values to benefits is not possible, or these values are disputed.

For the AHYP a cost-effectiveness approach is likely to be more appropriate in the short-term, unless the link between participation and employment and educational outcomes can be reasonably well established. The main outcome measures for the evaluation will be around participation which does not have a defined monetary value.

For a cost-effectiveness analysis the cost per extra 'unit of participation' will need to be estimated (where 'unit of participation' might be defined as an extra young person doing any positive activity within a defined period, or might be a 'participation' session.) Based on the evaluation design options set out in this paper, this estimate could potentially be derived by comparing the change in spend on youth participation collected as part of an LA survey with the local increase in participation as measured by TellUs. But it is very unclear that LAs would be able to provide sufficiently detailed information on spend over time in the context of a survey. A cost-effectiveness study might be more reliable in the context of the case study design set out in Section 4.2.

The cost-effectiveness approach involves the calculation of 'cost-effectiveness ratios' per outcome variable, where the ratio is the difference in positive outcomes between areas (or in this case groups of areas) divided by the difference in costs (after standardising for population profile differences across areas). The conclusions drawn then depend on the sign and magnitude of each of these ratios. This is a subjective judgement.

In instances where the ratio is negative the conclusion is unambiguous, because this either reflects improved outcomes for reduced costs or worse outcomes for increased cost. In instances where the ratio is positive (which reflects either better outcomes but increased cost, or, much less plausibly for AHYP, worse outcomes but at a cost saving) judgement would be needed on whether AH-style activities merited being funded. The larger the ratio the easier the decision, but for the outcome measures collected for the AHYP evaluation there are unlikely to be any definitive thresholds for the ratio on which to base the decision. What the evaluation report would do is present the ratios and discuss what might reasonably be concluded. But the final assessment on what the ratios mean for the future of AHYP would be left open for discussion.

If the link between participation and subsequent education and employment outcomes was to be tested via follow-up studies of young people then this would allow for a full cost-benefit analysis rather than just cost-effectiveness, since for many education and employment outcomes there are established methods for assigning monetary values.

8   SUMMING UP

Overall, our recommendations are that – to address fully whether the AHYP strategy is meeting the six objectives it was set – that the evaluation should involve –

- The four elements proposed in Sections 3 and 4 to measure the association between LA implementation of the AHYP strategy and young people's participation in positive activities. That is it should involve, an LA survey, secondary analysis of the LA survey data against trends in TellUs, case studies within around 20-30 LAs looking specifically at AHYP activity and spend; and a cross-sectional survey of young people in these same areas (total sample size 4000 or more) ;
- A follow-up study (as outlined in Section 5) which looks at the links between participation and later outcomes for young people – whether it involves follow-up surveys or linking to administrative data;
- Secondary analysis of surveys which provide data on local level perceptions of young people (Section 6);
- An assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the strategy (Section 7).

The least expensive evaluation option would be a LA survey coupled with analysis of TellUs and CCIS data, but this would not give a thorough assessment of how AHYP promoted activities achieve their aims. In particular it would not generate much evidence about how the strategy is influencing LA decision making, or how LA activity subsequently affects YP participation. Nor would it establish the link between participation and subsequent outcomes.

Although including case studies of LAs and local face-to-face interview surveys of YP adds very significantly to the costs of an evaluation, these elements are necessary if the evaluation is to give a thorough assessment of how the strategy is affecting YP participation (that is, which elements and models of LA activity are most successful in encouraging participation, and which groups of young people are most impacted on).

Appendix A: References

DCSF (2004) Every Child Matters: change for children

DCSF (2006) Youth Services Review, internal paper

DCSF (2010a) Aiming High for Young People - three years on

DCSF (2010b) Aiming High for Young People - three years on: evidence annex

Feinstein L and Robson K (2007) Leisure Contexts in Adolescence and their Effects on Adult Outcomes: A More Complete Picture

Harvard Family Research Project (2003) A review of out of school time program quasi-experimental and experimental evaluation results

Appendix B: List of those consulted

- John Doherty, DFE Young People Analysis Deputy Divisional Manager
- Kiran Egan, DFE Youth Research Team, Young People Analysis Division
- Norman Hole, DFE Activities and Engagement Divisional Manager
- Anthony Hughes, DFE Activities and Engagement Divisional Manager
- Chris Hutchings, DFE Workforce Reform
- Judy Leavesley, DFE Workforce, Activities and Engagement Division
- Alison Lockwood, DFE Activities and Engagement Youth Empowerment Team Leader
- Andrew McCully, DFE Director of Supporting CYP Group
- Anthony Moody, DFE Young People Analysis Divisional Manager
- Cath Rourke, DFE Activities and Engagement Division
- Tracey Spencer, DFE Youth Facilities
- Anne Weinstock, DFE Director of the Youth Taskforce
- Richard White, DFE Youth Research Team, Young People Analysis Division

- Natalie Keogh, Treasury Youth Policy Team
- Phil Slarks, Treasury Youth Policy team.
- Mark Peters, TNS_BMRB, Extended Schools evaluation team
- A group of young people who are part of NYA's Young Researchers Network
- 4 Local Authorities

Appendix C: Young researcher focus group report

Held at the NYA in Leicester on Friday 23rd October 2009.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the focus group was to firstly explore how young people think NatCen should measure the Aiming High strategy in terms of the (a) markers to use to measure success (or failure) of the strategy and, (b) the anticipated impacts/outcomes on users, all young people, on families, on communities. Secondly, the focus group set out to find out how the strategy is working on the ground from the perspectives of young people.

2. Background context

Published in 2007 the Aiming High Strategy sets out a ten year vision to improve services and outcomes for young people. NatCen were commissioned to look at how an evaluation might work.

The focus group was organized by the Young Researcher Network (YRN) a project of the National Youth Agency on behalf of NatCen and was made-up of nine young people from the YRN. Using the perspectives and experience of young people the aim of the focus group was to understand how the proposed evaluation can accurately capture impact and establish appropriate measurements. A copy of Aiming High for Young People (young people's version[9]) was sent out to focus group participants ahead of the meeting. The six promises from this document were also displayed on the walls with examples of programs being delivered under each promise (e.g. Myplace funding for the promise to increase the number of places to go).

3. Methodology

The meeting had two sections. The first section addressed impact and the second section dealt with measurement. We used a mixed method approach involving whole group discussions, presentations, a diagnostic exercise as well as creative and interactive exercises to generate information on the aforementioned areas (see appendix).

We started the focus group with a look at the three central themes that thread throughout the day's discussion. They are: the DFE, Aiming High, and evaluation. Participants were asked what they know about each of the themes. They know very little about the function and role of DFE (then DCSF). We then went on to explain the reasons behind doing an evaluation and its particular strength in determining the effectiveness of programs and intervention

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[9]Published by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), Activities & Engagement Division. Available here: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/Youth/aiminghigh/aiminghigh/

We also sketched out for participants several reasons as to why evaluate a program or intervention;

- indicators useful for seeing how services are doing;
- reflect on what works;
- justify use of funding;
- keep government happy;
- find out what stakeholders think especially service users;
- feed in views continuously;
- give confidence to try new ideas.

We then turned our attention onto the feasibility study itself and began to narrow down the discussion focusing on the six promises made in Aiming High. The six promises were presented in jigsaw format as well as A3 sized posters with accompanying programs and interventions and used throughout the day as a reference point.

4. Impact exercise 1: collages

Working in two groups the participants were asked to discuss and then create a collage on how they think the impact of Aiming High is seen or experienced from the perspectives of the community, service users and young people in general. From these three options the two groups chose to explore the impact of Aiming High on service users and the community.

Feedback from exercises: how the impact of Aiming High has been seen or experienced by **young people who use the services**.

Group one defined eight key ways that Aiming High can or has positively impacted on **young people who use the services**. They are:

1. media representation;
2. good quality youth work;
3. reaching non-traditional users;
4. making youth work provision 'cool';
5. reducing cultural and post code barriers to accessing provision;
6. reducing crime by getting young people more involved in something positive;
7. clear and accessible information about what's on; and
8. locality.

The discussion around the impact of Aiming High on **young people who use the services** centred on the following issues:

- Media perceptions about young people – means young people see the stereotypes of how they are supposed to be. Can be a self-fulfilling prophecy – people believe the stereotypes they read about young people. It would require a large culture shift to represent young people more positively.

- Too many people with ephebiphobia (fear of young people)!
- Recognition that the government, through strategies like Aiming High, can't really control what the media says – newspapers will publish what people want to read.
- Has Aiming High made an impact on media perceptions? Some young people felt that stereotypes had reduced recently and had noticed things like Channel 4 putting on youth led programming. However, local media still publish negative stories first. Smaller things that young people have done that should be celebrated are buried further in the paper.
- Youth work – provides an opportunity to be involved.
- Concern that youth provision doesn't actually reach the people who need it most. Those who are already engaged will continue to use youth centres etc. There are benefits for those already engaged to take part in decision making, but fears that this is the same group of people. Young people more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour (ASB) etc are not taking up the opportunities. This might be because they feel that the opportunities are not 'cool' enough.
- Cultural barriers are also an issue (e.g. young Asian girls might not be able to go away for a week on a residential visit).
- Who is involved? Middle class young people? Perception that middle class white people are separate in certain areas of cities and wouldn't mix or 'last five minutes' with other young people from different backgrounds.
- Depends on the area and who lives in each locality (e.g. if a youth centre is in a deprived area, it will draw in people from nearby. Certain black and minority ethnic (BME) communities congregate in certain areas so will also use services nearby and in turn shape who is involved).
- Has Aiming High had an impact on crime? Would a new youth centre stop young people being involved in crime/ASB? Response was that you have to change the culture too – not just about upgrading facilities. You need to tackle attitudes, especially between young people. Living in run down areas can make you feel like you're not getting anywhere, there's pressure to achieve but young people can feel like they don't have any options.
- Are these people using the new interventions under Aiming High? Do they know about them? Feeling was not at the moment. Not publicised enough for young people. The services would also be more effective if they are created by young people, as tend to identify more closely with people from same areas and background.
- Aspirations are very important and you need to start at an early age. This relates to family too – not just school/youth services.
- Location of clubs is critical – if near a school, would more people get more involved as nearer?
- Getting involved can also be about extracurricular achievement, points to put on UCAS form etc.

Feedback from exercises: how the impact of Aiming High has been seen or experienced by **communities**. Group two defined five key ways that Aiming High can or has positively impacted on **communities**. They are:

1. parents feeling safe and reassured in knowing where their child is going;
2. local adults and parents holding a constructive view of the provision;
3. the centre empowers local young people;
4. good qualified staff; and
5. Friday and Saturday opening.

The discussion around the impact of Aiming High on **communities** centred on the following issues:

- The group produced a collage representing two communities, one with a youth centre where there are free services and good access and one where there is no youth provision. In the first community (with good provision for young people) the community knows young people are safe. Young people's voices are heard. There is somewhere to go and things to do every day of the week. In the other community where there is no youth provision, and the community is 'adult led'. No young people involvement. More ASB and violence is committed (by all people). Barriers exist between young people and adults. [See Appendix 1, photo 2.]
- Youth centres – need to ask young people what they want in it. You can't just provide services without involving young people. Youth centres play a key role in keeping people off the streets. Positives about youth centres – get involved with youth projects to try and break barriers between young people. Get people interested in something they can feel passionate about. Outside an educational context. Also, parents and guardians benefit by know where young people are and that they are safe.
- Need to give more help and guidance to working class parents who might not be familiar with the system.
- What would you be doing if you weren't involved with Young People Council etc? Bored, causing trouble.
- Aiming High helps to empower young people – know they can have a voice. Showing that their opinion matters, views can be taken into account. Young people being engaged and participating alters the relationship with adults. Need to let young people know that they have a voice and an opportunity – be clear about their rights but also their responsibility too – not just power for the sake of it.
- Adults –need training on how to interact with young people. Especially leaders of Councils, councillors etc. Youth workers and managers are good in this respect as they have the skills – it's their day job! – but this needs extending.
- Can feel like consultation through the Young People's Council is box ticking – do a one off involvement as they know they have to involve young people. This needs to be made continuous and meaningful.

- Has anything changed over last two years since Aiming High was introduced? Fri/Sat opening has helped with drinking on streets. Have noticed that the quality of youth centres has improved – in some places, not all.

5. Impact exercise 2: spectrum questions

Participants were read out a number of statements about Aiming High and asked to position themselves along a scale based upon whether they 'agree', were 'unsure' or 'disagree' with the statement. The rate and range of responses that were elicited follows:

- Five young people out of seven agreed that young people should know what the government is doing. The other two people (one unsure, one disagreed) felt that young people only really need to know about those parts of government strategy that relate directly to them.
- Only two young people agreed that they can relate a particular local event or activity in their area to the Aiming High strategy. Four young people disagreed because they felt that before the event they would not have associated Youth of Today, Shine, Myplace as being part of Aiming High (although they were aware of those initiatives).
- We asked participants whether Aiming High broadens or improves educational experience. Five participants agreed, two were unsure and one disagreed. Those agreeing suggested that the initiatives developed through Aiming High created opportunities to build social and communication skills, gain and broaden experiences through volunteering and activities.
- When asked whether Aiming High will help you get a job. Seven out of the nine young people disagreed. The general agreement was that it will help in later life possibly with university and maybe lead on to a job but the participants did not see a directly link.
- When asked whether Aiming High will improve your physical health three participants disagreed and four were unsure; only one person agreed. They felt that if a young person was already active they would get involved with the exercise activities at youth centres, but also recognised you could go elsewhere to improve physical well-being.
- Four participants agreed that Aiming High will help reduce crime and ASB if everyone gets involved, but there was recognition that there will always be some young people who do not, for example, attend youth centres. Also, not everyone will stop what they're doing just because they are attending a youth centre.
- Six young people disagreed that they have ever engaged with Myplace.
- Four young people disagreed and three were unsure whether they've benefited from SHINE. Participants reported that they had not really heard of SHINE week.
- Three young people agreed and four were unsure about whether they felt young people should stay in compulsory education to the age of 19. Staying on in education until 19 lead on to a discussion on how this is not just formal education

in a classroom but can also be apprenticeships or other learning. Some opposition to the compulsory element existed and the importance of genuine choice was stressed.

6. Measures exercise 1: How would you know 'Aiming High' has been successful in your life?

Working in two groups we split the six promises of Aiming High equally between the groups. Each group was asked to discuss, record, and then present how they think Aiming High should be measured to find out whether it is improving outcomes for young people. The responses have been grouped around the six promises:

Rebalancing the public narrative about young people
- Look at youth-led media services – radio and newspaper – where there are more positive reports in the media? Estimate how many?
- Look at the local media – were they encouraged and displaying good things that young people do?
- People outside of the system should be made aware of the different activities. Speak to young people who are not involved and/or engaged. Where does the ripple of impact end?

Empowering young people
- Audit youth-led programs under Aiming High – speak to each LA – Head of Youth Services or equivalent.
- Follow-up work – how has the empowerment affected their lives in the long term? (detailed case studies)
- Look at Youth Parliament and all other participation forums. Is it real power sharing? Are there equal voting rights? Is the work restricted by council frameworks?

Increasing the number of places to go
- Look at take-up of after-school club activities in schools and at youth clubs – are there any, how many, who attends, when, etc?
- Look at the actual youth centres – they shouldn't be run down they should be well-equipped. Look at physical build issues – are there broken windows, is it safe, are there leaks etc.
- See the results of what young people have asked for, trace back decisions made and actual results. Did anyone act on what young people said? Look at previous consultation and see if there is any direct link.

Removing barriers and supporting access
- What areas and locations have users come from – use questionnaires? How far have they travelled, how did they travel (e.g. bus, train, taxi, coach, car). Could be done when signing in.

- Targeted groups (e.g. disabled, bullied groups) do they exist, how many attend? Is there a group for young parents?
- Do interviews about what stops young people from accessing services (e.g. postal wars, transport, racism, etc).
- Examine whether opening times and costs are barriers to participation.
- Targeting hard to reach young people – observations.

Improving capacity and quality of services
- Involving young people in the design and decision-making process RE what facilities young people would like. Monitor and look at how many young people use the service.
- Is there a forum for young people to discuss and explore issues?
- Look at information recorded via the signing in process and consent forms for attendance.
- Is there a comment box, how can it be improved? How do those delivering services know what young people would like to see happen?
- Ask parents, carers and school teachers what they think about the condition of local youth provision.
- Do youth centres involve community groups?
- Do youth centres have regular inspections? If so, what were the results and how were they recorded? Were young people involved in the process?
- Do they have open days and launch days? How often? How many attend and where are they from?
- How do youth centres advertise and communicate with young people?
- Assessment for youth facilities (e.g. like OFSTED).

Supporting youth workers to do their best for young people
- Ask the young people (questionnaires/interviews) what they think about their youth worker.
- An independent youth worker (not involved) to evaluate and speak to the young people.
- Is there a person that they can complain to if they believe that the youth worker is not doing their job (an independent worker)? Do they get feedback?
- Do they have awards (staff of the month or year) to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of youth workers?
- Are the young people involved in the interviewing process of who is being employed? Are they involved in staff appraisals (ongoing involvement)?

7. Measures exercise 2: How should young people be involved in the future evaluation of Aiming High?

We felt it important to consult the participants on how they felt young people should participate in any future evaluation of Aiming High to ensure that the strategy can make the biggest possible impact on young people. They suggested:

- Be involved as participants, evaluators and subjects.
- Young people would like to be involved in steering group and throughout all stages: the design (before), fieldwork and analyses (during) and telling people the results (after).
- If young people are offered 'incentives' to take part they should only be told about them after they've agreed to do the work so that you get the right people involved for the right reasons.
- They would like to hear about the outcome of the evaluation through school, media, youth workers, newsletters,
- Would like to see the link between who had the original idea and what happened in the end. If young people had the original idea it should be badged as such – e.g. a young people's idea or a 'thumbs up' from YP.
- Use a kite mark – 'this came from young people' to show that it is a young people led initiative
- How would you add value? Young people are the end users. Increase the likelihood of services being used if they have been involved.
- What resources do you need? Training, travel, expenses. A good briefing beforehand. See the aim of the project/objective so can assess against these.

8. Overall thoughts on 'Aiming High'

- There are a lot of promises
- Lots of things are related to Aiming High that they hadn't thought about
- Didn't realise lots of these initiatives were part of this umbrella [Aiming High]
- Lots of promises.
- Already involved in parts of it without realising.
- Should look at giving young people apprenticeships in youth work
- Overall they give their backing to Aiming High and what it's trying to achieve.

9. What happens next?

Young researchers who participated in the focus group were advised of the following next steps:

- NYA will write up the workshop and share this with all the young researchers who took part.
- NatCen will feed this into their work for DFE and write a report which advises Government how they could evaluate the Aiming High strategy.

10. Conclusion

Improved relationships were identified as a measurable goal and a priority for young people in connection with Aiming High. Key relationships are youth workers and users, local adults and young people, and local adults and youth workers. The quality of these relationships dominated much of the discussion. In particular, young people highlighted that the promise of 'supporting youth workers…' whilst a worthy aim, perhaps missed the fact that a much bigger issue was the relationship between other adults and young people. Supporting youth workers to do their best for young people is a positive step but more focus needs to be put on supporting other adults, especially those providing services, who have little interest or ability in engaging effectively with young people.

Also identified, was the current and potential users of youth provisions. It was felt that traditional groups will continue to use and benefit from the experiences and investment in youth provision through strategies such as Aiming High. However, real change is when non-traditional groups (the so-called 'hard to reach') are persuaded to access youth provision and barriers are dealt with effectively. This is not currently thought to be the case with regards to Aiming High. Important barriers include, post code wars, cultural and ethnic differences, youth provision not being deemed 'cool' enough and inaccessibility.

The group also identified that there will always be a hard core of young people who will not engage in youth provision and will continue to engage in risky behaviour (risky to both their own well-being and their local communities) – e.g. commit petty crime; similarly some young people who attend youth provision will continue to commit crime.

To conclude, the group felt that young people's involvement in the future evaluation of Aiming High would not only help to make the findings more trustworthy in the short term but also help to persuade groups of young people to access local provision long term.

Appendix D: TellUs4 questions around participation for Years 8 and 10

12. Which of these have you been to in your free time in the last 4 weeks?
(Please do not count things that were part of school lessons)

PLEASE TICK **ONE** BOX ON EACH LINE

	Yes	No
Local park or playground	○	○
Sports club or class (not in school lessons and only count where you've done sport not just watched it)	○	○
A youth centre or club to take part in organised activities	○	○
A youth centre or club with few or no organised activities	○	○
Religious, faith or community group (not including services)	○	○
Art, craft, dance, drama, film/video-making group (not in school lessons)	○	○
Music group or lesson (not in school lessons)	○	○
Given your time to help a charity, a local voluntary group or done some organised volunteering	○	○
Something else	○	○

13. What sort of things stop you from doing any activities you would like to do?

PLEASE TICK **ALL** THAT ARE TRUE FOR YOU

○ Nothing stops me
○ Not available in my area
○ Not available when I want to do it
○ Costs too much
○ I can't get there
○ I have no one to go with
○ I don't have the time
○ My parents/carers worry about me
○ I don't know how to find out what's on offer
○ Something else

14a. Do you go out on a Friday or Saturday night to take part in any activities such as sports, arts, media or go to a youth centre or club?

PLEASE TICK **ONE** BOX ONLY

○ Yes
○ Sometimes
○ No
○ Don't know

14b. What do you think about the things to do and places to go on Friday and Saturday nights?

PLEASE TICK **ONE** BOX ON EACH LINE

	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
There are safe places where I can go out to do activities on Friday and Saturday nights	○	○	○
There is a good choice of activities I can go out and do on Friday and Saturday nights	○	○	○
There are enough activities for me to go out and do on Friday and Saturday nights	○	○	○