youth futures FOUNDATION

What works in systems change interventions
A review of national and international evidence

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Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with a £90m endowment from the Reclaim Fund to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change.

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About the research team

The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource management. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For 50 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has around 50 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet. Our values infuse our work. We strive for excellence, to be collaborative, and to bring curiosity to what we do. We work with integrity and treat people respectfully and with compassion.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

1.1.1 The youth employment system in England

Youth unemployment in England continues to be a pressing issue, particularly for disadvantaged young people who face higher unemployment rates and lower wages in adulthood (Li and Heath, 2020). The youth employment system in England has undergone significant transformations with the goal of reducing youth unemployment and improving career prospects for young people. Policies and initiatives include the Education and Skills Act in 2008, which raised the participation age in education and training from 16 to 18 years old, the Youth Contract for 16-17 year olds and separately, 18-24 year olds, Future Jobs Fund, Kickstart as part of the Plan for Jobs as well as the Youth Obligation and the current Youth Offer. However, some of these are discrete interventions which means they have limited reach and are not fully embedded in the 'system' so their effects do not last in the longer term

There are a number of established 'systems' definitions. Youth Futures Foundation describes a 'system' as "a set of processes, the actors involved in them, and the interactions between these processes that contribute to an overall outcome". The UK youth employment system involves multiple departments, such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department for Education (DfE), and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Moving through the layers from national and local systems, there are complex and varied networks with a mix of statutory and voluntary support. The wide-ranging nature of the system is captured by the YFF's Youth Employment Systems Map (YFF, 2021). The system can therefore lack full connectivity.

Young people engage with different elements of this system which can lead to disparate understandings of it among those delivering within it and those experiencing it. Young people at the margins – for example, those not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET), who are care-experienced, in touch with the criminal justice system, or disadvantaged due to their ethnic or racial[ised] background – may be least equipped to access and navigate this complexity and most disenfranchised from institutions that deliver support. Furthermore, key actors in the system (support services, education and training providers, and employers) may at times be creating, or amplifying, barriers preventing marginalised young people from successfully navigating the system, through certain behaviours or practices (Adam, 2017). Funding silos and service fragmentation, leading to a disconnect and duplication in service provision, are further long-standing challenges that illustrate the complexity of England's youth employment system.

1.1.2 The Connected Futures partnerships

It was against the context set out above that in 2022, YFF launched its flagship Connected Futures Fund. This provides £16m to support young people to get good jobs through pioneering local partnerships and initiatives that seek to change the systems for youth employment in specified geographic areas. These partnerships are undertaking a wide range of place-based activities, aiming to create long-term and sustainable positive change that supports better employment outcomes for marginalised young people.

The fund's design and approach reflects the priorities of young people who face disadvantage in the labour market, including: holistic support that addresses their needs and builds on their strengths; aligned services that work together to help them achieve their goals; connected help where organisations and sectors communicate well and co-ordinate their activities; and consistent support over time.

1.1.3 Overview of this research

Given the complexity and challenges in England's youth employment support system, there is a need to investigate effective principles and practices for interventions that aim to shape and transform this complex system so that better outcomes can be achieved for young people. There has not so far been a robust investigation into the principles and practices of effective systems and systems change interventions in the UK. YFF therefore has commissioned this review. It aims to support the work of the YFF Connected Futures Fund, focused on supporting young people using place-based systems change approaches.

1.2 Research approach

The review has two key areas of focus: understanding the evidence on policies and practices that are effective in changing systems; including an understanding of how elements and levers of systems change interact; and the role played by 'place' in systems change. The review embraces the interests of YFF which include extending beyond the youth employment system so that effective approaches to systems change can be revealed. Through consultation with YFF and the research team, a robust approach to conducting this work was identified, which encompasses a comprehensive review in two areas which are developed through two parallel research strands. Strand 1 includes a review of systems change interventions; Strand 2 includes a review of three systems change case studies for youth employment in England. The detailed methodology is included in Appendix 2.

Strand 1 draws together findings from a review of studies that discuss systems change interventions. The aim is to further understanding of the features of systems change, key levers of change, and conditions that determine success. All studies included in the review use 'systems change' language,

with the vast majority of studies making explicit reference to systems-wide or systems change interventions. This review is based on papers identified from a systematic search of academic and grey literature databases to source evidence pertaining to 'systems change'. Overall, 70 papers met the criteria for inclusion, and these include evaluations, and other primary and secondary studies (evidence reviews, qualitative and mixed methods studies). Appendix 4 includes a table with details of each intervention referenced in Strand 1 of the research.

Strand 2 of this research aims to answer research questions on the key features of change to the youth employment system in England. For the second strand, three 'candidate' examples of change in the youth employment system were agreed following piloting and consultation within the research team and with YFF. These 'changes', which encompass policies and accompanying interventions, cover Raising the Participation Age (RPA), reforms to the Careers Information Advice and Guidance system (CIAG), and the Kickstart subsidised employment scheme.

There are a number of caveats to this review, which are worth highlighting. This includes the variability in the quality of the evidence, with the extent of methodological robustness varying substantially; a skew towards positive findings and 'what works' evidence, with more limited evidence on challenges and pitfalls; and, a skew towards place-based or organisational approaches, with the majority of evidence focusing on policies where there is local, regional, or organisational determination.

1.2.1 Systems change model

To aid the reading and understanding of this review, a model outlining the relationships between the elements that make up systems change was developed and is outlined in Figure 1 below. The model was developed drawing from the evidence and conclusions from both Strand 1 and Strand 2. It highlights the interconnections between different components of the systems change process including:

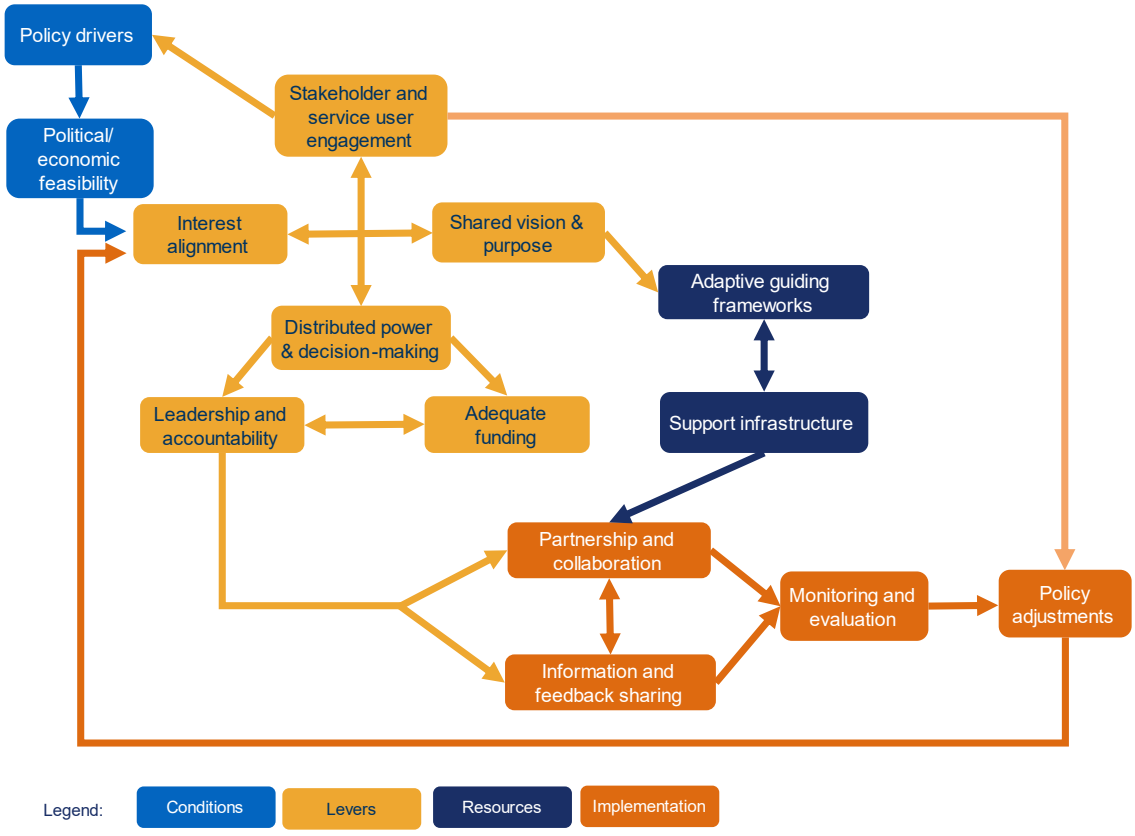
- The conditions for systems change to take place. These include both policy drivers and political and/or economic feasibility, which are required to sustain the momentum for change
- The levers for change. These include stakeholder and service user engagement, which can also serve to influence policy drivers; together with this engagement, creating a shared vision and aligning interests across system actors and levels. Establishing mechanisms for distributed power and decision-making, leadership and accountability, and sustainable funding plays a key role in the development and maintenance of these levers.
- The resources for change. The levers facilitate the development of key resources needed for systems change, chiefly guiding frameworks and

adequate support infrastructures which account for the support needs of all stakeholders in creating systems change.

- Implementation of systems change. Effective implementation takes place through successful partnership work, with a systems change approach; the ongoing sharing of knowledge and information through adequate channels across system levels and stakeholders; robust monitoring and evaluation of the systems change process; and consequent policy adjustments, which in turn inform the ongoing cycle of systems change.

It should be noted that this model is illustrative, and serves to highlight how systems change is an ongoing process, produced by the interaction of highly interdependent elements.

Figure 1



1.2.2 How to read this report

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows:

- Defining systems change – outlines different aspects to systems change and discusses the evidence on the policy and intervention rationales that drive systems change interventions
- Effectiveness in systems change – discusses the evidence on how effectiveness is defined in systems changes, including elements of effectiveness and challenges in both defining and realising effectiveness
- Levers of systems change – discusses the evidence on four key levers of systems change, including interest alignment and shared vision, service user voice, funding mechanisms, and power and relationships
- Applying systems change in practice – discusses the evidence on the design features and infrastructure of systems change interventions
- Systems change in the England education and youth employment landscape – discusses policies and interventions with a systems change focus in the England context focusing on three case studies (Raising of the Participation Age, Careers Information, Advice and Guidance, and Kickstart)
- Lessons for systems change – discusses learning from the evidence included in the review to discuss key lessons for effective systems change.

2 Defining systems change

This chapter outlines different aspects to systems change and presents the evidence based on the policy and intervention rationales that drive systems change interventions.

2.1 Understanding systems change

Systems are a configuration of interacting, interdependent parts, connected through a web of relationships, that form a whole greater than the sum of its parts (Green et al. 2013). In the policy and practice arena, systems are comprised of diverse actors that interact with each other such as people, services, organisations, institutions, policies, laws, and organisational cultures, through intricate interconnections and overlaps, often in non-linear and non-proportional manners (Cordis Bright 2020; Foster-Fishman 2007). Complex systems do not have straightforward dynamics, they may be in a state of continual change, but also resisting change at the same time (HM Treasury 2020).

Systems change is represented by a change to a system that alters the way the system works and is sustainable in the long-term (CFE 2018). Such change aims to improve outcomes for the beneficiaries of the system. However, not all systems change leads to improvements or sustainable changes. Simply tweaking the established approach to an issue does not constitute systems change; it requires **widespread and sustainable changes at multiple levels** of a system (ibid.).

In exploring systems change, distinctions have been drawn between **explicit (structural), semi-explicit (relationships) and implicit (to ways of thinking) change** (Kania, Kramer and Senge, 2018). The explicit level can influence the 'large picture', while the semi-explicit level focuses on internal relationships between people. The goal of the semi explicit level is to bring people together and to strengthen collective action (Kania et al., 2018). The implicit level focuses on the mental models as they shape and guide the approaches that influence the other levels.

A differentiation can also be made between **systems innovation**, which involves working within a system to produce incremental change, and **systems transformation**, which focuses on transforming the dynamic of the system itself (Dugal 2020). Similarly, a distinction can be made between systems change efforts aiming to change many points in a system, a **'whole-systems approach'**; and those aiming to **change relationships**, rather than structures, focused on encouraging stakeholders from different parts of the systems to work together in aligning goals, resources and activities (Egan et al. 2020).

While theoretical models are helpful to conceptualise 'systems change', in practice systems change interventions do not follow these clear-cut lines. They are complex, and progress is likely to be mixed across different

outcomes. Elements that contribute to complexity are the number of **causes of the systemic issue**, alongside the level of **flux and change of the environment** in which the intervention is being introduced. There is then the **number of levels** in the system that an intervention needs to affect, and whether this leads to multiple interventions. This has implications for the **number of actors** involved, with a larger number increasing the likelihood of conflicts of interest and different perspectives, and potential challenges around the extent to which **control over the intervention** is shared between actors (Cordis Bright 2020).

2.2 Rationales behind systems change

Systems change interventions are often driven by the need to create a systemic transformation due to factors which are exogenous (e.g. policy-led) or endogenous (e.g. changes arising from within the system). These changes often aim to tackle 'wicked' issues or bring about sustainable changes in attitudes and behaviours across the system.

Systems change interventions can take place when **existing systems fail to meet the needs** of their target populations, leading to poor take up and fragmentation of services, inefficiencies, and disconnection (Cavendish et al. 2016; Clark 2011; Hurwitz 2019; Kazak 2010; OYF 2021; White 2007). Interventions can also be prompted by the **recognition of disparities and inequities** within systems (CFE 2022b; Connell et al. 2019; Couturier 2014; Goode 2014; McCarthy 2022), and a recognition of the **limitations of linear, siloed approaches** to tackle complex issues, which instead require holistic, highly integrated and coordinated collaboration across different parts of the system (Bridgewater 2011; CFE 2022a; Cordis Bright 2018, 2021b; Kousgaard 2019; Pullybank 2022). Further drivers can be policy changes as a result of governmental changes, or changes to political agendas, planning for the future sustainability of the system, as well as ambitions to create a cultural shift towards **empowerment and ownership** among service users and communities (Andersson et al. 2005; Aspinall et al. 2023; Cook et al. 2010; Lachance 2018; Lechasseur 2017).

In healthcare settings for example, the recognition of complex factors influencing chronic conditions, as well as the identification of inefficiencies in existing public health systems, has determined a shift in several policies towards systems thinking (Bokhour et al, 2022; Davidson 2007; Doherty 2022). Systems thinking emphasises the implementation of **multi-component, community-based strategies**, with a focus on community infrastructure development, and a holistic 'whole health' approach, aimed at empowering individuals to take control of their well-being (Andersson et al. 2005; Aspinall et al. 2023; Connell et al. 2019; Malkellis 2017). The evidence also highlights a common policy focus on place-based approaches, through **community involvement and local ownership**, to enhance intervention effectiveness. By leveraging local contexts and engagement, these policies

aim to embed principles of person-centred care (i.e. a practice in which patients actively participate in their own medical treatment in close cooperation with their health professional) and enhanced system accountability in the provision of healthcare (Cook et al. 2010; Cordis Bright 2021b; Goode 2014)

The Alliance to Reduce Disparities in Diabetes (ATRDID) is a comprehensive public health model implemented across five regions in the USA to address healthcare disparities and improve clinical outcomes in disadvantaged, minority ethnic and tribal communities. The development of this model stemmed from a policy recognition that inadequate risk identification, failure to follow clinical guidelines, lack of provider education, insufficient patient self-management education, and limited care coordination were systemic issues leading to poor health outcomes among disadvantaged, minority ethnic communities. The ATRDID model seeks to move beyond traditional programme delivery, to identify and address underlying gaps and weaknesses in healthcare systems, alongside addressing cultural norms and community characteristics, through a multi-component approach (institutionalising patient self-management education in targeted health facilities; providing cultural awareness education for healthcare providers; modifying existing service delivery policies and procedures) (Clark 2011; Goode 2014; Lewis 2014a, 2014b).

In welfare policy settings, for young people and adults, the focus of systems change interventions is on addressing complex social issues, such as violence, child exploitation and experiences of multiple disadvantage. Policy drivers for these interventions stem from a recognition of the need for multi-agency**, holistic approaches**, and that coordinated and integrated efforts involving diverse sectors are necessary to address multi-faceted issues (CFE 2022a, 2022b; Coldwell et al. 2022; Cordis Bright 2022). The focus is often on developing shared frameworks across a wide range of actors, and to strengthen investment in **evidence-based practice**, building community capacity, and robust collaboration and information-sharing, commonly through localised approaches (Bridgewater et al 2011; Kelly 2019; TCS 2021).

Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) is aimed at strengthening and developing prevention, early intervention, and family support services in Ireland through a new child protection and child support agency (Tusla). The programme operates in the context of a broader national policy framework known as "Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures," which adopts a 'whole-of-government approach' to improve outcomes for children and young people. The framework provides a structured, systematic, and outcomes-focused approach to improving the outcomes for children and young people across

government departments, statutory services, and the community and voluntary sector. The PPFS adopts an area-based approach aimed at creating a culture of strong relationships, interagency collaboration, and integrated multi-agency work through five work streams. These are: child and family support networks; children's participation in decision-making processes; parenting support and parental participation; evidence-informed commissioning strategic framework; and widespread public awareness, across providers and service users, of available support. (Malone 2018; Malone et al. 2022)

3 Effectiveness in systems change

This section presents the evidence on how effectiveness is defined and identified in systems changes, including challenges in both defining and realising effectiveness. While the literature on systems change is wide-ranging, robust evaluative evidence is sparse, and the development of evaluation methods for systems change is in its early stages (Matheson 2020). Therefore, the discussion that follows draws on the breadth of evidence in this review, ranging from academic studies to process evaluations, to provide a nuanced and comprehensive narration, while acknowledging the limited nature of the evidence on effectiveness.

3.1 Defining effectiveness in systems change

There is an inherent tension in conceptualising systems change as an outcome and something that is 'embedded' or 'sustainable', in a constantly changing system. This has led some researchers to suggest thinking of systems change as a trajectory or continuum (Cordis Bright 2021). There are several spheres which recurrently emerge as those where evidence or impact on systems is most often mentioned:

- **Change in policy** is identified when an intervention generates a shift in policy focus or agendas. This can take the shape of a complex issue becoming embedded into the national political agenda (CFE 2022b, Cordis Bright 2021), sometimes even leading to sector reforms (Guggleberger 2014), the recognition of an intervention as a permanent service line in the delivery of a policy (Pullybank 2022), and changes in local policy through place-based interventions (Lachance 2018; Nobles et al 2022). Policy change is also viewed as a mechanism for supporting intervention effectiveness, as tracking policy change in real time enables initiatives to better measure progress, engage stakeholders through feedback mechanisms, and make midcourse corrections in response to evolving priorities and strategies (Lachance 2018).
- **Cultural or organisational changes** pertain to sustainable positive changes in attitudes, behaviours and practices across systems levels (Cordis Bright 2021). This is evidenced, for example, when an intervention produces a sustained changed in attitudes towards and a greater understanding of an issue, with a greater recognition of its role and impact (CFE 2022b), or when demonstrates sustained improvements in outcomes over the long-term alongside reduced variation in delivery (Aspinall et al. 2023). It is highlighted through improved partnership work, more flexible and coordinated approaches (evidenced in leadership, infrastructure, pathways and processes, strategy and commissioning) which are sustained over time (Cordis Bright 2018). This can be described as producing a perceptual shift in stakeholders' views and experiences of the system, and the ways they operate within them (Clark 2011).

- **Indicators of broader change** are those evidenced for example when the systems-level impact outlined in a framework or model for systems change (such as a theory of change) is achieved. This type of change is often surfaced through evaluation activities and articulated through iterative refinement of causal pathways and achievement of systems-levels outcomes defined in the framework or model (Doherty 2022). Interventions can therefore identify 'reliable enough' indicators of change, which can be plausibly linked to programme efforts, while accepting they may look small next to the overall change they hope to create, and that they cannot capture all the effects of their activities in a single moment (TCS 2021).
- **Achievement of KPIs and outputs**. Many interventions rely on measures of KPI, output, and cost-effectiveness. However, this has limitations, as it seldomly provides a comprehensive overview of systems change. While these measures can provide oversight and accountability on performance, a broader and more nuanced approach should complement these to identify wider and interconnected impacts (TCS 2021).

3.2 Challenges in measuring effectiveness

There are inevitably complexities in defining 'effectiveness' in systems change, linked to the challenges of establishing comprehensive and robust measures for effectiveness, which include:

- **Complexity of defining the system.** Systems change efforts often encounter hurdles from the design stage, particularly on setting system boundaries. If boundaries are drawn too wide, then the systems change effort can become cumbersome and unmanageable, but if drawn too narrowly then vital elements may be ignored (Foster-Fishman 2007). As a result systems change efforts can run the risk of focusing their attention on leveraging change in a distinct part of the system only, ignoring the systemic nature of the contexts they target and complexity of the change process (Foster-Fishman 2007).
- **Challenges in measuring systems change**. Resulting from challenges tied to defining the system, measures for systems change are also difficult to define, particularly during design stages, due to the broad scope of the work (Doherty 2022). It is challenging to define at the development stage what the systems level outcomes are, and there is the risk that interventions focus on siloed programmatic outcomes, or to set vague indicators making it difficult for evaluation to generate the evidence to understand progress over time (Doherty 2022). Linked to this, evaluating systems change is also challenging because change spans different contexts and system levels, taking different forms, making attribution challenging (Matheson 2020).

- **Timescale of change**. The long-term nature of systems change is also a challenge, particularly as change happens in non-linear ways (TCS 2021). Changes take time to embed and demonstrate significant results (Malkellis 2017). Often timescales span beyond those usual in commissioning of evaluations. When the expected causal connection is over a long period, evaluation needs to account for this (Matheson 2020).
- **Fragmentation of systems**. Systems are composed of multiple levels, which often operate at different paces and scales, and within different contexts. Evaluations looking to assess evidence for systems change can face the challenge of trying to identify change within a system where partners, stakeholders and components are at different stages in development and implementation (Coldwell et al. 2022). Moreover, evaluating systems change requires that data is collected at a systems level. In place-based approaches implementing wide portfolios of work particularly, these systems-level data are not always 'joined up' (Doherty 2022). This can mean multiple definitions and tools are used to measure improved outcomes which are hard to aggregate (Malone 2018).

3.2.1 Approaches to tackle challenges

Evidence on how these challenges can be addressed is limited, however promising proposals include:

- **Using a maturity model**, as proposed by Coldwell and colleagues (2022). This draws inspiration from models used in social policy evaluations. Maturity models categorise different levels of effectiveness in a structured manner, on the assumption that system components progress through these levels as they become more effective. However, maturity models, like any model, simplify what is otherwise a complex process of change. To create an effective maturity model, there must be consensus on the key elements necessary for enhancing effectiveness and achieving planned outcomes. Maturity models are most effective when there is a clear and logical sequence of change. The process of working with a maturity model typically begins with an assessment to determine the current level of progress. Once this assessment is complete, the description of the 'next' level can be used to identify priorities for improvement. This prioritisation is valuable because it can inform both evaluation and future implementation.
- **Adopting a systems change framework**. It may be challenging for a single framework to comprehensively address every aspect associated with evaluating systems change. However, frameworks can be designed in a way that includes a broad range of indicators and accommodates the range of system components (such as improved cross-system pathways, quality, scale, comprehensiveness, linkages, alignment, coordination, leadership, organisational and cultural change) measured using common sources of evidence (Gray 2018; Hayes 2015; Howley et al. 2022).

- **Investing time to develop scope**, as proposed by Nobles and colleagues (2022). It is essential for those implementing the intervention and those conducting the evaluation to invest substantial time in understanding the initial conditions in the system. This includes gaining insights into factors such as the actors involved, existing relationships, existing actions and policies, and historical socio-political influences. This is followed by defining the scope of the evaluation. Different stakeholders often place value on distinct aspects of the systems intervention. Stakeholders need to collaboratively determine the scope and focus of the evaluation, establishing these parameters early on, clearly communicate the boundaries, to reach a shared understanding. This entails seeking to understand motivations for participating, level of familiarity with the approach, expectations for how it will function, and specific impacts and outcomes aimed for.
- **Defining the boundaries of the systems change**, in tangible terms as proposed by Doherty (2022). This entails clarifying the assumptions around how the anticipated changes are to be realised, and ensuring that delivery proposals are underpinned by these assumptions and their rationales. The evaluation plays a central role in providing support to stakeholders and partners in the intervention, refining the evaluation framework to 'draw the lines' between intervention-level work and systems change, to build capacity and enable data collection at the intervention level to sufficiently inform the systems-level. These boundaries may evolve over time as the evaluation progresses, and sufficient room for refinement and iteration is essential.

3.3 Elements of effectiveness

It has been challenging to document systems change effectiveness as robust evaluative evidence is often lacking. However, there are a number of recurrent themes which the evidence highlights as contributing to the effectiveness of systems change interventions:

- **Effective leadership**, which blends centralised and distributed models, taking top-down and bottom-up approaches to effect change, and aims to include individuals with different levels of expertise and experience (Hurwitz 2019). This inclusive approach is evidenced as ensuring fit of the intervention, and helping manage and mitigate uncertainty, often through using change agents from the strategic to the operational level (Aspinall 2023). This type of leadership is shown to foster a spirit of collaboration and sense of community ownership and investment, embedding the intervention in a culture of change. In turn this supports efforts on sustainability and leveraging of funding (Lachance 2018). Strong leaders are also shown to be effective at moving issues on the policy agenda and pushing for political prioritisation and commitment, through a blend of vertical and horizontal coordination, and the development of a 'common language' for change (Scheele 2018).

- **Coherent blueprints for change**, involving all leadership levels, improve design effectiveness and foster strong governance structures clarifying timescale expectations, lead times, and key decision points. It supports the development of strategies containing tools and objectives and the scoping of resources (Kousgaard 2019). A steering group that includes policy-makers and those with operational experience with real power to engage in decisions supports this process (Baird and Kelly 2009). A clear blueprint mitigates the risk of broad and ill-defined boundaries for systems change, helping clearly structure steering groups, define their scope and remit, and develop more specific delivery proposals aligned with intervention frameworks (Doherty 2022, TCS 2021).
- **Using evidence-based approaches**, that harness knowledge or innovations within the system to continuously inform practice, creating the space and capacity to think about, interrogate and catalyse change (Cordis Bright 2021). Systems change often happens in cycles, and effective evidence-based approaches start by identifying major problems and concerns, initiate research simultaneously with action, and move on to a new research and action cycle in a process that is continuous (Cook et al. 2010). This requires a systematic approach that veers away from criticism and steers towards future opportunities for improvement (Aspinall et al 2023). Evidence-based approaches of this kind are also help address the tension between the timing of policy decisions and research practices, that require long timelines, by determining what level of evidence is most relevant to policy makers and strategically leveraging legislation to fast-track high-quality research to inform system change (Bokhour et al 2022).
- **Increased partnership and coordination** is shown to facilitate multi-agency collaboration (Cordis Bright 2019), long-term sustainability planning, (Goode 2014) relationship building (Nobles et al 2022), capacity building (Andersson 2005), and knowledge sharing (Cordis Bright 2019). Through these mechanisms, interventions better navigate complexities, adapt to changing contexts, and maximise their effectiveness in driving meaningful change. In particular, strong partnership supports improved infrastructure arrangements, through joint decision-making, leading to more effective delivery and sustainable transformation (Cordis Bright 2021b). Successful partnerships include a broad array of agencies in the development of the model, and focus on investing resources to develop sustainable relationships with communities and service users. They are planned and designed in consultation with representatives from all key agencies involved in delivering the interventions, and consultations directly inform delivery planning (Cordis Bright 2021b).
- **Building trusting relationships**, is a key facilitator of impact as it plays a pivotal role in aligning stakeholders (Nobles et al 20220), building trust with and within communities (Bridgewater 2011), nurturing long-term relationships between service users and system components (Davidson 2007), and increasing the momentum for change (Clark 2011).

Additionally, a skilled and adaptable workforce plays a pivotal role in driving impact, often spanning and linking systems levels, helping align stakeholders, develop deep connections, and supporting adaptation to change (Matheson 2020, Pullybank 2022). Quality relationships support the formation of strong professional networks, which in turn support interventions to amplify their impact through increased collaboration and knowledge sharing. Through mutually beneficial relationships, changes in organisational culture are facilitated, for example through language change, or more joint working and information sharing (Cordis bright 2021).

- **Strong user voice and involvement**, is cited as driving systemic change beyond the immediate scope of the intervention (Cordis Bright 2021), fostering a deeper understanding of community dynamics, behaviour and motivations (Bridgewater 2011); supporting the development of tailored strategies, which are fit for the context, population and location of the intervention (Clark 2011); increasing cultural relevance of interventions and empowering communities (Matheson 2020). Alongside, involving people with lived experience means the voice of experts is heard by a wide range of stakeholders and decision-makers, which leads to renewed and expanded understanding of systemic issues, and in turn this can lead to improvements to ways of working and service delivery (Bridgewater 2011, CFE 2020, CFE 2022a).

Virtuous cycles in systems change

Evidence highlights the 'virtuous cycle' aspect of effective systems change interventions, where changes initiated in one part of the system, in time produce positive effects on and impact other parts of the system, generating a positive change loop:

In the **Shape Up Somerville intervention**, school policy, practice, and environment changes sparked several significant and positive changes like student empowerment activities (e.g., students as 'food ambassadors') while opportunities for school staff capacity training increased. These changes in turn fuelled other dynamics such as school nurses' engagement with families, which then connected the school subsystem to the family subsystem. Moreover, the school policy and practice changes fuelled the perception of positive change that helped increase the enthusiasm and willingness (of other organisations) to commit and support in the community subsystem (Hennessy et al. 2020).

During the development and mainstreaming of the **PPFS Programme**, there was a strong emphasis on instilling values and behaviours associated with evidence-informed practice to enhance service delivery outcomes. This led to a noticeable cultural shift, as both staff at Tusla and members of the community

and voluntary sector increasingly embedded evidence-informed practices in their daily activities. Several key factors were attributed to facilitating this cultural transformation, including the establishment of a commissioning framework and the continuous collection and utilisation of evidence throughout the development of the PPFS Programme. This cultural shift reflected a broader change in service provision, which recognised that implementing strategies and approaches lacking evidence-based support was no longer feasible (Malone 2018)

A number of interconnected factors were crucial to the process of **School Health Promotion** implementation in Scotland. Firstly, strong national-level political commitment and dedicated stakeholders played a pivotal role in all implementation phases. This commitment was substantiated by scientific and practical work from key stakeholders, supported by financial backing, frameworks, and structures provided by the government. This unwavering political support enabled various actors and systems to prioritise Health Promotion and align their objectives. Secondly, Scotland's strategy involved devolving power to local authorities. This approach combined local self-organisation with national-level guidance. The national government set clear objectives and offered diverse resources, including financial support, information sharing, communication structures, and partnerships. This strategy steered clear of excessive intervention at the local level, avoiding micromanagement and the imposition of external ideas and values. Instead, it empowered local entities by providing the necessary resources and frameworks for action (Guggelberger 2014).

3.4 Challenges in realising effectiveness

There are some common challenges that systems change interventions encounter in trying to realise effectiveness. Many of these are interconnected, and tied to broader challenges related to building consensus, successfully addressing contestations and shifts in the system, and responding with adequate resources to implement sustainable change. These challenges include:

- **Lack of a focussed vision**. In the pursuit of inclusive and ambitious goals, interventions often encounter early mistakes, specifying too many goals, which can lead to overwhelm and an unfocused vision. At the other end a lack of focus on factors like place, system-wide impact, and community involvement can generate the same results (Holding et al. 2021). Similarly, a lack of scoping and resource assessment for introducing interventions, relying on individual components of the system to self-organise, is a risk (Baird and Kelly 2009). This can also happen because it is challenging to

identify where to begin and where the greatest opportunities for scale-up exist in systems change efforts (Lachance 2018). Lack of specificity in collaboration objectives, with vague visions and lack of detailed and shared plans on how to achieve these visions is a risk (Kousgaard 2019). To compound this, governance initiatives and specific actions can sometimes be lacking in systems change efforts, reflecting a disconnect between policy discourse and practical implementation (Kousgaard 2019).

- **Barriers to buy-in**. There are several stages at which a lack of buy in can hinder systems change efforts. High-level strategic actors may not fully engage with or comprehend domain-specific (operational) factors in systems change interventions. These nuances, while seemingly unimportant at a strategic level, can be pivotal to the success of a policy, and lead to policies that lack the necessary depth and specificity to bring about meaningful change (Baird and Lee Kelly 2009). Similarly, the vulnerability of initiatives to political changes can disrupt long-term plans and this instability can often result in a shift in goals and deviation from the original vision (Matheson 2020).
- **Resistance to change**. Alongside barriers to strategic/central buy-in, those attempting to facilitate multi-agency approaches can encounter resistance from partners and stakeholders on an operational and/or local level, who may display limited flexibility in their established methods of operation, hindering the adaptability required for successful collaboration (Cordis Bright 2019). Shifting from a traditional focus on programme delivery to a more abstract emphasis on systems change can pose a significant challenge, as departure from established practices can encounter resistance. Particularly in areas with limited exposure to such concepts, grasping the significance of systemic changes can be difficult. This shift involves acknowledging that the initial results of policy and systems changes may not always be immediately visible, requiring a level of persistence that not all stakeholders may want or be able to maintain (Clark 2011, Kousgaard 2019).
- **Challenges in operationalisation**. The dynamic context of systems change interventions pose unexpected hurdles. Sudden events, like personnel changes, can affect how partnerships and initiatives operate, making it difficult to anticipate and adapt to them. Shifts in local and national strategic policy priorities complicate efforts to stay aligned with overarching goals (Doherty 2022). Some systems change efforts encompass a wide range of objectives and target populations, making it challenging to operationalise strategies (Doherty 2022). In some cases, there is also weak planning which hinders operationalisation. For example, there may be a lack of formal agreements in support of long-term collaborative relationships, which result in fragmented efforts and missed opportunities for synergy (Kousgaard 2019). Additionally, inter-organisational differences, such as misalignment in financial incentives,

different organisational models, and incompatible management structures, compound these challenges (Scheele 2018). For example, large, national organisations and smaller, charitable providers may have contrasting operational structures and priorities, making it challenging for systems change efforts to accommodate these varying models (Gray 2018).

- **Resource constraints**. If a systems change mandate lacks accompanying financial resources and preparation time, this can ultimately hinder the system change process (Cavendish 2016). Underestimating the time and costs required to build stakeholder relationships and introduce new activities, cutting funding before an intervention can demonstrate impact, and challenges in developing sustainability plans in the face of time-limited funding are all risks that affect effectiveness (Clark 2011, Cordis Bright 2019, Cordis Bright 2021b). This is challenging where decisions on funding continuation are taken annually, and/or where there are delays in decision-making on funding which result in periods of uncertainty (Cordis Bright 2019b; Pullybank 2022).
- **Limited integration and collaboration**. Despite the focus on collaborative efforts in systems change, constraints that impact effectiveness can still arise. Challenges in funding and funding governance, including siloed and competitive funding approaches, ultimately discourage organisations from working in a truly collaborative way (Matheson 2020). For example, partners may withhold information from each other to maintain a competitive advantage in securing future funding, undermining the collaboration needed for systems change (Holding et al 2021). The challenge of integrating strategic and operational work is common, particularly in place-based work which spans multiple areas. For example, there is a risk that some areas lack a strategic group or deprioritise it once operational groups run efficiently and vice versa, or that communication between strategic and operational levels is disjointed. This disconnect can disrupt the alignment of effort, ultimately hindering systemic change (Cordis Bright 2020). The absence of a common framework, poses an early risk, undermining the potential for holistic and coordinated solutions (Bridgewater 2011). Similarly, simply co-locating actors does not guarantee cross-sectoral collaboration. Barriers such as differences in work routines, unaligned incentives, and a lack of clarity about the collaboration's content and purpose impede integration efforts (Kousgaard 2019). This risks interventions starting to operate in isolation, being perceived as separate efforts, contributing to the further fragmentation of the system (Hayes 2015).
- **Limited transformative change**. The endeavour to change systems is arduous and demanding. It necessitates disruptive actions that challenge existing power dynamics, and requires sustained focus, high energy and perseverance across change-makers, as well as strong leadership which can moderate, mediate, and facilitate change. This is difficult to sustain,

particularly given the uncertainty surrounding impact (Matheson 2020). A further challenge is that systems can quickly 'absorb' changes into existing, engrained, structures and revert to the status quo. As a result, well-intentioned efforts to bring about transformative change may ultimately wash out, leaving the system largely unchanged (Carey and Cramond 2015).

- **Staff recruitment and retention challenges**. Given the large-scale and long-term nature of systems change, recruitment and retention challenges, especially at leadership levels, are a key barrier for intervention effectiveness. Issues around workforce stability, limited pools of qualified candidates, especially in more deprived or remote areas in the case of place-based interventions, are key issues (Matheson 2020). Getting the right skills across staff is also a challenge (Matheson 2020). In multi-agency interventions, different partner organisations may have varying levels of budget and capacity. When staff leave or organisations fail to recruit, understanding and delivery of the intervention is affected, causing partners to spend time reintroducing their work and creating new relationships, leading to breakdowns and negatively affecting change efforts (Cordis Bright 2019c, Lachance 2018).

A checklist for effective practice

- Define clear goals and objectives for systems change
- Establish effective leadership and governance with clear accountability mechanisms and performance frameworks
- Anticipate delays and have contingency plans
- Involve key stakeholders early in the planning process to build support and commitment
- Start where there are already established relationships within the system, and prioritise building relationships with key stakeholders
- Identify and empower champions who can drive change initiatives and provide them with support
- Regularly listen and learn from stakeholders to improve change strategies, adapt to evolving needs, and secure their sustained support
- Embed flexibility into programme design to allow for responsive adaptations as understanding of the system evolves
- Consistently document and share key decisions, which not only serves as a communication tool but also marks progress
- Create a culture in which professionals feel comfortable discussing and exploring gaps in their knowledge and understanding
- Arrange dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms among stakeholders and partners, especially in resource-constrained contexts

- Establish standards for the types of data that should be collected, and collaborate with partners to establish baseline data before initiating work
- Ensure standardised measurement processes across different system components and partners
- Promote approaches for sharing good practices and tools across areas and levels of the intervention
- Provide strong strategic and operational support, through effective project management, and steering and working groups.

Pitfalls to avoid

- Different conceptualisations of the issue, especially in complex cases, which can complicate coordination efforts
- Inequality of power between actors, differences in organisational responsibilities, and conflict in goals and priorities
- Promoting culture change within organisations, which can be met with resistance
- Stakeholders' scepticism about the added burden of implementing the system change(s)
- Difficulty in identifying responsibility and accountability across system levels
- Working across complex organisations with dispersed operations, which may face logistical and infrastructural limits
- Economic pressures within the system and embedded organisational procedures
- Challenges in engaging and maintaining collaboration with partner organisations, also due to resource costs of establishing and maintaining partnerships
- The time-limited and uncertain nature of funding which can hinder long-term planning and sustainability
- Difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff with the right skillset, across multiple system levels and components

4 Levers of systems change

This section presents the evidence base on four key levers of systems change, including interest alignment and shared vision, service user voice, funding mechanisms, and power and relationships.

4.1 Interest alignment and shared vision

When **defining the system** and its boundaries, a dialogic approach that involves stakeholders with different perspectives is important. Negotiating the definition of the problem to be addressed and identifying who and what is within the system requires collaboration and shared understanding among stakeholders. **Consistent messaging** and framing the issue(s), and talking about them, as shared is key to develop alignment among stakeholders. It helps produce a **shared language** and unified understanding which supports the development of a unified approach to tackle the complex determinants of systemic challenges (Holding et al. 2021; Malkellis 2017; Nobles et al. 2022; Scheele 2018). It also helps challenge assumptions and encourages a shift from separate and fragmented thinking to **interconnected thinking** (Gates 2021; Scheele 2018). In turn, this culture of shared thinking, can support stakeholders to feel comfortable discussing gaps in their knowledge and understanding and be more predisposed towards collaborative work and learning (Cordis Bright 2019c).

Cultural readiness for systems change is also critical in the early stages of system interventions**.** This indicates the preparedness and predisposition that organisations, partners and communities have towards change (Carey and Cramond 2015). This can be facilitated through the early design and implementation of **clear communication and feedback channels**, particularly between strategic and operational parts of the system. These are instrumental in breaking down silos, promoting collaboration, and aligned priorities (CFE 202; Cordis Bright 2018; Doherty 2022; Gates 2021). These channels can inform strategic decisions with insights from staff delivering on the frontline, and provide operational staff with a better understanding of the broader context in which they work, which is essential in complex system-wide interventions (Cordis Bright 2020, 2022).

System change further requires stakeholders repositioning themselves as **change agents** and visualising how change will occur, through a shared strategy (Foster-Fishman 2007). Recognising the **interdependence of different factors** within the system promotes an approach that embraces interconnectedness and inclusion in both problem analysis and the processes used to address them. It involves redefining core concepts and moving away from a narrow focus on individual issues to broader considerations (e.g. from healthcare to a holistic vision of improved health and well-being) (Gates 2011).

The centralisation of acute stroke services in London and Manchester stemmed from the recognition of the need for service consolidation, based on evidence that specialised stroke units could provide faster access to essential treatments. In both areas, a stroke project board (including providers, commissioners and patient representatives) was established to develop new service models and manage implementation. Change was governed using a 'top-down' approach in London, led by the pan-regional health authority, while a more 'bottom-up' network-based approach was used in Manchester, led by local providers and commissioners. In London, designated leadership was employed to unite stakeholders around a broader perspective of improvement. This approach emphasised what became known as the "London model", to encourage organisations to recognise that their actions had city-wide implications. Both regions recognised the importance of engaging a wide range of stakeholders (physicians, ambulance services, hospital senior management, local politicians) to ensure the success of the initiative. Recognising that stakeholders might disagree privately but not express their concerns in meetings, change leaders were vigilant in addressing differences. Achieving clinical consensus and creating a shared business proposal were identified as a key factor in aligning interests, ensuring that changes were both clinically viable and financially sustainable. (Turner 2016).

4.2 Service user voice

Meaningful engagement with service users is a key component of systems change interventions. Alignment of systems change with the experiences, needs and expectations of those the change intends to serve contributes to building ownership and legitimacy. This alignment can take various forms, such as the adoption of participatory methods (e.g. codesign), emphasis on forging deep connections to amplify community needs and voices, and engaging with existing frameworks of community values and knowledge to integrate these within intervention planning (Matheson 2020). These approaches play a key role in fostering equity, transparency and inclusivity which are important drivers of systems change (see Rationales behind systems change).

The collection of knowledge and views at the local level from members of affected communities also gives validity to the vision of interventions. Individuals and communities can come together to learn from one another, **jointly identify issues of concern**, and inform decisions on the appropriate plans and actions to address these issues. This is facilitated by equipping people with the **skills to critically assess** the potential effect of the intervention, developing their ability to collaborate to solve problems and create opportunities for community improvement (Pursell 2012). In line with

these principles, **trust-building** plays a pivotal role, particularly when engaging young people and vulnerable groups, who experience greater power imbalances. As trust grows, service users are supported to become more open in sharing their unique insights. Service users have rich views of issues they have deeply contemplated, and **effective listening** methods are crucial to help them share their valuable insights (Bridgewater 2011).

Respectful treatment of service users is a key tenet of these practices, and involves acknowledging their capacity to participate in **defining problems and generating solutions**. This can be facilitated through **'bottom-up' approaches**. In the Disrupting Exploitation (DEx) Programme, insight gathered from young people involved helped refine the programme focus on three priority areas - crime, context, and care. For example, one of the programme's systems change priorities focused on school exclusions. This arose because the staff team noted the prevalence of school exclusions and discussed it in their one-to-ones with young people. Through different forms of **participative work** in which young people were supported to share their experiences of school exclusion, and analysis of programme data, the team were able to understand the contribution of school exclusions to exploitation. Following this exercise and deeper analysis of emerging themes, school exclusions were set as one of the programme's systems change priorities (Cordis Bright 2019c; TCS 2021). In the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) initiative, the partnership was able to identify nine basic components of recovery in serious mental illness based on members' personal and professional experiences. Each of these nine components was then used as the basis for identifying and developing recovery-oriented practices and supports. Patients were first **involved in defining** what recovery looked like for them. They were then involved in defining what practices and supports would promote recovery. Following on, patients and staff co-produced the ways in which programmes and systems needed to be structured and managed to provide such supports and practices (Davidson 2007).

Alongside defining priorities for interventions, service user engagement helps drive impact during implementation. In the Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF), collaboratives reported evidence of youth led or involved participatory research and data gathering. Drawing on young people's lived experience was critical to fully **understanding what the data meant** (OYF 2021). In the Texas Self-Directed Care (SDC) programme, people in mental health recovery received training and support to cover roles, including: involvement in the **recruitment and hiring** of the programme's director and advisors, serving on the community advisory board, working as advisors (50% of the SDC Advisors are people in recovery), and as **peer researchers** to the evaluation (including formulation of research questions, design of recruitment and interview protocols, hiring people in mental health recovery as part of the research staff, and ongoing examination and interpretation of programme data) (Cook et al. 2010).

Transforming service users into partners helps leverage legitimacy for the intervention and build social and political capital to influence change (Lechasseur 2017). A hallmark of the First2 Network is its adherence to the principle that students with the lived experience of barriers to STEM persistence (i.e. returning to university for the second year of studies), should inform approaches to improve STEM persistence. Students serve in Network **leadership roles** (as Steering Committee members, working group co-chairs, campus club leads, and mentors), participate as full peers in working groups, and **conduct outreach** to STEM-interested secondary school students and to state legislators (Howley et al. 2022).

However, there are also challenges in engaging service users that inhibit effective systems change. **Managing the meaningful and sustained involvement of service users** throughout the intervention and systems change level is identified as a challenge (Doherty 2022, Gray 2018). Incorporating a diverse range of views into policy and practice decisions remains a persistent hurdle (Doherty 2022). **Providing equitable opportunities** for engagement and representation of all groups of service users can also be difficult, particularly where there are high levels of vulnerability, and communication and engagement may be complex and sensitive (Gray 2018). There is a risk that service user involvement becomes **tokenistic** with limited impact on transformation efforts. For example, during the centralisation of acute stroke services in London and Manchester, service users' views, while sought through consultation, sometimes were used instrumentally to support predefined service models (Turner 2016). **Dominant community norms**, among both decision-makers and service users, can pose resistance to initiatives that aim to promote collaboration. For decision-makers, this can be the belief that partnering with service users is more resource-intensive than worthwhile (Foster-Fishman 2007). For service users it can be diffidence towards services and institutions, particularly when engagement may fail to be inclusive and representative of cultural diversity within communities (Aspinall 2023, Malone and Canavan 2018).

The Youth Violence Systems Project (YVSP) in Boston, (US), recognised that community residents had local knowledge and expertise about neighbourhood dynamics and violence prevention, and sought their input to understand community-based youth violence. The intervention created a process to help residents capture this knowledge by participating in design, delivery, and evaluation. This approach was welcomed, with one participant declaring, "You're asking me what I think creates the violence cycle? Now that's a first. Usually outsiders come and tell us what they think, and then leave, and we never see them again" (cit. from Bridgewater 2011). The inclusion of youth in the design teams was an important part of the process. This provided important insight into the behaviours and motivations of community youth. The process was also perceived as respectful to the community because time was invested in

developing trusting relationships. It also provided accountability, which is crucial in leading sustainable community transformation. Furthermore, the YVSP recognised that all community-based initiatives occur within the context of the community's historic relationship with similar initiatives. In addition to developing critical analytical skills, community residents develop a clear perspective regarding what types of collaborative relationships are useful for their communities. The YVSP benefited from listening carefully to these perspectives and respecting the diversity of skill and motivation within the community, and avoided a number of potential pitfalls by learning from residents' assessment of previous initiatives. For example, staff learned from the failure of a previous project to "go deeper with gang members." Upon partner consultation, the project team adopted a very direct, interpersonal approach to inquiry design that increased their ability to generate primary data about the rules, norms, behaviours, and motivations of gang members (Bridgewater 2011).

4.3 Funding mechanisms

Funding sources in systems change interventions vary widely, from leveraging governmental funds to grants from charitable foundations and outcomes-based funding systems. The processes also vary depending on the nature and approach of the intervention. This ranges from small allocations, for example for interventions operating through multi-disciplinary learning collaboratives to support additional staff time (Connell et al. 2019), to large allocations for comprehensive place-based interventions. Given the long-term and large-scale nature of many systems change interventions, shared and flexible funding mechanisms are common. For example, the Greater Manchester Local Care Approach (GMLCA) used **pooled budgets**, managed jointly by clinical and political leaders, and value-based payments models as part of their shared commissioning model. Alongside this, **flexible funding arrangements** were introduced to improve funding sustainability. An example is the Thriving Communities Hub in Oldham, which increased the flexibility of its grant allocation with the aim of reducing procedural barriers for third sectors organisations to apply as contracted providers.

Funding arrangements in systems change interventions also include **'braided funding'**, in which different funding streams are combined (see Maintaining engagement and buy-in: incentives and funding) . The notion of 'braiding' refers to combining funds in a manner that is seamless to programme participants but in which amounts from different funding sources can be separated at the intervention's 'back-end' for monitoring and reporting purposes (Cook et al. 2010). This was the case for the SDC in Texas, as well as for the Living Well programme in New York, a combined intervention to deliver a state-wide chronic disease self-management programme and a diabetes self-management programme. To implement and evaluate Living Well, local, state, and federal funds were braided as a public health

sustainability strategy. Through this strategy, implementation of the programme was expanded and additional data collection for evaluation was carried out. Living Well later leveraged this funding arrangement to involve the health care system's business intelligence and population health departments to assist in developing proposals for a sustainable payment model (Pullybank 2022).

Funding by charitable bodies is also a common mechanism. An interesting example is the MEAM Approach, for which there is no central funding available for local areas. The local partnerships, formed of voluntary and statutory sector agencies pooled their budgets, similarly to GMLCA, to fund and deliver the local work. However, ad hoc funding from the Big Lottery Fund in 2017 **supplemented core funding** for the intervention to help expand its work and disseminate good practice. This enabled the expansion of the number of areas involved, brought together data from the MEAM Approach and Fulfilling Lives areas to make a stronger case to government about the impact of local interventions for people facing multiple disadvantage, and funded the provision of the "critical friend" support (see Partnership work and collaboration).

Funding dynamics in systems change are linked with power dynamics, governance structures, and decision-making processes. System change and its challenges are complex, and identifying solutions takes time and sustained partnership work, to build the relationships necessary to create change. **Building strong relationships with funders** can facilitate repeat funding as well as funding for additional or non-core activities. Established relationships make it more likely that funders understand not only the intervention landscape, but its trajectory and evolving needs (OYF, 2021). In the Fulfilling Lives programme, the NLCF invested £112 million in the 12 partnership areas. One of the major factors that many stakeholders agreed to be beneficial was the long-term nature of the funding, embedded in a test and learn approach. The NLCF accepted that not everything would work, but recognised this would provide valuable learning. Substantial funding over a much longer period than usual was important in enabling partnerships to get to grips with the system challenges and begin to enact change locally (CFE 2022a, 2022b).

Interventions also leverage their **'systems-building' identity to strengthen legitimacy** with funders. This was the case for the Bay View Early Childhood Network, a state-wide multi-component initiative focused on improving parental engagement in early childhood education, which thanks to progressive consolidation of partnership work across two decades, came to be viewed as a legitimate influence over local opportunities to improve systems for children by funders. This included local, regional, and national foundations and the state education department. Funders granted the partners $300,000 to grow their infrastructure and support implementation of a wider community plan. This acted as a **virtuous cycle**, whereby inter-partner legitimacy, as a network focused on systems building, was leveraged

for new external legitimacy with funders, which in turn brought the network increased legitimacy with additional local service providers (Lechasseur 2017).

There are, however, challenges related to funding that hinder effective systems change efforts, and in some cases, contribute to negative outcomes. Firstly, **systemic funding shifts may be difficult** to enact, as they require a long time horizon to build relationships and develop buy-in among stakeholders, to secure significant commitment (OYF 2021). A further challenge is the **complexity of the commissioning process**, ranging from understanding application processes, to the allocation of public funds earmarked for specific purposes, and the intricate pathways through which state and federal allocations funnel funds to local levels. Hiring staff with expertise in public funding can help address this challenge (OYF 2021). In some cases, system change interventions encounter **resource limitations** when funding is cut short, is not extended, or does not account for aspects of delivery (Cavendish 2016). Budget constraints can also lead to the **removal of essential components** from interventions. For example, the Domestic Abuse Whole System Approach (DAWSA) intervention included a fourth theme around education and prevention, which entailed work in schools and a focus on early intervention, but this was removed in response to lower-than-anticipated funding levels from the Home Office (Cordis Bright 2019b).

A further challenge, particularly in place-based interventions, is that the development of **mechanisms for shared commissioning functions may vary significantly** across localities. This variability can affect progress in critical areas, such as budget pooling, the establishment of unified teams, and transition of commissioning responsibilities. As a result, issues may arise when determining financial responsibilities and decision-making authorities, particularly during unexpected events, as was the case for the COVID-19 pandemic (Cordis Bright 2021b). In the GMLCA, the introduction of block contracting for NHS providers during the pandemic was a particular challenge in preventing money from moving around the system. Rochdale's pooled budget was suspended, and Trafford's Joint Commissioning Board did not meet in 2020, highlighting that integrated commissioning practices were fragile (Cordis Bright 2021b). **Obtaining political support** can also be challenging, often requiring more than evidence of intervention costs and effects. Some politicians seek compelling business cases that demonstrate interventions' economic surplus to justify their prioritisation. This demand for evidence-based economic viability can add complexity to the funding approval process (Scheele 2018).

The Care Transformation Collaborative (CTC) has enabled Rhode Island to make significant gains in access and affordability, healthy lives, and prevention and treatment, receiving national recognition as a leader in state-wide patient-centred medical home (PCMH) implementation. Over fifteen years, Rhode Island went from having a broken primary care system to becoming an exemplar case

for healthcare improvement. In 2004, legislators recognised there was a need for urgent action for systems-level change. At a structural level, Rhode Island put into place legislation to create infrastructure, funding, and oversight. This led to the creation of the Affordability Standards (AS). These standards required insurers to increase investments in primary care and encouraged primary care practices to adopt the PCMH model. The AS established a funding mechanism to create a state-wide public-private primary care transformation effort, which in 2015 was incorporated as the CTC. The AS worked to reduce costs through the adoption of payment reform strategies such as population-based contracting, alternative payment methodologies, improved hospital contracting practices, and controlling cost increases associated with population-based contracts. Additionally, the legislature funded an all-payer claims database to collect and monitor expenditure data and required that state and private payers invest in the Health Information Exchange, a system facilitating mobilisation of health care information electronically across organisations within a region, community or hospital. In this way, the legislature established policy and implementation structures to support health system change. Primary care innovation has also been funded through large federal and foundation grants. In 2015, funding from the Rhode Island Foundation, Tufts Health Plan, and the State Innovation Model enabled the CTC to pilot a model by which primary care practices received infrastructure payments to implement universal screening for depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders. In 2016, using State Innovation Model grant funds, the CTC was able to expand the model to six further geographic locations. In 2019, with multi-partner support and braided funding from Medicaid and the State Mental Health Authority, CTC added peer recovery coaches and further enhanced the CHT network to address the needs of children and families affected by substance use disorders.

4.4 Power and relationships

4.4.1 Leadership and accountability

Leadership in systems change interventions requires ensuring that key actors at all levels of the system are supported to view themselves and act as change-makers, sharing the same vision for the systems change. Some place-based interventions activate leadership at the local level, for example through local strategic groups, comprised of representatives from a range of sectors and diverse spheres of influence, including service users, seen as change-makers in their organisations or communities (Matheson 2020). A key aspect of this type of leadership is the ability to **look and work beyond one's own priorities** (acknowledging working within a system rather than silos), and to feel comfortable working in more collaborative and equal ways, through

increased **flexibility and trust** (see Power and decision-making) (Nobles et al. 2022). In the DEx programme, while senior leaders were accountable for quality and held ultimate responsibility for risk, practitioners were allowed to innovate, explore, test and shift the traditional boundaries of their roles to identify what worked to meet system change goals. This allowed practitioners to explore promising leads in regards to systems change work, which was essential to respond well to the evolving context of the intervention (TCS 2021).

Strong leadership entails leaders **being adaptive**, as well as **utilising 'spheres of influence'** to progress the goals of the intervention, being proactive about change, and making the right decisions quickly (Matheson 2020). Strong leadership was central to maintaining local areas' strategic presence in the MEAM Approach, with stakeholders indicating key elements of this as: **possessing a vision** for the local area; having **established relationships** with partners across the system; and having **values** aligned with those of the MEAM Approach (Cordis Bright 2021). Similarly, in the GMLCA the quality of leadership was seen as vital for the effective implementation of the local care approach. Effective leadership was credited with establishing and maintaining a clear **sense of direction and purpose**, and with ensuring consistency and coherence of decision making. Good leadership was described as 'empowering', giving people permission to innovate, take risks, and respond to changing circumstances quickly, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cordis Bright 2021b).

There are also challenges to effective leadership which can hinder systems change interventions. When there are **multiple levels of leadership** (e.g. strategic and operational), if leaders on one level do not fully buy into proposed changes, this can lead to inconsistencies in embedding the intervention, and result in lack of coherence and **disjointed efforts** (Malone and Canavan 2018). Similarly, if some **leaders are not adequately involved** in discussions about proposed changes, they can be unaware of important developments or not understand the significance of the changes, ultimately affecting their ability to support and lead the transformation (Manthorpe 2009). **Staff turnover** in leadership roles can be a significant challenge. Maintaining consistent and high-quality leadership is crucial for the success of system change initiatives, and staff turnover can disrupt continuity and long-term vision, making it difficult to sustain progress or build momentum for change (Cordis Bright 2021b). Another challenge can be the **lack of a system-wide authority figure** or body in large-scale interventions. Without system-wide authority, it becomes challenging to overcome resistance to change and align stakeholders, which can lead to fragmented efforts (Turner 2016).

The centralisation of acute stroke services in London and Manchester highlights the importance of combining designated leadership with distributed responsibility for improvement. While clinical leadership was visible in both areas, there were

differences in designated leadership and how this was used to capitalise on distributed leadership. In Manchester, transformation was led by the local stroke network board, which did not have formal authority over providers. As programme leaders lacked formal authority, they relied on peer support and consensus-building. When a late challenge to the suggested model came from some hospitals that were set to lose activity in the proposed changes to stroke services, to maintain unanimity, programme leaders implemented a less transformative model. This led to a less radical transformation of services. Stakeholders recognised that greater authority would have been useful in ensuring different stakeholders prioritised the wider metropolitan area's interests. However, programme leaders' weaker authority made encouraging distributed leadership more difficult. In London, designated leadership was easier to exercise than in Manchester because programme leaders possessed greater political authority to manage stakeholders' resistance to change. Programme leaders were members of the pan-regional authority which oversaw changes to stroke services as part of a wider review of health services, that had political influence because it was clinically led and demonstrated public support. In London, designated leadership was used to encourage distributed leadership, by encouraging stakeholders to associate with a wider geography of improvement (a pan-London approach). Further support for centralisation was garnered through pan-London events during the public consultation. The London model exemplified the interplay between bottom-up and top-down leadership in achieving change, highlighting the need for a system-wide authority to align multiple stakeholders over a large scale and encourage commitment to system-wide improvement goals (Turner 2016).

4.4.2 Power and decision making

Closely tied to leadership and accountability, a key tenet of systems change is shifting traditional power and decision-making structures, from top-down to **distributed models**, emphasising individual, collective, and community efficacy (see Communication and interest alignment and Service user voice). By **acknowledging power dynamics**, making them visible and exploring them as part of relationship-building and partnership processes, systems change efforts can work towards more equitable and effective decision-making (Doherty 2022). This involves **reorganising decision-making** mechanisms to provide stakeholders, including service users, with more control over the design and implementation of activities, emphasising more inclusive and participatory approaches (Foster-Fishman 2007). In the Texas SDC intervention, subcommittees, (made up of consumers, providers, researchers, staff, family members and other mental health advocates), met weekly over a three-month period to define the programme's policies and procedures,

determine staffing and organisation, create a purchasing policy, design the provider network, and discuss use of IT to enhance programme operation (Cook et al. 2010).

Power within a system can stem from various sources, including formal authority granted through policies and procedures, but also **individuals or groups' reputations**, their **ability to control information** or resources, their relationships within the system, and their **capacity to sanction or reward** others. This determines how resources are allocated, actions are carried out, and decisions are made within the system (Foster-Fishman 2007). As the MEAM partnerships developed, there was progressive recognition of the need for increased flexibility in the delivery of support, which involved delegating some decision-making power to staff on the frontline. Staff were enabled to connect and deliver support to clients in a wider variety of ways as opposed to formal appointments, with a greater understanding of individuals' wider needs, not just the presenting issue. This allowed assessments to be flexible about service access thresholds and default exclusion criteria, enhancing the type and quality of support provided. It also involved adapting processes, such as non-attendance policies, to reduce barriers to engaging people experiencing multiple disadvantage and meet people 'where they were' (Cordis Bright 2022).

As with the other levers of change discussed in this review, there are challenges to effective power and decision-making mechanisms in systems change efforts. The imposition of **mandated processes and timelines** for implementing changes can put a strain on the intervention and resources to support the change effectively. This can hinder the successful implementation of the intervention, especially if it negatively impacts or fragments stakeholders' shared understanding and alignment. Additionally, **pressures from top-down accountability systems**, can affect decision-making processes, which can lead to disjointed efforts on the lower or local level (Cavendish 2016).

When involving service users in decision-making, challenges arise due to **varying perceptions of the weight of service user voice** by those in power. The extent to which service users' voices are considered and respected can vary, and there may be instances where service user input is overridden by professionals' views, which can sometimes result in adverse outcomes. This may have been the case in Fulfilling Lives, where service users' views were dismissed during the decision on who to recruit into a post. Though causality cannot be established, the evaluation reports that the successful candidate subsequently resigned after six weeks as they were unable to connect with clients (CFE 2015). The **tension between consensus-based and formal authority** decision-making can pose a challenge. Where leaders lack formal authority over providers and commissioners, decisions made by consensus can result in resistance from some and lead to less radical transformation. In contrast, when programme leaders possess political authority, they can challenge resistance more effectively (Turner 2016).

Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) was designed and implemented through multiple levels of distributed power and decision-making arrangements, from the national to the local level. At the national level, the leadership and guidance provided by the CEO, Chief of Operations, and National Lead for the PPFS Programme were key to setting the policy agenda and instigating cultural and behavioural change. Below these three key figures, the National Programme Manager (NPM) was responsible for designing the programme and advocating within Tusla for the organisation to adopt it, building the implementation infrastructure (in particular the PPFS national programme team), overseeing implementation, continuously advocating for the programme and its objectives within the organisation, and troubleshooting issues as they arose. The NPM was supported through a network of operational leadership through the Regional Implementation Managers, who were responsible for programme implementation in each area. This group was in turn responsible for supporting the Area Managers and 75 Senior Managers, to develop an area-based approach in each local area. Power was also shared locally at the operational level. For example, Participation Officers were involved in the design of the multi-stranded Children's Participation programme, which they went on to deliver. Parent Support Champions were introduced to provide ongoing advocacy of parenting support in day-to-day operating contexts in Tusla, in externally funded organisations, and in various interagency and multidisciplinary settings (Malone and Canavan 2018).

4.4.3 Relationships across the system

Relationships between stakeholders

Relationships play key facilitating and constraining roles in systems in multiple ways. They provide the vehicle for information and resources to be disseminated through the system; they support the development of coordinated and coherent responses; they allow the creation and sharing of norms, values, beliefs and attitudes; and they provide a mechanism for system members to access opportunities (Foster-Fishman 2007). It is, therefore, key for systems change efforts to understand both how relationships are structured within the targeted system and what types of relationships will be required to bring about desired changes.

An important aspect to building relationships among stakeholders is **'joining the dots'** to bring people, organisations and their agendas, together (Nobles et al. 2022). In Fulfilling Lives, almost all the reported impacts on policy happened as a result of ongoing relationships built between partnerships, experts and stakeholders through recurring meetings and consultations (CFE 2020). Similarly, in the GMCLA improved working relationships, trust, and

communication between partners was viewed as vital for the success of the local care approach. In some localities dedicated social prescribing link workers were recruited to strengthen relationships and collaboration across health and care services, as well as the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector (Cordis Bright 2021b).

A useful concept is that of developing strong **'system stewardship'**, meaning identifying key people and organisations who take responsibility for forming working relationships with others to drive transformative change in the system (Gates 2021). This type of relationship building differs from that which focuses on delivering discrete interventions, as it centres on strengthening relationships with a view to leveraging influence and connecting the means and ends that drive transformation within the system (Gates 2021). In the Healthy Families intervention, partners found that the most useful organisational relationships were purposeful and developed around specific activities. As a result, they moved away from initial attempts to create large Prevention Partnerships, to instead focus on more **focused collaborations** for specific issues. The relationship between the national team and the local teams enabled adaptation, through the flexibility of resources and narrative-style contract reporting rather than required reporting on specific targets. This type of flexible and adaptive relationship also allowed more immediate and responsive sharing of information (Matheson 2020).

One of the most important parts of systems change is **mindset change** to a shared and collaborative approach, and it is also the part that often takes the longest. It is key to engage core and strategic partners that are committed to creating change (ie. **change-makers**) drawing from stakeholders from all segments of the system (Lachance 2018). Having the opportunity to come together and talk, facilitates and supports this goal. In Barnardo's CPP-MHWB, the opportunity for partners to come together to talk and build rapport, for example through the theory of change workshops, over the course of several months, was reported as going a long way in supporting mindset change (Doherty 2022).

Relationships with service users

Systems change interventions occur in the context of place and community. Service users play a pivotal role in supporting the transformative shifts that interventions seek to achieve, and are a cornerstone for building legitimacy. A perspective that emerges in the systems change literature, particularly around 'wicked' issues, is that challenges do not lie with communities and individuals experiencing complex issues, as much as they do with complex and failing systems (CFE 2022b). Alongside this, is the view that **everyone in a system is subject to its powerful dynamics**, and may feel that they have little agency or scope to resist the system forces (TCS 2021). From these considerations, the kind of relationship that is developed with service users, and the principles that govern these relationships, are key to the success of systems change efforts.

A key guiding principle is **service user empowerment**. This can take different forms across different types of interventions and sectors. The ATRDID incorporated **cultural and linguistic competence** throughout the design and implementation of projects, with sites adopting patient-centred approach to self-management, considering the cultural and linguistic needs of patients. Alliance Communities also employed cultural brokering, a health care intervention through which the professional increasingly uses cultural and health science knowledge and skills to negotiate with the client and the health care system for an effective, beneficial health care plan. This required an understanding of the patients' cultural perspectives to foster productive partnering between providers and patients (Goode 2014, Lewis 2014b).

Closely tied to empowerment, is promoting **inclusive participation**, enabling service users to engage with staff and service providers on a more equal basis. In the Bay View Early Childhood Network, staff deployed strategies specifically designed to reduce barriers to participation facing parents. This included employing code-switching (which means adjusting speech, behaviour, or expressions appropriately) when working with district and other agencies or meeting with parents and families, particularly those who not proficient in English. This was cited as convincing families that district–community partnerships were attentive to their needs and willing to be responsive to their input (Lechasseur 2017).

Comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) emerged in the US starting from the 1990s, when foundations and federal agencies realised that discrete programmes were inadequate in addressing deeply rooted and complex social issues. The CCI intervention model aimed to address these problems comprehensively and at various levels in the community, actively involving residents in the planning and implementation processes to foster sustainable local systemic change. One particular CCI was designed to tackle educational and economic disparities in a city marked by high levels of poverty. In its initial phase, this CCI sought to empower residents in low-income neighbourhoods by providing them with resources such as mini-grants, community organising support, and leadership training. The goal was to enhance their readiness and ability to engage in collective actions. The CCI also aimed to facilitate partnerships and collaborative efforts between residents and local organisations. In an effort to empower residents, the CCI introduced a neighbourhood mini-grant programme, allowing residents to apply for small grants to improve their communities alongside their neighbours. This programme aimed to grant residents access to resources in ways previously unexplored in the community, while also building their capacity for broader change efforts. Although successful in many respects, the mini-grant programme experienced decreasing resident participation over time. Analysis of programme applications and interviews with

residents revealed that this decline was partly attributed to the removal of initial technical assistance (TA) support, leaving only those residents with the leadership skills and capacity to pursue mini-grants (Foster-Fishman 2007).

5 Applying systems change in practice

This chapter presents the evidence base on the design features and infrastructure of systems change interventions.

5.1 Guiding frameworks and mapping tools

Guiding frameworks and mapping tools, including systems and conceptual maps and Theory of Change, are an integral part in the realisation of interest alignment and a shared vision among stakeholders. Beyond merely understanding the system they help to **tangibly visualise and theorise** the interconnectedness of different features and factors contributing to systemic issues, and how specific actions can lead to meaningful changes. They serve to represent the system and change journey in a holistic perspective, and help **articulate the desired impact** (i.e. how the system will look and function differently following the intervention).

When looking at systems-level outcomes, a **systems mapping** exercise aimed at understanding the landscape of services available to the target population, can highlight 'system blockages' such as gaps in provision, or inconsistencies between provision and demand for services (Doherty, 2022). Alongside mapping, **systems analysis** of key positive and negative interactions, and patterns of interaction across system levels (e.g. strategic, operational), as well as analysis of root causes for system behaviour (e.g. regulatory processes, policies, procedures, roles, resources, and power structures) (Coldwell et al. 2022; Foster-Fishman 2007) can support system actors to identify areas of focus for the intervention. **Theory of Change** (ToC) visualise how a strategic change made in one part of the system influences (or fails to influence) other parts of the system and the subsequent results of these changes (Foster-Fishman, 2007). Tools such as **systems change pathways**, which visualise change through stages (e.g. coming together, goal-setting, building an interdependent approach, implementation, sustaining change) help stakeholders envision and determine how to support transformative action at each stage of the intervention (Gates 2021).

Frameworks and mapping tools are also key to identify any social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors which shape the system, as well as any leverage points for change. They support resource assessment and assumption testing, and the identification of opportunities for collaboration and cross-boundary work**.** They also serve as the basis for planning and developing evaluation approaches, supporting the identification of indicators and outcomes (Coldwell et al. 2022; Doherty 2022; Hayes 2015; Pullybank 2022). Through the use of frameworks, stakeholders can develop a shared language and understanding of the system, clarify how they think about and define the properties of the system (see Communication and interest alignment), and whether the planned change journey is well equipped to accommodate the actual characteristics of the system. This reduces risks of inconsistencies and gaps in stakeholders' understanding.

The Children's Community Initiative, a UK place-based systems change intervention aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people, faced the challenge of making formative assessments of complex and emergent change processes across different social and spatial contexts, to support improved programme implementation. This was achieved through synthesising a ToC approach with a maturity model. First, an evaluation framework aimed to specify the categories of information that would be

collated and analysed to understand and demonstrate what difference the Children's Communities had made. Then, the evaluation team supported the three Children's Communities local partnerships to develop Theories of Change for their overall programmes and in specific theme areas (each Children's Community identified three or four priority themes for action). Reflecting the systems thinking approach, which address the interactions between different (hierarchical) elements of the system, the Communities were encouraged to consider change and interactions at different system levels.

The development of a maturity model for the Children's Communities emerged out of recognition that although the ToC informed the evaluation framework in relation to the programme's aims, objectives and mechanisms of change, the Children's Communities had different origins and two were further ahead as established partnerships with shared aims. Consequently, the evaluation team sought an evaluation design to incorporate the implications. The resulting analytical framework encompassed three overarching system-level categories: strategic direction, operational management and services and programmes. Strategic direction referred to the planning and governance within the systems. Operational management encapsulated the operation and management of the Children's Community and services. Services and programmes focused on the delivery of services and experience of service users.

An overarching category of 'people' was also included, to reflect the importance of people and relationships as central to systems change. Within these categories, 11 infrastructure aspects were identified which related to things that can be seen (and evaluated) within the system to assess and promote maturity. Under each infrastructure aspect, in line with the maturity model, a three-stage categorisation of maturity ('building', 'developing', 'sustaining') was set out to capture the processes through which a newly formed Children's Community would become an established agent of local change. The associated assumption was that moving through the maturity phases – from 'building' to 'sustaining' – would induce positive longer-term outcomes for families, children and young people in the area (Coldwell et al. 2022).

5.2 The role of 'place'

Any policy or intervention is implemented in a 'place'. System change interventions often have a strong place-based element, as they recognise that the places where people live shape the systems they interact with and vice versa. There are **complex, intersecting local factors**, and specific circumstances to every place. Each community has its unique context, challenges, and assets, and individual areas exist as their own systems (Cordis Bright, 2021; The Children's Society, 2021). System change interventions should entail enabling communities to apply local skills and strengths and **harness local resources** and build on what works locally.

Community ownership is a key tenet of systemic change. Local stakeholders, including community members and service users, are seen as active participants and co-creators of change. This helps develop **local accountability** and helps ensure that interventions align with local needs and priorities. Empowering communities to take ownership of their challenges and solutions fosters a sense of responsibility and resilience. **Leadership at the regional and local level** also plays an important role, harnessing local assets and capabilities, aligning resources and services, and supporting the establishment of local collaborative networks to plan and implement interventions.

The ReThink Health Initiative, a partnership of 17 philanthropies across the US which aims to transform the healthcare system towards equitable health, operates on two scales, national field building and regional, place-based stewardship. In field-building work, the intervention looks to understand and shift the norms, values, mindsets, and practices that constrain current systems influencing health and well-being, by partnering with national and global groups working to influence public health. In place-based work, the intervention works with regionally based changemakers to develop projects designed to generate changes that meet local priorities and needs. Each intervention locality is governed by an inter-sectoral local steering committee, and operates through a collaborative network of local partners (Gates 2021).

The Greater Manchester Local Care Approach (GMLCA), is an integral part of the 'Taking Charge' devolution agenda, that has as core objective to achieve the greatest and fastest improvement to the health, wealth and wellbeing of all people in the region. To achieve this, the GMLCA aims to deliver an integrated approach to commissioning and service provision across the health and social care system, with an emphasis on place-based ways of working. The aim of this approach is to provide holistic, person-centred, and joined up care, to keep patients out of hospital where possible. The core features of the local care approach include a local care organisation (LCO) and a strategic commissioning function (SCF), as well as a model of neighbourhood working. The latter is delivered through co-located Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs), including district nurses, social care staff and wider professionals, and by creating links to wider public services (incl. housing, police, etc.) to address the social determinants of health. Maintaining place-based working is considered key to preventing silos between sectors. As implementation progresses, all localities are moving towards full co-location and integrated management of their INTs. Integration with other health and care services is also improving, with increasing involvement in the INTs of mental health, pharmacy and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, for example, via social prescribing link workers. At all levels of the workforce, improvements in the quality of relationships are facilitated by effective leadership overseeing well managed workforce engagement, co-location both of frontline staff and senior leaders, and the development of a strong sense of place and clear organisational culture (Cordis Bright 2021b).

5.3 Partnership work and collaboration

Systems change interventions are, by their nature, collaborative and partnership-based. Unlike multi-agency work in discrete interventions, partnership work in systems change interventions looks to embed a cultural shift in how collaboration is carried out, across multiple system levels, even after the nominal 'end' of an intervention – it is an ongoing and cyclical process.

Partnership of this type require both **responsiveness and representation** to address the depth and scale of complex systemic issues. There are three key components to achieve this: instilling a **collective identity** among collaborators to allow for opportunities for growth and inclusion; supporting partners to understand and **embrace the context** in which the partnership operates, flexibly and adaptively; granting partners **agency and autonomy** to develop tailored solutions (Rayner and Bonnici 2021). For these components to be present, the involvement of a diverse community of partners is required, who work together to determine the best way to adapt each element and apply proven approaches to the needs and particular features of their community. This requires mechanisms supporting collaboration to shape evidence-based approaches to the features and needs of the context in which the intervention takes place.

In different systems, partnerships differ in structure and function, based on the nature and context of the intervention. However, they tend to be based around two key types of structure, one at a strategic level and one at an operational level. Across both levels, effective practice centres around the extent to which partners develop **a sense of shared ownership over the intervention** and systems change process. Beyond developing a shared vision and values (see Interest alignment and shared vision), effective practice includes: consistent representation from a wide range of partners; strong relationships between all levels of the partnership and among individuals; close connection between strategic and operational groups; an appropriate level of seniority and authority among partners; and representation of frontline staff and community members (Cordis Bright 2020). An example of these principles in action is the Children's Communities Initiative (CCI) in the UK, which in the developmental stages established a partnership between Children's Community teams and local agencies working to improve outcomes for children and young people. Consistent early work around strengthening collaborative mechanisms, formulating vision and direction, aligning community priorities, creating a governance structure created strong ownership, embedded the shared approach into the thinking of partners (Coldwell et al. 2022).

A further aspect of partnership work in systems change interventions is the **importance of evolution**, through flexibility, adaptability, and regular monitoring, as the partnership builds and progresses over time. This links to the complex and long-term nature of systems change, where new priorities and needs emerge over time, as the system transforms and new learning emerges. One of the biggest challenges of the ATRDID model was to provide coordinated care to patients in the context of a system of care that was fragmented and confusing. Care coordination was not originally identified as an essential feature of intervention success, but as the programme developed it came to be understood as crucial. Over time, referral systems, contractual agreements, and partnerships solidified so

that programmes **enhanced communication and coordination** to be responsive to patient needs (Clark 2011, Lewis 2014b). Similarly, in the Disrupting Child Exploitation (DEX) intervention, control was progressively devolved through an organisational restructure to support a **more distributed way of working**. Through the work of an internal community of practice on systems change and the learning from the systems change programmes within the organisation, decision making was brought closer to the frontline. This was a counter-cultural way of working, particularly in the field of child protection, which is traditionally driven by compliance and risk minimisation (Cordis Bright 2019c, TCS 2021).

Domestic Abuse: A Whole System Approach (DAWSA) is a comprehensive place-based initiative, designed and implemented across thirteen sites and six force areas in Northumbria, to tackle gaps and disjointed practices in current domestic abuse services through a transformative collaborative approach. The intervention stemmed from the recognition of domestic abuse as a national strategic priority, but a poorly addressed one, and the need for innovative partnership models due to reduced long-term funding resulting from austerity measures. The model focuses on short-term injection of resources into local systems to improve multi-agency work (e.g. introduction of Domestic Abuse, Child, and Joint Safeguarding workers who operate alongside police officers), provide training and resources to victims, perpetrators, and workers, and establish long-term good practice across the region to transform ways of working, in a way that is not isolated to specific areas or agencies (eg. Good Practice Standards for domestic abuse case work). During the design of the intervention, programme leads, senior stakeholders and stakeholders with insight into specific projects regularly convened through strategic working groups to collectively define the rationale for including each of the individual projects, which made up the themes and the objectives they were intended to achieve. The regional approach allowed for the identification and sharing of good practices and tools across force areas, which facilitated cross-area learning and replication and adaptation in other regions. Alongside this, as part of delivery, force areas conduct regular multi-agency, strategic needs assessments to support the definition and re-definition of ongoing programme priorities at the strategic level, identifying changing development needs through collaborative planning. Through this collaborative approach a number of innovations were introduced into the programme, particularly the introduction of new roles to fill critical gaps in system linkages.

5.4 Support structures and resources

For systems change interventions to be implemented and delivered successfully, a robust support infrastructure is essential. Even if stakeholders hold attitudes and values that are congruent with the intervention, and mechanisms for collaborative work are set up effectively, adequate resources and support, including knowledge and skills alongside coordination and troubleshooting, are essential to fully implement the system change. Without these capacities, systems change efforts risk failure.

A key task to understand if the support and resource context is compatible with systems change efforts is to examine the extent to which resource distributions reflect and support the desired goals or outcomes of a systems change (Foster-Fishman 2007). While economic resources are an essential condition (see section on funding), on their own they are not sufficient for systemic change, as systems intervention aim to leverage collective change in the behaviour of a wide range of stakeholders, and this entails resources in the form of a coherent support infrastructure. Domains including knowledge of the system, intervention factors, partners and roles, and resources tend to interact with and affect stakeholders' level of engagement with system change efforts (Hennessy et al. 2020).

The provision of resources and support takes different forms, but in many interventions there is a common element of workforce development, including **training and supervision** (Connell et al. 2019). An effective approach is the **'train the trainer' model**, whereby stakeholders share learning and good practice with staff and partners (Scheele 2018). For example, in the PWCCS, an intervention focused on introducing new care standards in hospitals in New Zealand, each phase of implementation included facilitators with different experience levels, from the expert leading the process (chief nurse) to the novice recipient of the change (ward/unit manager). Initially, the focus of facilitation was on directing the practical and technical elements of implementation. The role graduated to a more collaborative and partnership approach, as novice facilitators became more experienced following coaching, training and guidance from the expert facilitator, and went on to train successive facilitators (Aspinall et al. 2023). This type of approach can help **bring about changes across multiple organisations**, as staff from one start collaborating with staff from other organisations, and can share good practice, supporting change in the way they operate. This helps effect change in cultures, pathways and processes outside of single organisations where training is delivered (Cordis Bright 2021).

To support these efforts, interventions often invest in building a range of **upskilling resources**, such as good practice guidance, toolkits, and online resources (e.g. videos, training modules) (CFE 2022a). Some use **'test and learn' models**, giving stakeholders and staff coaching, guidance, permission and budget to trial new approaches, and are successful in identifying and incubating innovative solutions to the systemic issues they aim to tackle (The Children's Society 2021). A key element of effective models is the capacity to provide **consistent and timely support**, for example through established channels of communication (e.g. phone and online), and within and between formal training. Alongside this a **dynamic communication style**, for example through frequent meetings to troubleshoot and discuss progress, is a common element of effective practice (Edward 2017). Timely support and dynamic communication are elements of a wider model of **tailored support**, which provides a variety of tools and approaches, developed as the interventions develops and often in co-production with stakeholders, rather than being ready-made and one-size-fits-all (Gates 2021).

The Connecticut Collaborative on Effective Practices for Trauma (CONCEPT) is a state-wide intervention to introduce trauma-informed practice in child welfare services. Among workforce development activities, CONCEPT introduced a cohort of 'trauma champions' to serve as liaisons to local area offices and function as early adopters of

trauma-focused activities, alongside the implementation of trauma-focused training, system-wide, for the child welfare workforce. A tailored 'trauma toolkit' was developed and implemented as a core component of trauma training for staff. The toolkit was conducted as a two-day session designed to improve knowledge about child trauma and promote trauma-informed practice change across organisational levels within the child welfare workforce (Connell et al. 2019). Alongside the toolkit, the DCF Commissioner mandated departmental review of all policies (i.e., legislative and administrative directives) and practice guides (i.e., procedure and resource manuals related to programme and policy areas) to integrate trauma-informed guidance in the workforce development model. CONCEPT facilitated a policy workgroup, including relevant DCF staff, who conducted a systematic review and revision of child welfare policies and practice manuals, as well as policies related to the state's juvenile training school. The policy workgroup developed a policy review tool based on essential elements of a trauma-informed system which were disseminated to agency staff and incorporated as part of ongoing staff training.

5.5 Information and knowledge sharing

Identifying and fostering connections between stakeholders, agencies, and settings to share information, skills and practices is essential to systems change interventions. Good practices for information and knowledge sharing include the **flow of information** within the system, i.e. giving stakeholders access to data and reporting, but also linking them through networks to provide new opportunities for insight and action (Carey and Cramond 2015). This can involve regular meetings, ongoing communication, knowledge sharing platforms, fora, and events as well as mechanisms to track partnership activities from the start of collaboration (e.g. centralised information hubs) (Kazak 2010; Matheson 20120 Serpas 2013). Dedicated inter-disciplinary working groups are common practice in systems change interventions, where stakeholders and experts, from academic and industry backgrounds, collaborate to exchange and build knowledge and develop holistic approaches (Cook et al. 2010; Hennessy et al. 2020; Salway 2019).Information and knowledge sharing mechanisms enable stakeholders to pass knowledge across different systems levels and areas of an intervention, promoting feedback and continuous improvement.

The MEAM coalition coordinated and **co-produced shared learning hubs** and networks at regional and national level, to strengthen peer learning and support practices, which were identified as a key benefit of the MEAM network. Through the hubs, local areas shared knowledge and learning with other MEAM areas in their region. In some instances, local areas highlighted examples where they had been able to transfer tools and approaches already developed by another local area into their own local work, speeding their progress (Cordis Bright 2018). As part of the community component of the ATRDID comprised a collegial support system and a **work group for mutual sharing of ideas and expertise** designed to move work forward (Clark 2011). Similarly, the Care Transformation Collaborative of Rhode Island, a holistic multi-sector intervention to reform the state's healthcare system, was driven by **learning collaboratives**. These invited practices to

participate in sharing their experiences, best practices, and implementation barriers around targeted topics. Issues and possible solutions raised in the collaboratives served as the basis for identifying systems improvement opportunities (Hurwitz 2019).

The Food for Life Partnership (FFLP) is an England-wide healthy and sustainable food intervention, led by a coalition of national charities, that evolved in schools and is being adapted for children's centres, universities, care homes, and hospital settings. The partnership's mission is to promote 'good food culture' through a settings-based approach that extends beyond nutritional and dietary education to encompass wider aspects of the health, social and environmental dimensions of food. For each new setting FFLP works with stakeholders to design and pilot a suitable whole setting approach. As part of this approach, FFLP facilitates the exchange of good practice between similar organisations. FFLP staff act as links between settings, and draw on experience from one context when working in another, developing tailored frameworks with shared principles that can be adapted to each specific context. The framework gives a clear direction of travel to institutions that want to take a whole setting approach to food with the different areas of focus and with a set of criteria they might work towards. The framework, which integrates national principles, local priorities, and mutual learnings, allows for the sharing of good practice and a sense of benchmarking which is motivating to local settings that want to know how they can compare with other settings (Gray 2018).

5.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Traditional monitoring and evaluation approaches primarily measure changes in system outputs and outcomes. However, system change interventions often lead to subtler, harder-to-measure changes in system conditions. In systems change, the focus shifts from attribution to contribution, to understand the contribution of interventions to broader system changes, beyond discrete projects. Evaluation pushes beyond determining the value of the components of the initiative, to be integrated into the system change process, through a continuous and embedded evaluative process, which becomes part of the change. This requires a shift from evaluating for or about system change to evaluating as system change (Gates 2021). To address the complexities of monitoring and evaluation in systems change, interventions have taken various approaches.

Recognising that there is no single well-defined way to measure or monitor systems change, the DEx programme continually tested and refined its approach, through the ongoing development and review of the monitoring framework and theory of change. Through revision and refinement, it aimed to shift away from a target-based approach towards a more qualitative focus. The initial Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) mostly focused on activity were necessarily set at the start of the evaluation, to provide a baseline and oversight and accountability on performance. However, as DEx matured, the team saw the need for, and developed, a more nuanced approach to reporting which used more qualitative case studies and narrative to describe some of the impact DEx was having to

complement the quantitative KPIs. This was driven by a new theory of change which embedded theories for each system change priority (Cordis bright 2021, TCS 2021).

Using advanced evaluation frameworks, combining multiple methods designed to explore complexity, and provide flexibility is also a common feature across interventions. Specifically, these frameworks look to identify elements such drivers for change, system conditions, culture and leadership, blockages and deficits, and interactions within the system, and with wider systems (Aspinall et al. 2023;Howley et al. 2022). Alongside, innovative participatory methods are explored in interventions to assess and track impact on communities. The Stockholm Diabetes Prevention Programme (SDPP), a multi-municipality community-based programme in Stockholm County, used a longitudinal evaluation approach, which included a spidergram method. The spidergram tracked how participatory relationships were formed and maintained in the community, and how this influenced long term development and perception of local participation. Group discussions were used to reflect and interpret collectively the meaning of changes visualised in the spidergram (Andersson et al. 2005). In the Fulfilling Lives evaluation, service users trained as peer researchers and downloaded a customised app on their phone that encouraged them to record their thoughts before and after attending events, meetings or other activities linked to the systems change. Prompts encouraged them to reflect on their contribution, how it was received and the impact their attendance might have (CFE 2020).

Data monitoring is pivotal to systems change evaluation efforts, to support the identification of patterns, dynamics, and areas for improvement within the system. Data also serves as cornerstone for decision-making, not only informing the ongoing development of interventions but also tracking progress and garnering support for ongoing delivery, enhancing the credibility of interventions.

The West Virginia First2 Network INCLUDES Alliance is a collaborative initiative aimed at addressing attrition from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) majors during the first two years of college, particularly for underrepresented groups and first-generation students. The programme is part of the Inclusion across the Nation of Communities of Learners of Underrepresented Discoverers in Engineering and Science (INCLUDES), which supports initiative aimed at shifting systems towards improving STEM education and career pathways for underrepresented groups. To evaluate the initiative, the programme adopts Latham's framework for evaluating change in human service delivery systems. This framework distinguishes between two domains of systems change: pathways and structures. Pathways involve the organisational and inter-organisational arrangements designed to deliver programmes and services, while structures encompass policies, regulations, funding flows, culture, and knowledge bases that influence how pathways function. Structures are factors, typically outside the control of many people, that incentivise, constrain, and enable the approaches that people use to build and maintain pathways. The framework enabled the evaluation to define relevant systems as pathways (progression through school levels and STEM programmes, in the case of the First2 Network) and structures

(such as state education policies, resource flows, relationships and connections, and power dynamics), and evaluate changes in both domains (through indicators of quality, scale, comprehensiveness, linkage, alignment, and cross-system coordination, reduction in barriers, and development of enablers) (Howley et al. 2022).

6 Systems change in the youth employment landscape

The second part of this report examines youth employment policies and interventions which required systems change. Two cases are for England and one operated across the UK. The three case studies were selected for their relevance to supporting young people attain good quality employment. All three can be categorised as a policy change, in terms of the type of systems change they represent based on the systems change literature.

The selected cases are the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA), Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), and Kickstart. Each section starts with the case study, showing the development of the policy. This is followed by a discussion on key features of systems change and what the evidence for each example tells us. The short case studies included in this section have been developed from longer case studies, for which full references are provided alongside a detailed methodology in Appendix 1.

6.1 Systems change in education and training: Raising the Participation Age (RPA)

This section examines the case of Raising the Participation Age (RPA), providing an overview of how the intervention was introduced, the change journey it followed, and its effectiveness in changing the education system.

6.1.1 Background to RPA

The Raising the Participation Age (RPA) policy in England, introduced through the Education and Skills Act of 2008 in England, extended the expected duration of education for all young people from 16 to 18 years (Parliament UK, 2008). In contrast to the former policies of Raising Of the School Leaving Age (ROSLA) which were restricted to school-based education, RPA required young people aged 16-18 to be in education or training. RPA thus supports full-time education, part-time education alongside work or volunteering, and work-based training in the form of Apprenticeships, Traineeships and Supported Internships.

The origins of the policy lay with the Labour government (1997-2010) (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). The 2005 Leitch Review of Skills emphasised the importance of preparing young people for the evolving job market, as also highlighted in the green paper 'Raising expectations: staying in education and training post-16' (Department for Education and Skills, 2007).

The 2008 Education and Skills Act required implementation in a staged process from 2013 for 16-17 year olds and to 18 years by 2015. This extended lead-in time allowed for preparation through four pilot phases involving Local Authorities (LAs) and Subregional Groups (SRGs); curriculum development; and infrastructure readiness (Department for Education and Skills, 2007; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007a, 2007b).

The change in government in 2010, meant that the policy was adopted and implemented by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government. The new government had reservations over the cost involved although no appetite to repeal the policy through primary legislation (Woodin et al, 2012). It diluted the policy through not enforcing a legal obligation on young people (or employers) to participate or to support participation and instead encouraged participation by highlighting the advantages it offered.

RPA has multiple goals; it aims to boost participation; reduce the number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET); enhance the qualifications and skills of young people to improve their future earnings; and, boost the nation's competitiveness and economic growth (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). RPA also aims to bring about social benefits such as reducing crime.

When participating first became a requirement, in 2013, most young people (83.6% in 2012) were already engaged in post-16 education or training (Department for Education, ongoing data series). While RPA is a national level policy monitored by the Department for Education, Local Authorities (LAs) were responsible at a local level. They took this forward as part of 14-19 education partnership structures that then operated (Department for Education, 2007, 2010). To support the policy's goals, the funding methodology for post-16 participation changed from payment per qualification to per student (Department for Education and Education Funding Agency, 2012). Change in funding formula here shows how changing one element in a system can lead to changes in many other elements, requires adaptive management and policy adjustments (Fig- Systems Model).

The monitoring data on rates of participation and NEET collected by the Department through education and training providers and LAs indicates that the policy may have led to an increase in the number of young people staying in full-time academic or vocational training beyond the age of 16 but other factors and policies are also likely to have contributed to this outcome. This is illustrated by the varied rates of participation in different areas of England which may be linked to local labour markets and longstanding trends on local economic performance (ONS, ongoing data series).

6.1.2 The journey of change in RPA

On a strategic level, the alignment of RPA with the Leitch Review of Skills and the emphasis on preparing young people for the evolving job market reflected a shared vision of enhancing the skills and employability of young people (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). However, the shift in political leadership between the ideation and implementation of RPA affected the policy, with aspects of the original vision diluted or altered by roll-out. The policy was introduced under a Labour government but implemented under a coalition government, resulting in key changes, such as making RPA voluntary and abandoning the 14-19 Diplomas (DfE, 2010). RPA also faced challenges in effectively addressing its dual objectives, increasing employability and competitiveness in the labour market alongside increasing participation of the most disadvantaged (DfE, 2010; Maguire, 2013; Woodlin, 2012). In part, this was due to the highly vertical and top-down approach, with the policy developed and mandated centrally, which made it more susceptible to political changes.

At the delivery level, though RPA was introduced as a national policy and mandated centrally, planning and implementation took place at the local level, with considerable local variation. The intervention was piloted through a four-phased approach, which afforded local authorities the opportunity to work out the practicalities of implementation at the local level and then plan accordingly. As piloting progressed, the number of LAs and sub-regional groups (SRGs) progressively increased. In the first and second phase, 14-19 Partnerships led by LAs and the Learning and Skills Councils, which operated at that time, were responsible for strategically coordinating and managing provision (Isos Partnership, 2011). At this stage, partnerships were also developed with voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and private companies, as well as alternative provision education. Successively, in the third phase partnership work extended to the Locally-Led Delivery Projects (LLDPs), which included 19 LAs and three SRGs, with a mandate to develop local solutions to enhance participation. The LLDPs identified priorities and developed and tested approaches to address these (Day 2012a, 2012b). The fourth phase consolidated partnerships structures developed in previous phases, concentrating on strengthening strategic ownership, data and tracking, early intervention, and the 17+ agenda (Maguire and Newton, 2013).

There was good practice which emerged from the implementation of RPA. The phased approach of the pilots allowed for learning and improved planning, with each phase learning from the previous one. This was supported by each trial having its own evaluation, and the learning and reports being used for the planning of the following trial. The use of data collection at the local level, such as through the CCIS and the introduction of the Key Stage 4 destination measure, allowed the DfE to monitor compliance with participation duties and better understand place-based differences, which contributed to more informed implementation (DfE, 2012). RPA also acknowledged the importance of local leadership and local governance structures were developed, with day-to-day responsibility for trial activities delegated to operational staff under the supervision of an overarching trial lead (Isos Partnership, 2011).

However, RPA also encountered considerable challenges. Managing short timescales while building the staffing infrastructure proved challenging. LAs struggled to secure qualified staff, including dedicated trial leads and additional human resources (Isos Partnership, 2011). LAs also lacked clarity about their responsibilities in RPA delivery and how they could contribute effectively. Coordination issues arose, particularly in areas where Connexions was involved, and agencies failed to share crucial data for tracking participation. Challenges in data sharing between agencies and LAs persisted during wider roll-out, with poor data sharing, especially between local authorities, schools, and colleges, hindering the identification and engagement of young people NEET (Isos Partnership, 2011; Day, 2012a, 2012b; Ofsted, 2014). There was also variation across local areas in the degree of success in inter-agency work, particularly around the engagement of providers and wider stakeholders (Isos Partnership, 2011; Maguire and Newton, 2013).

On a wider level, the focus of RPA on gradually increasing participation was affected by the rapidly changing educational and economic landscape. Changes in the policy's direction hindered planning and execution. During the

trials, some areas struggled to understand the starting point for their activity and to determine the unique contribution that trial activity would make, especially given the all-encompassing nature of RPA which cut across the vast majority of the then 14-19 work streams (Isos Partnership, 2010). Reductions in funding further complicated the implementation process. As implementation progressed, parallel reductions in LA budgets due to the Coalition's policy for austerity compromised the policy aim of tracking and re-engaging young people not continuing in education and training, especially young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Isos Partnership, 2010, 2011; Maguire, 2013). Reductions in funding impacted local authorities' ability to procure provision, support systems, and develop tracking systems for RPA delivery (Isos Partnership, 2011; Maguire, 2013). Finally, the policy was not subjected to a major post-implementation review, and gaps in understanding remain on why it has 'failed' certain young people.

It is important to note that young people, the primary stakeholders in RPA were not involved at any stage of development and implementation of RPA. In response to consultations on the policy, Barnardo's[1] alone (2010) consulted with young people and young mothers to understand their perspectives on RPA and participation challenges. A key message emerging from this research was that much more work was needed to understand young people who were not participating or of the youth labour market to bridge the gaps for groups most at risk. Barnardo's submitted a memorandum to Parliament, welcoming RPA while advocating for changes in crucial areas (flexibility in compulsion and enforcement to safeguard non-participating young people; sufficiency and diversity of provision; support mechanisms for young people's participation; and, financial support) (Evans, 2009; Evans & Slowley, 2010). These recommendations were never formally addressed and implemented in RPA's successive work.

6.1.3 Effectiveness of RPA

The effectiveness of any system change intervention can be assessed through the answer to two key questions: firstly, whether the system change took place as intended; and, second whether the system change achieved the planned effect. The evidence for RPA suggests a positive effect in respect to the first question. Although making education or training compulsory for young people was abandoned, systems are in place to support transitions between education phases and promote participation. Over time the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET has fallen[2] and more young people are in full-time education and training overall compared to 2013. However, success is providing young people with options that open doors to good quality employment. The lack of legal obligation for participation means there are no explicit incentives to promote adherence, and no penalties for failing to comply, which may affect the 'take-up' and success of the policy.

The answer to the second question is less clear. Systems change happened; the policy was enacted. The change in political leadership, from Labour to the Coalition government, between the Act passing and its implementation is the root cause. Hence, this systems change was highly influenced by changed leadership

causing changes to plans and cost-cutting in light of austerity which all influenced the way RPA could work.

The policy rationale was largely to increase competitiveness by investing in continued education or training post-16 but over 80 per cent of 16-17 year olds were already participating based on RPA criteria. It can be argued therefore that the real focus for RPA was the most disadvantaged 20 per cent, who were meant to be tracked and re-engaged. This policy complexity conflicts with Tinbergen's rule that you need as many policy instruments as there are policy objectives; RPA was not the right tool for the first objective. The hopes for increasing competitiveness lay in investment in education and training universally and not a focus on the most disadvantaged.

The monitoring of RPA centres on participation rates and numbers of young people NEET, but it is not clear how many young people benefit from prolonged education in terms of gaining better employment. Research shows that the quality of work young people can access has declined over the past 20 years without any sign of an effect from RPA (Papoutsaki et al, 2019). Moreover, the data show that relatively consistent proportions of 16-17 years olds (around 5%) and 17-18 year olds (closer to 15%) continue to not participate post-16. Understanding why the policy 'fails' these young people is not fully possible without a review. It might be argued that RPA was driven more by the emerging requirements of the economy than the complex requirements of disadvantaged and marginalised young people.

6.2 Systems change in the provision of careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG)

This section examines the case of the reforms to CIAG, providing an overview of how the reforms took place, the change journey followed, and their effectiveness in changing the CIAG system.

6.2.1 Background to CIAG reforms

Initiated in 2001 under the Labour Government, Connexions was intended to be both (1) a universal service to support young people's transitions through offering impartial advice on education, training and careers; and (2) to reduce social exclusion through providing targeted support to disadvantaged young people (NAO, 2004).

The central government policy, the 1973 Employment and Training Act, continued to provide the framework for careers guidance for young people, but in 2001 responsibility was transferred from privatised careers companies to 47 Connexions partnerships (Andrews, 2013). Connexions fostered strong partnerships between the government, statutory agencies, the voluntary sector, and private sector businesses (DfE, 2000). It emphasised coherence across service boundaries and the central role of personal advisers in providing comprehensive support to young people (Smith, 2007). For most young people, their first point of contact with Connexions was the adviser whose role it was to provide a range of support to meet their needs and help them reach their potential (House of Commons, 2004).

Despite this, the service experienced challenges in delivering targeted *and* universal careers services (NAO, 2004; DfE and Skills, 2005). The target to reduce

the number of young people who were NEET led Connexions services to focus on the targeted support aspect of their work, over the universal provision of guidance (Andrews, 2021). Connexions partnerships were dissolved in 2008 but LAs could retain Connexions services to meet their duties to provide targeted support.

The change of government, to the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2010 brought a new policy approach. The Education Act 2011 handed over responsibility for universal CIAG services in England to schools and education and training providers (Andrews, 2013; Chadderton, 2015). LAs retained duties to support and re-engage young people in education and training. Revised guidelines in 2014 mandated schools to provide careers guidance from year 8 to year 13 (DfE, 2014).

Challenges remained to quality of careers guidance despite these changes. To support schools and providers to deliver to high quality standards, Sir John Holman led research to recommend improvements that could be made (Holman, 2014). His recommendations – including the Gatsby Benchmarks - were published in 2014 and were adopted as part of the careers strategy from December 2017. Since 2018, they form part of statutory guidance for secondary schools. Their delivery is supported and monitored through the Careers and Enterprise Company.

The current system of career support services in England is fragmented, with different departments and agencies responsible for different groups of people. For example, the DfE is responsible for career support services for young people in education and delegates this responsibility to education providers (DfE, 2023). This means that the careers service can vary from school to school. Similarly, the DWP is responsible for career support services for young adults who are unemployed or looking for a new job and commissions support for claimants through the National Careers Service (DWP, 2022). LAs play a role in providing targeted career support services, but delivery approaches vary. This situation can lead to gaps in provision, meaning that some young people may not be able to get the support they need (PyeTait Consulting, 2022).

6.2.2 The journey of change in CIAG reforms

The Connexions Service was understood as much more than a replacement for the former local careers services because it attempted to coordinate and bring together a wide range of agencies providing integrated youth support. The service had a clear mission to support young people's transition to post-16 learning and reduce social exclusion, with a focus on reducing disengagement from education and employment through a place-based approach. The service was designed for all young people, with intensive support delivered to those at the greatest risk of disadvantage.

Connexions established place-based multi-agency partnerships, across local government, statutory agencies, and the private and voluntary sectors, which allowed for integrated and localised support. It did this as part of its mandate to provide holistic support to young people, particularly those facing complex challenges. The model for CIAG consisted of the central Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU), based at the then Department for Education and Skills (and its predecessor/successor bodies), delivered through local partnerships. The CSNU developed national policy, provided the partnerships' grant funding, and monitored their performance, providing a national framework for local

adaptation. Alongside the partnerships, nine Government Offices for the Regions monitored and supported Connexions locally on behalf of the Department, and schools continued had an important role in implementation. In most cases, the major front-line services were delivered by ex-careers service companies, either private sector or ex-partnership companies that retained their former status' (NAO, 2004).

The transition from Connexions to school-led guidance services marked a significant change in the approach to CIAG. Connexions had a partnership-based approach with personal advisers playing a central role, whereas other changes such as taking schools out of LA control and into multi-academy trust arrangements means partnerships are now more varied. This transition produced a shift in interest alignment from a centralised model to a hyper-localised, school-focused approach. This resulted in a shift from holistic support to a more segmented approach. Specific focus on disadvantaged young people through a single comprehensive service was also lost and a shared vision became less clear and prominent. The transfer of responsibility to schools also lacked a clear overarching strategy and the shift in responsibilities was not accompanied by clear guidelines. The transition was driven more by policy changes and funding cuts than by aligning interests and developing a shared purpose for the system. The shift disrupted previous power structures and relationships, without a dominant player, leading to a less coordinated approach.

The loss of the place-based approach increased fragmentation as in person CIAG provision became hyper-localised, with quality dependent on the individual institution. Shifting only the universal service responsibility to schools and colleges, disrupted collaboration. The emphasis on partnership and inter-agency coordination remains in principle in the current delivery, but, the lack of interdependencies between various institutions and a lack of overarching strategies for capacity building and resources, means that in practice the degree of partnership and collaboration varies greatly from school to school. Schools are now monitored in the delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks via Careers and Enterprise Company, and the Key stage 4 destination measure shows the effectiveness of their careers provision. While coverage is high (90 per cent), not all schools report on the Gatsby Benchmarks, and schools' performance on the Benchmarks varies greatly, largely depending on each individual school's resources and monitoring mechanisms (CEC, 2023).

A further key change brought about the transition from Connexions to school-led services was in funding. Connexions was funded centrally by the DfE through annual funding allocations of around £200 million per year (Watts, 2012). Funding was removed in the transition to delegated responsibility for CIAG to educational institutions, with no planning for alternative funding arrangements (ibid.). This created a funding gap for schools and colleges, forcing them to use their existing budgets to buy support. As a result, career services were negatively affected, as schools redirected resources from other areas, often resulting in underqualified staff and a lack of capacity to deliver high quality CIAG (Andrews, 2021).

As for RPA, young people were not engaged in the planning and development of either Connexions nor successive reforms to the delivery of CIAG. As a result, ongoing challenges have hindered young people's engagement with CIAG services. Research with young people identified that some young people were

unclear about the role and function of Connexions (Hibbert, 2010), that the CIAG they received was ineffective or not tailored enough to their personal circumstances (NAO, 2004), and that the service was difficult to access (Hibbert, 2010). Research also suggested that students from disadvantaged backgrounds lacked awareness of the routes and process of career development (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). When delivery moved to schools, an Ofsted report (2013) found that three-quarters of schools were not providing good enough impartial careers advice, and these challenges continue today as a result of challenges in schools' resources and capacity to provide CIAG (Ofsted, 2022; Ofsted 2023).

6.2.3 Effectivness of CIAG reforms

In assessing this systems change, we ask the same two questions: did the system change as intended and did the system change achieve the planned effects? The response to both overlaps. Both Connexions and the new approach are challenged in meeting the dual mandate of universal and targeted services.

Today, the current system of career support services in the England's fragmented. Alongside school's statutory responsibility to deliver CIAG, different departments and agencies at the national level are responsible for different groups of people. The DfE is responsible for career support services for young people in education, while the DWP is responsible for career support services for adults who are unemployed or looking for a new job. LAs also play a role in providing career support services for young people over 18, working with various partners, including schools, colleges, and Jobcentre Plus (JCP), but their remit can vary from place to place. As a result, complex power structures exist within CIAG, without a dominant player. This division between departments and agencies leads to gaps in provision, meaning that some people may not be able to get the support they need at all.

With the shift to school provision / LAs responsible for NEETs, CIAG services have undergone transformation. So a change has taken place. However, that change could not achieve the intended impact. The lack of preparedness for the transition from Connexions to schools-led guidance failed to offer schools enough time and resource to prepare, and for LAs to harness the partnership models which underpinned Connexions effectively to provide targeted support. It also marked the broadening of the service for the beneficiaries rather than in-depth tailoring. The concerns raised after the introduction of school-led services related not only to whether wider support service would be provided but whether it could continue to provide universal career guidance service alongside the more targeted support. The funding model and eligibility criteria for access, main channels, and expectations for services changed a bit, but largely there remains very limited access to careers guidance. Notably additional supports have been needed to universal careers support and resources for tracking and re-engaging young people NEET have diminished over time.

6.3 Systems change in employment support

This section examines the case of the Kickstart scheme, providing an overview of how the scheme was introduced, the change journey followed, and its impact on the employment support system.

6.3.1 Background to Kickstart

The Kickstart Scheme was introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and ran from 2020 to 2023. It was a UK-wide initiative that offered funding to employers to create new six-month job placements for young people aged 16 to 24 who were on Universal Credit (UC) (DWP, 2021). Part of the government's Plan for Jobs, the scheme aimed to avert long-term unemployment among young people, particularly considering the potential negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their job prospects. Funded through an allocated governmental budget of £2 billion (HM Treasury 2020), Kickstart provided comprehensive funding for employers covering 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage (NMW) for 25 hours a week, associated employer National Insurance contributions, and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions (NAO, HC 291, 2021). An additional fund of £1,500 per job placement aimed to support employers with setup costs and training.

Accessible to employers across private, public, and voluntary sectors, initially there were three routes to Kickstart: employers could apply directly to the DWP if they created 30 or more jobs; collaborate with other employers to reach the threshold; or use a 'gateway' which acted as an intermediary organisation (NAO, HC 801, 2021). However, from January 2021, the rules changed allowing all employers to apply directly to the DWP (ibid.). Successful applicants could add additional job placements to their agreement, recruiting young people through Jobcentre Plus (JCP), with job descriptions submitted to local JCP for candidate referrals. Gateways played a dual role. They liaised with employers to maximise Kickstart placements, offering advice on managing new employees. Simultaneously, young people received six-month wraparound employment support during their placement, facilitating their transition to sustained employment post-Kickstart (ibid.). This collaborative approach aimed to ensure effective implementation and support employers and young people.

As part of Kickstart, employers were expected to offer careers advice and help young people to set goals, supporting young employees to find long-term work (NAO, HC 291, 2021). Following completion, the job placement could be filled by a second candidate. As a training subsidy addressing youth unemployment, Kickstart was short-lived. It was intended to conclude on 17 December 2021 but an extension until March 2022 was announced in October 2021. This aimed to accommodate the ongoing demand, with the last referrals occurring in March 2022 (HM Treasury, 2021). Kickstart, largely modelled on the positively evaluated Future Jobs Fund (FJF) (2009-11), underwent rapid development without a formal business case.

The scheme aimed to enhance young people's skills, yet evidence on whether experiences and outcomes differed for different groups of young people remains limited, though evaluation has being undertaken (DWP, 2023). Notably, the National Audit Office (NAO) reports the absence of widening participation targets for Kickstart, highlighting its non-specific approach to addressing the challenges faced by specific groups on Universal Credit (NAO, HC 801, 2021). The evidence so far indicates that Kickstart did not reach particularly disadvantaged young people, and even where it did, these groups had much lower satisfaction levels than other Kickstart participants.

6.3.2 Implementation of Kickstart

Kickstart was implemented on a very short timeframe with close-to-no preparation time, which had implications in terms of communication and interest alignment of all actors. Jobcentre staff generally acknowledged that the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic created a need for swift action. As a result, the 'agile' rollout led to complexities in the application process and extended processing times. The removal of gateway rules enabling direct application for small businesses increased the backlog. Limited communication also had implications for quality assurance; as DWP speeded up the process, there was increased risks of jobs being approved without significant oversight of their quality and the support offered to participants.

Kickstart also faced early challenges stemming from a lack of clarity and a shared understanding of its key concepts (DWP, 2021). The NAO reported that the DWP launched Kickstart as a 'minimum viable product' and iteratively refined service components (NAO, HC 801, 2021). However, ambiguities in the concept of job 'additionality' resulted in varying interpretations, leading to varying quality of job placements. This lack of a shared understanding created confusion and hindered implementation (DWP, 2023). The speedy rollout also led to challenges in providing proper training for Jobcentre staff (DWP, 2022). Alongside this, a perceived lack of clear guidance from central teams about how the regional and local Jobcentre staff should implement and run Kickstart and 'lack of processes' in the initial phase were identified as issues across many case study areas (HC 655, 2022). Work coaches were increasingly expected to support young people into permanent work , but this was marred by the 'lack of structural monitoring of how work coaches were helping people towards work' (HC 655, 2022).

A further element of the accelerated roll-out was the lack of stakeholder engagement, particularly of/between employers, Jobcentres, LAs, and gateway organisations. The lack of evidence on reshaping employers' contacts with employment services, such as recruitment for alternative vacancies, suggests a disconnect in the shared vision for the scheme's overarching goals Partially because of challenges from the lack of stakeholder engagement, and shared planning and design for the intervention, despite 429,000 referrals to Kickstart jobs over 2020-22, only 163,000 Kickstart jobs were started during 2020-22 (DWP, 2023). The DWP provided no specific guidance on what employers should offer with the allocated funding and did not routinely collect data on the support provided. The system for monitoring was also reported to be underdeveloped (McCullough, 2022).

Monitoring gaps extended to assessing the additionality of jobs, with the DWP acknowledging a lack of routine checks on employers' commitment fulfilment (NAO, HC 801, 2021). A report by the NAO raised concerns about the adequacy and efficacy of DWP oversight of Kickstart, with the DWP exhibiting 'limited assurance' (NAO, HC 801, 2021, p.13) on the intended functioning of Kickstart. The report highlighted minimal government monitoring of funded jobs' quality, accessibility to the target group, and the potential existence of these jobs without the scheme. The NAO report (HC 801, 2021) underscored the DWP's limited oversight of funding distributed through third-party organisations, including gateways responsible for 70% of Kickstart job placements until November 2021. It

should be noted that DWP is partway through an independent evaluation which will provide more concrete insights.

6.3.3 Effectiveness of Kickstart

When thinking about the effectiveness of Kickstart, as for the previous case studies, it is important to consider whether the intervention took place as intended, and whether it achieved its desired effects in terms of transforming the system. In answer to the first question, the Kickstart scheme promptly addressed the risk of a mass youth unemployment crisis, positioning itself as a short-term solution in times of crisis rather than a long-term change.

Given this scheme was designed to help young people without significant training and work experience, the provision of a paid work placement with the offer of support and training met the intervention's original aim. For young people, the scheme offered benefits through exposure to paid work experience, providing a formal and supported entry point into the labour market for junior-level applicants. For employers, the scheme enabled them to spend money for placements 'with no method of recovery if the job did not last', minimising traditional risks faced by employers in relation to recruitment and retention of young people (Simmons, 2020). The scheme also created opportunities in the challenging context of the pandemic that would have not existed otherwise (McCullough, 2022). Many employers, previously uninvolved with JCP or DWP schemes, found Kickstart to be a gateway for hiring and adapted to meet expectations (Philips, 2022). Alongside most young people on Kickstart were reported to have progressed into employment, education, or training (EET). Although many felt they would have achieved an EET outcome in the absence of Kickstart as well, there are indications in the evidence that Kickstart provided young people with skills that propelled them into positive directions for future roles (Philips, 2022).

In terms of its effectiveness as an intervention, however, it is clear that Kickstart fell short on its stated objectives. The rollout may have been too slow to be a genuine demand-side response, especially given the challenges posed by lockdowns. On the supply side, it was likely more successful at providing real work experience than targeting disadvantaged groups or supporting transitions to sustained employment. The post-pandemic reopening of the economy further complicated the scheme's impact assessment, as private sector firms receiving subsidies were expected to have facilitated job placements. Concerns persist regarding job stability and retention, with the risk of employers exploiting government-subsidised jobs as a temporary work solution potentially undermining the positive impact for and engagement of young people (Peace, 2021). An evaluation conducted by the DWP (report no. 1032, 2023) identified factors correlating with satisfaction and outcomes of the Kickstart scheme, including age, prior work experience, and education level. The report found that individuals aged 18 to 21, those with lower or no qualifications, and those lacking prior work experience were more likely to be NEET post-placement.

Positioned as subsidised on-the-job training, Kickstart aimed to incentivise employers to hire at-risk young individuals. However, the evidence suggests it did not generate the planned number of work placements. The subsidised and short-term nature of Kickstart made it more favourable for employers than young employees. While access to skill development and sustained employment

opportunities attracted young individuals, the failure of employers to translate these opportunities into training and job retention compromised the scheme's long-term impact. Recognising that job creation schemes must adopt a more focused approach in targeting the most disadvantaged and least likely to secure employment is crucial. Without such focus, there are substantial risks of high deadweight costs, potentially diverting employable young individuals from promising career paths into temporary, low-wage, and subsidised employment. The scheme's design, funding any jobs with minimal oversight on additional support and little active effort to place disadvantaged young people, contributes to this risk.

It is also important to note that, similarly to RPA and CIAG, young people were not engaged at any stage of Kickstart's development and implementation. This lack of service user engagement may have affected its success. The process evaluation found that individuals with health conditions had unfavourable experiences, with lack of support being a prominent issue, and identified disparities across ethnic groups (DWP, 2023). Alongside this, expectations that young people should proactively contact placements discouraged participation (Ilic, 2022). DWP evaluation reports also identified young people faced challenges with drafting applications, interview anxiety, confusion about role details, discrepancies between adverts and roles, and limited feedback from unsuccessful interviews (DWP, 2023). Moreover, the evaluation highlighted that the diverse needs of participants (including learning difficulties, caring responsibilities, and language barriers) were only partially met. Had there been greater service user engagement during the development phase, these needs could have been better anticipated and addressed, leading to a more inclusive and effective intervention.

6.4 Effectiveness of systems change in the youth employment landscape

The selected cases illustrate different attempts at systems change in the England and UK context. While the studies from Strand 1 used 'systems change' language, and interventions discussed were framed to greater or lesser extents as such, the policies and interventions in Strand 2 were not designed as systems change interventions. Nonetheless, RPA, CIAG, and Kickstart were interventions which aimed to change how the youth employment and skills system worked and impact the outcomes of those who came in contact with the system for the long-term. However, the evidence highlights that given the challenges each of the interventions encountered, while the system was affected, effective or positive systems change did not occur. In particular, the major stumbling blocks which in most cases led to change in processes but no effective systems change were:

- **Failure to build on existing systems**. This was particularly the case for the CIAG reforms and for Kickstart. In the case of the CIAG reforms, the end of Connexions partnerships removed a wide network of relationships that had supported youth at risk of being NEET. Whilst some staff who had worked in Connexions partnerships became service providers to schools there was no institutional continuity between the two systems. A lot of learned expertise was lost when former Connexions partners moved out of careers guidance. Similarly for Kickstart, previous youth wage subsidy schemes, such as Youth Contract, had been locally administered. In contrast Kickstart was run centrally by DWP. This gave a large work burden in a new area of work to a central agency, rather than drawing on the established expertise and systems at local level.

- **Multiple goals with a single instrument**. RPA aimed to achieve the ambitious dual objective of enhancing young people's competitiveness in the labour market and increasing participation, but this presented a significant challenge. Connexions had the dual goals of both a universal and a targeted service. But the accountability framework was focused on the latter reaching NEETS, and so the former was relatively neglected. The situation has been reversed, with schools providing a universal service but inadequate provision for those most in need. This highlights that top-down policies with overlapping goals and one-size-fits-all approaches are not suitable to address the multi-faceted issue of supporting the most disadvantaged young people into positive destinations at the local level, which requires a more targeted approach.
- **Lack of preparedness.** Systems change requires planning, piloting and partnership. In RPA, the trials helped build a stronger foundation for delivery, identifying local challenges, devising solutions, trying different governance models, and documenting the implementation process. However, challenges still arose around the lack of guidance, building infrastructure as delivery commenced, lack of clarity around governance, and challenges in coordination and partnership work. When the transition from Connexions to school-based CIAG took place, schools had never before been commissioners of career guidance and were not prepared for the role. The consequence of this lack of preparedness was a lack of delivery of services through the new system. In the first year only one in five schools were providing guidance to Years 9-11, and even two years later a third of schools were still not doing so. The main challenge encountered by Kickstart was lack of preparedness due to the lack of a lead-in period before implementation, with staff at multiple levels not sufficiently prepared for the workload causing long lags in processing, and employers uncertain about the workings of the scheme.
- **Lack of monitoring and evaluation.** The impact of systems change is not instant, and it is necessary to keep monitoring the change and its effects since it is a continuous process. Independent impact evaluations at regular intervals are important. The lack of evidence to document the progress and effect of RPA highlights the need for policies and initiatives to be continually assessed to understand what works and why and the importance of thorough evaluation to evidence systems change. When it comes to CIAG, while coverage is high, not all schools report on the Gatsby Benchmarks, and schools' performance on the Benchmarks varies greatly, largely depending on each individual school's resources and monitoring mechanisms. A key weakness of Kickstart was its weak monitoring system, which makes it challenging to assess the additionality of jobs and their quality, and accessibility to and impact on the target group.
- **Lack of young people's perspective.** RPA, the CIAG reforms, and Kickstart were introduced as policies and interventions for young people, but young people were not involved at any point during the development of these measures. Evidence for each of the measures highlights that the lack of meaningful engagement with young people as part of the design and implementation of these interventions likely had an impact on uptake of the interventiosn and success of the policies.

7 Lessons for systems change

This section summarises lessons that may be learned about effective systems change from the evidence in this review. In doing so we draw on the systems change literature as well as the youth employment systems change examples.

The youth employment systems change case studies demonstrate that in England and the UK the impetus for change often comes top down from central government. These national changes require adaptations in systems at the local level. The national system provides the parameters to which local systems must adhere. Differing local contexts, and differing roles and responsibilities, lead to differences in the locally developed approaches to the required changes. Locally developed systems represent local attempts to implement the planned changes which is achieved by building alliances and developing incentives to make this happen.

7.1 Planning, piloting and preparedness as the foundations for effective systems change

Planning is the cornerstone of systems change, according to its dedicated literature. Good planning is best informed by piloting, and the planning informs changes to enhance preparedness for the systems changes. However, plans have limited impact if no one knows about them and so central to the success of planning is communication. Effective communication mobilises relevant actors to engage with each other to prepare for changes. Piloting can support planning and preparedness adapted to the local context.

- **The importance of communication.** Communication clarifies roles and responsibilities to build a shared understanding among stakeholders. Dialogue with local actors allows the incorporation of diverse perspectives to work out how to plan and prepare for the planned changes in the local context. Stakeholder engagement, through dialogue and participation in planning, helps instil a sense of ownership and shared purpose, helping build trust and social capital for the systems change.
- **Aligning interests.** Interest alignment means that actors at the local level have the incentives to make the necessary changes to bring about the planned system change. Communication can support interest alignment but is rarely sufficient on its own. Another contributing factor is experienced and credible leadership which sets the ground for interest alignment by fostering a culture of collaboration and shared thinking. Consistent messaging, framed as shared issues, can bind stakeholders together, and so help them overcome engrained attitudes and values. It can build a shared language around the systems change which supports shared purpose to emerge.
- **Understanding the system and its boundaries.** To be successful, systems change interventions need a good understanding of the existing system. This ideally involves identification of: existing linkages within the system and beyond it, possible effects of change, affected people, possible actors, and other stakeholders but this can lead to a vast system with an unmanageable network

of actors. The planning process can usefully include a system mapping exercise showing possible linkages which can help define boundaries to make change manageable in terms of implementation as well as in monitoring and evaluation. Piloting can help tackle the challenge of broad and ill-defined system boundaries by helping develop more specific delivery proposals. The youth employment system change examples show there can be more and less opportunity for partnership work to support systems change at a local level with national policy changes. For example, RPA afforded this opportunity – since LAs were the coordinating body and at that time had responsibility for schools, meaning there was possibility to define boundaries and build network membership around this existing system. In CIAG, in the transition from Connexions to school-led services, parallel changes over time to remove schools from Local Education Authority management weakened connectedness in the system, which, alongside funding constraints, led to fragmentation. Kickstart in contrast saw rapid implementation with limited scope for local involvement which meant it needed iterative development for recruitment and support mechanisms to become effective.

- **Having a clear objective and avoiding conflicting objectives.** A system change intervention should have a clear purpose. If there are multiple objectives, they should be prioritised to avoid any conflict of objectives as having multiple or conflicting objectives within a single system change can create problems. This is demonstrated by the RPA and CIAG case studies both of which had dual goals of increasing skills and competitiveness and of including the most disadvantaged young people. These are not complementary goals which meant the young people most in need were not well served by the changes. The CIAG system sought to address challenges of the Connexions service by separating roles and responsibilities between schools (universal careers support) and LAs (targeted support) but this fragmented the system, which was exacerbated by other reforms, notably schools moving out of LA management.
- **Building on existing systems.** Systems change is more likely to be successful and easier to implement if it builds on existing systems rather than creating new, parallel structures which may duplicate existing services and so create confusion and tension, competition for funding, and a lack of clarity for service users. Building on existing systems also supports the change being coordinated with the broader system within which agencies operate increasing likelihood of the sustainability of the change. In Kickstart, previous youth wage subsidy schemes, such as Youth Contract, had been locally administered. In contrast Kickstart was run centrally by DWP. This gave a large work burden in a new area of work to a central agency, rather than drawing on the established expertise and systems at local level.
- **The role of piloting.** Piloting helps to work out the practicalities of implementing the system change at local level, and so informs preparedness. Piloting embodies the principle of adaptation, that is, trying things out to find approaches which are implementable in a specific context. The case studies contain contrasting examples: RPA was undertaken with extensive piloting and Kickstart which was implemented in a short timeframe without any piloting. In the case studies, only RPA provided funding and time for piloting to develop the localised systems ahead of full national implementation. Four phases of

pilot, involving increasing numbers of LAs, tested what would be needed to support RPA at local level. This meant the pilots could build shared understanding across stakeholders, although challenges arose from the changed national leadership and associated changes to how the policy was implemented. In contrast, Kickstart was developed at speed to respond to the feared youth unemployment crisis. It attempted to gear up through Jobcentre Plus and created new bodies (the gateways) at a local level to coordinate employer demand. In practice, this was not a workable solution for implementation. While implementation adapted to better support delivery, the lack of piloting and consultation with employers about how they could be engaged hampered overall success.

- **The importance of place.** Place is a central factor in system change interventions. Recognising the influence of local contexts on systemic interactions allows incorporation of unique challenges, assets, and circumstances of each community. Engaging local stakeholders as active co-creators of change can support community ownership. Leadership at the regional and local levels plays an important role in leveraging local assets, aligning resources, and fostering collaborative networks. When implementing systems change interventions, tailored strategies grounded in the specific contexts where the intervention is taking place can enhance intervention success and support the intervention to better navigate system dynamics. The youth employment systems change case studies illustrate how top down, national policy changes require shaping at a local level, and where there is a permissive timeframe, or funding model, place-based system solutions can be developed. However, the boundaries and responsibilities within the system related to the policy change also affect the degree of localised influence on implementation.

7.2 Successful implementation: rules, relationship and partnerships

Successful implementation is supported by four factors. First, is getting the right balance between adoption of top-down rules and regulations and bottom-up localised approaches. Second, is building on existing systems. Third is relationship and partnership building. Fourth, credible leadership of a collaborative approach. The systems change literature promotes its best examples of this, while the youth employment systems change examples illustrate how leadership adapts depending on policy intent.

- **Balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches.** Bottom-up local adaptation to the proposed system change is usually necessary for successful implementation. However, this is best done when a central (top-down) framework provides overarching guidance. The absence of clear parameters for system change can result in confusion and inefficiency. In contrast, overly detailed plans and central micromanagement do not provide the adaptive environment that effective systems change needs. Instead, the aim should be for top-down guidance that sets out broad parameters and objectives. This approach allows for flexibility and adaptability to local contexts. An important element is trusting local areas and stakeholders to develop and implement solutions according to their specific circumstances and needs. The three youth employment case studies provide some key lessons: the piloting approach for

RPA got local systems working together in the interest of the policy goal and enabled the systems change. Local areas had to decide what was needed locally and to implement these local plans. In contrast, the design of the CIAG systems change and Kickstart was determined nationally with little room for place-based tailoring. In CIAG the level of local determination moved to the hyper local with responsibility for implementation falling on schools but initially without clear central guidance this approach did not support successful systems change. There is now statutory guidance for schools from government on careers guidance as well as the framework provided by the Gatsby Benchmarks which serve to define the parameters for school career guidance services.

- **Prioritising relationship building and partnerships.** Successful systems change involves stakeholders recognising their roles as integral parts of a larger whole, and so building the necessary relationships and partnerships for working together to achieve the intended outcomes. However, a focus is needed not only on the specific planned outcomes, but also on the system's evolution. Unlike discrete interventions, collaborations aim to foster shifts in ways of working that endure beyond the nominal 'end' of an intervention. Successful partnerships instil a collective identity, while granting agency and flexibility for tailored solutions. The youth employment case studies span across different degrees of opportunity to embed this form of collaboration. Furthermore, ongoing changes to the partnership infrastructure, such as reforms and changes including dissolution of 14-19 partnerships, Learning and Skills Councils, and creating new bodies such as Local Enterprise Councils (themselves now due to close), all change the landscape of the local system. This constant flux also stresses a need for ongoing scoping to identify which relationships are needed.
- **Defining and engaging with the target group**. Clear definition of the target group and alignment between the group and policy objectives support success. Incorporating the voice of the target group may help to achieve this, as stressed in the systems change literature. This aligns the intervention with the experiences, needs, and expectations of the target population. Service users, when recognised as partners and change agents, can support the development of a sense of shared ownership within the target population. Without sufficient focus on how the intended target group will be reached system change can end up supporting individuals who are easier to help or lose sight of key priorities, achieving little significant impact overall. Full user engagement is not realised in the youth employment systems change examples covered by this report – a key stakeholder group, young people were not meaningfully involved in influencing RPA, CIAG and Kickstart, with negative impacts on engagement seen in each.
- **Engaging local partners.** Engagement of local partners helps adaptation to local context, working out the practicalities of implementation. The youth employment system change examples show there can be more and less opportunity for partnership work to support systems change at a local level with national policy changes. For example, RPA afforded this opportunity – since LAs were the coordinating body and at that time had responsibility for schools, meaning there was possibility to define boundaries and build network

membership around this existing system. In CIAG, in the transition from Connexions to school-led services and parallel changes over time to remove from Local Education Authority management weakened connectedness to the system, which, alongside funding constraints, led to fragmentation. Kickstart in contrast saw rapid implementation with limited scope for local involvement.

- **Leading through collaborative and adaptive leadership.** Successful systems change interventions are best supported by strong, adaptive, and collaborative leadership that fosters a shared vision, aligns stakeholders, and addresses challenges to ensure sustained progress and momentum for change. It should be clear who is responsible for leading the system change process. Leaders need to ensure that key actors at all levels of the system understand there roles and responsibilities, have aligned interests with the change and share a common vision for the change. This involves fostering collaboration, flexibility, and trust, working beyond individual priorities, and allowing practitioners the freedom to innovate and adapt within the boundaries of the system. It also requires the ability to mobilize stakeholders, garner broad support for change, and ensure that the necessary resources are available. RPA provides the example where leadership was most important. LA credibility to engage stakeholders in the local context and to build the alliances to work together were key elements of success. However, measures of success such as the participation rate or NEET rate have limited value in identifying this as local contextual factors are as influential on these as much as the leadership approach.

7.3 Maintaining engagement and buy-in: incentives and funding

Systems change is a long-term process. Maintaining stakeholders' engagement is important for sustaining successful implementation of the change. This is supported through ongoing alignment of interests and mandates, fostered through the use of incentives, and ensuring adequate resources are available to support the change.

- **Aligning interests and mandates.** Since people and organisations are primarily motivated by their own mandates and accountability, establishing clear benchmarks to hold them to account for the systems change is an important first step. Each requires incentives to motivate behaviour change, especially where the proposed change expands their mandate. To make systems change stick, individuals and institutions need to see direct benefits. Incentives should provide value to stakeholders which means they support behaviour change for sustainable transformation. An example is the introduction of the Key Stage 4 destination measure supporting RPA which provides a shared accountability in the form of a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) between schools, post-16 destinations and LAs. The use of Gatsby Benchmarks to measure the quality of CIAG in the schools-led system is a further example. Both were introduced as the policies were not achieving their planned impact but show how incentives matched to mandates support better system change.
- **Developing effective incentives.** Effective incentives, such as clear communications on objectives, roles and responsibilities, adequate funding and aligned KPIs can all help motivate stakeholders. A clear and realistic plan can show stakeholders that they can achieve their existing goals more efficiently through systems approaches, and that the sum of their collective efforts is

greater than their individual contributions. This encourages stakeholders to see themselves as playing an important part in a larger system and understand the benefits of operating in a more joined-up way. Stakeholders should have a good understanding of the mandates of their partners to understand who is meant to do what. By aligning accountability structures, for example, stakeholders can operate in a coordinated and coherent manner. New requirements should not be imposed on the system without providing additional, sustainable resources, as this may lead to short-term outcomes but not achieve lasting change. Identifying the costs and benefits of the new way of working is a useful step. It is equally important to maintain a realistic perspective and avoid overestimating potential benefits, to have a realistic assessment of the incentives for different stakeholders.

- **The role of funding.** The range of organisations in a system means that funding systems change interventions often involves a combination of sources, ranging from governmental funds to charitable grants. Standalone funding streams are typically not sustainable and so may not support long-run systems change. For systems change to be sustainable it is necessary to establish a funding model that is not dependent on transient resources. Shared and flexible funding mechanisms, such as pooled and braided budgets and value-based payment models, are common in long-term, large-scale interventions. Secure funding is also linked with power dynamics, governance structures, and relationships with decision-making processes. Building strong relationships with funders not only facilitates repeat funding but also enables support for additional or non-core activities. Interventions which leverage their 'systems-building' identity can strengthen legitimacy with funders, leading to a virtuous cycle of increased external legitimacy and ongoing support. However, systems change interventions remain vulnerable to shifts in funding, changes in commissioning processes, and resource limitations. The need for longer time horizons coupled with funding instability can lead to the removal of essential components from interventions, undermining effectiveness. In the youth employment system change examples, the top down approaches determined funding allocations and which bodies would receive funding, which provides impetus to act on the one hand but may lead to the dismantling of effective aspects of a system. This might be a case in point for Connexions which was judged to be effective at partnership building and in leading targeted support. Shifting the funding to a schools-led system improved universal guidance provision but at the expense of targeted support as this duty passed to LAs with limited funding under austerity.

7.4 Sustaining transformation: governance, learning, and evaluation

- **Systems change takes time.** Building sustainable systems change interventions requires a strategic, long-term approach that recognises the time requirements of the process. Time is required not only to understand and implement system changes. The systems change literature recommends an adjustment period, providing stakeholders with the time to understand and feel confident in their new roles. It recommends consideration be given to preparedness – that is financial readiness, technical capacity and skillset - to execute the intended changes. Equally important is ensuring that institutional and governance infrastructure and incentives are aligned with the system change and reflected in accountability mechanisms. Clearly designating roles and responsibilities at

the start of the systems change process is important. Establishing accountability ensures that key components, including decision-making processes and timelines for funding and resource allocation, are attended to. In addition, unintended consequences may arise, necessitating changes in planned approaches. The contrasting cases of RPA, in which piloting gave time for preparation, and Kickstart in which there was little lead time, illustrate how allowing adequate time for the systems change affects implementation.

- **Viewing systems change as a trajectory.** Systems change is an ongoing process that is not a series of linear, pre-defined steps but rather an iterative, and adaptive process. Continuous learning, refinement, and a commitment to adapting strategies based on the evolving understanding of the system all support successful, sustained systems change. The systems changes in youth employment seek to respond to new emerging issues with new solutions for example, the Key Stage 4 destination measure (RPA) and the Gatsby Benchmarks (CIAG).
- **Developing clear accountability.** Clearly designating roles and responsibilities at the start of the systems change process is the basis for accountability on who is meant to do what, and who is responsible for making sure that they do. These are high ideals, and it is unlikely to be possible to apply them in the youth employment system which has high level national determination, affected by different leadership priorities. The case studies track how these changes lead to different emphases over time, and different demands at a local level. Local systems, where adaptive due to shared incentives, can adjust nonetheless depending on the opportunity to do this embedded in the system change policy.
- **Continuous learning, improvement and adaptation.** Achieving meaningful change takes time, often longer than initially expected, and requires a culture of continuous learning through iterative implementation experiences. This involves actively listening to feedback, understanding the changing contexts for the system, and being open to adapting strategies and tactics accordingly. Systems are constantly changing, and this change is best informed by ongoing learning. The youth employment case study system changes all respond to new local needs, as well as respond to new national-level thinking. Local systems are most likely to be able to be responsive where interests and incentives are aligned. The evidence on the youth employment systems changes shows how roles and responsibilities, and funding, change over time and how that affects what the system achieves and who it supports. Despite local efforts, systems change may not be sustainable if derailed by national policy shifts.
- **Considering unintended outcomes** Systems change may lead to unintended outcomes. Change in one part of the system may produce unexpected change in another part. These unintended outcomes can hinder the success of interventions and may undermine them. Regular monitoring is required which can capture such unintended outcomes and so inform adaptation. Developing a theory of change, leveraging evaluation for continuous testing and modification, and involving stakeholders in the evaluation development process are elements recommended by the systems change literature.

- **The role of monitoring and evaluation (M&E).** An adaptive approach should be informed by information on how the system change is progressing. Monitoring can provide quantitative and qualitative indicators of what has been achieved. Evaluation can dig deeper into implementation and assess the impact of the system change. The starting point for monitoring and evaluation design is developing a theory of change. Using a combination of approaches, such as advanced evaluation frameworks, participatory methods, and longitudinal evaluation, can help assess and track the impact of interventions on the system. Standardising data collection and centralising data sources are important for effective monitoring, decision-making, and maintaining the credibility of the findings regarding interventions. Arguably all the youth employment systems changes are monitored, but it is less clear they are subject to regular evaluation to update practice. Kickstart is undergoing an evaluation, as a short-term system change, but it is not clear it will be retained as a policy option in an adapted form ready for the next youth employment crisis. Neither the CIAG school-led system or RPA has been fully evaluated. Both are subject to monitoring review but the extent of local context and socio-economic variation by place is not captured. Measures of success such as the participation rate or NEET rate have limited value in identifying this as local contextual factors are as influential on these as the leadership approach hence the need for rigorous impact evaluation to disentangle these factors.

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Appendix 1: Systems change checklist

This checklist is not a set of instructions. And it is not a list of problems which necessarily arise in designing and implementing systems change. It is a list of points to be discussed by stakeholders in designing and implementing the systems change. The questions apply to systems change taking place at national, regional or local level, as well as thinking about local implementation of a higher level systems change.

Who is this checklist for?

The checklist is for all stakeholders involved in a systems change. It can be used by managers to plan consultations for the design and implementation of the systems change. It can be used by local actors in thinking through how they will adapt to the systems change. And it can be used by other stakeholders in thinking about their tole and contribution to the systems change.

How to use this checklist

The checklist is a guide to planning and action. It is not a questionnaire. Not all items will be relevant. And there is some repetition to give stakeholders a chance to consider and reconsider issues at different stages of the process.

Managers should regularly consult the checklist to ensure that actions are being taken with respect to relevant items. Locals stakeholders can use the checklist to inform the agenda of meetings to discuss the local adaptation and implementation of the systems change. Stakeholders not directly involved in official discussions can refer to the checklist as the basis for request to be included in consultations and planning.

Discussion of checklist items

Planning and preparation

1.1 Are the objectives of the planned system change clearly stated and realistic?

- Why is this system change being introduced? What is it intended to achieve?
- For the system change to have the desired effects then there should be a clearly defined and commonly agreed and understood goal or objective, or set of goals or objectives.
- Discuss the objectives with stakeholders. What will success look like?
- Listen to concerns stakeholders may have about how the systems change may not achieve these objectives, and so what modifications may need to be made.

1.2 Is there any possible conflict or trade-off between the objectives?

- There is a rule that a single policy instrument can only achieve a single policy goal. Many systems changes for youth employment have multiple objectives.
- Most commonly systems changes for youth employment seek to both strengthen the skills base and to include disadvantaged youth. The first objective may create pressure to work with the less disadvantaged. If there is believed to be a conflict between objectives, then separate activities may be needed to meet both of them. Special attention may need to be paid to the means by which disadvantaged youth are included. This includes have clear eligible criteria, a targeting mechanism, and recruitment strategy.
- Discuss the objectives, and how the systems change can realistically be expected to achieve each objective. Consider what supplementary measures may be necessary to ensure all objectives are met.

1.3 Has a system and stakeholder mapping been undertaken?

- Including stakeholders in planning and implementing the systems change is associated with successful systems change. The first step is to identify all relevant stakeholders. The process of identifying stakeholders can itself involve stakeholders.
- Is system and stakeholder mapping included in the planning for the systems change? Who is responsible for doing it?
- Have all relevant stakeholders been identified? This may include youth workers, training providers , trade unions, employers and local authorities, as well as young people. For each stakeholder group identify specific points of contact.

1.4 Does the planned change utilise existing structures and systems where feasible?

- Existing structures and systems will be based on experienced staff with relevant networks, including agencies with experience of working with young people. There is a cost to changing systems. Stakeholders have to be aware of and understand new roles.
- Using existing structures and systems can ease the transition in a systems change, including reducing possible opposition from those who may be replaced if wholly new structures are introduced.
- Consider the extent to which existing structures and systems are fit for purpose to accommodate the proposed systems change, and in what ways they would need to modify structures or ways of working for the desired change to take place.

1.5 Have stakeholders been consulted during the planning process? Stakeholders include those responsible for implementing the systems change and those who will be affected by it.

- Consider how you will engage stakeholders, and the means of incorporating their views into the design and implementation of the proposed systems change.
- What is the best means of engaging young people directly? Discuss how you can best capture a range of youth voices. Are there existing youth fora which may be used?

1.6 Has space been allowed in the planning process to incorporate the interests and concerns of stakeholders, especially those of young people?

- Substantive engagement of stakeholders, especially youth, from the start is likely to help relevance, feasibility and acceptability of the systems change. Consultation is a process not a one-off event.
- Consider when stakeholders might best be involved and how much time is required for adequate consultation.

1.7 Is there a written plan of the intended design of the new system? Is it clear in the plan who does what and when? Is there room for testing this plan?

- A system change can mean a change in roles and responsibilities. Do people understand what they are meant to do and when? And do those they work with also know this?
- Consider means of rehearsing new roles – including piloting – to identify and iron out practical problems which may arise with the new system.
- 'The plan' for a systems change should not be seen as fixed approach. It is guide to aid thinking through implementing the systems change which can be amended based on experience.

1.8 Is there a national or regional-level guidance on design and implementation? Is the guidance sufficiently flexible to allow local adaptation. Have stakeholders been consulted on it?

- National-level changes which require implementation at the local level should be added by clear central guidance.
- There is a balance to be struck between ensuring that the guidance is clear, but not overly prescriptive.
- Guidance is best developed based on evidence from piloting, and in consultation with local stakeholders.

1.9 Does the plan include a communication plan for the various ways in which stakeholders will be informed about the new system and their roles and responsibilities? Roles refers to who is meant to do what, and responsibilities is who is meant to make sure it is done.

- Actors in the system need to clearly understand what they are meant to do. And others who engage with the system need to understand who does what so that services are utilized. It is useful to have an explicit communication plan for informing people of their roles through meetings, guidance and other documentation, and an online or in-person help facility.
- Consider who needs to be informed of what and when, and test out planned methods of communication.

1.10 Does the plan contain activities related to the attainment of each objective? Are there clear roles and responsibilities for each objective?

- It should be clear how the operation of the system will achieve its intended goals and objectives. And it should also please clear who is responsible for carrying out the different roles

1.11 Does the plan contain details about what will be done regarding the institutionalisation of incentives for individuals and organisations to carry out their roles and responsibilities?

- For individuals and organizations to carry out their planned roles and responsibilities to support the systems change they should face appropriate incentives, including various means of support. These cannot be provided on an ad hoc basis. For individuals and organizations to have confidence that the incentives and support will continue they should be institutionalized.
- This institutionalisation is probably best determined and led by the concerned agencies themselves. If not, it is best that they are closely involved in their design.

1.12 Does the plan include a set of key performance indicators for monitoring purposes? Is it clear who is responsible for the delivery of each KPI?

- Having determined what success looks like, are there monitoring indicators – which may be both quantitative and qualitative – which measure progress in carrying out the systems change.
- Is there a well-defined, and commonly agreed, set of key performance indicators? It is clear who is responsible for the delivery of each one? Does each KPI have an 'owner' who will ensure that these data are collected?

1.13 Is there a feedback loop from the monitoring system to management?

- Monitoring data are collected so that managers and others can keep track of progress of the systems change. For managers and others to respond to the monitoring data it needs to be available to them on a regular and timely basis. Who is responsible for this? Managers should utilize this feedback loop to discuss progress with stakeholders, and what adaptations may be necessary when progress with the systems change in not as expected.

1.14 Is there an accountability mechanism related to performance against the KPIs? Is accountability both downwards and upwards?

- Who are those responsible for the systems change accountable to?

- How does this accountability function operate and with what frequency?
- Are there channels for accountability 'downward' to local stakeholders as well as 'upwards' to national agencies and funders?

Piloting and preparedness

2.1 Is there a pilot of the systems change? Is the pilot of sufficient scale and duration to identify issues which may arise and work out local solutions?

- Piloting is generally not about if the systems change will work, but how to make it work.
- Systems change can be complex and needs to be adapted to local context. It is likely not possible to fully anticipate and plan for all eventualities. Piloting allows local stakeholders the opportunity to work out amongst themselves what needs to be done and how to do it. This process will take time. Time to discuss and plan, and to then develop and try out planned approaches.
- The form of adaptation may vary between contexts. And different places may come up with different solutions.
- Consider the necessary time and scale for the pilot.

2.2 Are all relevant local stakeholders engaged in the pilots?

- Piloting necessarily involves local stakeholders: those who will implement the system change and those who will use the services being delivered. These stakeholders should be involved in piloting from the start – discussing the purpose of the systems change and how to pilot it at the local level.
- Consider which stakeholders need to be engaged in the pilot and how the will be engaged.

2.3 Does the pilot allow for adaptations in the design of the system change to local context?

- The system change should not be over-specified. It needs to be adapted to the local context. Different agencies or actors may be involved in different roles in different areas (usually different local authorities in the UK context). Specification of the system change needs to allow for this adaptation.
- Consider how the framework for the pilot will allow local adaptation within the parameters of the intended systems change. Are there any obligatory elements to the systems change?

2.4 Are mechanisms in place to learn from the pilots, and so to make adaptations at national and local level as needed?

- Piloting is usually done in a few places, to learn lessons to inform the design and implementation of the system change at scale. Conducting a pilot will help the preparedness of stakeholders when the system change is taken to scale.
- Scaling up of the systems change may be done in a phased manner, so that testing and learning can continue.
- The lessons from the pilot should be captured to feed into the scale up of the systems change. There should be an explicit process in place to capture these lessons and incorporate them into the scale up.
- Consider how lessons will be captured, who is responsible for doing so, and the means by which these lessons will be incorporated into the scaling up of the systems change.

2.5 Does the guidance contain a 'Preparedness Checklist' to help preparations at local level for the systems change?

- Implementing systems change is helped by adequate preparation for the change before it takes place – that is 'preparedness'. Central guidance to support the systems chance can usefully include a preparedness checklist to be discussed by local stakeholders.
- Consider how the main issues for preparedness can be incorporated into a checklist. The checklist should be developed in consultation with stakeholders.

2.6 Are the expected roles and responsibilities within the existing mandates of the individuals and organisations involved? If not, what is being done to formally extend their mandate and to support this expanded mandate?

- Organizations, and individuals in those organizations, carry out tasks that are within their mandate. If the systems change requires actions outside their mandate they are unlikely to sustain those actions. Mandates can be changed. But new roles and responsibilities will likely need to be supported with additional resources and possibly staff or training of existing staff.
- Consider if the current mandates of the relevant agencies cover their planned roles and responsibilities. If there is ambiguity discuss with the agency staff. Consider how the mandate may need to be altered.

2.7 Do the existing roles of the individuals and organisations involved in implementing the systems change align with their new roles and responsibilities? Do they have the capacity to undertake any necessary new tasks?

- Systems change will likely involve new tasks for individuals and organisations. Consider the extent to which these tasks are consistent with their existing roles and responsibilities. If the tasks differ substantively from their existing tasks, do they have the capacity, in terms of both skills and time? What support might they need?

Implementation

3.1 Is the time line for the stages of the systems change realistic? Has sufficient time been allowed?

- Systems change takes time and will likely involve a series of stages of communication, preparation and implementation.
- Consider the time required for all stakeholders to be aware of their new roles and responsibilities and to take time to prepare for and to adjust their ways of working, build the national.

3.2 Are all stakeholders aware of their roles and responsibilities to support the proposed systems change?

- All stakeholders need to be aware of what they are meant to do and when.
- Consider how new roles and responsibilities will be communicated, and how it will be ensured that these roles and responsibilities are properly understood.

3.3 Have partnerships been formed which will support the systems change? Have partners established ways of working together?

- Well-functioning partnerships are important for systems change as organizations need to work together. Part of preparedness is forming partnerships, or existing partners agreeing how they will work together.
- Consider what partnerships are needed, and how it will be ascertained that the partnerships have been made and carry out the necessary tasks.

3.4 Is there a clear leadership structure for the system change? Does the leadership have the authority and credibility to mobilise stakeholders to support the change?

- Change should be supported by a change leadership team who are responsible for ensuring that the change happens as planned. Is the team clearly identified? Are the recognized as leaders by other stakeholders?
- Discuss with stakeholders who the change leaders are, and what style of leadership which is appropriate to manage the systems change.

Maintaining engagement

4.1 Are the mandates of individuals and organisations consistent with their roles and responsibilities to support the systems change?

- Organizations, and individuals in those organizations, carry out tasks that are within their mandate. If the systems change requires actions outside their mandate they are unlikely to sustain those actions. Mandates can be changed. But new roles and responsibilities will likely need to be supported with additional resources and possibly staff or training of existing staff.
- Consider if the current mandates of the relevant agencies cover their planned roles and responsibilities. If there is ambiguity discuss with the agency staff. Consider how the mandate may need to be altered.

4.2 Have incentives facing individuals and organisations been clearly aligned with supporting the systems change?

- Organizations, and individuals in those organizations, carry out tasks which align with the incentives they face. If the systems change requires actions which are not incentivized they are unlikely to sustain those actions. Incentives can be changed.
- Consider if the current incentive encourage planned roles and responsibilities under the systems change.

4.3 Has a funding model been developed which will sustain the systems change? If not, what steps are being taken to develop one and secure the funding?

- Activities being carried out under the systems change will require funding. Has funding been made available, and, if so, for how long? If funding is time limited, how will future funding be secured.
- Consider the adequacy of funding and possible future funding models if required. Discuss proposed funding models with stakeholders.

4.4 Is there a process for stakeholder feedback during the systems change?

- Things do not always go as planned, and may possibly be done better. Stakeholder feedback can help improve implementation of the systems change.
- Consider what processes are planned for stakeholder feedback. How will this feedback be utilized? What plans are there for feedback on the use of feedback?

Sustaining the systems change

5.1 Are the mechanisms for continuous learning and adaptation? Has an M&E system been established? Are the feedback loops in the monitoring system? Are regular independent evaluations commissioned?

- Sustainability is most likely if the systems change is subject to a monitoring and evaluation system with feedback loops to allow adaptation. This should include independent evaluation.
- There should be opportunities for reflection and learning from the M&E system. There should be a process for monitoring the adaptations made in response to lessons learned, and that agreed plans have been implemented.

5.2 Has clear accountability been established for the systems change?

- Who are those responsible for the systems change accountable to? How does this accountability function operate and with what frequency. Are there channels for accountability 'downward' to local stakeholders as well as 'upwards' to national agencies and funders.

5.3 Is there a mechanism for identifying unintended outcomes? Is a process in place to adapt to these if necessary?

- Systems change is complex and so may have unintended consequences. There should be a mechanism for identifying these unintended consequences, and corrective action undertaken if these are adverse changes. If they are positive changes, is it possible to build on or reinforce them?

Appendix 2: Study methodology

Overview of the review

The objectives of this review are:

- Investigate 'what works' in creating systems change with a focus on effectiveness and sustainability, and prioritising practices that have most relevance to youth employment and place-based initiatives.
- Deliver workable definitions of place-based systems change, drawing on well-evidenced examples that use rigorous evaluation or other methods.
- Review relevant literature on selected systems change interventions affecting youth employment in the United Kingdom (RPA, CIAG, and Kickstart)
- Drawing on both research strands, demonstrate how system components and levers of change interact with context, drawing links between contexts in the youth employment systems map and emphasising place-based features.
- Identify and examine three levers of systems change, showing their fit and operation in the system, providing information on how they can be used in local settings, and documenting coverage and gaps where further action and research could add value.
- Establish key principles for effective systems change, through the synthesis and exploration of the findings in stakeholder workshops and discussions.
- Assess the confidence we have in the evidence related to the above research questions.

The review has two key areas of focus: understanding best evidence on policies and practices that are effective in changing systems, including an understanding of how elements and levers of systems change interact, and the role played by 'place' in systems change. An initial consultation with YFF's Youth Advisory Panel indicated key issues for young people centre on inclusion and equity, particularly around health and disability, structural barriers to accessing opportunities, piecemeal transitions support, and inequalities in access to the labour market. In particular, young people emphasised the need for a universal approach to high quality mentoring at transitions stages, the inclusion of employability skills in curricula, early age careers education, and levelling the playing field for young people's entrance into the labour market.

The review embraces the interests of YFF which include extending beyond the youth employment system where necessary so that effective approaches to systems change can be revealed. Through consultation with YFF and the research team, a robust approach to conduct this work was identified, which encompasses a comprehensive review in two areas which are developed through two parallel research strands in the review: (1) a review of systems change interventions, and (2) a review of the evaluations of selected systems changes for youth employment in the United Kingdom.

Research questions

There are two, related, strands of work for this review. The first is a review of systems change interventions. The second is a review of evaluations and other studies of specific systems changes affecting youth employment in the UK, such as Raising the Participation Age (RPA), subsidized on the job training, and careers information, advice and guidance.

Based on the aims of the research, this review answers the following questions:

- What are the key features of systems change interventions?
- How do evaluations of systems change interventions identify the effectiveness or otherwise of the system change?
- What specific elements, features, characteristics etc. of an approach to systems change affect the likelihood of success in creating systems change?
- To what extent do place-based approaches contribute to effective systems change?
- What contextual factors facilitate or inhibit the effectiveness of systems change interventions?

The first strand of the review answers the research questions by reviewing evidence from the wider systems change literature in policy and practice areas such as employment, education and public health. The second strand of the review answers the research questions focusing specifically on youth employment systems change interventions in the UK and specifically investigates:

- What kinds of change and/or success are reported in evaluations of systems change interventions for RPA, CIAG, and Kickstart?
- What have been the factors associated with success or failure in implementing systems change for RPA, CIAG, and Kickstart?
- What have been the effects of systems change for RPA, CIAG, and Kickstart?

Research approach

Strand 1: Examining systems change / interventions / evaluations

The first strand aims to develop a robust understanding of the key features of systems change interventions and systems change evaluations. This approach mitigates risks of sourcing insufficient evidence around systems change and evaluation, and enables the development of a robust framework for analysis through which evidence in Strand 2 of the research can be evaluated and critiqued. The research team first led early, scoping examination of the systems change literature, working more intensively with items referenced in the research brief as well as using novel searches in Google/ Google Scholar to generate additional materials. Successively, through further, systematic searches on systems change interventions in the policy and related practice spheres, the research team identified studies on systems change practice and evaluation in a broader range of policy areas (public health, education, employment, criminal justice, social welfare) and across a wide geography (United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Sweden, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand).

Search strategy and selection criteria

Academic, evaluation, and grey literature was reviewed. The following electronic databases were searched to identify studies for inclusion in the review: PubMed, ERIC, CENTRAL, Muse Project, PsychInfo and JStor. Alongside these electronic databases, searches were also conducted on Search Oxford Libraries Online (SOLO), the online search engine and catalogue for Oxford University's libraries.

Each database was interrogated using combinations of the following terms

((“system* change” OR “system* intervention” OR “system* change intervention” OR “system* design” OR “system* approach” OR “multi system*” OR “multi-system*” OR “multi sector*” OR “multi-sector*” OR “multi agenc*” OR “multi-agenc*” OR “multi stakeholder*” OR “multi-stakeholder*” OR “inter system*” OR “inter-system*” OR “inter sector*” “inter-sector*” OR “inter agenc*” OR “inter-agenc*”))

Searches were screened based on key terms included in the title and abstract of each study, following the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Inclusion/exclusion criteria for Strand 1

Inclusion	Exclusion
Studies of interventions in social science policy spheres and/or related practice (eg. public health, education, employment, criminal justice)	Studies outside of interventions in policy spheres and/or related practice (eg. clinical trials, discipline-specific systems)

	Studies focused on medical, biological and environment systems – such as the workings of human biology, the ecosystem in natural environments etc
Studies that use systems change approaches (terms, frameworks, etc.) AND/OR Studies that include evidence of what works/does not work in systems and systems change	Studies that do not explicitly use systems change approaches (eg. discrete interventions)
	Studies that do not include evidence of what works (eg. description of a system)
Studies conducted in the UK, Republic of Ireland, EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand	Studies not conducted in the UK, Republic of Ireland, EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand
Studies published in English	Studies not in English
Studies published from 2002 onwards	Studies published before 2002

The research team interrogated and systematically extracted the literature generated in order to arrive at the principles and features of systems change, the operation of systems change interventions, and the approaches to and messages from systems change evaluation.

Deduplication

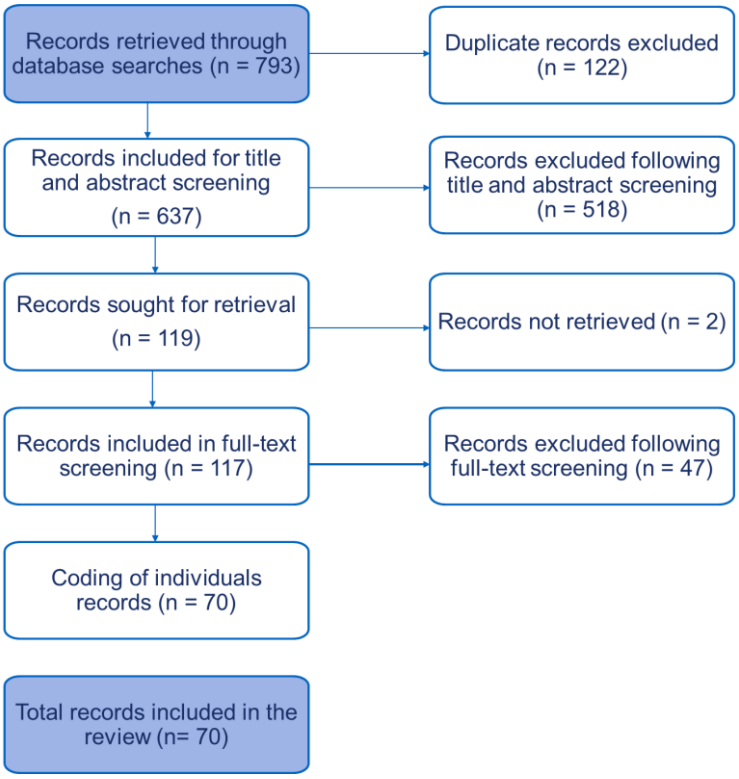
All retrieved through the database searches were imported to Covidence, a screening and data extraction software for conducting evidence reviews, and duplicate studies were removed.

Screening

Following the import of all search results into Covidence, screening based on title and abstract was conducted, and each study was assessed individually. Only studies which fit the inclusion criteria based on title and abstract were included for full text review. Full texts were then reviewed to assess if studies met the inclusion criteria, and studies which did not meet the criteria were excluded.

Following the initial database searches, 793 studies were imported into Covidence for screening. 122 studies were duplicates and were excluded. Following title and abstract screening 119 studies were included for full text review, two of which could not be retrieved. 117 studies were reviewed, and 70 studies were included in the review.

Figure 1: PRISMA Diagram for Strand 1



Data Extraction and Qualitative Synthesis

Each study was coded individually. A qualitative coding framework for synthesis was developed through multiple iterations of piloting. Through each round of piloting, the framework was refined to remove redundant codes and new codes were added.

The qualitative framework resulted from this iterative and evidence-based process. Using the framework, information was extracted from all the studies included in the review. The coding framework used for qualitative synthesis is outlined below.

Table 2: Strand 1 Coding Framework

Theme	Codes	Subcodes
Study design	Primary	Impact evaluation Process evaluation Other mixed method study Other quant or qual primary study
	Secondary	Systematic review Evidence review Other secondary study
	Data collection/analysis approach	
	Type of system change focus	System change description System change intervention

		System change evaluation
Intervention features	Area of focus	Education Work Skills Health Offending Welfare Youth work Community-building Other area of focus
	Country of focus	
	Approach to system change	New intervention introduced Existing intervention modified or removed Change in the process Change by other means
	Level of intervention	Local Regional National Organisational
	Population of interest	Young people Adults Families Elderly people Practitioners Policy-makers
	Disadvantage	
	Provider	Administration authority Delivery agent
Systems change features	Context	Drivers Rationale and aims Links
	Setting	Place-based approach Multi-agency approach Other setting
	Design	Communication Systems mapping Vision and purpose Understanding of systems change Interest alignment Culture
	Funding	Targets and incentives

		Nature and duration Governance Other features
	Service user involvement	
	Relationships	Leadership and accountability Power and decision-making Partnership working Relationship between stakeholders Relationship with service users Individuals
	Infrastructure	Resources Support Use of frameworks Governance
	Information sharing	Information gathering Planning and evaluating Infrastructure for information sharing
	Other levers of change	
Implementation	Design	Design strengths Design challenges
	Implementation	Implementation strengths Implementation challenges
	Impact	Facilitators to systems change Barriers to systems change Overall impact
	Lessons	Success of systems change Risks for systems change failure Lessons and improvements for systems change

Strand 2: Examining changes in the youth employment system through the lens of systems change and evaluation approaches

The second strand aims to answer in particular research questions around the key features of UK youth employment systems changes. For the second strand, three 'candidate' changes in the youth employment system in the UK were agreed in consultation with the research team and YFF. These 'changes', including policies and accompanying interventions, included Raising the Participation Age (RPA),

the reforms to the Careers Information Advice and Guidance system (CIAG), and the Kickstart subsidised employment scheme. Criteria for inclusion covered whether there was a sufficient evidence base to interrogate implementation and the degree of systems change that resulted.

Search strategy and selection criteria

To lay the groundwork for the search, key papers on RPA, CIAG, and Kickstart were reviewed. We picked policy papers for this as this help understand the rationale and context around the intervention e.g. for RPA we started with the Green papers like "Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16". Through these papers, a list of potential actors, agencies, and stakeholders in the system was developed, that in turn informed the list of data sources. Searches were carried out through a number of databases, including Government Databases (such as the websites of DfE, NAO, National Careers Service, Ofsted, and Parliamentary reports), Academic Databases (PubMed), Google Scholar, and Specific Documents (green and white papers related to RPA, CIAG reforms, and Kickstart). Employing a systematic snowballing technique, studies cited within relevant reports that aligned with the defined inclusion criteria for this review were identified and included.

Table 3: Search criteria for Strand 2

Primary term	Secondary terms
e.g. Raising the Participation Age	White paper Green paper Consultation Statute Bill Policy Review Evaluation Monitoring etc

A systems evaluation approach was used to find information and records which could be directly or indirectly related to the case studies. Directly related records concerned the specific policies and interventions (RPA, CIAG reforms, and Kickstart). Indirectly related sources showed significant linkage to it and were worth exploring considering systems evaluation.

Details on searches from different sources are as given below:

- **Government databases**: including websites of Department for Education, National Audit Office, Gov.UK, Department for Work and Pensions, Department

for Business, Innovation and Skills; Parliamentary reports (PAC) to find information and records which could be directly or indirectly related to the intervention.

- **Academic and other databases**: including PubMed and Google Scholar
- **Specific documents**: for RPA, the review covered the full series of DFE's participation records, to enhance our understanding on what changes were observed at different time points and underlying causes. However, our report presented analyses from 2012 onwards to show the participation just before the launch of RPA and afterwards. Other specific documents included evaluation reports on RPA trials, related case studies, survey studies, DfE's Skills for Jobs white paper, the Levelling Up the United Kingdom white paper, and Policy papers related to 14-19 education reforms. For CIAG, our search encompassed the BIS Research paper series on NCS partnership delivery, Ipsos MORI reports on the National Careers Service, and PAC reports on the Connexions Service. For the Kickstart initiative, we included the NAO report on 'Employment support: The Kickstart Scheme', the DWP process evaluation of the scheme, and the 'Plan for Jobs: progress update'.

Deduplication

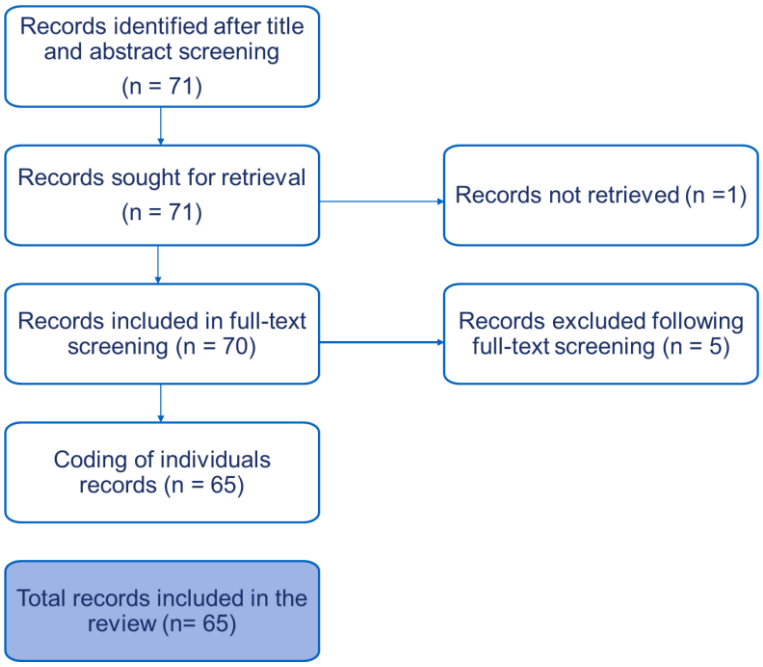
All retrieved through the database searches were imported to EPPI Reviewer, a screening and data extraction software for conducting evidence reviews, and duplicate studies were removed.

Screening

As we were looking for studies and content related to interventions which were quire specific in nature, we were finding more content from specific sources as compared to common academic database like PubMed. We looked into specific websites using different key terms and screened the studies based on title and abstract/summary concurrently during the searches. Only those studies which fit the inclusion criteria based on title and abstract were considered for full text screening and these studies were imported to the EPPI Reviewer software.

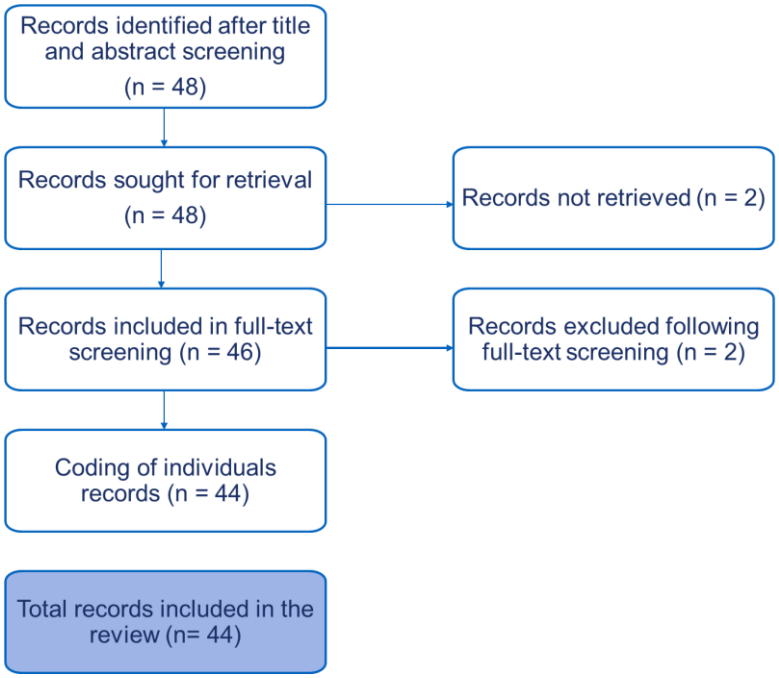
RPA: 71 studies were found through various data sources and were included for full text screening. All but one of the 71 studies were retrieved. Of the 70 full texts studies screened, 65 were included in the review, the remaining 5 were excluded as they were not related to RPA.

Figure 2: PRISMA Diagram for RPA



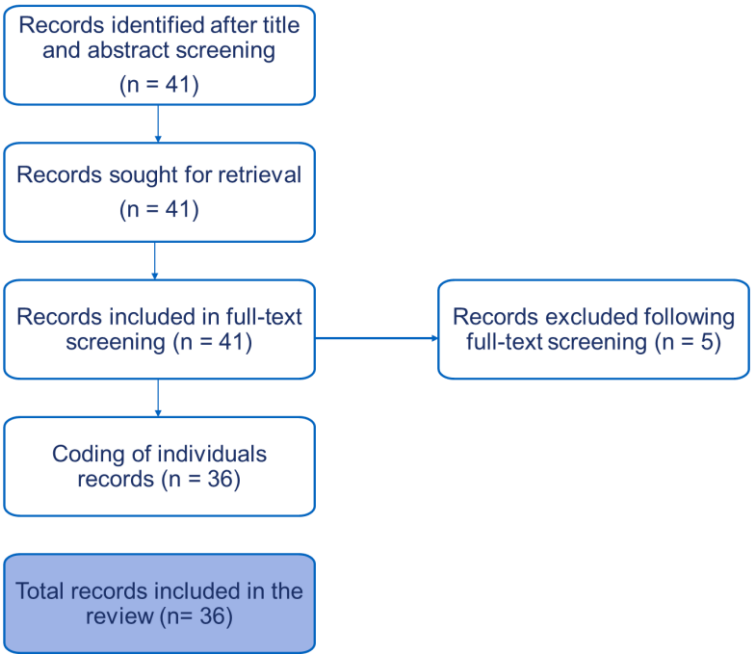
CIAG (Connexions and National Careers Service): The database search identified 48 studies and included them all for full text screening. Out of these, 2 files could not be retrieved, and 46 studies were assessed for inclusion for coding after full-text screening. Two studies were excluded at the full-text screening stage because these records were not directly related to Connexions and NCS. The final number of included studies in the review for CIAG is 44 studies.

Figure 3: PRISMA Diagram for CIAG



Kickstart: The database search identified 41 studies through various data sources and included them all for full text screening as the title and abstract level screening. All 41 studies were assessed for inclusion for coding after full-text screening. Five studies were excluded at the full-text screening stage because these reports were not directly related to the Kickstart scheme. The final number of included studies in the review for Kickstart is 36 studies.

Figure 4: PRISMA Diagram for Kickstart



Data Extraction and Qualitative Synthesis

Each study was coded individually. A qualitative coding framework for synthesis was developed through multiple iterations of piloting. Through each round of piloting, the framework was refined to remove redundant codes and new codes were added.

The qualitative framework resulted from this iterative and evidence-based process. Using the framework, information was extracted from all the studies included in the review. Finally, the synthesis was edited to remove the information that was being repeated through different questions. The coding framework used for qualitative synthesis is outlined below.

Table 4: Strand 2 Coding Framework

Theme	Codes
Systems Change	What was the system change? Was the change a place-based Intervention? What aspect of the planned systems change required a place-based approach? How power structures and the nature of leadership affected desired change/ Role of Interagency co-ordination? How money and funding decisions affected desired change?

Population	Which young people does it affect? Which type of Disadvantages/Marginalisation/Barriers are considered under this intervention?
Stakeholder engagement	What stakeholder engagement was undertaken in preparation for the change? Were youth consulted? What design changes were made on the basis of trials, pilots or consultation? How was the change communicated to stakeholders, including young people? What are the views of other stakeholders/CYP with respect to the programme or change?
Implementation	Who is responsible for executing and delivering the change? Has the change been implemented as planned? What challenges have been faced in implementation? What factors supported implementation? (Facilitators from different perspective)?
Process of Systems Change	How is the change expected to affect youth (un)employment? How does the change engage with other parts of the system? History of the change / voices for the change/ Drivers of the change / role of civil society in supporting or opposing the change? Rationale for the change? Related initiatives, schemes and concepts?
Effectiveness of systems change	Was the programme trialled or piloted? And What were the findings of the trials or pilots? Were independent evaluation of policy/program conducted? What evaluative approaches have been used in evaluations/for making evidence claims? Has the change been ‘successful’? Other Evidence? What data sources were used? What is the strength of evidence for each evidence claim in this summary?

Appendix 3: Youth Advisory Panel consultations

This briefing note draws together insights that emerged from the YFF Youth Advisory Panel consultations that were held in April and June 2023. The rationale behind leading these consultations was to engage directly with young people, seeking their perspectives and experiences related to various aspects of the youth employment system. The aim was to incorporate their valuable insights into the research and use their expertise to inform the research approach. However, due to the complexity of integrating these consultation findings into the evidence review, findings from the consultation have been included in this appendix. This decision was made to preserve the integrity of the review while still acknowledging the significance of the young people's input.

The June 2023 consultation started with a sub-group of the young people leading a presentation on our approach to the research we are conducting, the findings that emerged from a first scoping review on systems change, and an introduction to Raising the Participation Age (RPA) as a systems change intervention. After a brief discussion on the wider group's perspectives on RPA, the young people split into two groups to discuss and share their thoughts on the features within or outside the youth employment system that affect young people's experiences of it, and any elements they think are missing from our research in terms of understanding young people's engagement with the system. The panel had the opportunity to share their thoughts through a Jamboard, and this briefing notes presents key messages that emerged from both the Jamboards and wider group discussions.

Young people consultation – April 2023

Young people's experiences of the youth employment system

- **Health and disability support**. One of the young people shared that as they struggle with sensory overload due to Autism Spectrum Disorder, they were struggling with attending in-person lectures at university. They explained that through the Equality Act (2010) and their employer's support they were able to negotiate their learning mode with the university.

- Another young person highlighted that the quality of opportunities young people can access depends on the school they attend and on the local area more broadly, leading to **structural inequalities in access to opportunities.**
- In terms of **barriers to accessing work experience,** Covid-19 emerged as having had a big impact on the work experience opportunities that young people were able to access. The impact that health conditions such as neurodiversity and other disabilities, were also highlighted as often preventing young people from accessing opportunities.
- A young person also shared that the **transition support** provided by schools and universities is quite **fragmented**, and guidelines on navigating the job market and accessing good quality opportunities are very unclear. They highlighted that this is exacerbated for people with additional barriers, such as those experiencing homelessness and refugees.
- It was also noted that when young people enter the **labour market,** they often do **not** face a **level playing field**, with many entry level roles requiring work experience.

Changes needed in the youth employment system to achieve better outcomes for marginalised young people

- **Targeted support and outreach at each stage of young people's transitions** emerged as a strong aspect that would enable them to achieve better outcomes, to raise awareness on the different options and opportunities available.
- **Personalised mentoring and coaching** were highlighted as approaches that would enable young people to build their network and raise their ambitions.
- The young people discussed the importance of **equitable access to opportunities**, through salary transparency, clarity throughout the recruitment process, entry level roles being truly entry level.

Young people consultation – June 2023

Most and least important features of the youth employment system

When we consulted the young people on the most important features of the youth employment system in their experience, these seemed to be the most prevalent:

- **Mentors and role models**. Some of the young people shared that having access to a mentor that they can relate to helps them network and navigate the transition from education into the workplace.
- **Paid work experience**. The financial aspect came through as an important factor too, with the young people highlighting that low salaries or unpaid internships pose a barrier to gaining relevant skills and experience.

- **On-the-job training and support** was shared as a relevant feature that can often increase the retention rates of young people.
- **Careers guidance in education and training**. While not an aspect of the employment system, it was felt by the young people that the type and quality of information and opportunities available in schools varies significantly depending on their geographical location, highlighting the importance of place. This is in turn seen as affecting young people's opportunities and experiences of the employment system.
- **Employer attitudes and stigma** towards young people, due to their age, were seen as having a significant impact on their experiences of employment, as often employers will perceive young people as lacking the skills needed for a job.

We then asked the young people about their perspectives on what the least important features of the youth employment system are.

- **Careers guidance** and information that are **not** relevant and **up to date**. An example that the young people provided of included careers websites containing information that is no longer relevant.
- **Educational attainment** was perceived as one of the less important factors affecting young people's experiences of the youth employment system.

Other factors affecting young people's experiences of the youth employment system

The last Jamboard discussion was centred around young people's perspectives on any other factors, such as other systems, which can affect their experiences of the youth employment system.

- Access (or lack thereof) to the **healthcare system** was highlighted as having a big impact on employment opportunities for young people. Similarly, the young people shared that long-term illnesses and disabilities can also lead to young people missing out on education or work opportunities.
- As was already mentioned above, the **education system** is seen as affecting young people's experiences of the youth employment system. Related to this, parents' and carers' attitudes towards education can also influence how young people experience the employment system.
- The young people explained that involvement with the **criminal justice system** often poses barriers to engaging with employment or training, partly due to lack of support for young people in inpatient facilities.
- Social class and **social mobility** emerged as central aspects that affect the types of work opportunities young people can access. For instance, one young person gave the example of someone from a lower socio-economic background having to relocate to the North of England for financial reasons,

and this in turn affecting the quantity and quality of work opportunities they will have.

- **Unconscious bias** within all systems, about young people's experiences and skills, was a further factor that can negatively impact their experiences of employment.

Appendix 4: Table of systems change interventions

Intervention	Area of focus	Population	Location	Level of intervention	Description
Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF)	Education and employment	Young people	USA-wide	Urban and rural regions	The Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions (FCS) launched the OYF in 2012. The OYF is a network comprised of over forty cross-sector local collaborations in urban, rural, and tribal communities across the United States that have adopted a systems change approach to build and scale reconnection pathways that achieve better outcomes in education, employment and overall well-being for opportunity youth. Opportunity youth are young adults, 16-24 years of age, who are engaged in neither work nor education.
Fulfilling Lives	Health and violence	People experiencing multiple disadvantage	UK	Local and national level	Launched by the National Lottery Community Fund in 2014 and delivered across 12 local partnerships in England, the Fulfilling Lives programme supports people with multiple needs, including homelessness, alcohol and substance misuse, offending and mental ill-health. The programme aims to create long-term changes to the systems for people with multiple forms of disadvantage, to make them more responsive and tailored to their needs.
Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM)	Health and violence	People experiencing multiple disadvantage	UK	Local areas	The MEAM approach is a framework developed in 2012 by three national charities. It aims to support local areas to deliver better-coordinated support for people facing multiple

					sources of disadvantage, including homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill-health and experience of the criminal justice system.
Disrupting Exploitation (DEx)	Welfare	Children and young people	UK	National and local level	The Disrupting Exploitation programme ran from 2018 to 2021 and focused on disrupting the exploitation of children and young people across London, Birmingham and Manchester, as well as at the national level. The programme worked with multiple partners to effect systemic changes in relation to the identification and responses to exploitation, with the goal of improving outcomes for children and young people.
Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS)	Welfare	Children and families	Ireland	National level	Launched in 2015, the PPFS Programme formed the early development of Tusla, the newly established child and family agency in Ireland. The programme invests in parenting, prevention, and family support services. It aims to improve outcomes for children and parents by delivering transformative change in Tusla policies in relation to family support and child welfare and protection.
Domestic Abuse: A Whole System Approach (DAWSA)	Welfare and offending	Domestic abuse victims	UK	Local level	Developed by Northumbria OPCC and Northumbria Police and funded by the Home Office, DAWSA is a programme that has been implemented in six force with the aim of transforming domestic abuse services to and improving the experiences and outcomes of victims. The main focus themes of the programme are: effective working with the criminal justice system, partnership work with civil and family courts, multi-agency victim support and offender management.
The Great Manchester Local Care	Health	General population	Great Manchester, UK	Urban local area	The Local Care Approach in Great Manchester aimed to deliver an integrated approach to service

Approach (GMLCA)					provision across the health and social care system, with an emphasis on place-based ways of working. The programme's core features vary in each locality to reflect local needs and challenges.
The Alliance Model for Health Care Improvements	Health	Low-income communities	USA	Local level	The Alliance to Reduce Disparities in Diabetes was launched in 2009 and is delivered across five low-income communities in the USA. The programme aims to drive action and change to reduce health status inequity and improve outcomes related to diabetes control. The programme is comprised of a collegial support system and a work group for mutual sharing of ideas.
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed)	Health	Young people, adults and older adults	USA	Regional level	The SNAP-Ed programme combines educational strategies with policy, system, and environmental interventions to deliver evidence-based nutrition education and obesity prevention and promote healthy eating. The programme focuses on collaborative efforts with federal, state, and local partners.
Completion by Design	Education	Young people	USA	Regional level	Completion by Design is a five year community college redesign effort, which focuses on raising completion rates for low-income students while ensuring the quality of community college programmes and credentials.
The Food and Fitness (F&F) Community Partnerships	Health	Children and families	USA	Local level	Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation from 2007 to 2016 the Food & Fitness (F&F) community partnerships were established to create community-determined change in relation to health and health equity. Through changes in policies, community infrastructure, and local systems, the programme focused on

					increasing access to locally grown good food and safe places for physical activity for children and families.
Response to Intervention (RTI)	Education	Young people	USA	Regional (state) level	RTI is an educational reform designed to meet the needs of low-achieving students through large-scale systemic change and multi-disciplinary coordination. It is a multi-tiered model of instruction which allows for interventions that are increasingly intensive depending on the student's needs and their response to instruction.
Stockholm Diabetes Prevention Programme (SDPP)	Health	General population	Stockholm, Sweden	Regional level	SDPP is a comprehensive intervention aiming to increase physical activity, reduce tobacco consumption and obesity, and improve dietary habits among the general population. The programme is co-ordinated by a central diabetes prevention unit. However, is each of the three municipalities where the intervention takes place, local partners from different sectors collaborate to plan and implement activities. The ultimate goal of the programme is for the local community to "own" the programme.
Patient Whaanau Centred Care Standards (PWCCS)	Health	Practitioners	New Zealand	National level	Developed in 2014 in a hospital setting, the PWCCS is an organisational peer review measurement and improvement programme with an inpatient focus. The programme aims to increase the visibility of fundamental care through systematic measurement and engagement of all levels of nursing leadership.
The Veteran's Administration (VA) Whole Health (WH) System of Care	Health	Adults and elderly people	USA	Regional level	VA'a WH System of Care aims to transform the organisation and culture of care and to provide care to improve Veteran's overall health and wellbeing. This is achieved through three pathways: introducing Veterans to WH concepts,

					aligning integrative health care with Veterans' personal health goals, wellbeing programmes to equip Veterans to manage their health.
The Youth Violence System Project (YVSP)	Offending	Young people	USA	Local level	YVSP aims to help communities strategize for and achieve sustained reductions in youth violence in Boston. This is achieved by engaging residents to develop a systems dynamics framework of youth violence in the community.
The Children's Communities Programme	Not specified	Young people	UK	Local level	Launched by Save the Children UK, the Children's Communities programme is a local systems change initiative aiming to improve outcomes for children and young people through capacity building and collaborative working across sectors in the community. The programme is delivered in three local areas, which have different cultural contexts.
The Connecticut Collaborative on Effective Practices for Trauma (CONCEPT)	Health	Children and young people	Connecticut, USA	Regional (state) level	Implemented in 2011, CONCEPT aims to improve capacity of Connecticut's child welfare system to provide trauma-informed care. The initiative uses a multi-component approach including workforce development, policy change and improved access to evidence-based trauma-focused treatments.
Texas Self-Directed Care (SDC)	Health	General population	Texas, USA	Regional (state) level	Texas SDC was created by a public-academic partnership between a university research centre and a state mental health authority, in collaboration with community stakeholders. SDC programmes involve giving participants control over public funds to purchase services and support for their own recovery.
Connecticut's Recovery Initiative	Health	General population	Connecticut, USA	Regional (state) level	Beginning in 2000, the Connecticut Recovery initiative is a multi-year systemic process involving:

					developing core values and principles based on the input of people in recovery, establishing a policy framework based on this vision, building workforce competencies, changing programme structures, and aligning administrative policies.
Core Priority Programme (CPP) in Mental Health and Well-being (MHWB)	Health	Young people	UK	Local level	Developed by Barnardo's, the CPP in MHWB aims to address the determinants of poor mental health, build resilience, and influence wider policy and systems change. The programme involves multi-sectoral collaboration with stakeholders in three localities. One of its key principles is co-production with young people and parents.
The Healthcare Improvement Collaboratives Model (HICM)	Health	Practitioners	Australia	Regional and organisational level	Developed in 2012, the HICM focused on the management of inadvertent perioperative hypothermia across nine hospitals within Australia. The programme involves engaging frontline staff to implement healthcare research evidence into practice, with multidisciplinary teams working together on local topics.
The ReThink Health initiative	Health	General population	USA	National level	Funded by the Rippel Foundation, the ReThink Health initiative is an ongoing initiative that involves field building to understand and foster systems change and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for the population
Food for Life	Health	Young people	UK	National and organisational level	Food for Life is a healthy and sustainable food programme that developed in schools, and is being adapted for children's centres, universities, care homes, and hospital settings. The programme aims to drive systemic change through the key principles of: food education, skills and

					experience; food and catering quality; community and partnerships; and leadership.
Shape Up Sommerville (SUS)	Health	Young people	USA	Not specified	Led by a community coalition, SUS was a three year whole-of-community childhood obesity prevention intervention.
Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT)	Education	Young people	USA	Local level	The SWIFT approach involves partnering with the whole school community to positively transform learning outcomes for all students. It provides a set of services to implement, evaluate and scale up inclusive education in states, districts and schools.
The Australian Capital Territory 'It's Your Move!' (ACT-IYM)	Health	Young people	Australia	National level	ACT-YM was a three year systems intervention to prevent obesity among adolescents. The programme consisted of initiatives targeted at the individual, community and school policy levels aiming to promote healthy eating and physical activity.
Individual Budget (IB) schemes	Health	General population	UK	National level	Individual Budgets is a form of personalised support for adults that was implemented in 13 local authorities in England with the aim to expand opportunities for users of social care services to determine their own priorities and preferences, in the expectation that this will enhance their well-being.
Healthy Families NZ	Health	Adults and families	New Zealand	Regional level	Implemented in 10 communities, Healthy Families NZ is a government-funded systems-change intervention to prevent chronic diseases through strengthened community leadership. The initiative aims to strengthen the health prevention system through evidence-based action, enabling people to make good food choices, be physically active, smoke-free and free from alcohol-related harm.

Enhancing Permanency in Children and Families (EPIC)	Welfare	Young people, adults, families	USA	Local level	The EPIC programme uses four evidence-based multi-system practices to promote safety and permanency outcomes for children involved with the child welfare system due to parental substance misuse. This is achieved through alternative judicial support, peer mentorship and allowing families to choose which intervention to engage with.
We Can Move (WCM)	Health	Adults and elderly people	UK	Regional level	Implemented in Gloucestershire, WCM is a physical activity focused systems approach. It aims to achieve this by engaging community groups, organisations and systems leaders to remove barriers around physical activity.
The National Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health (TA Network)	Health	Young people	USA	National level	The TA Network supports the development and implementation of Systems of Care (SOC) for young people with complex behavioural needs and their families. It achieves this by providing training related to children's behavioural health to states, tribes, territories and communities.
The Living Well programme	Health	General population	USA	Regional level	The Living Well programme is a multi-sectoral collaboration between a rural healthcare system and a network of community-based organisations. Two of its intervention are the Chronic disease self-management programme (CDSMP) and the Diabetes self-management programme (DSMP), which are delivered through collaboration with health care providers and community partners.
Health Impact Assessment	Health	Practitioners	Ireland	Local level	HIA is a tool supporting decision-making by analysing the potential effects of a planned action on health. It has become a widely used tool to assess how policies positively or negatively affect health and health equity.

Prevention Tracker	Health	Practitioners	Australia	National level	Designed by the Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, Prevention Tracker is a national initiative that uses a systems thinking approach to better understand the nature of chronic disease prevention efforts in local communities.
Project Catalyst	Health	Vulnerable people	USA	National level	Beginning in 2017, Project Catalyst aims to improve responses to Intimate Partner Violence (IV) and Human Trafficking (HT) through collaboration with state- and territory-level organisations to initiate policy changes.
San Diego Healthy Weight	Health	Children and young people	San Diego, USA	Local level	The SDHWC is a consortium of diverse organisations which aim to develop a systems approach to address child obesity.

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