

Pilot Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the Liverpool Talent Match

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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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Glossary

AP	Alternative Provision
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EC	Employment Coach
EET	Education, employment or training
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
LEO	Longitudinal Education Outcomes
LTM	Liverpool Talent Match
MYA	Merseyside Youth Association
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
QED	Quasi-Experimental Design
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
ToC	Theory of Change
YFF	Youth Futures Foundation

Executive summary

The project

This is the final report of the pilot evaluation of the Liverpool Talent Match (LTM) programme, delivered by Merseyside Youth Association (MYA). This programme was funded through a development grant from Youth Futures Foundation (YFF).

LTM works with young people aged 16-24 in Liverpool, who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and face barriers to accessing the labour market. The programme pairs participants with intensive mentors to support them through their journey towards employment or education. Based on their needs and interests, participants are offered the opportunity to engage in personal and social development activities, employment support programmes, and therapeutic interventions, among others.

The pilot evaluation took place between June 2022 and May 2024. It was a mixed-method evaluation, using qualitative and quantitative data, such as surveys, interviews, and digital diaries, to understand the association between the programme and the outcomes of interests, the mechanisms through which outcomes were achieved, and the programmes' delivery and costs.

The evaluation of LTM was completed alongside a pilot evaluation of another youth employment support programme based in County Durham. The original intention was to report on these concurrent pilot evaluations together and include a comparative element in the reporting. Due to the differences in the programmes' respective target cohort and the delivery models in practice, it was concluded that a comparison study would not be productive, and two separate reports were created. The corresponding report for the programme based in County Durham can be found [here](#). As data collection, analysis, and reporting for the two programmes were completed concurrently, the resulting reports have been considerably influenced by each other. As such, they should be viewed as companion pieces, with the evidence and insights put forward in both complementing the other.

Findings

The table below summarises the findings of our evaluation.

Research question	Findings
<p>Research question 1: What is the association between increasing levels of engagement with Liverpool Talent Match and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uptake of employment, education or training opportunities? • retention of employment opportunities? • labour market experience? • self-esteem? • resilience? • mental wellbeing? • work-related skills? 	<p>Overall, we find associations between higher levels of engagement (as measured by impact-weighted hours of engagement, See Appendix D “Development of the dosage indicator”) and outcomes for LTM. In addition, compared to a comparator group drawn from Understanding Society, participation in LTM is associated with increased likelihood of transition into education, employment and training (EET). Data collection constraints meant the analysis was unable to capture whether employment opportunities were retained. It should also be noted that these estimates are correlational and do not imply a causal effect.</p> <p>Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that many LTM participants achieved positive outcomes. These include perceived improvements to confidence and self-esteem, social and interpersonal skills, as well as improvements in knowledge of the job market and job searching skills. The research also demonstrated that some participants achieve EET outcomes, but it is worth noting that some participants start their journey far away from the labour market, and that it is not realistic for all participants to achieve EET outcomes. In some cases the focus of the intervention was on stabilising life circumstances.</p>
<p>Research question 2: What are the drivers of the associations (or absence of association) observed?</p>	<p>The qualitative interviews show that positive outcomes are especially driven by the personalised and holistic approach of the intervention, centred on the mentor-mentee relationship. External barriers include a lack of motivation, family breakdown and bereavement, disruptive peer groups, and poor mental health.</p> <p>Findings from the quantitative outcomes analysis show that previous educational attainment can be a driver of positive outcomes, as it is positively</p>

Research question	Findings
	associated with transitions away from NEET status and into employment.
Research question 3: To what extent was the programme delivered as intended, and in what ways did implementation vary?	The programme was delivered as intended. LTM provided tailored, person-centred support that matched participants' needs and preferences. Both the focus of the sessions as well as the type of communication were tailored to each participant's needs. Although journeys can substantially vary across participants, the phases described in the programme's participant journey map were consistent with the delivery.
Research question 4: To what extent does the programme develop the skills and knowledge of employment coaches, local employers and/or service providers?	Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that staff from MYA have been able to access ongoing training opportunities to gain new skills and ways of working with vulnerable young people. Interviews with employers also suggest that recruiting young people from these programmes has had some positive effects on employers. However, given the small sample of employer interviews, these findings should be treated with caution.
Research question 5: How does the programme develop strategic relationships with programme partners and service providers, and how does this affect young people's support journeys?	At MYA relationship building generally takes place on a very local level and is completed autonomously by frontline and strategic staff. Building formal and informal relationships with referral partners and employment providers was key, and this was facilitated by the fact that MYA is a well-established organisation dating back to 1890. Having a Youth Hub in central Liverpool was seen as an enabler to building strong relationships. The external relationships built with local employers and organisations have a significant effect on their participants, as they often contribute to their employment journeys starting, and support progress towards suitable employment.
Research question 6: To what extent does the programme adopt a No Wrong Doors approach, and how does	MYA offers a range of services to support participants with different levels of need, which is in line with the No Wrong Doors approach. The MYA

Research question	Findings
this affect young people's support journey?	youth hub, which brings together an integrated range of services, is at the centre of this approach.
Research question 7: What are the costs and benefits of the programme?	<p>Whilst it is important to note that the results from the quantitative outcomes analysis are purely correlational and do not imply a causal effect, the programme was found to have positive associations on the probability of transitioning away from NEET status and on finding employment.</p> <p>Assuming that these results reflect the actual impacts of the programme, there are positive net benefits associated with it (i.e. the benefits were greater than the costs of each programme). The total net benefits were worth £1.9 million for Liverpool Talent Match, equivalent to a net benefit per participant of £5,100. These figures correspond to a benefit-cost ratio of 2.2 for Liverpool Talent Match (i.e. the total benefit associated with Liverpool Talent Match was 2.2 times greater the total cost).</p>

1 Introduction

This report describes findings of the evaluation of Liverpool Talent Match (LTM), delivered by Merseyside Youth Association (MYA), an employment support programme that works with young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The evaluation was funded by the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) and conducted by the Policy Institute at King's College London and London Economics.

1.1 Background

Within Liverpool City Region, some NEET young people face complex barriers to engaging with the labour market. These include those who have received Children's Social Care interventions; received Special Educational Needs (SEN) support; experienced exclusions from education; and/or attended Alternative Provision (AP).¹

Research shows that these young people are less likely to make positive progression into sustained employment or training.² Those experiencing deprivation within these groups are at even greater risk of becoming and remaining NEET. To address this, the LTM programme aims to fill the gap in post-16 employment support provision for these young people, helping them to find and sustain employment.

1.2 The programme

LTM is an employment support programme within the Liverpool City Region offered by MYA, a well-established organisation that was founded in 1890. The programme has existed since 2013³. It works with young people aged 16 to 24 who are long-term (at least 12 months) NEET, and often supports young

¹ 21% of the sample have received Children's Social Care interventions, 14% received SEN support, 9% experienced exclusions from education, and 13% attended AP.

² For instance, Neil Harrison, Jo Dixon, David Sanders-Ellis, Jade Ward and Poppy Asker (2023) Care leavers' transition into the labour market in England, Nuffield Foundation; Elizabeth Sanderson (2020) Youth transitions to employment longitudinal evidence from marginalised young people in England, Journal of Youth Studies, Vol 23(10); Andy Powell (2021) NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training, House of Commons Library Briefing.

³ The national Talent Match programme was evaluated in 2020. The evaluation is available [here](#).

people who face multiple complex barriers to participating in Education, Employment and Training (EET).

Participants are paired with a mentor who provides individualised support through one-to-one mentoring, refers young people to other internal and external services, supports participants in overcoming material barriers to employment by providing access to the Breaking Down Barriers fund (which covers things such as interview clothes or transport expenses), undertakes an individual assessment, and creates a bespoke action plan designed to address young people's needs and interests. The plan can include a combination of elements, including personal and social development activities, employment mentor support, volunteering opportunities, job tasters, skills workshops, therapeutic interventions, and Youth Ambassador opportunities.⁴ If a young person gains employment, their mentor may continue to provide ad hoc in-work support for the participant and the employer.

Support is based around an integrated youth hub which is central to the model of support. This hub, located in central Liverpool, acts as an access point for service users and a delivery site for programme activities. LTM staff also operate out of regional locations, for example community halls in areas like Knowsley and Bootle, to increase the accessibility of the programme.

Further details about the programme can be found in the TIDieR framework in Appendix A, and the programme's Theory of Change (ToC) and participants' journey are depicted in Figure 8 and Figure 9 respectively, and discussed in detail in Section 3.2.

1.3 Research questions

The research questions that have guided the evaluation are presented below.

1. What is the association between increasing levels of engagement with Liverpool Talent Match and uptake of employment, education or training opportunities; retention of employment opportunities; labour

⁴ Youth Ambassadors are champions for young people, they can offer support and guidance to programme participants and represent their interests.

market experience; self-esteem; resilience; mental wellbeing; and work-related skills?

2. What are the drivers of the associations (or absence of association) observed?
3. To what extent was the programme delivered as intended, and in what ways did implementation vary?
 - a. To what extent were the programme's interventions captured by the Theory of Change?
 - b. To what extent were the programme's mechanisms of change captured by the Theory of Change?
 - c. To what extent were the programme's outcomes captured by the Theory of Change?
4. To what extent does the programme develop the skills and knowledge of:
 - a. Mentors?
 - b. Local employers?
 - c. Service providers?
5. How does the programme develop strategic relationships with programme partners and service providers, and how does this affect young people's support journeys?
6. To what extent does the programme adopt a No Wrong Doors approach,⁵ and how does this affect young people's support journey?
7. What are the costs and benefits of the programme?

1.4 Ethics and data protection

All data was held according to King's Data Protection Policy and Procedures. All data collection adhered to ethical practice ensuring the confidentiality of information shared and the secure handling of data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and King's Data Protection

⁵ This approach can be summarised as follows: no matter what a participant's starting point is, or how they initially access the programme, they will be connected to the support that is right for them and is responsive to their current needs.

Policy. The privacy statement of MYA was also amended to reflect data sharing with King's College London. Appendix B contains relevant ethics and data protection information for this study.

2 Methods

This section sets out the methods that were used to respond to the evaluation questions identified in Section 1.3.

2.1 Participant selection

The target group for the evaluation followed the programme's inclusion and exclusion criteria. That is, all young people who have been long-term (at least 12 months) NEET aged 16-24 with complex needs (including care experience, exclusion or alternative provision experience, special education needs and disabilities (SEND), experience of homelessness, criminal justice system experience, mental health or long-term health condition).

The exception to this was the exclusion of LTM participants who were designated to the "red" zone of support by MYA staff, which meant they were at crisis point (e.g., suicidal or at immediate risk of homelessness) and needed immediate support (see Figure 9 for more details on the different zones).

The evaluation is based on the management information data of 149 participants who engaged with MYA during the evaluation period. Participants started the programme between June 2021 and December 2022 and exited between February 2022 and December 2023. As shown in Table 1, this evaluation is also based on the responses from 138 baseline surveys, 231 midline surveys completed by 104 participants at different time points, and 46 endline surveys. Surveys included questions on mental wellbeing, resilience, self-esteem, work-related skills, and feedback on the programme.

A total of 16 young people were recruited to take part in the qualitative interviews (see Table 1 for more details). From these 16, a total of five young people, were interviewed twice (six to 12 weeks into engagement, and towards the end of their engagement in the programme). The evaluation team also conducted four observations of the sessions being delivered to further understand the dynamic and set-up of the intervention.

All participants were provided with an information sheet which gave details about the evaluation, the data that would be collected about them and how it would be used. Participants were given at least one week to consider if they would like to participate in the research before providing consent.

2.2 Theory of change development

King's worked collaboratively with MYA to develop a programme-level Theory of Change (ToC) during the mobilisation stage of the pilot evaluation. The final ToC, which was reviewed after data collection activities were completed, is depicted and explained in Section 3.2.1.

2.3 Data collection and analysis approach

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to address the research questions. Table 1 below provides an overview of the quantitative and qualitative methods used and the question(s) they aimed to answer. More details about the data collection activities, as well as the qualitative and dosage-response analysis approach, can be found in Appendix D.

In particular, Section 3.4.1.2 describes our approach to developing a dosage-response model, in which we develop a dosage indicator to assess the association between engagement with the programme and outcomes. Throughout this report this is referred to as the "dosage-response analysis." However, it should be noted that this analysis is correlational, not causal.

2.4 Quantitative outcomes analysis and economic evaluation

The evaluation also provides a quantitative outcomes analysis alongside the "dosage response analysis". The "quantitative outcomes analysis" applies econometric models to a treatment group (participants in the programme) alongside a comparator group (comparable young people from the Understanding Society longitudinal dataset), to provide estimates of the impacts of MYA on key outcomes. This was designed primarily to answer RQ7 on the costs and benefits of the programme. The analysis of the benefits of the programme mainly considered the benefits to individuals and wider society resulting from an increased number of individuals in employment or education. To identify these potential impacts, an econometric approach was used to estimate the change in the number of young people entering employment and education that is associated with the programme.

Similar to the dosage-response analysis, it is important to note that the econometric methods used cannot show a causal relationship between the programmes and employment and education outcomes. The impact evaluation estimates instead show correlational relationships between

employment and education outcomes and involvement in the programme, as well as for a range of control variables.

The estimates from the quantitative outcomes analysis were combined with calculations of the monetary value to the individual and society associated with a move into employment or education to understand the aggregate benefit associated with the programme. This was then compared to the costs of the programme to generate the net benefit and benefit-cost ratio associated with it. Further details on the methodology of the quantitative outcomes analysis and cost-benefit analysis can be found in Appendix E.

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Table 1: Data collection methods

Data collection method		Approach	Research question	Number
Quantitative method	Repeated survey for participants	Baseline survey at the time of programme enrolment, repeated every three months and at exit. A final survey was conducted after 3 months of finishing engagement.	1, 2	138 baseline, 231 midline (several per participant) and 46 endline surveys
	Feedback survey	At two timepoints (midway through programme delivery and three months post-programme), we conducted a short feedback survey to assess participants' experience, perception and mentor relation.	1, 2	26 midline and 46 endline surveys
	Cost analysis survey	Mentors were asked to complete a short survey every three months providing an estimate of the time spent working.	7	207 entries
	Management information data	During the study, the programmes collected a range of management data that was used during the evaluation. This was collected through the registration and referral forms.	1, 2, 7	149 records
Qualitative method	Longitudinal interviews	Interviews with participants were held six to 12 weeks into engagement, and towards the end of their engagement.	1, 2, 3, 6	16 young people, with 5 interviewed twice
	Interviews with frontline staff	We conducted semi-structured interviews with frontline staff including mentors and counsellors.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	8 interviews
	Multi-media diaries	We invited young people from the programme to participate in a digital diary exercise at six points between October 2022 and August 2023.	3	8 participants
	Observations	We conducted observations at four time points over the delivery of the programme.	3	4 observations
	Staff workshops	We held workshops with up to eight staff members in each session at three time points across the evaluation.	1, 2, 3, 5	3 workshops
	Interviews with strategic staff	We conducted semi-structured interviews with Programme Managers and Project Leads.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	3 interviews
	Employer interviews	Towards the end of programme delivery, key LTM employment partners were interviewed.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	2 interviews

3 Findings

This chapter provides the key findings of the pilot evaluation, bringing together all strands of the research. This section is broken down into the following sub-sections:

- **Participants:** this section provides a description of the participants involved in the study.
- **Programme theory:** this section discusses the programme's ToC and participants' journey.
- **Operation of the model in practice:** this section explores whether the programme was delivered as intended.
- **Evidence of promise:** this section explores whether the programme led to any perceived impacts among participants, especially on young people, as well as on mentors, employers and service providers.

It is worth noting that the available information management data used in this section had limitations that required us to make a number of assumptions in preparing it for analysis. These limitations include missing data, inconsistency of recording activities, and sample attrition.

3.1 Participants

This section presents a detailed summary of the demographic profile of the participants in the LTM programme, based on management information data from 149 participants⁶ collected by the delivery team and shared with the evaluation team for analysis. It also draws on qualitative data gathered through interviews with young people, mentors, and digital diary entries.

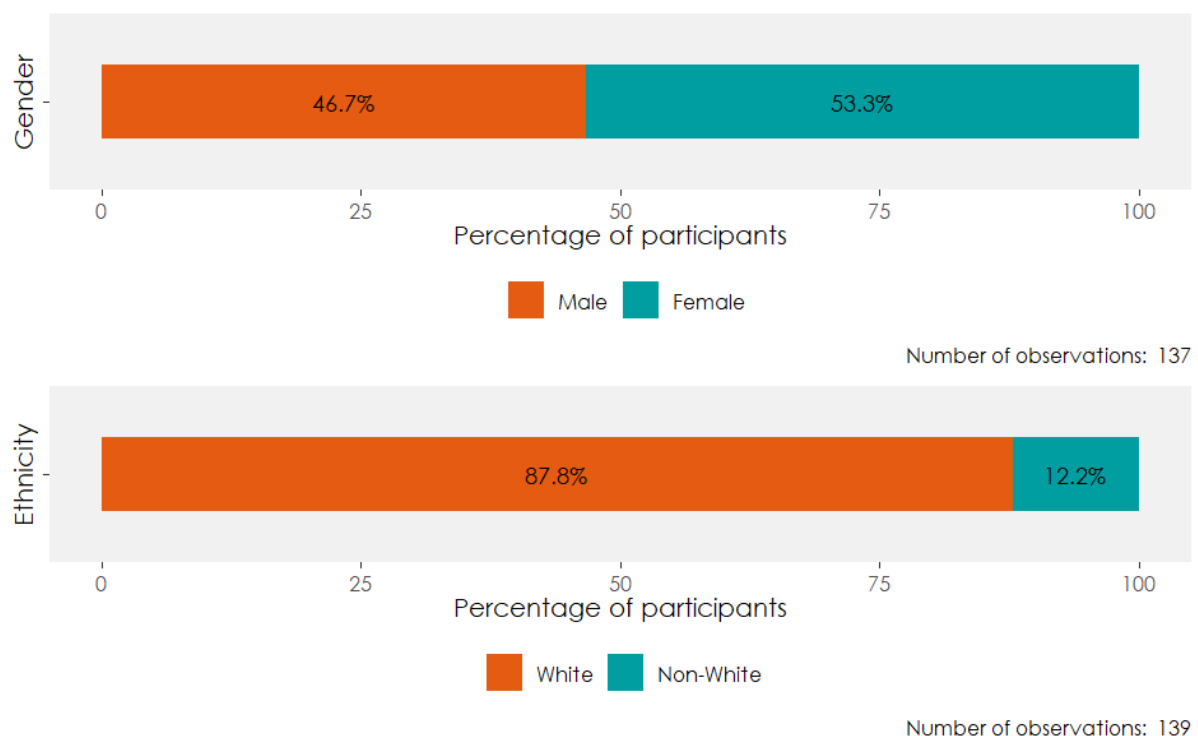
The age of the participants in the sample, when they started the programme, ranges from 17 to 26 years old, with participants being 21 years old on average. It should be noted, however, that MYA staff believe this data to be inaccurate and that all participants were under 24 years old, as intended, when they signed up to the programme. This discrepancy could be due to inputting errors made by staff members at the point of registration.

⁶ This is the total number of consenting evaluation participants that the programme worked with during the evaluation period.

As shown in Figure 1 below, the gender distribution of the sample is slightly skewed towards participants who identify as female (53%) compared to male (47%). A small number of participants who identified in a different way were excluded to preserve anonymity.

Participants who self-identify as White (including English; Welsh; Scottish; Northern Irish; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller; and British among others) take up the largest share of the sample, equalling 88%. The participants who self-identify as non-white (12%) include people from Asian, Black, mixed and other ethnic groups. While data received through the surveys presents a more granular description of ethnicity, these have been aggregated to avoid disclosing small numbers that could risk participants' anonymity.

Figure 1: MYA participants' gender and ethnicity

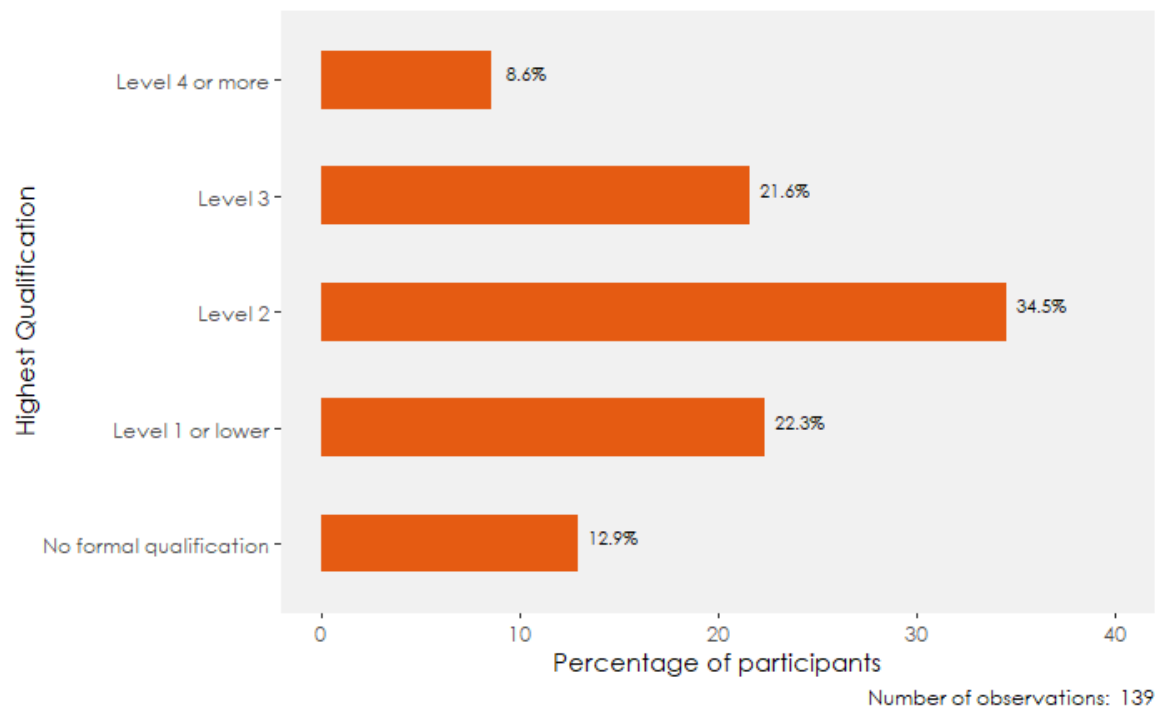


Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

Most of the young people in the sample hold a Level 2 qualification or higher (64.7%); participants with level 2 qualifications were most common in the sample. At the same time, the sample also comprises 12.9% young people who do not have any formal qualification. Figure 2 shows the specifics of the breakdown. The variety of qualification levels and the lack of formal qualifications among some participants was confirmed during interviews with young people and mentors. According to interviews, programme participants often had not completed their education – sometimes because

of successive COVID-19 lockdowns – yet others had degrees or postgraduate degrees.

Figure 2: MYA participants' qualifications

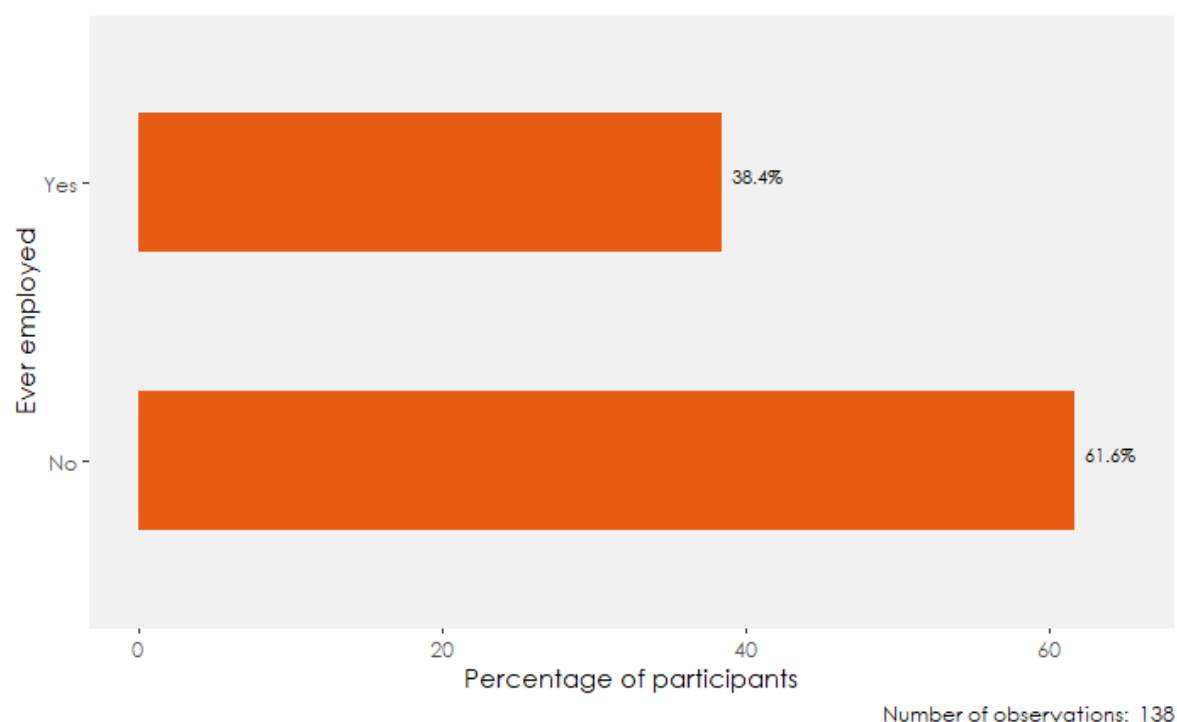


Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

Mentors frequently referenced the impact of participants' complex backgrounds had on their readiness to enter work, commenting that young people faced barriers that hindered their progress towards employment, such as being fearful of engaging in temporary employment opportunities. Further details on the support that young people accessed in the programme and were referred to are explained in Section 3.3.1.1

The data on employment shows the distance from the labour market amongst participants prior to joining LTM. Before starting the programme, 62% of the young people involved in LTM did not have any previous work experience, as shown in Figure 3. Among those with experience, the average time out of work prior to starting LTM was four months.

Figure 3: Percentage of MYA participants employed before joining the programme



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

Moreover, broadly consistent with the eligibility criteria to participate in the programme (which was to have been out of work for 12 month or more), 90% of the sample had been out of work for 10 months or more, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants' time out of work prior to starting LTM

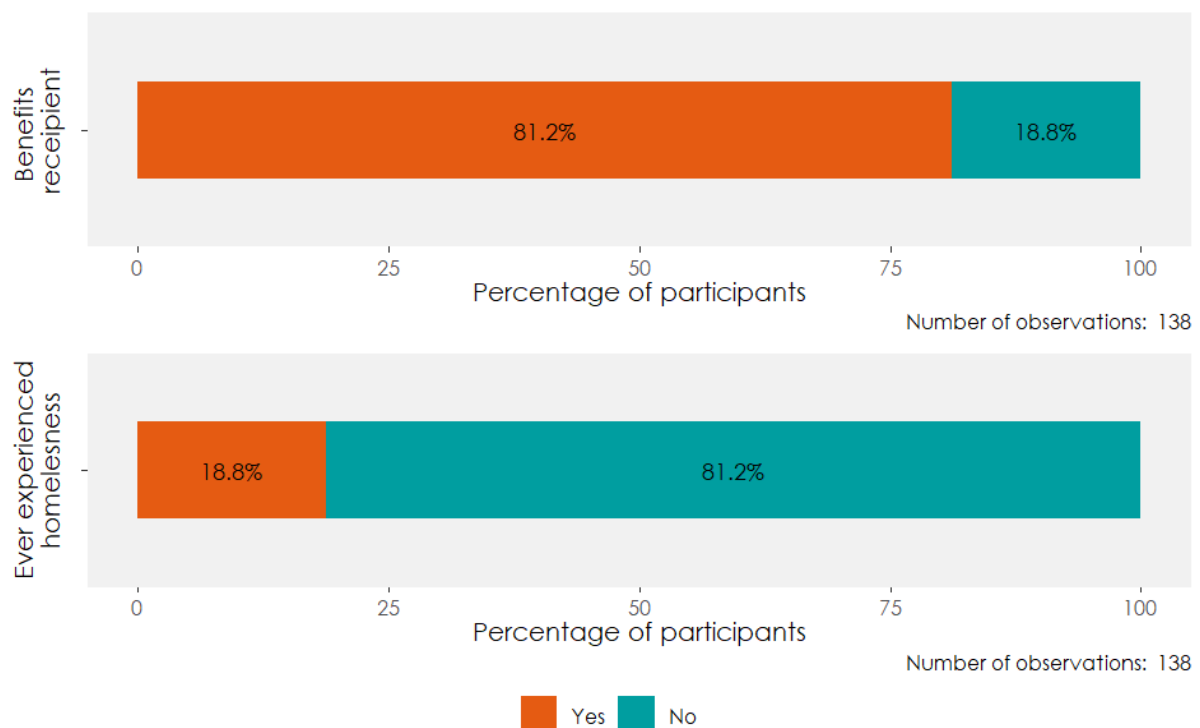
Time out of work	Percentage (%)
0-3 months	2.3
4-6 months	4.5
7-9 months	1.5
10-12 months	19.5
13-15 months	0.8
16-18 months	1.5
18+ months	69.9
Includes 133 participants, with 18+ months category including those who were never employed. Source: KCL analysis of MYA Administrative data	

It is also worth noting that among the participants with no previous experience of employment, 11% were in a particularly vulnerable position when finding opportunities as they had no formal qualifications. Overall, those figures point to the vulnerabilities faced by young people in the programme, both in terms of lack of qualifications and distance from stable employment.

A minority (8%) of these participants were recorded as being in EET more recently. It should be noted, however, that MYA staff believe this data to be inaccurate and that all participants had been NEET for at least 12 months. This discrepancy could be due to inputting errors made by staff members at the point of registration.

Other complex barriers to employment identified in the data included unstable housing, poor mental health, offending histories, substance use, and trauma from adverse experiences. Management information data confirms that a majority of participants (around 81%) claimed benefits such as Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, and Incapacity Benefit, or Employment and Support Allowance. Also, 19% of participants had experienced homelessness in the past, as presented in Figure 4, further confirming their vulnerability.

Figure 4: MYA participants' experiences with homelessness and benefits



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

Table 3 below provides further details on participants' housing situation.

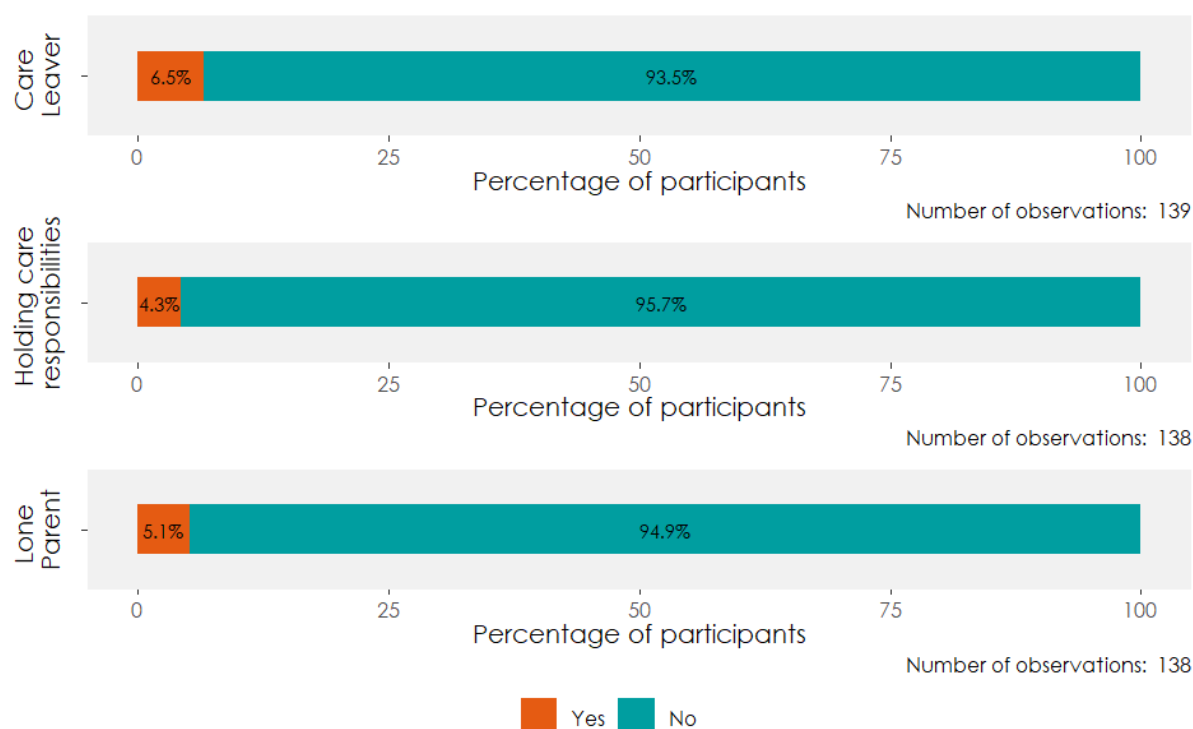
Table 3: MYA participants' housing situation

Housing Situation	Share Of Participants (%)
Homeless	5.8
Hostel/Shared Accommodation	6.5
Living Rent Free	69.6
Renting from acquaintance	7.2
Renting from housing association/LA	5.1
Renting from private landlord	5.8
Source: KCL analysis of MYA Administrative data	

The largest share of the cohort lives in accommodation that is rent free. This could include living with parents or carers, friends or relatives. While this is likely reflective of the age of this group, and is potentially pointing towards more stable housing, this figure can also include hidden homelessness, for example, if a participant is sofa-surfing between friends' homes.

Overall, the share of young people with previous experiences of care in the evaluation cohort is low. Similarly, a small proportion holds caring responsibilities or is a lone parent, as shown in Figure 5.

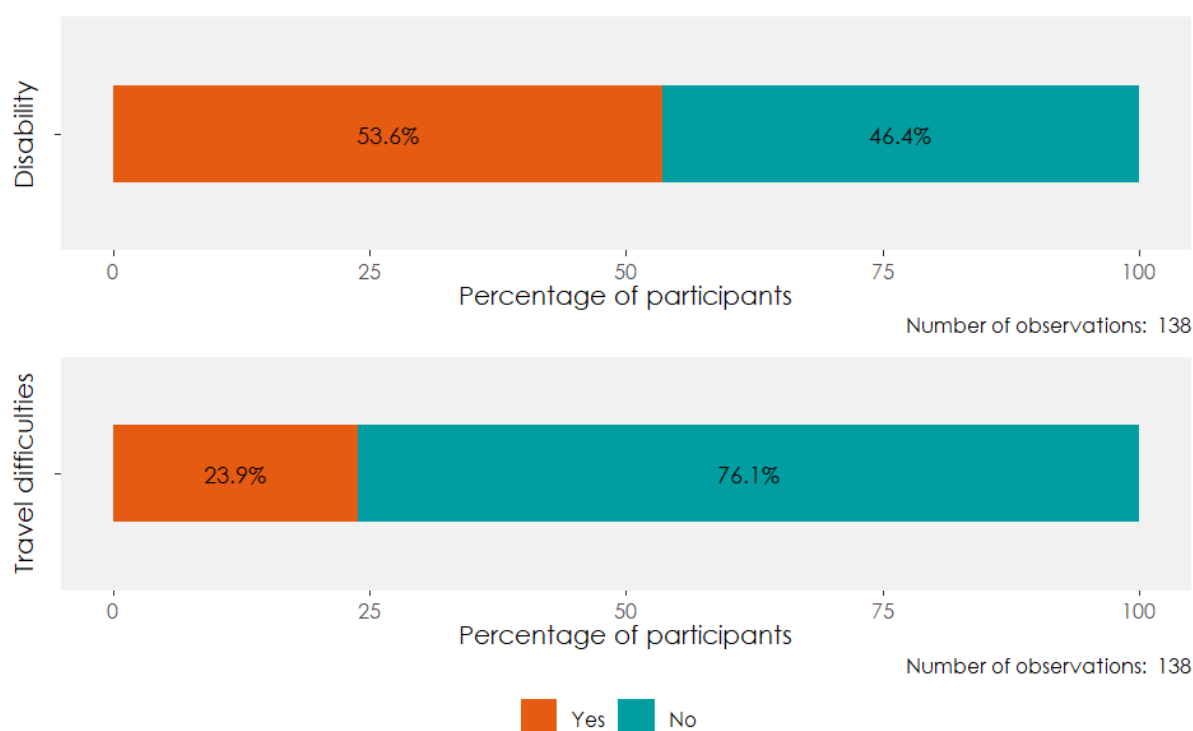
Figure 5: MYA participants' care responsibilities and experiences of care



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

Figure 6 presents the rates of disability and travel difficulties of the cohort in the evaluation.

Figure 6: LTM participants' disclosed disabilities and travel difficulties



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

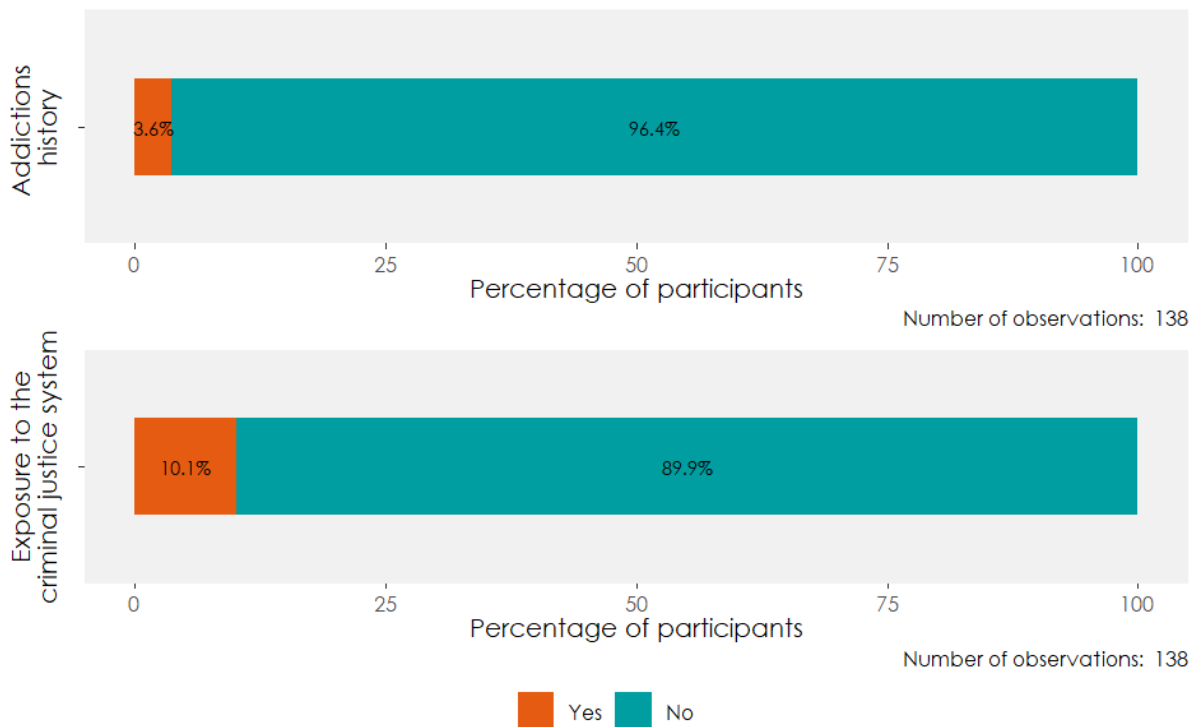
More than half of the sample reported a disability (53.6%) while 23.9% reported facing mobility issues, further constraining their opportunities to study and/or work.

The management information data also covered information on addictions and contact with the criminal justice system. The results are summarised in Figure 7. Only 4% of participants reported having a problem with addictions. While this self-reported variable tends to underestimate the real extent of addictions in groups,⁷ it is likely that most of the sample will not have a problem with addictions. Also, 10% reported having exposure to the criminal justice system. Overall, in the UK, 5% of young people aged 10-17 have been cautioned and sentenced for an offence.⁸ Although this statistic is not directly comparable, the evidence suggests that the cohort in the evaluation has a higher rate of exposure to the criminal justice system than the overall population.

⁷ Literature suggests that self-reports of substance abuse and addictions tend to underestimate their prevalence. See, for instance, Khalili, P. et al (2021) "Validity of self-reported substance use: research setting versus primary health care setting". Available [here](#); or Steinhoff, A. et al. (2023). "When Substance Use is Underreported: Comparing Self-Reports and Hair Toxicology in an Urban Cohort of Young Adults". Available [here](#).

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b391a60c75e30012d800fa/Youth_Justice_Statistics_2022-23.pdf

Figure 7: LTM participants' addiction history and experiences with the Criminal Justice System



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

3.2 Programme theory

This section provides a detailed description of LTM's ToC, as well as a participant journey map. Based on the findings from the qualitative research, both the ToC and participant journey map, which were originally developed during the mobilisation stage, have been reviewed by the research team to ensure they accurately reflect the programme.

3.2.1 Theory of Change

The delivery of the LTM programme was largely reflected in the ToC that was initially developed. However, based on the findings from qualitative interviews with staff and participants, which will be explained later in this report, an additional detail has been added to the diagram. Under the employment support programme activity, it has been specified that young people receive pre-employment support, which can range from being accompanied by mentors or work coaches to interviews, to receiving financial support to buying interview clothes. Figure 8 below shows the final ToC for the programme in full. This sets out the interventions and activities that

the programme offers; the outcomes the programme aims to achieve; and the mechanisms anticipated to lead to these outcomes.

3.2.1.1 Target group

LTM works with young people aged 16 to 24 who have been NEET for at least 12 months.

3.2.1.2 Interventions/activities

When joining MYA, LTM staff receive training to ensure they are adequately prepared to support young people who face complex barriers to employment. Employment and intensive mentors also receive training in trauma informed support and receive supervision and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities. There is also informal training between colleagues who have experience or specialisms in different areas.

LTM provides a holistic service that is person-centred. After a referral has been made (See Figure 9 for more details) – either through referral agencies, MYA outreach or self-referrals - young people are allocated a mentor who is their primary point of contact within LTM, and who works with the young person to understand their individual circumstances and provide personalised support.

Once the core support starts, which usually lasts six to twelve months, young people and mentors develop a Personalised Action Plan, and engage in regular one-to-one intensive mentoring sessions. At the same time, and depending on the needs of the young person, mentors offer different activities and programmes to young people, which include:

- Skills, Employment, Life, Future (SELF) toolkit and/or I Can Toolkit⁹
- Personal and Social Development (PSD) activities, such as residentials and group classes like Fitness to Work
- Youth Ambassador roles
- Employment support programme, offered by employment mentors and intensive mentors, which focuses on skills development workshops (e.g., CV preparation, interviewing skills, job application support), pre-

⁹ This toolkit is used by mentors to establish where a participant is now in their life, to think ahead to where they want to be in the future, and to explore different pathways for getting there. It includes a guide to explore these questions, including activities and discussions.

employment support, work tasters, in-work support, collaboration with employers, and volunteering opportunities

- Signposting to external services, such as physical support, housing, and advocating for young people
- Breaking Down Barriers Fund to cover various expenses such as travel expenses, sport memberships or interview clothes
- Therapeutic interventions

After the core support period ends, young people can receive follow-up support for up to 12 weeks.

3.2.1.3 Mechanisms

By working with skilled mentors to develop a Personalised Action Plan, young people receive a highly personalised, non-linear, and adaptive programme of support. The type and frequency of engagement and communication with the mentors is based on the young person's individual needs and preferences.

During the core support and programme activities, young people and mentors work together to achieve goals based on their assets and barriers, allowing participants to recognise their own skills, talents and strengths. As a result, participants develop goal-setting mindsets, build strong, trusting relationships with their mentor, and feel in more control of their future.

By taking part in the PSD activities, young people have the opportunity to test transferrable skills such as dealing with conflict, teamwork, initiative, problem solving and motivation. This equips them with the support and knowledge to seek and engage in employment, education and training opportunities and develop a more positive attitude towards learning and work. This is also expected to be achieved by engaging in employment support programme activities.

Through therapeutic interventions tailored to their needs, participants are expected to identify and acknowledge their personal barriers, as well as develop pro-social coping mechanisms, the ability to self-regulate and work with others to reach goals, and improve their communication. This is anticipated to give young people greater control over their life and future.

3.2.1.4 Outcomes

LTM provides a flexible and participant-driven programme, therefore young people taking part in it will not receive the same type of support (e.g., not all participants will attend therapeutic interventions or work with employment coaches). Because of this, and their diverse backgrounds, not all of them will achieve the same outcomes, or achieve those outcomes in the same way.

Overall, LTM aims to stabilise young people's immediate circumstances, such as housing, income, mental health, substance use, and offending. Alongside these stabilisation outcomes, the programme also seeks to build the skills young people need to engage with employment, education or training in the future, such as resilience, self-esteem, wellbeing, and workplace skills.

The programme also supports young people to access volunteering opportunities, enter apprenticeships, gain vocational qualifications, or enter full or part-time employment or education. In the longer term, the programme aims to help young people into sustained employment and equip them with the skills to make positive choices.

3.2.1.5 Assumptions

To ensure that LTM can operate as identified in the ToC, a range of assumptions have been identified within the context of the programme, its referral partners (such as Jobcentres and social services), delivery partners (such as local employers), and the Liverpool City Region.

3.2.1.5.1 Internal context

- MYA can recruit and retain skilled mentors, therapists, and employment mentors who have experience working with the target group.
- A “no wrong doors” approach is applied consistently across the programme by staff and partners.
- The MYA Youth Hub provides a safe and positive space in which participants can access DWP and MYA services.
- MYA staff utilise trauma-informed mentoring techniques.

3.2.1.5.2 Partner context

- Employers are willing to offer flexible support to young people with the assistance of MYA.

- MYA has established links with external services.
- Partners and services are available within young people's local area, or they are willing to meet young people in an area they feel comfortable.

3.2.1.5.3 Local context

- Suitable EET opportunities are available across the Liverpool City Region.
- MYA have locations across the city region that enable them to reach different communities.
- Entrenched and/or generational barriers to ambition and employment can be addressed through intensive support.

3.2.1.6 Is the programme theory plausible?

There is a range of evidence that supports the theorised mechanisms of change. The central role of the mentor and intensive one-to-one mentoring is supported by medium-to-high quality evaluation evidence that suggest mentoring, in a variety of contexts, can lead to better educational, employment, and well-being outcomes.¹⁰ The theorised role of employment support activities is also well-founded in the literature. There is evidence that suggests support in completing administrative tasks relating to job searching can positively impact young people's EET outcomes.¹¹

A range of LTM interventions beyond intensive mentoring have also been shown to have an impact on NEET young people's outcomes. For instance, group-based learning communities and interventions designed to target motivation and confidence are linked to sustained engagement in further learning.¹² And several studies have shown that life skills training and formal

¹⁰ See, for example: Eby et al. (2008) *Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals*. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 72(2); Claro & Perelmiter (2021) *The effects of mentoring programs on emotional well-being in youth: a meta-analysis*. Contemporary School Psychology, 26; Rapose et al. (2019) *The effects of youth mentoring programs: a meta-analysis of outcome studies*. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 48.

¹¹ See, for example: Izzo et al. (2000), *Increasing employment earnings: extended transition services that make a difference*. Career development for exceptional individuals, 23(2); Smith et al. (2015), *Brief report: vocational outcomes for young adults with autism spectrum disorders at six months after virtual reality job interview training*. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders; Dorsett (2006), *The new deal for young people: effect on the labour market status of young men*. Labour Economics, 13(3)

¹² Learning and Work Institute (2020), *Evidence review: what works to support 15 to 24-year olds at risk of becoming NEET?*

work training opportunities can lead to positive effects on employment outcomes and raise engagement in education and training.¹³

The therapeutic aspect of the LTM programme theory also has a firm evidence base; other research has indicated well-being, engagement with education, and work readiness are positively improved by interventions that focus on supporting young people overcome mental health challenges.¹⁴

There is evidence that material support to make work more accessible, which is referred to as the breaking down barriers fund in the LTM programme theory, can be beneficial to young people who are looking to find work, as accessibility to transport has been linked to better employment outcomes.¹⁵

As such, we view the programme theory as plausible. With experienced staff who can provide support to participants with a variety of interventions, it seems likely that LTM can create the outputs and outcomes that MYA aim to achieve. Figure 8 overleaf represents the ToC for LTM.

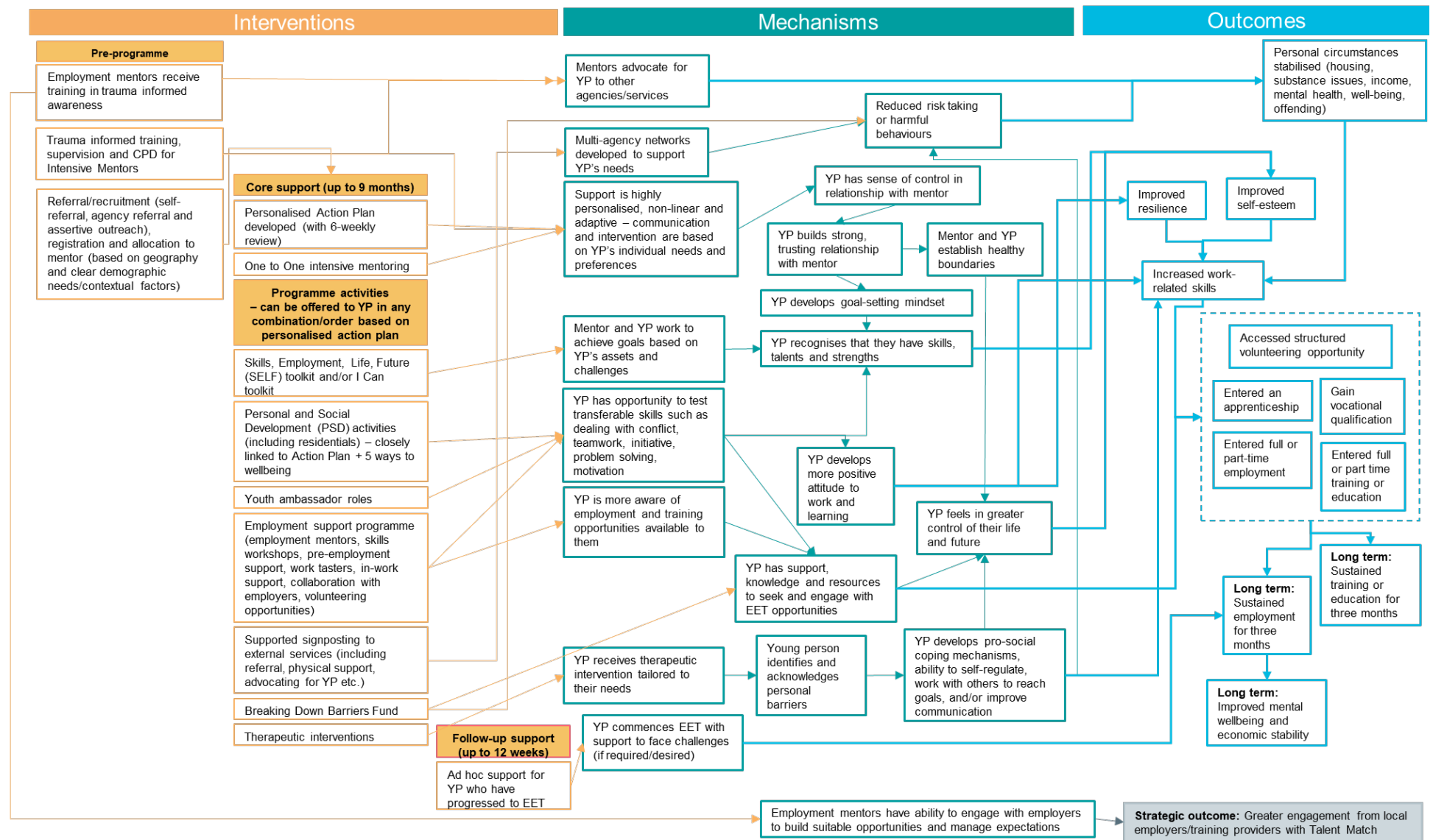
¹³ See, for example: Mawn et al. (2017), *Are we failing young people not in employment, education or training (NEETS)? A systematic review and meta-analysis of re-engagement interventions*. *Systematic Reviews*, 6

¹⁴ See, for example: Geenen et al. (2015) *Better futures: a randomised field test of a model for supporting young people in foster care with mental health challenges to participate in higher education*. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research*, 42(2)

¹⁵ Bastiaanssen et al. (2020) *Does transport help people to gain employment? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical evidence*. *Transport Reviews*, 40(5)

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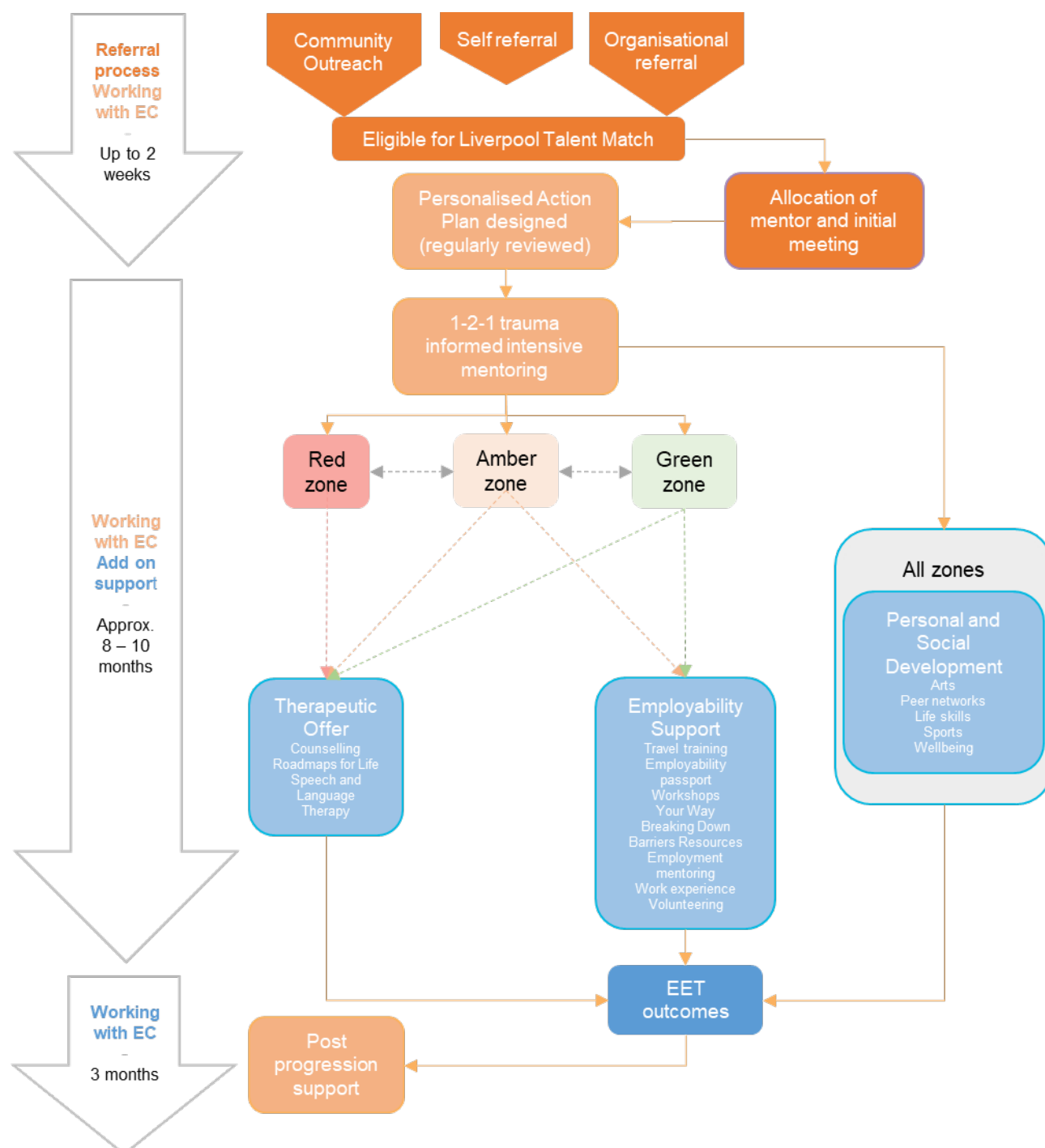
Figure 8. Co-developed LTM Theory of Change



3.2.2 Journey Map

During the mobilisation stage, based on the ToC and following discussions with MYA staff, an overview of the participant journey was developed. Figure 9 below outlines the participant journey.

Figure 9: Journey Map



As identified during the mobilisation stage and confirmed during the data collection and analysis phases, LTM provides a person-centric support, and it is adapted to the needs and interests of participants. As a result, participants'

journey through the programme can vary substantially. However, the core journey that participants generally experience is as follows:

- **Referrals:** referrals tend to come through community outreach activities, self-referrals, or through organisational referrals (e.g., Jobcentre, or social services). Once referrals are reviewed and an eligibility check is conducted, eligible participants are allocated a mentor and attend an initial meeting.
- **Personalised Action Plan:** Participants and mentors design a Personalised Action Plan, based on the young person's needs and goals. This plan is reviewed regularly to ensure it is still relevant.
- **One-to-one trauma informed intensive mentoring:** Participants engage with mentors across approximately eight to ten months. During this time, mentors work to identify whether young people are ready to move towards EET (green zone), whether they are ready to move towards EET yet require additional support to stabilise their personal life (amber zone), or whether they need intensive therapeutic support before being able to move towards EET (red zone). Those participants that are in the red and amber zones tend to receive therapeutic interventions such as counselling, or speech and language therapy, as well as additional support to stabilise their material circumstances. Those in the amber and green zones tend to receive employability support, consisting of travel training, skills development workshops, employment mentoring, in order to access EET opportunities.
- **Personal and Social Development Support:** regardless of whether participants are ready to move towards employment or not, they are all offered the opportunity to join personal and social development activities such as sports, arts, peer networks, and activities to develop life skills.
- **EET outcomes:** once participants achieve EET outcomes, they can still receive support from LTM during up to 12 weeks.

3.3 Operation of the model in practice

This section presents the findings related to the programme's implementation in practice. It explores whether the programme was delivered as intended, how strategic relationships are developed as part of the programme, and

the extent to which LTM adopts a No Wrong Doors approach. This section answers evaluation questions 3, 5 and 6.

3.3.1 Was the programme delivered as intended?

This section addresses the following research questions:

- RQ3: “To what extent was the programme delivered as intended, and in what ways did implementation vary?”
- RQ6: “To what extent does the programme adopt a No Wrong Doors approach, and how does this affect young people's support journey?”

Using qualitative data gathered in interviews with LTM strategic staff, mentors, employers, and participants, as well as management information data and digital diary data (See Appendix D for details), the section explores whether LTM was delivered as intended, or whether and why variations have occurred. It also outlines the enablers and barriers that have affected delivery.

3.3.1.1 Referrals

As reflected in the ToC and as confirmed by staff in interviews, referrals generally came from a range of organisations, with most referrals coming from the Jobcentre Plus (JCP). Other sources included Career Connect, Child Adolescent Mental Health Services, Pupil Referral Units, Probation and Youth Offending teams, as well as social services. The variety of referral routes and the prominence of referrals coming from JCPs was supported by the findings from interviews with young people. Participants often mentioned having been referred by work coaches in JCPs, as well as other employment programmes, support workers, or by family members.

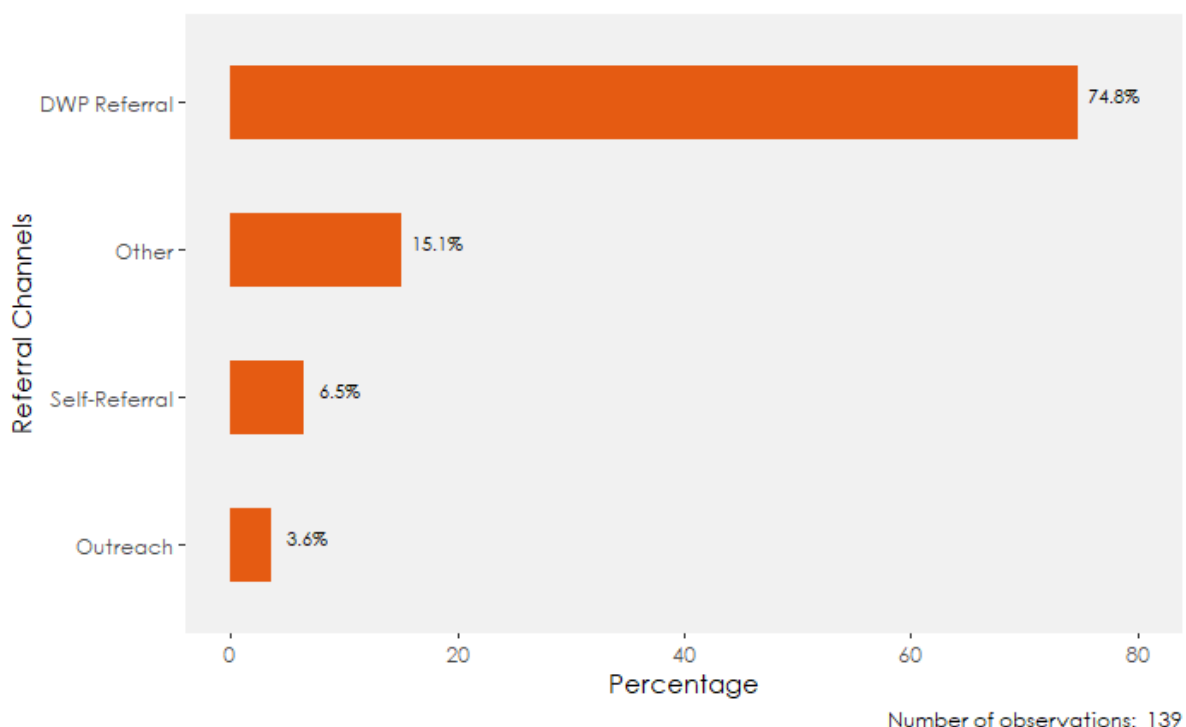
Case Study: Aiden

(See Appendix G for the full version of Case Study 2)

Before joining LTM, Aiden was in college, but he was not sure he wanted to continue. He was willing to work, but he was not actively searching for jobs, partly due to a lack of confidence. After being recommended by someone in a different service, and with encouragement from his parents, Aiden wanted to explore what support LTM offered, hoping it would provide a chance to secure a job. Aiden subsequently joined the LTM programme.

This picture is also confirmed by administrative data, as participants provided information on their referral routes. Figure 10 below shows that DWP referrals (including JCPs) is the largest referral route, accounting for around three-quarters of referrals. Around 7% of referrals are self-referrals, while 4% come from MYA outreach activities. Outreach activities may also encourage self-referral, so we expect these categories to have some overlap.

Figure 10: Referral channels for LTM participants



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

LTM staff play an active role in building relationships with referral partners and significant resources are spent ensuring that referral streams are active. Interviews and workshops indicated that mentors regularly visited JCPs to

discuss referrals with staff and generate interest in the LTM programme. This is further explored in Section 3.3.3 below relating to relationship building in the programme.

Staff also reported that, while JCPs constitute the biggest referral agency, they frequently refer young people with complex barriers – such as neurodiversity, homelessness, or mental health issues – who tend not to be ready to enter the job market. Receiving referrals for young people with complex needs was seen as a potential consequence of the long NHS waiting lists for counselling services. This had implications for LTM, as staff believed they would receive greater amounts of referrals when other services were stretched. At other times, however, referral rates would slow down - one member of staff mentioned that referrals were a “roller coaster”, and when referrals were lower, they had the capacity to do community outreach activities and approach organisations to introduce their services to potential participants.

Once referrals were received, these were checked against the eligibility criteria of Talent Match:

- Young people aged 16 to 24 living within Liverpool City Region
- NEET for at least 12 months

3.3.1.2 Initial engagement with participants

After a young person had been admitted into the programme, they were allocated a mentor who acted as their main point of contact across their LTM journey. Mentors were responsible for arranging an initial meeting with participants to introduce them to the different services the programme offers so that they could make an informed decision about whether they wanted to take part or not.

“It was quite an easy process. She [mentor] introduced it to me, and all the things they do with other young people, and stuff like that, and what’s out there, what opportunities they could offer me. And she took my number, and left me her number, and she gave me a week or so to make my mind up.” Participant

Young people’s experiences during the first meetings and initial engagement varied. Insights gathered from interviews with participants suggest that while

some were positive about their initial experience, others experienced anxiety and nervousness when they started engaging with the programme. Some reported being unsure about what to expect from taking part or feeling scared and anxious as it was a new experience.

"I was okay at first until like the day of it [first session] (...) I was very anxious. But I managed to get the courage to walk in on my own and meet everyone." Participant

These findings align with the insights from mentors' interviews, as these emphasised that most participants struggled with social interaction, and often suffered from anxiety and/or depression.

Despite the initial nervousness that several young people reported experiencing, most of them became comfortable with the programme and its sessions quickly, as the staff and atmosphere were welcoming and friendly. Management information data suggests dropping off the programme after attending a first session is not common. The sample shows that only seven out of 89 participants – for which engagement data was available – did so. Findings from interviews suggest that the initial sign-up process was also fast and simple.

"It was quite nerve-wracking 'cos you don't really know what to expect from it, so just signed me up and said, "Come in and we'll do the introduction". [They] said who they were, they were quite welcoming, no judgement at all. [They] just let you say what you wanted and what you wanted from it."
Participant

Once young people decided to take part in the programme, mentors and participants agreed on the frequency and location of the sessions, reflecting the programme's personalised approach (See section 3.3.1.6 for more details). In the beginning, mentors leveraged the initial one-to-one mentoring sessions as a foundation for building their relationship with the participant, getting to know their needs, and tailoring their support in a manner that best addressed those needs. Section 3.3.1.4 provides further details on the focus of the mentoring sessions, and explains the different activities participants can also join, such as counselling or group activities.

3.3.1.3 Support sought by participants

Findings from interviews with participants and staff provide insights into the reasons why young people decide to engage in the programme. The main two reasons identified are (i) participants' interest in entering the labour market and finding employment opportunities, and (ii) participants' search for support to overcome personal barriers, such as mental health issues and lack of confidence. In interviews, staff emphasised that young people had been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted both their personal and professional development and increased the number of young people accessing the programme for this reason (ii). These findings suggest that LTM is not only perceived as a youth employment programme but is also seen as a programme that helps young people's personal development. This perception was shared among both staff and participants.

For young people who were primarily interested in receiving support from LTM to enter or re-enter the labour market, some reported having had difficulties writing job applications or interviewing for positions on their own. These difficulties often stemmed from a combination of factors, including a lack of self-esteem and confidence, limited prior work experience, and/or uncertainty about their career interests.

Most young people interviewed reported having limited or no prior work experience. A few mentioned having done internships or having worked in the hospitality sector as catering staff or in bars. However, their employment ended due to different factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or lack of enjoyment in the role. Several participants also reported having left school, college or university – with some reporting having had adverse experiences in education – and being unsure about their career and education aspirations.

"I was in Uni last year and I dropped out because I didn't really like it, so I decided to get a job quickly and stuff. And my brother told me about this place and that's why I came here."

Participant

Some young people hoped that by engaging in the programme, they would receive support to develop their CV, find out what job opportunities could be a good fit for them, and get ready to enter the labour market.

“[LTM] is for young people. It helps you get into a job, employment, and some experience, work on your CV, and that all appealed to me.” Participant

The other key aim described by multiple participants was the desire to receive support to overcome personal barriers. These often took the form of mental health issues or unstable personal circumstances. Findings from interviews with participants and staff revealed that many young people engaging in the programme experienced mental health and learning barriers such as anxiety, eating disorders, ADHD, social isolation, and travel anxiety. For instance, management information data shows that around 24% of participants faced issues when travelling. As a result, some hoped that the programme could help them improve their confidence, develop communication skills, work skills, and ultimately get a job.

A few others decided to join LTM with the aim to receive support to overcome other personal barriers such as financial difficulties and housing instability. Management information data collected by MYA confirms that housing instability affected some participants, with around 6% of participants being homeless when they started engaging with the programme while a further 19% had experienced homelessness in the past. At the same time, a very large proportion of participants (81%) received benefits, further confirming the financial difficulties that some participants faced.

“I wanted to build my confidence and other working skills. I wanted to be able to communicate more because I can’t really. I struggle to make conversation or talk to people or strangers.” Participant

Overall, most participants interviewed did not have any previous experiences with similar programmes. However, engagement with JCP was common among young people interviewed. A few of them reported that their experiences in JCP were generally negative, as their environment was seen as intimidating and uncomfortable.

“With the Jobcentre, like there’s other people sitting next to you chatting with their co-workers and you’re feeling really uncomfortable due to anxiety, in my position. Speaking on behalf of myself, I didn’t find it very friendly and welcoming.” Participant

Only a few participants had experienced other employment support provision in different settings before engaging with LTM such as at their secondary school, or at Prince's Trust.

It is worth noting that, while the programme theory suggests that participants should be moving towards employment outcomes, this is not always what young people expect to achieve when engaging with LTM. Instead, support stabilising personal circumstances is something that some young people primarily seek to receive.

3.3.1.4 Support provided

LTM employed a total of 26 intensive mentors, 10 of whom were funded by YFF. Each mentor managed a caseload of 15 to 25 young people and worked intensively with around 10 to 15 of them. The programme also employed six employment coaches, two of whom were funded by YFF. Each EC worked with approximately 15 to 20 young people simultaneously. The five counsellors could accommodate up to 15 young people at a time, yet the caseload size could decrease when working with participants with very complex needs.

As explained previously, LTM is a person-centred programme that offers young people a bespoke action and support plan to help them overcome barriers and achieve their goals. As a result, young people go through different journeys depending on their needs and starting point, and they might not work with employment coaches or counsellors.

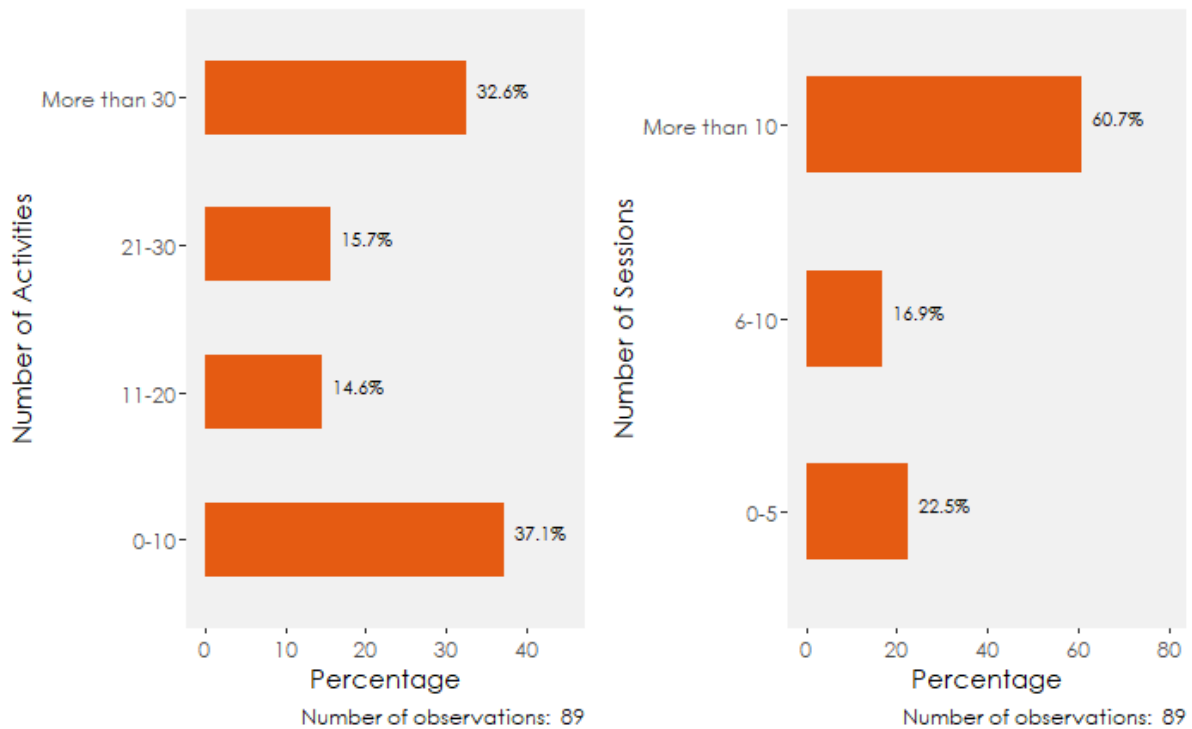
The tailored nature of the support offered is apparent in the administrative data. Participants had quite variable levels of contact as represented through variable amounts of activities and sessions recorded:

- A session refers to the number of interactions that a staff member had with the young person, regardless of the purpose of such contact.
- Activities, on the other hand, refer to the specific task undertaken during the session.

A session can therefore be made of several activities, for example, if a participant had a check-in with the mentor and prepared for an interview at the same time. As shown in Figure 11, most participants recorded at least 10 sessions with MYA staff in their support journey, but the amount of activities varied considerably. This suggests that some participants had very focused

sessions with MYA staff, whereas others would undertake a range of activities when they engaged. There was no significant difference between participants of different genders or ethnicities in relation to how many activities and sessions they received as part of the programme.

Figure 11: Number of activities and sessions attended by LTM participants



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

The types of activities engaged with also varied considerably between participants. As Table 4 shows, a majority of LTM participants included in the sample took part in mentoring sessions and information and guidance activities, whilst smaller (but still considerable) numbers took part in counselling sessions or received advocacy support from LTM staff. More specialist services like crisis interventions were received by smaller numbers of participants. The data therefore indicates that the flexible and tailored approach to support that is outlined in the TOC is implemented in practice. It should be noted though that the variable nature of data collection between different mentors means this data is not entirely reliable.

Table 4: Percentage of participants that engaged with each type of activity during LTM engagement.

Activity Type	% of participants who engaged with activity
Action Plan Support: from planning to final revision	36.5
Advocacy	40.0
Counselling session: including post-exit counselling support	34.1
Crisis Intervention	9.4
Direct Engagement, including initial meetings and informal check-ins, and other direct contact not accounted in the other categories	90.6
Employer Support	21.2
Exit Session	48.2
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)	56.5
In work support	5.9
Mentoring session	76.5
Other Assistance, including safeguarding and safety planning	3.5
Referral Support including referrals to EET providers, referrals to counselling, either internal or external.	41.2
Sessions/Workshops/Activities including group and solo activities, skills workshops, roadmaps for life, among others.	52.9
Source: KCL analysis of MYA Administrative Records	

While LTM is an employability programme, staff emphasised that not all participants are necessarily going to exit the programme into employment, but they will receive support to get closer to the labour market.

“I think it’s really important that we are an employability programme, but not everybody is going to go into

employment. But we can get them much closer to the labour market than anybody else can." Strategic staff

To support their clients towards employment, staff focused on understanding participants' barriers and needs. Considerable focus is placed upon helping them stabilise their personal circumstances and meet their basic needs. Alongside this, staff provide intensive mentoring, offer personal and social development support, design and review an action plan, and ultimately focus on employability skills and progression pathways.

Insights from staff and participants interviews suggest that upon entering the programme, young people worked with intensive mentors to develop a trauma-informed and person-centred action plan, subject to subsequent reviews and updates. To develop these plans, mentors focused the initial sessions on explaining to participants what LTM offers and exploring participants' aspirations for their engagement in the programme. The first sessions were used to start building a trusted relationship and identifying participants' barriers – both personal and professional – and goals.

If participants had complex needs and their basic needs – such as housing – were not being met, mentors worked to stabilise participants' personal circumstances. For instance, they could refer young people at risk of homelessness to housing associations, help participants secure a form of ID, or register to access Universal Credit to support with living costs. If participants faced very complex needs, such as substance use that they wanted to address, mentors could refer them to external agencies to receive further support.

"We want to embed therapeutic support because it seemed to us, if you look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the only way that you're going to sustain employment is if your basic needs are met and that stabilisation of outcomes around just your basics; your housing, your food, your income (...)."

Strategic Staff

Alongside helping participants stabilise their personal circumstances, mentors offered ongoing intensive one-to-one support with participants. Findings from interviews with staff and participants suggest that this was a key part of the programme, as mentoring sessions focused on exploring and supporting

participants' overall wellbeing and offering them a space to reflect on their day-to-day routines, and general progress.

An observation of a one-on-one support session revealed the vast range of issues mentors help their clients address. Within a 20-minute meeting, a LTM mentor had helped the participant contact their housing provider, fill in a form for the police, get food and toiletries from a food bank, and complete an application for a training course. Given the variability of their clients' circumstances, this support is flexible and necessarily responsive. Mentors therefore need a range of knowledge to successfully support their clients. Interviews with participants suggested that they felt programme staff had the requisite knowledge to provide meaningful support.

"I think because she [mentor] knows us as a person, she knows what we need help with. We've sat and spoken about things we need help with. (...) She knows the situation you're in, like she knows if you're homeless, she knows if you're struggling at home, she knows about your family and friend relationships."

Participant

Many participants mentioned having regular check-ins with their mentor to talk about their day, or just have casual chats. Some also used their regular catch ups to talk about mental health (e.g., discuss healthy eating or emotions) and emotional wellbeing. These sessions offered participants a space to explore their barriers, try to break them down, and lay the foundations needed – such as confidence, communication skills, or emotional management – to go into employment. As will be explained below, when mentors thought participants needed further support, they were offered the opportunity to attend counselling or other therapeutic interventions. These findings highlight the central role of the mentor through the programme, and suggest there is fidelity with programme theory, where the mentors closely guide participants through their support journey.

Young people with complex needs who could benefit from working with a counsellor and other therapeutic interventions were also offered the opportunity to do so. According to interviews with counsellors, while there has been a waiting list at times, overall, young people could access that service quickly. Before starting the counselling, counsellors usually receive a referral form which presents the main issues the young person is facing (as identified

by the mentor), as well as a pre-assessment form. Before the first session, counsellors explained to participants the person-centred ways of working that they would adopt during the sessions, and asked questions to get to know them, such as previous experiences with therapy or reasons for joining LTM.

The focus of the counselling sessions varied depending on the young person's personal circumstances and needs, which might include navigating anxiety or learning how to cope with traumas. Counsellors mentioned that they adapted the focus and frequency of the sessions to the young person's preferences. They could also refer participants to the Roadmaps for Life programme - a group course that focuses on emotional regulation and mindfulness skills, particularly beneficial for young people with anxiety. To avoid having a dual relationship with the counsellor, those attending Roadmaps for Life were unable to attend counselling sessions simultaneously, but they could join it before or after they finished their counselling programme.

Case Study: Zak

(See Appendix G for the full version of Case Study 1)

Zak was stuck at home, isolated without a social circle of friends, and spending most of his time in his room. He was struggling with a mental health issue and felt uneasy discussing it, but he acknowledged that he needed help. Despite lacking prior job experience, aside from a brief stint at a chip shop, he was now seeking job opportunities. After being paired with a mentor, his initial sessions and counselling focused on improving his mental health, with the goal of reaching a stage where he felt ready to begin searching for employment. Gradually, the focus of the support transitioned to employability and skills building. They worked on CV preparation and identifying training opportunities. Zak also engaged in several other activities facilitated by LTM focused on personal and social development, gaining work-related qualifications, and mentoring other young people.

"The counselling itself was very, very helpful for me like formatively and just developmentally for my mental wellbeing and such."- Zak

Working closely with mentors was seen as a key factor for the success of counselling sessions. With the permission of the young person, counsellors reported being able to discuss with mentors the issues that were brought up in the sessions and identify the best way to support young people collaboratively while acknowledging the limits of counselling and acting within the bounds of patient confidentiality.

Mentors also offer participants the opportunity to attend personal and social development activities, which were usually delivered in group settings. These activities could involve outdoor and cultural activities, such as visits to museums and cinemas, water sports, fishing, and archery. The Breaking Down Barriers Fund also allowed mentors to offer young people gym memberships. Mentors could also offer participants the opportunity to join different internal or external programmes to develop life skills and get to know other people. Some of these programmes included Fitness for Work, which offered sports sessions then group discussions around mental health and positive choices, or the Moving Forward programme which focused on motivation, resilience and teamwork.

Young people were also given the opportunity to join the LTM Your Way programme, a 7-week programme created to support neurodiverse young people. It was developed by MYA with support from The Brain Charity, and offered hourly sessions where participants explored neurodiversity in a group setting and worked to address confidence and build skills. This programme was open to young people with and without a formal diagnosis.

Overall, mentors and staff interviewed considered that giving young people the opportunity to join personal and social development activities – especially group activities – was key to the programme's success. LTM offered a wide range of options, and mentors reported that it was usually possible to find a group activity that worked well for participants.

"I think that's a really important thing, making sure there's safety and just lots of things for people to do. So, when there's loads of groups on you can normally find at least one group that would interest someone." Mentor

Participants who had taken advantage of these opportunities spoke extremely positively about them. For many, the social aspect of these additional activities was viewed as the most impactful part of their support

journey. For instance, a participant who attended the Fitness for Work programme mentioned they really enjoyed taking part in this programme, which helped them with improve their confidence. Another participant who attended the Your Way programme explained how it helped them with their confidence meeting people who were also neurodiverse. Further details on the outcomes of attending these programmes are presented in Section 3.4.

"We learnt about the struggles of it [neurodivergence] and how it can affect other people and how other people are very similar with each other. I didn't know that anyone there was very similar to me (...) It makes me more comfortable because I know that they've got their struggles as well and so have I. So I'm not like the only one." Participant

According to the programme theory, LTM also offered young people the opportunity to use Skills, Employment, Life, Future (SELF) Toolkit, and/or I Can toolkits, but these three offerings were not mentioned by participants interviewed. Similarly, only one participant mentioned taking on a youth ambassador role. With the caveat of the limitation of the interview sample, this suggests that these activities may be less common among participants, who generally benefited from other support interventions such as Personal and Development activities.

Intensive mentors were responsible for identifying young people who demonstrated readiness to transition towards employment – such as those who had been able to strengthen their confidence – and referred them to an employment coach. Intensive mentors would communicate relevant information to employment coaches about the young person before they started working together, such as barriers to employment they continued to have, as well as any work-related interests.

Both intensive mentors and employment coaches offered participants employability support to get them closer to the labour market. While intensive mentors could also work with young people on other non-work-related topics such as personal development and mental health, employment coaches exclusively focused on helping young people prepare for and navigate the labour market. Both worked with participants to explore what types of jobs they are interested in and help them access training opportunities and courses they could benefit from. For instance, young people interviewed

mentioned their mentors helped them access health and safety courses, first aid qualifications, or other training opportunities such as travel training or employability courses. If interested in educational opportunities, employment coaches could also take young people to colleges' open days and explore apprenticeship and training opportunities.

Mentors and employment coaches helped young people create their CVs, by exploring their previous working experience as well as their strengths and skills. This process was reported to have non-work related benefits for participants, such as improving their confidence.

"When you just do a CV and show them what they have done, even if it's skill transference, it just makes them feel better about themselves." Employment Coach

They also supported participants' searches for placements and job opportunities by helping them to sign up to vacancy tracking websites, prepare job applications and personal statements, and prepare for interviews. The extent to which these activities were directed by the young person or the mentor varied by individual; where participants were more confident or more able to navigate labour market opportunities, they were given the autonomy to do so, whilst those that required more support or encouragement were directed by their mentors.

Through the Breaking Down Barriers Fund, which is part of MYA's offering, employment coaches could also help participants get interview clothes and travel to interview locations. Overall, employment coaches worked to develop the necessary skills that young people are expected to need to succeed in the labour market on their own.

"That's what I try and do with everyone though; show them how to do it, how to like apply for a job, how to do this, how to do that. So you don't wait to come and see me every two weeks or every week (...) The idea is for you to do it in between seeing me as well. We're only here as long as the funding is here." Employment Coach

Employment coaches explained that if, during the sessions with the young people, they identify that they are not ready to enter the labour market, they will relay this information to the intensive mentor. As a result, they would

postpone their work until the participant is deemed ready to pursue new opportunities. Although staff acknowledged that young people's progress is not always linear, employment coaches interviewed praised the effectiveness of intensive mentors in identifying those prepared to transition towards employment. Therefore, it was uncommon for the employment coaching to cease due to participants' lack of readiness.

Findings from interviews suggest that mentors, employment coaches, intensive mentors and counsellors can identify whether a young person is ready to move towards employment based on different factors, including:

- Whether they have been able to work on or resolve traumas, especially if the participant has attended counselling sessions.
- Changes in participants' routine such as a more regular engagement with the programme or other activities.
- Changes in participants' social and communication skills, reflected in their ability and willingness to socialise.

According to MYA staff, building up a relationship with the young people, and keeping honest and ongoing conversations was key to identifying whether a participant is ready to move towards employment.

"Employability is always at the forefront and literally for me kind of like, 'Where are they going? What are they going to do?' And it's through conversations." Mentor

Overall, maintaining close and ongoing communication between intensive mentors and employment coaches was regarded as key to ensure that young people receive the appropriate level of support. As reflected in the programme's theory, working closely with other staff members and establishing multi-agency partnerships was key to ensure young people received appropriate support. When needed, intensive mentors and employment coaches could have one-to-one catch-ups to discuss the young person's progress, and they sometimes had joint meetings with the participant, to ensure the transition process was smooth.

3.3.1.5 No Wrong Doors approach

As outlined in the programme theory, MYA considers No Wrong Doors approach a key contextual factor that underpins the support provided in the

LTM programme. This approach can be summarised as follows: no matter what a participant's starting point is, or how they initially access LTM, they will be connected to the support that is right for them and is responsive to their current needs. Findings from participants and staff interviews have been used to answer RQ6 "To what extent does the programme adopt a No Wrong Doors approach and how does this affect young people?".

As outlined in the sections above, MYA offers a wide range of services to support participants with different levels of needs, which is in line with the No Wrong Doors approach. The youth hub, which brings together an integrated range of services to support young people, is at the centre of MYA's No Wrong Doors approach. This was reflected in interviews with MYA staff and participants, who described how centralising the different services in one hub allowed mentors to offer young people a range of internal and external opportunities – from personal development activities to counselling sessions – that are tailored to their needs and are easily accessible.

At the same time, the hub allows mentors to work closely with counsellors and employment coaches, keeping a close eye on the progress of young people and allowing them to tailor the current and future support offered to them.

"[A participant] did actually get a qualification while he was with us. He got it in customer service, so that was with the Youth Hub." Mentor

Further details on how this approach affects young people's journey and the achievement of outcomes are explained in Section 3.4.

As described in staff interviews, MYA's approach to referrals and initial assessments also embodied the No Wrong Doors approach. In staff workshops, frontline staff described how participants with a huge range of barriers are referred to them and that they will work with them provided they are the right age and are open to being contacted. Interviews and meetings with strategic staff further demonstrated the organisational commitment to the approach; one interview highlighted how the range of services provided at different sites meant they were able to support individuals facing a huge range of barriers.

"What we have done is we created a number of community-based hubs where the people can go where they feel safe

[...] it's very welcoming. That sort of No Wrong Door approach is key. It has to be accessible." Strategic staff

Strategic staff's commitment to a No Wrong Doors approach was also emphasised in conversations the research team had with them regarding future evaluation work. Staff's apprehension towards randomised allocation of treatment for a further evaluation demonstrated their belief that LTM support should be offered to anyone eligible that asks for it.

Observations further confirmed frontline staff's commitment to following this approach. Within a single session, mentors were observed supporting participants to access a range of services and support options. This included discussing referring them to in-house counselling, organising a foodbank pick up for them, and liaising with their housing officer. Observations of group activities gave further evidence that this approach was consistently followed as participants in a social activity described how they had been given the opportunity to build confidence in a relaxed environment that was appropriate to them. This demonstrated adherence to programme theory.

There is further evidence that the No Wrong Doors approach is embedded in staff's practice throughout different levels of LTM. Participant interviews add weight to this claim. Across interviews with young people at different stages in their support journey, LTM participants highlighted the range of support that was made accessible to them by MYA staff.

"You can ask them any questions and they will support you with the answers. If they don't have the answer, they'll just help you in a different way." Participant

As such, the qualitative data suggests that this contextual factor that underpins the programme theory is consistently present within the LTM delivery model.

3.3.1.6 Communication with, and engagement of, participants

Findings from interviews show that the communication arrangements and the frequency of engagement of participants depend on the young person. Intensive mentors and employment coaches generally worked with young people once a week, and in some instances, twice or more a week. The frequency of engagement depended on the size and needs of the caseload. This shows fidelity to the programme theory, which reflects that

support is highly personalised and communication is based on participants' individual needs and preferences.

While intensive mentors generally reported working with young people for around 10 to 12 months, employment coaches worked with them for 2 to 3 months. However, the length of support varied depending on the participant. Those attending counselling were able to see the counsellor up to 14 times for hourly sessions. Management information data shows that, on average, participants engaged with the programme for 8 months – ranging from 1 to 28 months, which shows a significant degree of variation in engagement.

Intensive mentors and participants usually met in-person in the Youth Hub or other MYA buildings for their sessions, and in some complex cases, mentors visited participants in their house. Qualitative data suggests that this approach was generally taken at the beginning of the programme, once participants started to engage in it, and only in cases where young people were not ready to leave their house due to personal and mental health barriers. Over time, mentors aimed to help the participant leave their house by accompanying them on public transport and travelling together to the Hub.

Face to face meetings were usually alternated with phone calls and text messages in between sessions, to check on participants and maintain engagement levels. Overall, findings suggest that young people were pleased with the level and type of communication they had with their mentors. They reported being able to reach out to their mentors outside of the sessions over the phone whenever they needed it, and received appointment reminders via text messages before the sessions.

"Depending on the needs and circumstances, like I could message her [mentor] anytime I wanted via WhatsApp and say, 'Oh, I'm having some difficulties like searching for this' she would be like, 'Okay, I'll arrange a meeting.' Within a week I would be going to the meeting, so it was rapid." Participant

The frequency of communication between intensive mentors and participants could also vary over time. Findings suggest that participants often communicated less frequently with their mentors when they felt an improvement in their wellbeing, or while they actively engaged in EET. A mentor flagged that they were required to officially sign off young people

from the programme once they secured employment. However, despite this sign off, mentors still offered support during the transition period to ensure an easier and seamless process. This aligns with the programme theory, where mentors provide follow-up and ad-hoc support to those who have progressed to EET to ensure participants can be supported if they face challenges.

Case Study: Zak

(See Appendix G for the full version of Case Study 1)

After working closely with his mentor, counsellor, and employment coach, Zak secured an internship. He struggled with some of the social interaction in the workplace, but he worked through it with support from his mentor who would pop into the office to have a chat. During his internship, Zak and his mentor would stay in touch, including by coming to the Youth Hub to have an informal chat with his mentor.

Interview findings show that in some cases, young people were still in touch with their mentors after they had left the programme to focus on EET or when they were no longer eligible; young people might provide updates about their life, have casual conversations with mentors, or request some guidance. This suggests that in some cases, mentors and participants create strong and lasting relationships.

"To be honest, [after they have left] they always update me. I don't ask them, but I always find my young people always come back and tell me news." Mentor

In terms of agency, insights from interviews suggest that intensive mentors and employment coaches frequently led the sessions and provided ideas of what to focus on, while taking into consideration participants' preferences. Despite this, some young people reported providing the same level of input as their mentor during the sessions. Young people who commented on the way the sessions were led were happy with the approach they were following, as they trusted their mentors.

"The relationship between me and my mentor is as close to a friendship as can be professionally, and I feel I could go to her with anything that was on my mind. I trust her. (...) In our meetings, it is a two-way discussion with equal input. What we

discuss is based on what it is I'm requiring at the time."

Participant (digital diary quote)

Findings suggest that counsellors generally lead all sessions, especially when working with people who have experienced trauma or are neurodiverse.

In terms of enablers that could positively influence the level of engagement of young people, mentors identified that the location of the Hub is key to ensure young people attend the sessions, as it is located in the city centre and can be easily accessed by most participants. At the same time, being understanding and flexible was also seen as crucial to ensure participants stayed engaged with the programme; not putting pressure on targets or giving young people deadlines allowed mentors to work productively with participants. This is a key factor that allowed mentors and participants to build trusted relationships and establish healthy boundaries.

"We've got a luxury of having time with young people. You know, we don't want to get rid of them in three months, we can still be working with them 12 months down the line."

Mentor

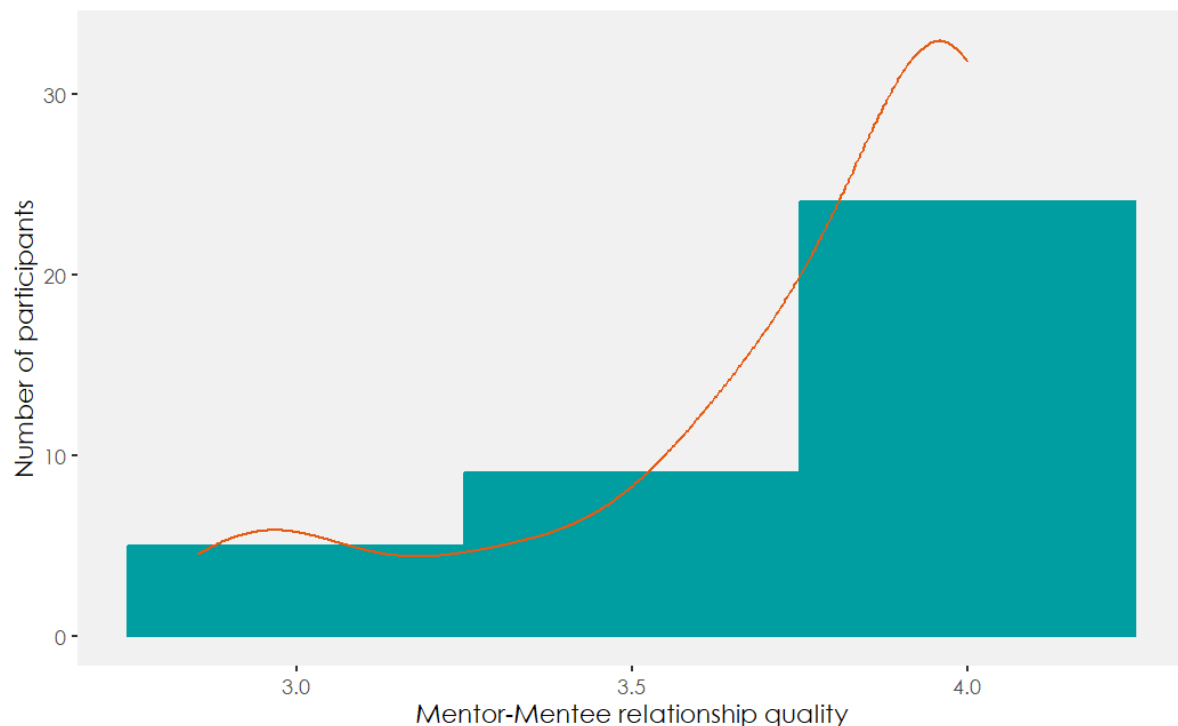
Overall, LTM staff emphasised the importance of establishing trusted relationships with young people to effectively identify young people's needs and recommend the best type of support. Participants interviewed and those who completed digital diary tasks generally expressed positive relationships with their mentors and were satisfied with the support they received or were receiving from LTM staff. They also expressed contentment with the opportunities offered to them throughout the programme.

Young people described their interactions with mentors as relaxed and natural, and mentioned feeling comfortable working with them. Young people saw their mentors as patient, caring, and understanding. For instance, on a digital diary task, a participant defined their mentor as follows:

"My mentor has loads of amazing qualities that just make a strange and scary environment a safe and comforting one. She is compassionate, caring, always listens carefully and responds to everything I say bits at a time, never lets me down and provides me with so many opportunities so I can be the best me I can be." Participant (digital diary quote)

These perceptions coincided with the information collected on the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship in the endline survey. Figure 12 presents the distribution of participants' responses computed into a mentor-mentee relationship quality score. Over 82% of the participants who completed the endline survey had a score of 3.5 out of 4.0, or more.

Figure 12: Young people's perceptions of their relationship with their mentors



Source: KCL analysis of LTM participant survey responses

Some mentioned that their trust in their mentors increased over time, and others emphasised mentors' ability to listen and understand what young people need. These are key characteristics that strategic staff looked for when recruiting mentors.

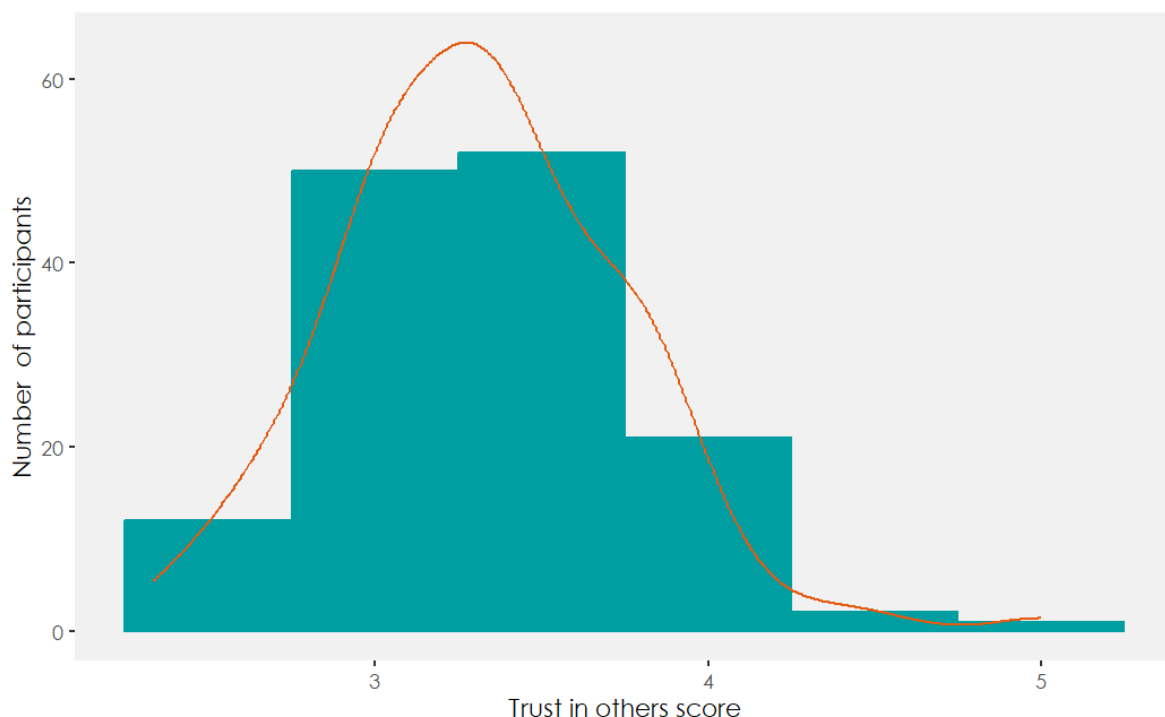
"[The mentor is] Quite easy going and relaxed. She doesn't speak down to you. She doesn't speak against you. She listens to what you say and takes it in, writes it down, then works on that." Participant

Staff identified several barriers that could hinder participants' engagement, including personal and mental health barriers that could negatively affect initial engagement (e.g., young people feeling incapable of leaving their house or have experienced severe trauma), as well as the heavy

involvement of some families in the programme, which could affect young people's agency. Staff would have to work around disruptive family involvement by communicating with family members and building trust with the young person and their family.

Indeed, this was also detected through some information in the baseline survey. On top of the challenges discussed in the Participants section, we collected information on young people's trust in others when joining the programme. Figure 13 summarises the distribution of responses, showing a higher concentration of young people reporting lower levels of trust in others.

Figure 13: Young people's trust in others score, at baseline



Source: KCL analysis of LTM participant survey responses

3.3.1.7 Factors that ensured the programme was delivered as intended

MYA employed different resources and inputs to deliver the various interventions outlined in the ToC and reflected in the sections above. During qualitative interviews, strategic staff and mentors reflected on the most important resources and enablers that helped them deliver the programme. In particular, they highlighted the following factors:

- Delivery of staff training:** As will be explained in Section 3.4.2, intensive mentors completed different types of training, including trauma-informed practice and safeguarding, which helped them deliver support effectively and engage with young people to build trusting and healthy relationships.

- **Ongoing staff support:** Ensuring that staff were comfortable and felt supported was key to the successful delivery of the different interventions. To achieve this, MYA put staff welfare at the forefront of their delivery strategy, and offered them wellbeing days, regular supervision, counselling, and continuous support.

"They do take people's wellbeing very, very seriously, you know, if we're going to help hardest to reach youth, we need the healthiest of staff to do that on their own mental wellbeing." Strategic Staff

- **Strong, qualified team of mentors:** According to strategic staff, MYA sought to employ mentors that possess the skills and personality needed to succeed in the role, often looking beyond formal qualifications. In order to support participants, intensive mentors employed were resilient, empathetic, passionate about their work, and had previous experiences working with young people or with complex and vulnerable groups. Mentors also had to be clear about where their role and responsibilities end, and be able to balance administrative tasks and youth support.
- **Effective caseload management:** The reduced number of young people that intensive mentors work with was seen as a key success factor. Strategic staff also emphasized the importance of managing caseloads to avoid having a large number of "red zone" cases (See Journey Map in Figure 9), which could lead to staff burnout.
- **Establishment of strategic relationships:** As it will be outlined in Section 3.3.3, MYA is reliant on robust relationships with external partners – such as referral agencies or employers – that enable the wraparound and tailored support MYA seeks to provide.
- **Accessible Youth Hub and venues:** As mentioned above, being able to deliver activities in the Hub, which was in a central and accessible location helped with the engagement of participants. Staff saw the Hub as a neutral and welcoming space that could bring together young people. Ensuring that the Hub and other spaces employed for the delivery of some activities were in a community setting was also key to their ability to attract young people.

- **Funding availability:** Availability of funding to deliver the programme and to part-fund the employability programme with a collaborating employer were essential resources for the delivery of the intervention. Having access to the Breaking Down Barriers Fund was also seen as key by staff.

3.3.1.8 *In Summary*

Findings from qualitative interviews with staff and participants, alongside the administrative data, suggest that the programme was delivered as intended. LTM offered support tailored to young people's needs and goals. While the one-to-one sessions with young people with their intensive mentor were at the core of the programme, LTM also offered a wide range of opportunities to support participants' social and personal development. At the same time, intensive mentors and employment coaches adopted their working and communication style to the preferences of participants, and took into account any complex needs that participants might have.

3.3.2 **Young People's Engagement with Liverpool Talent Match**

The following section summarises the extent to which young people in the sample engaged with the programme. The activities in which they were involved in are recorded in MYA's system as reported by participants' mentors.

MYA recorded the contact with young people at session and activity level:

- A session refers to the number of interactions that the mentor had with the young person, regardless of the purpose of such contact.
- Activities, on the other hand, refer to the specific task undertaken during the session.

A session can therefore be made of several tasks, for instance, if a participant had a check-in with the mentor and at the same time received support with a preparing for an interview.

One of the main concerns that was identified was the variability in the description of the activities that could be recorded in the administrative datasets by the mentors. To address this, we defined clear-cut categories of activities, based on discussions with MYA, to improve the consistency of the records for this analysis. While good progress was made, we still expect the results to contain some biases reflective of different recording levels from mentors (where some might record engagement with young people with

more granularity). It is also worth noting that for some participants, it was not possible to get full records of their engagement from MYA's data. This explains some differences in sample sizes compared to the demographics presented in 3.1.

For this analysis, we have services information for 89 participants, out of a sample of 149. As mentioned above, several activities could be done in a particular session. On average, each participant had 24 interactions with MYA. The number of sessions per participant ranged from one to 83. This highlights the extremely varied levels of engagement among the participants. When it comes to the activities conducted during those sessions, on average, participants have participated in 26 activities. Activities data also demonstrates extremely varied participation patterns as they range between 0 and 106 activities per participant.

Table 5 provides a detailed description of the activities within each of the overarching categories.

Table 5: Type of services provided by MYA

Activity type	Share (%)
Action Plan Support	2.7
Advocacy	3.3
Counselling session	9.5
Crisis Intervention	0.7
Direct Engagement	37.2
Employer Support	1.6
Exit Session	2.0
Information, Advice and Guidance	8.0
In work support	0.2
Mentoring session	16.2
Other Assistance	0.2
Referral Support	3.3

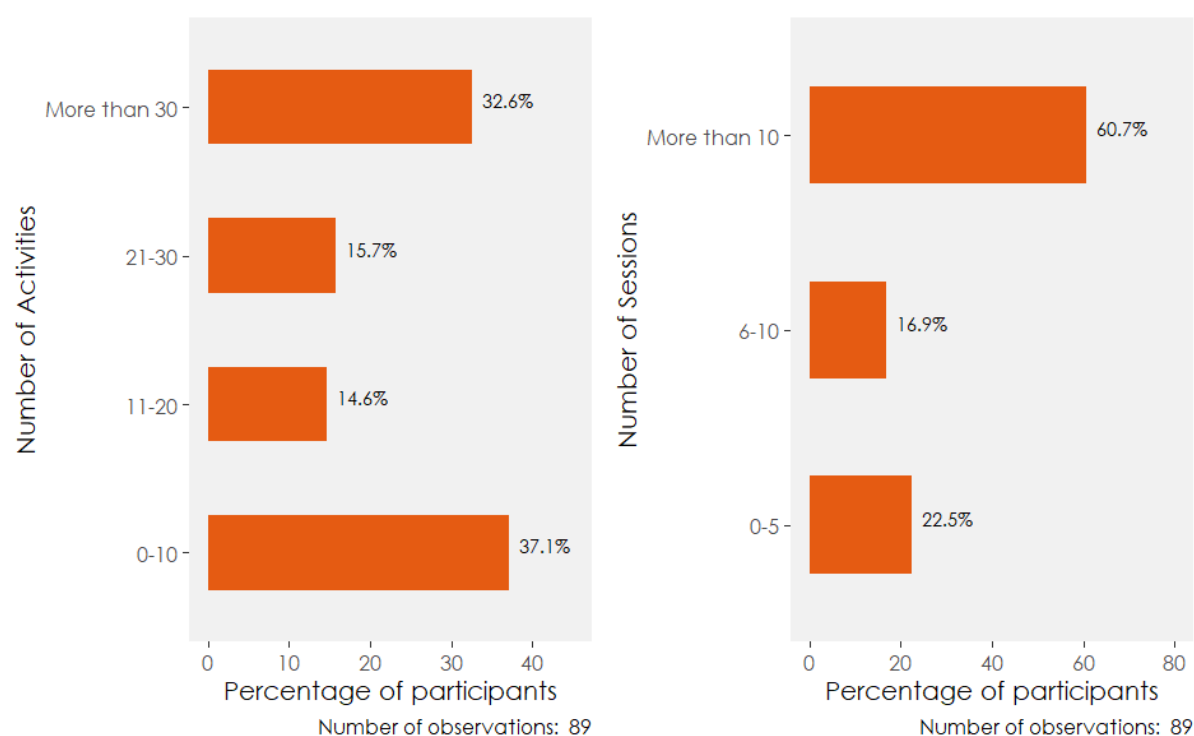
Sessions/Workshops/Activities	15.1
Source: KCL analysis of MYA Administrative Records	

The activity categories that were agreed upon are presented in Table 5. Direct engagement, which includes the initial set of meetings, informal check ins with mentees, and multi-agency meetings, is the most common way that young people engage in the programme. The next three most engaged with services were 1:1 mentoring sessions (16.2%), workshops (15.1%) and counselling sessions (9.5%).

3.3.2.1 Dosage distribution

Figure 14 summarises the dosage distribution¹⁶ of the programme, both in terms of numbers of activities and sessions more broadly.

Figure 14: Dosage distribution of the LTM programme (activities and sessions)



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

¹⁶ Dosage distribution refers to how the frequency of activities and sessions that participants engage in (the "dosage") is spread amongst the participants (the "distribution").

Below, for context, we also present the average length of engagement of young people with the programme, by number of activities and sessions.

Table 6: Average length of engagement by number of sessions

Number of activities	Average duration in programme (months)
0-10	6
11-20	9
21-30	7
More than 30	12
Source: MYA Administrative Records	

Table 7: Average length of engagement by number of sessions

Number of Sessions	Average duration in programme (months)
0-5	5
6-10	7
More than 10	10
Source: MYA Administrative Records	

Both the activity and session distributions point to non-linearities,¹⁷ that is, in both cases, more participants are concentrated at the extremes of the distribution, while the concentration around middle-level numbers is lower. This is especially true in relation to activities. Most participants either experienced 0-10 activities or more than 30, suggesting that it was common to be very engaged or not particularly engaged. This could also point to inconsistent data collection. The dosage of sessions is not split as extremely, as most of the sample (60.7%) received 10 or more sessions with MYA.

3.3.2.2 Differences amongst different groups

We also explored whether the services are experienced differently by different groups of young people.

In terms of gender, male and female participants have similar engagement distributions as presented in Figure 15. Female participants receive a slightly higher number of services, however the difference with male participants is not statistically different from zero, both in terms of their means, and their

¹⁷ A distribution is non-linear if graphically it follows a natural curve.

distribution (tested through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test).¹⁸ Overall, then, the information management data indicates that male and female participants are similarly engaged in LTM activities. We have excluded participants who define themselves as non-binary due to small numbers.

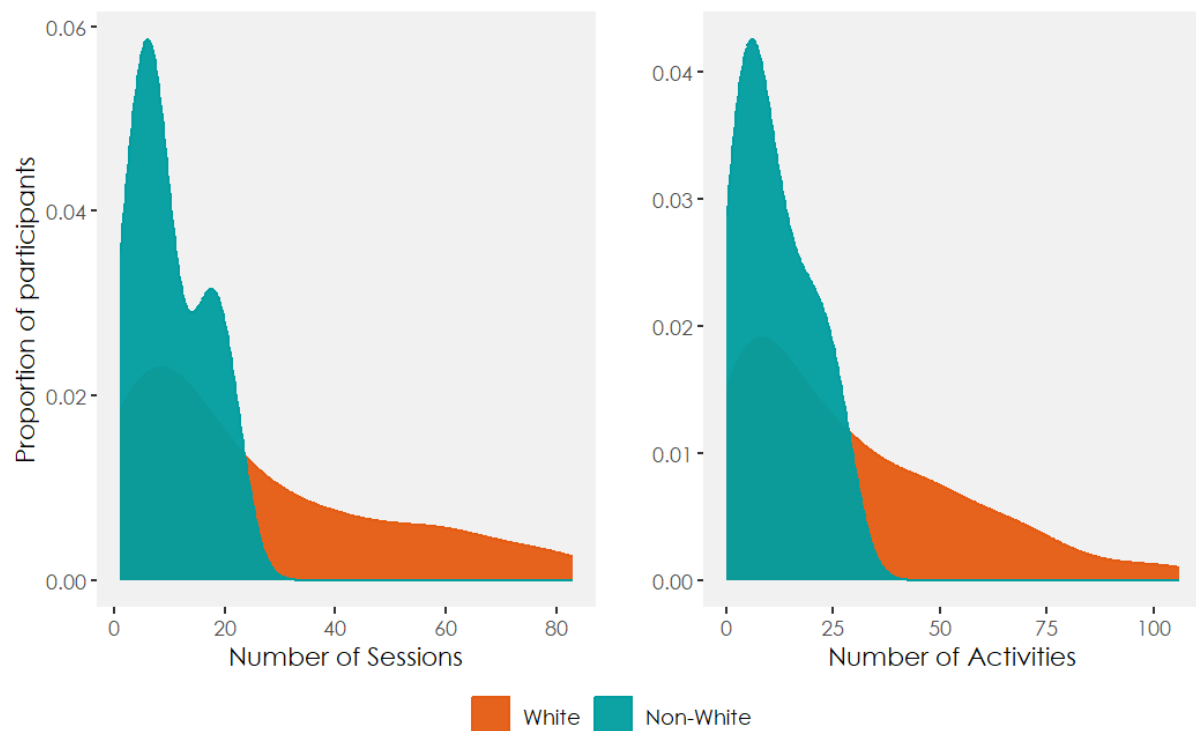
Figure 15: Differences in LTM dosage distribution by gender



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

¹⁸ This statistical test assesses whether the data shows enough evidence to ensure the dosage distribution female participants is different than the one for male participants.

Figure 16: Differences in LTM dosage distribution by ethnicity



Source: KCL analysis of MYA administrative data

When splitting the participant group by ethnicity, the picture is less clear. As with gender, there are no statistically significant differences across the distributions of services and activities across ethnic groups. However, as presented in Figure 16, graphically, white participants seem to receive a higher number of services and to engage in more sessions than participants who identify as non-white. However, when we explored this graphic difference, we found these differences are not statistically significant. This is mainly driven by the fact that engagement in services and activities varies significantly between participants so detecting statistically significant differences between groups is difficult. As such, given the noisy data and graphs presented above, it is reasonable to suggest that non-white LTM participants might experience a lower dosage of activities and sessions than their white counterparts.

3.3.3 The role of external relationships

This section address RQ5: “How does the programme develop strategic relationships with programme partners and service providers, and how does this affect young people’s support journey?”

According to programme theory, the support model that LTM offers is reliant on robust relationships with external partners that enable the wraparound

and tailored support MYA seeks to provide. To understand how these relationships are developed and function in practice, we combine insights from interviews with frontline and strategic staff, frontline staff workshops, management information data analysis, and interviews and surveys with programme partners. Interviews with service users are also used to explore the impact that MYA's wider relationships have on the support journeys young people experience.

3.3.3.1 How are relationships with different partners built and maintained?

Referral partners are central to the LTM programme. Whilst some participants self-refer, the majority are referred to MYA from a third-party (93.5%), typically a local JCP, another employment support provider, or a non-employment service provider such as a leaving-care team. Maintaining a stream of referrals is operationally important to MYA as their funding is dependent on the amount of support they provide. Furthermore, strong relationships with referral partners enable LTM staff to work more effectively with their clients as, where relationships are good, they receive more information about participants and can work alongside external staff to provide tailored support more easily and promptly. For example, one mentor, who has close working relationships with the JCP in their region, commented in a workshop that *"referrals [from the Jobcentre] are the best ones because you can work with the staff"* throughout the client's support journey. As such, the MYA team puts resources into developing strong relationships with referral partners.

A lot of this relationship building happens on a very local level and is completed autonomously by frontline staff. MYA mentors report regularly visiting JCPs and other referral organisations to meet with staff and to discuss potential clients who may be suitable for the LTM programme. These relatively informal drop-ins mean mentors speak regularly with referral partners and build familiar relationships. A lot of these relationships have been developed over a long period of time, with most of the mentors drawing on the networks they have developed over many years working in the sector to underpin their relationship building. These activities are further supported by how well-established MYA is in the area – LTM has high name recognition amongst other actors in the sector and a very positive reputation.

They also offer to meet young people whilst visiting these sites if appropriate. In interviews, mentors indicate that this approach can secure referrals more

quickly whilst also demonstrating their motivation and ability to support clients to referral partners. This latter point is seen as extremely important. Both strategic and frontline staff emphasised that demonstrating the value of the LTM offer to referral partners was crucial in maintaining strong working relationships. They argued that by showing the value of the service they could secure long term buy in. Staff further demonstrate this value whilst visiting referral partners by discussing how some clients (who still have a relationship with the partner) are progressing and how support can be improved. This approach, they argue, builds trust between MYA and referral partners and means that individual members of staff are more likely to refer appropriate clients to them, leading to a more successful programme.

In some cases, staff report that MYA have become important for referral partners:

“For Career Connect, we’re a lifeline, well we were for their 15, 16, 17-year-olds. There’s no provision for 16 and 17-year-olds across our city region at the moment. So they really value us.”

Strategic staff

From MYA’s point of view, it appears that a high level of trust and reliance has been built between the organisations. As well as the ad hoc work that is completed by frontline staff to build and maintain relationships with referral partners, staff in leadership positions also report putting aside time to strengthen these bonds. One interviewee commented how they prioritise communication at a strategic level with referral partners in the region:

“It’s got to be communication and it’s got to be ongoing, it has to be ongoing”

Strategic staff

The Youth Hub, based in central Liverpool, also supports MYA’s capacity to maintain relationships with referral partners. DWP staff are based in the hub meaning collaboration around referrals is logistically easy. Furthermore, staff report that the hub adds credibility to the programme – it is a well-known service throughout the region – which allows them to use the MYA brand in relationship building. However, the role of the hub is focused on staff who operate in central Liverpool, meaning the positive role it can play in relationship building is somewhat localised. For those that work across the wider City Region, the focal point of the Youth Hub does not offer as much

support. Nonetheless, as the programme is embedded in communities, mentors in the wider region are still able to use the prominence of MYA to cultivate relationship with referral partners.

Staff reported that relationship building had become more difficult in recent years as funding issues amongst referral partners had impacted their capacity to engage with MYA staff. In particular, it was reported that local authorities have faced significant cuts which had detrimentally impacted their relationships with MYA. This reported issue emphasises that maintaining healthy relationships with referral partners is not entirely under MYA's control – it requires partners to have the capacity, client base, and willingness to engage with them. As such, the state of the wider employment support ecosystem is important to MYA's operation.

Alongside referral partners, relationships with employment providers were seen as the most strategically important to maintain. Strategic staff emphasised that *“you've got to create employment opportunities”* if programmes like LTM are going to succeed. In recognition of this, MYA employ an Employment Engagement Officer who is tasked with reaching out to employers and developing opportunities, such as supported work placements or taster opportunities. This work is supported by Employment Coaches who work with participants once their mentor thinks they are ready to move into employment. Together, these staff members build networks of employers in the city region who MYA have informal links with. They largely maintain and build these connections through the work they do supporting their clients – by contacting employers on their clients' behalf, discussing their needs, and providing ongoing support as opportunities develop, MYA staff build trust with employers and demonstrate the value of the service. This means, according to the interviewees, that employers are more responsive to them in future.

Mentors also contribute to these informal networks on an ad hoc basis – by supporting their clients once they have entered work, the mentors naturally build relationships with employers in the region and can therefore facilitate opportunities for their colleagues' clients or for their own clients in the future.

Mentors appear to approach these relationships extremely openly and seek to offer support whenever they can:

“We always told the employer any problems at all don’t care how small they are let us know” Mentor

Employers that we interviewed commented that the quality of the relationships they have was dependent on individual mentor’s proactiveness; where mentors put in more time to maintain relationships, employers reported that they worked more efficiently with them. This emphasises the significance of individual experience and skill in relationship building whilst also suggesting that informal links are central to how MYA engages employers.

More formal relationships with employers have also been established in some cases. These have been more prominent when there was sufficient funding to support these links. In one example, MYA had previously part-funded an employability programme for several of their participants based with a collaborating employer. This approach had been successful from the point of view of the employer – the formal relationship had enabled them to offer meaningful work placements for a diverse group of young people which most of them completed and then continued to another post or related apprenticeship. Clearly the financial offer was crucial in building the relationship, but it was also facilitated and strengthened by the ongoing support provided by MYA staff throughout the placements which the employer couldn’t provide themselves. Echoing other findings, this interview emphasised that MYA’s ability to demonstrate their value-add in formal and informal relationships is important to how they maintain strong connections in the sector.

These more formal relationships with employers have not been common in more recent years in the programme as financial limitations (on the part of both MYA and potential employment partners) have become more significant.

Other external relationships, such as with other service providers, are built in a similar way to those with referral partners and employers. Generally, the knowledge and experience of individual members of staff was seen as central to building and maintaining relationships with these types of organisations. Mentors use their networks and their colleagues’ networks to

access different services for their clients and, as with referral partners, then maintain communication to build trust and maintain a working relationship.

The structural importance of the Youth Hub was again referenced by respondents when discussing more general relationship building. One mentor described the hub as “the key to success” as it acted as a focal point through which they could engage partners as well as participants.

At a strategic level, staff highlighted how ongoing networking in the Liverpool City Region has allowed MYA to stay connected with other services and build reciprocal relationships that benefit many different organisations in the sector. Using their position as a well-known actor in the sector, MYA host conferences and celebration events and their strategic staff proactively work with politicians at all levels to build awareness – this subsequently facilitates relationship building as other organisations have an awareness of the service and want to engage with them. This is important to MYA staff who believe collaboration is the best approach to supporting local young people:

“I think keeping good relationships with everybody is really important [...] there's so many people that need help and there's so many different agencies that can help. I don't think one agency can do it all.” Strategic staff

3.3.3.2 How do these relationships affect participants' support journeys?

From the point of view of staff, the external relationships have a significant effect on their participants as they often contribute to how their support . As discussed above, most LTM participants access the programme via a referral partner; these partners, according to staff interviews, feel comfortable referring young people with complex needs to MYA because the strong relationship that exists between them gives the referral partner confidence in the service. Furthermore, as referral partners often maintain some sort of contact with the participant, staff argue that a strong relationship between a LTM mentor and a Jobcentre work coach (for example) can lead to both services being more effective as all staff can be fully aware of the young person's context, needs, and progress.

Mentors believe that building a network for their clients is a key part of the support journey:

“my job is building that network....having dependence on me is not good either, so it's about creating different people for them.” Mentor

Creating this network is facilitated by strong working relationships with other service providers that individual staff members have. Without them, frontline staff would be able to refer their clients to external opportunities and would therefore struggle to provide the wraparound support that LTM strives for. This underscores the relational nature of the support.

In interviews, staff also emphasised how relationships with employers and training providers were crucial in providing meaningful opportunities for their clients. Because of the complex barriers faced by many Talent Match participants, mentors and employment coaches highlight how finding the *right* opportunity for each individual is central to success. Their capacity to provide these opportunities are enhanced by good relationships because staff can be confident about the support their client will receive and will have knowledge of the environment they will be entering. Strong relationships also make it more likely that employers will maintain contact with MYA staff which can facilitate more successful in-work support. As one employment coach described, having good relationships with employers *“is massive. We have really good relationship with employers, some come into the hub.”*

From the participants' point of view, the strong external relationships are significant even when it is not obvious to them that they are benefiting from them. Young people talk casually about the opportunities given to them by the strong relationships; for example, multiple interviewees explained how referrals to the Prince's Trust and other external programmes, including a scheme based at Strawberry Fields, had been fundamental to their support journey. Many had built confidence and developed new skills through these placements that were made possible through the external relationships that MYA has developed over time.

However, it should be noted that participants attributed most of the impact they felt to internal aspects of the Liverpool Talent Match programme. In particular, several respondents explained how the access to counselling and vast range of social activities, alongside meaningful mentoring, had defined

their Talent Match experience. As such, interviews with participants indicated that external relationships that MYA had were not fundamental to their support journey. Arguably though, this is partly because the participants are not fully aware of the role that external organisations have had in their journey as they struggle to distinguish between service providers who they interact with, and therefore did not discuss their role in interviews.

Overall MYA's approach to building relationships appears to be effective. The relationships they have often rely on the work of individual mentors, employment coaches, and strategic staff, but this is impactful because of the skills and experience of the Liverpool Talent Match team. Consequently, they are able to provide a range of support and employment opportunities to their clients and maintain strong referral rates from a range of sources, as outlined in Section 3.3.1.1.

3.4 Evidence of promise

This section presents the findings related to the programme's evidence of promise. It explores whether the programme led to any perceived impacts among participants, especially on young people (addressing RQ1 and RQ2), as well as on mentors, employers and service providers (RQ4).

3.4.1 Impact on young people

This section addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1: "What is the association between increasing levels of engagement with Liverpool Talent Match and a range of outcomes, including, a) uptake of employment, education or training opportunities, b) retention of employment opportunities, c) labour market experience, d) self-esteem, e) resilience, f) mental wellbeing, and g) work-related skills?"
- RQ2: "What are the drivers of the associations (or absence of association) observed?"

The specifics of the outcome analysis are presented in Appendix E. Focal outcomes were agreed with MYA and YFF as part of the scoping phase, and were measured as follows:

- EET status, the likelihood of being in employment, education and/or training. This was measured by management information data captured by MYA.

- The 'soft' outcomes, measured via baseline, midline and endline surveys:
 - Wellbeing¹⁹, as measured by the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale. This indicator is composed by 7 items.
 - Resilience, as measured by the Early Adolescent Resilience Scale (EARS). This indicator is comprised of 9 items.
 - Work readiness, as measured by the adapted Life Skills Development Scale. To make it relevant for the purpose of this analysis, 5 questions were extracted from the careers-decision making section of the scale.
 - Self-esteem, measured by the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (RSES) comprises 4 items.

3.4.1.1 Outcomes at Baseline

This section presents young people's starting point prior to programme engagement with regards to the outcomes of interest. This section excludes the outcome EET status, given that as part of the eligibility criteria into the programme, participants should be NEET at baseline. This section therefore focuses only on the soft-outcomes assessed in this evaluation, covering wellbeing, resilience, work readiness and self-esteem.

Table 8 provides a summary of the starting conditions of the participants in LTM. The results are computed on the basis of the participants who completed the baseline survey.

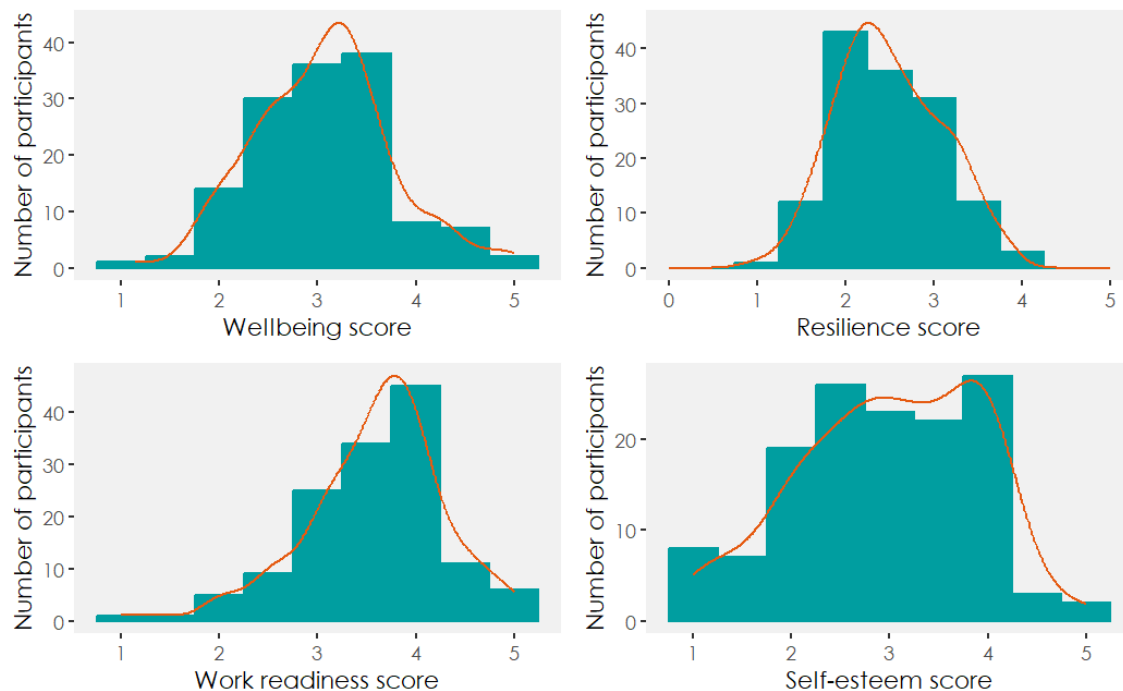
Table 8: MYA participants' soft outcomes at baseline

Outcome	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	StDev	Obs
Wellbeing	3.1	3.1	1.1	5.0	0.7	138
Resilience	2.5	2.4	1.0	3.8	0.6	138
Work readiness	3.6	3.6	1.0	5.0	0.7	137
Self-esteem	3.0	3.0	1.0	5.0	0.9	137
All measures are averages of between four and nine individual items (depending on the scale) and have a possible minimum score of 1 and a possible maximum score of 5. Source: KCL analysis of LTM participants' survey responses						

¹⁹ We want to remind the reader that instead of aggregating the items values to create the scores for the soft outcomes, we estimated the average score of the provided responses. This helped in maximising the number of available observations that we were able to include in the analysis, as we adjust the score for the number of items responded for each outcome, avoiding having to drop participants if they did not complete all the items per outcome.

Figure 17 presents the distribution of the four outcomes graphically.

Figure 17: Distribution of baseline wellbeing, resilience, work readiness and self-esteem among LTM participants



Source: KCL analysis of LTM participants' survey responses

For the results presented above, resilience is the measure for which participants report lower scores. In the survey, participants were asked to rank different outcomes from one (lowest level) to five (highest level), and the average score for resilience was 2.5, followed by self-esteem which scored 3, and wellbeing which scored 3.1 (see Table 8). Scores on the resilience scale were lowest. This finding coincides with insights from the interviews and digital diaries where anxiety, low self-esteem, low confidence, and depression were prevalent among young people accessing support from LTM. Work readiness on the other hand, is the outcome with highest levels on average. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that the average levels are not in the upper end with scores of 4 or 5 for any of the outcomes we measured.

3.4.1.2 Analytical Specification

We conducted four regression specifications for each outcome, to understand the association between increasing engagement with LTM and the outcomes. The dosage indicator represents a measure of impact-weighted hours of engagement. For MYA, this variable ranges from 0 to 507

weighted hours with a mean of 28 weighted hours and standard deviation of 62 weighted hours.

The model specifications are as follows:

- Model 1 models the association between increasing dosage and the outcome of interest, with individual and time fixed effects.
- Model 2 includes a dosage² term as there is some reason to think the relationship between dosage and outcomes might be quadratic.
- Model 3 uses an unweighted dosage indicator as a robustness check.
- Model 4 omits the fixed effects as a robustness check.

In the tables below we present the estimate for the main coefficient of interest in each model, which represents is the association between the dosage indicator and outcome scores. Where dosage² is included, the coefficient for this is also reported.

For additional information on the analytical specification and creation of the dosage indicator, see Appendix D.

3.4.1.3 Results of analysis

3.4.1.3.1 Education, Employment or Training

The main outcome of interest of this evaluation is young people's EET status: whether they have transitioned into employment, education or training. An increment of one in the dosage indicator is associated with an increased likelihood of transitioning to EET of around 0.3 percentage points (see Table 9). While the effect sizes in all the models below are small, it is encouraging to find that all the models show that the correlation between programme engagement and EET Status is consistently positive and significant.

While consistently getting positive and significant effect sizes suggests a link between LTM and young people's ability to transition to EET, it would also be interesting to explore how far they have travelled in their EET. Although we constructed survey questions to capture this dimension (such as the length of employment and the number of days spent working out of 28 days), there was a large percentage of missing responses, making it impossible to present meaningful results. However, this could be a useful area of investigation in the future.

Table 9: Association between LTM programme engagement and EET status

Model	Description	Dosage coefficient	Dosage ² coefficient
1	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.003**	
2	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.011***	-0.00003*
3	Fixed Effects Model with Unweighted Dosage	0.003**	
4	Linear Model with Weighted Dosage	0.003*	
***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1. Model 4 includes controls for age, gender, ethnicity, index of multiple deprivation and highest qualification status while other models include individual and time-fixed effects. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations. Weight 1: 3 (Activities ranked as 1), 2 (Activities ranked as 2), 1 (Activities ranked as 3). Source: KCL analysis of MYA management information data			

3.4.1.3.2 Soft Indicators

We also collect data on soft outcomes as described above.

Wellbeing is the first outcome of interest that we investigated. We find a positive and statistically significant correlation with the level of programme engagement in all the models (see Table 10). We see an increase in the range of 0.02-0.05 percentage points in wellbeing for every increase of one in the dosage indicator, except Model 4. This discrepancy in the results might be due to omitted variable bias stemming from limiting the number of control variables we used to preserve the degrees of freedom, given the small sample size in the dataset. Nonetheless, given that all the fixed effects models are statistically significant, which aim to control for both observed and unobserved variables that might be correlated with wellbeing, it suggests that wellbeing may improve with programme engagement. Like EET status, the dosage-squared indicator is negative and significant suggesting that as engagement increases, the rate at which wellbeing improves declines.

Table 10: Association between LTM programme engagement and wellbeing

Model	Description	Dosage coefficient	Dosage ² coefficient	Baseline-Endline correlation coefficient
1	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.002***		
2	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.005***	-0.00001*	
3	Fixed Effects Model with Unweighted Dosage	0.002***		
4	Linear Model with Weighted Dosage	0.001		0.462***
***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1. Model 4 includes controls for age, gender, ethnicity, index of multiple deprivation and highest qualification status while other models include individual and time-fixed effects. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations. Weight 1: 3 (Activities ranked as 1), 2 (Activities ranked as 2), 1 (Activities ranked as 3). Source: KCL analysis of MYA management information data and LTM participants' survey responses				

The next outcome we examined was resilience. At the baseline, the resilience score was not very high for the majority of people in the sample (see page 73). Overall the analysis suggests that increasing dosage is associated with a small, marginally significant increase in resilience (Table 11).

Table 11: Association between LTM programme engagement and resilience

Model	Description	Dosage coefficient	Dosage ² coefficient	Baseline-Endline correlation coefficient
1	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.001+		
2	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.002+	-0.00000	
3	Fixed Effects Model with Unweighted Dosage	0.001+		

4	Linear Model with Weighted Dosage	0.000		0.380**
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***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1.

Model 4 includes controls for age, gender, ethnicity, index of multiple deprivation and highest qualification status while other models include individual and time-fixed effects. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations.

Weight 1: 3 (Activities ranked as 1), 2 (Activities ranked as 2), 1 (Activities ranked as 3).

Source: KCL analysis of MYA management information data and LTM participants' survey responses

Work readiness captures any improvements in the participants' trajectory toward employment. While the EET status serves as a tangible marker of programme's effect, the soft outcomes encapsulated within work skills metrics provide insights into the perceptions of the young people about their preparedness to transition to work. We do not observe a significant effect of increasing dosage on work readiness (see Table 12). Across all specifications this association is small and is not statistically significant. This is surprising given that we found a strong positive association between engagement and likelihood of being EET.

Nonetheless, there are several factors that might drive this apparent contradiction. First, it is possible that MYA's approach results in participants being placed in employment where they can develop their work skills, rather than the programme itself increasing work skills.

Finally, EET is a broader category including employment, education and training while work readiness is interpreted as the level of preparedness to transition into employment activities. Thus, a direct relationship cannot be established unless we have more granular data about which category they transition into. It is therefore possible that a larger section of the sample might have transitioned to education and/or training instead of employment, making it possible for statistically significant effect on EET and not work-readiness to become a probable result. It would be interesting to understand which mechanisms are causing such results to appear.

Table 12: Association between LTM programme engagement and work readiness

Model	Description	Dosage coefficient	Dosage ² coefficient	Baseline-Endline correlation coefficient
1	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.001		
2	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.000	0.00000	
3	Fixed Effects Model with Unweighted Dosage	0.000		
4	Linear Model with Weighted Dosage	0.000		0.474***

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1.

Model 4 includes controls for age, gender, ethnicity, index of multiple deprivation and highest qualification status while other models include individual and time-fixed effects. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations.

Weight 1: 3 (Activities ranked as 1), 2 (Activities ranked as 2), 1 (Activities ranked as 3).

Source: KCL analysis of MYA management information data and LTM participants' survey responses

Confidence-building is one of the main objectives of the LTM programme. An increase of 1 in the dosage indicator is associated with an increase in the self-esteem score of 0.002 (Table 13, Model 1). The other models show similarly small, positive effects ranging from 0.001 to 0.005.

Table 13: Association between LTM programme engagement and self-esteem

Model	Description	Dosage coefficient	Dosage ² coefficient	Baseline-Endline correlation coefficient
1	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.002*		
2	Fixed Effects Model with Weighted Dosage	0.005**	-0.00001*	
3	Fixed Effects Model with Unweighted Dosage	0.001*		

4	Linear Model with Weighted Dosage	0.001		0.382**
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***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1.

Model 4 includes controls for age, gender, ethnicity, index of multiple deprivation and highest qualification status while other models include individual and time-fixed effects. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations.

Weight 1: 3 (Activities ranked as 1), 2 (Activities ranked as 2), 1 (Activities ranked as 3).

Source: KCL analysis of MYA management information data and LTM participants' survey responses

3.4.1.3.3 Other considerations

Another point to highlight is that the baseline-endline correlations of the wellbeing (0.462), resilience (0.380), self-esteem (0.382) and work readiness (0.474) score are strong and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Such a strong correlation, despite a small sample in the dataset is suggestive of the powerful contribution that these scales can make to the power of covariates for the overall design. These results have been presented so that they can be used for power calculations, necessary for future trials and impact evaluations in the field pertaining to young people and specifically programmes designed for providing employment support to them.

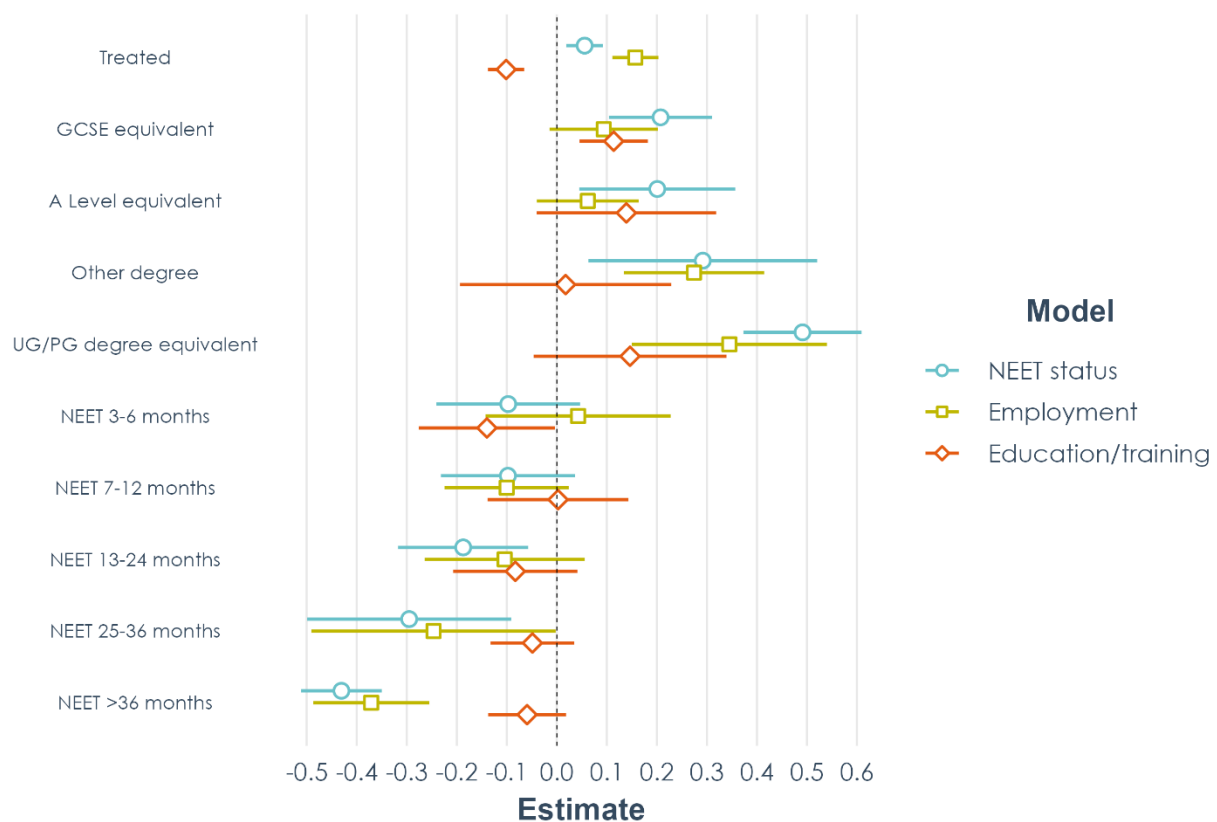
It is worth pointing out that in Model 2 a dosage-squared indicator has been included, to model a potential non-linear relationship. Across the outcomes this measure was sometimes significant; where this is the case it suggests that the effect of engagement on likelihood of EET status transition is different at different levels of dosage. This can be interpreted as arising due to heterogeneity in the attributes of young people who take up different levels of dosage. However, the coefficient on this outcome was generally very small, suggesting the relationship between dosage and outcomes did not vary greatly at different levels of dosage, even where it was significant.

3.4.1.4 Comparison of LTM participants to a comparator group

In order to complete the economic evaluation presented in Section 3.4.3 analysis was conducted comparing the outcomes of young people engaged with LTM against a comparison group of young people derived from Understanding Society. Full details of the regression model, key variables, and potential limitations can be found in Appendix E.1. Regression models were estimated which examined changes in NEET status, employment status, and education and training status for programme participants compared to the comparison group.

Figure 18 displays the estimated coefficients for the three regression models. The labels on the y-axis represent the variables which were included in the regressions, whilst the x-axis represents the size of the coefficient estimate. For each variable, the figure reports the point estimated association between that variable and the key outcome of interest (change in NEET status, employment status, or education and training status). This represents the percentage point change in the probability of achieving the given outcome associated with each characteristic. The figure also displays 95% confidence intervals for the estimated coefficients.

Figure 18: Coefficient estimates from the main econometric models relating to LTM participants



Note: The above figure shows the coefficient estimates from the regression model specified in Appendix E.1. for three outcome variables (probability of transitioning away from NEET status, probability of finding employment, and probability of entering education or training) for Liverpool Talent Match. Each coefficient is expressed as the association between the given variable and the outcomes in percentage point terms - for example, a coefficient of 0.1 would represent a 10 percentage point increase in the probability of observing the outcome of interest. The coefficients on the 'Treated' variable represent the estimated association between participating in Liverpool Talent Match and the outcomes of interest. All other variables are binary indicators defined relative to some baseline level - for example, the 'GCSE equivalent' variable gives the change in probability of achieving the outcomes for those who have GCSE equivalent qualifications relative to having no formally recognised qualifications or pre-GCSE equivalent qualifications, the baseline category. Further details on the baseline categories are given in Appendix E.1.

Source: London Economics' analysis of MYA management information data and Understanding Society

The key coefficients of interest are the coefficients on the 'Treated' variable displayed at the top of the figure. These coefficients represent the estimated association between LTM participation and the three variables of interest (change in NEET status, employment status, and education and training status). The estimated coefficient on NEET status was 0.056, implying that participants in LTM were 5.6 percentage points more likely to *transition away* from NEET status between programme entry and programme exit than members of the comparator group. The estimated coefficients on employment status and education and training were 0.157 and -0.101 respectively, which suggest that participation in LTM was associated with a 15.7 percentage point increase in the probability of finding employment and a 10.1 percentage point decrease in the probability of undertaking a form of education or training.

Overall, participation in LTM was associated with an increase in the probability of transitioning away from NEET status - either through finding employment or education and training. The results suggest that this overall effect was generated through an increased probability of finding employment, given that participants in the programme were less likely to enter education or training than their comparison group counterparts. This may be caused by LTM changing the distribution of participants between employment and education or training. In other words, the programme may have resulted in participants entering employment that otherwise would have entered education or training in absence of the programme.

In total, there was 366 YFF-funded participants in the LTM programme.²⁰ Table 14 shows the estimated impact of the programme in absolute terms (i.e., the number of people who achieved the specified outcome as a result of participating in the programme), assuming that the results from the impact

²⁰ To calculate this number, we multiply the total number of programme entrants by the proportion of total funding that was provided by YFF, separately for each financial year in which YFF funding was provided (2022-23 and 2023-24). There were 515 entrants to the programme in the 2022-23 financial year, and YFF provided 40% of the funding for the programme in this financial year, resulting in an estimated 206 YFF-funded participants in 2022-23. There were a further 501 entrants in 2023-24, and YFF funded 32% of the programme in this financial year, resulting in 160 YFF-funded participants in the 2023-24 financial year.

evaluation are approximately the same as the actual impacts of the programme.²¹

Table 14: Estimated impact of Liverpool Talent Match on outcomes of interest (absolute numbers)

	Lower bound	Central estimate	Upper bound
Entered employment	41	58	74
Entered education or training	-51	-37	-24
Exited NEET status	7	21	34

The figures above represent the estimated total difference in the number of young people who achieved the outcome specified in the left-hand column as a result of the programme. For example, the central estimate of 58 for the 'entered employment' variable suggests that an additional 58 young people entered employment due to Liverpool Talent Match than would have entered employment in the absence of the programme. The negative values imply that fewer people achieved the specified outcome variable than would have done in the absence of the programme. The lower and upper bounds are based on a 95% confidence interval around the central estimate.

Source: London Economics' analysis of MYA management information data and Understanding Society

The central estimate for the change in probability of entering employment (15.7 percentage points) suggests that participation in the programme is associated with an additional 58 young people entering employment. The corresponding lower and upper bounds (based on a 95% confidence interval) were 41 and 74.

The central estimate for the change in probability of entering education or training due to participation in LTM suggests that participation in the programme is associated with 37 fewer young people entering education or

²¹ The coefficient estimates presented in Figure 18 represent the estimated effect of each respective variable on the probability of observing each outcome of interest - including the probability of finding employment or entering education or training. Therefore, to estimate the impact of the programme in absolute terms, we can simply multiply the estimated coefficient on the variable of interest by the number of participants in the programme. For example, if programme participants were 20% more likely to find employment than non-participants and 100 people participated in the programme, then we can estimate that (on average) the programme would result in 20 people finding employment who otherwise would not have done so in the absence of the programme. This assumes that the true impact of the programme is similar to that found within the impact evaluation.

training (the lower and upper bounds were 51 and 24 fewer young people respectively). As discussed above, these findings may reflect the fact that some participants in LTM substituted entry into education or training for entry into employment.

Overall, the central coefficient estimates imply that the LTM programme is associated with 21 more young people entering employment, education, or training. The lower bound for this figure was seven and the upper bound was 34.

The coefficients in the rest of Figure 18 show the association between each variable and the three outcome variables defined relative to some baseline category. For example, the coefficients on education level give the probability of achieving each outcome at each respective qualification level relative to having entry level or pre-GCSE qualifications. These coefficients show the association between these variables and the outcome variables for both the treatment group (programme participants) and the comparator group.

The coefficients on education level suggest that people with higher level qualifications were more likely to transition away from NEET status and more likely to find employment than those with lower-level qualifications. For example, the coefficient on NEET status for those with an undergraduate degree, postgraduate degree or equivalent was 0.491, implying that these individuals were 49.1 percentage points more likely to transition away from NEET status than those with entry level pre-GCSE qualifications. The effect size of participating in LTM on NEET status was roughly one quarter of the effect size of having an A Level or equivalent qualification relative to not formally recognised or pre-GCSE qualifications. Interestingly, there was no clear relationship between qualification level and the probability of entering education or training.

The results also suggest that the length of time an individual has been NEET is negatively associated with their probability of transitioning away from NEET status and of finding employment. For example, the estimated coefficient on NEET status for people who had been NEET for over 36 months was -0.431, suggesting that those in this category were 43.1 percentage points less likely to transition away from NEET status than people in the baseline category (NEET for between 0-3 months).

3.4.1.5 Implications of the quantitative analysis

The regression analysis finds that increasing engagement with the programme is positively correlated with most of the outcomes, while LTM participation also seems to produce positive results against a comparison group drawn from Understanding Society.

It must be reiterated that the results obtained here are not developed through causal methods and thus the results are merely showing the possible direction of impact. For the dosage analysis, we attempted to make the models as robust as possible with the small sample size that was available. The fixed effects model was chosen to control for both observable and unobservable individual-specific characteristics, which would otherwise in a linear model not be possible due to collinearity issues and constraints faced due to degrees of freedom with a sample size. The insignificant results in the linear model are most probably stemming from these issues and not due to low impact of the programme.

Next, it is worth emphasising the positive and statistically significant baseline-endline correlation and the relatively larger effect sizes that have been presented in the tables above. While this value by itself does not suggest the effect the programme has, it does show that young people's outcomes have improved considerably over the course of time, which is an encouraging finding. These results can also be useful for power calculations while designing future trials and evaluations in the domain concerning young people.

The comparison with Understanding Society also suggests a positive direction, but again this analysis is not causal. It is likely that there are unobserved differences between LTM participants and the comparison group that may be influencing the direction and magnitude of the observed effect.

An illustration of the impact of different analytical approaches on the estimated impact of LTM is given by the Employment Data Lab analysis,²² which used propensity score matching to match LTM participants to a comparator group and found no significant increase in employment but an

²² Department for Work and Pensions, The. Employment Data Lab analysis: Merseyside Youth Association Talent Match Plus. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/employment-data-lab-analysis-merseyside-youth-association-talent-match-plus-programme/employment-data-lab-analysis-merseyside-youth-association-talent-match-plus>

increase in education and training courses passed. This highlights the difficulty in confidently and consistently identifying causal impacts of programmes like LTM in the absence of randomisation. We comment on the feasibility of further impact evaluation of LTM in Section 3.5.

3.4.1.6 Qualitative findings

The interviews with young people, employers, employment coaches, intensive mentors and counsellors demonstrate a range of perceived improvements on young people's:

- **hard outcomes**, such as uptake of employment, education, training opportunities and benefits.
- **job-related skills**, such as increased knowledge about jobs and sectors, as well as improvements in application and interviewing
- **soft outcomes**, such as improvements to confidence, interpersonal skills, mental wellbeing, resilience, self-esteem.

These will be described, in turn, in the following sections.

3.4.1.6.1 Harder outcomes

The interviews included examples of participants gaining employment, completing education and training, and gaining qualifications.

However, some of the senior strategic at MYA also reflected that inevitably the harder outcomes would be difficult to reach for some of the target group as they are initially far away from these. As described earlier, this was built in from the beginning, with mentors asked to identify whether young people were in the green, amber or red zone, depending on their readiness to move towards EET. Reflecting on what had played out in practice, this had definitely been the right approach. Mentors said, in some instances the cases were simply too complex for the programme, for instance due to severe mental health problems that needed more specialised treatment. For others, the focus should be on reaching the smaller, intermediary outcomes that have already been discussed, for instance to stabilise their personal life or confidence. Similarly, a counsellor said their main focus was to address anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and generally make young people happier in themselves. The counsellor therefore reflected that success look different for different young people:

“For some [young people], their success will be that they get a job, but for others [success] is that they're feeling better in themselves and not tortured by past trauma.” Participant

Young people sometimes recognised this themselves during interviews. As an example, a young person was experiencing homelessness when entering the programme, but LTM then supported them to secure shared accommodation and improve their mental wellbeing and confidence. While this young person had not yet achieved any employment, education or training outcomes, their progress was significant, and they described it themselves as life-changing.

Another young person used a metaphor to describe that they were progressing from a relatively low starting point, and were not ready to think about entering employment yet:

“I’m a baby, and they’re the ones trying to tell me to walk [laughter]. And they’re kind of like holding me up slightly, moving my feet. I think that’s what MYA is. They’re trying to get me to a bare bones walk until I can start running.” Participant

Mentors and senior staff also mentioned external barriers for the target participant group that sometimes made it hard to achieve the harder employment and education outcomes, such as lack of motivation, family bereavement, or influences from peer groups. More broadly, one of the mentors described that for the programme to work, it needed to be the “right time, right place and right intervention” to be successful.

When the programme worked, the senior strategic staff felt the consistent, personalised, non-judgemental support provided by mentors was crucial in driving those positive outcomes. This was also clear in interviews with participants who appreciated the personal relationship and support. As a typical example, a young person reflected back on the previous “tough love” approach they had received during previous support, which they did not respond well to. They said the mentor had got to know them as a person and realised that this approach did not work, and instead focused on them as a person, and had made them realise what they needed to do to change their life.

Senior strategic staff and mentors also pointed out that the mentor-young people relationship was a complex one, which simultaneously had to be professional with boundaries, but also passionate, informal and trusting. Matching the right mentor to the right person was not necessarily easy, as young people responded differently to different approaches, and “sometimes you don’t get that right and you lose people”. As such, sometimes small things could lead to disengagement among participants. One mentor reflected,

“Young people can be quite unforgiving sometimes, because they’ve been down before quite a lot.” Mentor

3.4.1.6.2 Job-related knowledge and skills

A common theme was that young people had developed skills in writing CVs, applying for jobs and attending job interviews, through support from their mentor and training. In particular, they gained confidence that the job searching process was not as complicated as they had first thought. As a typical example, a young person said they had found job searching and applications confusing at first, but realised following the support that it was not as hard as they had expected, and they now felt “a lot more confident”. Similarly, another young person said that initially “I wouldn’t know where to go”, but appreciated the support from LTM, including the guidance, resources, and that there are people to talk to who will give their opinion. Another young person said:

“They just made me realise that finding work, while it is difficult, it’s not like impossible. You can find work.” Participant

Others said they were now using certain websites to find job opportunities, how they deployed different strategies to evaluate the feasibility of job opportunities, and that they learned to expand answers in job applications and interviews. For one young person, the benefits of the LTM support was almost immediate. They had found work after one month with MYA, and attributed some of that success to tips for the job interview, including the suggestion to ask their own questions at the end of the interview.

In other cases, it was labour market opportunities and placements that developed the required skills. For instance, one young person totally changed during the programme, according to their mentor; they started to make eye contact, talk and have a laugh with people, but they still struggled

with interviews. However, they managed to secure a job placement that did not require an interview, and secured a permanent position due to strong performance on the job.

3.4.1.6.3 Softer outcomes

The most prominent perceived outcome among participants was an increase in confidence. Young people explained that their starting point had been a lack of confidence in entering new environments and meeting new people. Some participants explained that sometimes, they could not make eye contact with their mentors during the first appointment. However, the programme helped build their social and interpersonal skills through activities, such as Fitness for Work, fishing, team building exercises, trips, and community projects. For some, the programme had helped them getting out of the house, get on the bus, and not stress over small things. As an example, a young person was pleased they had managed to keep coming to every mentoring session by themselves, and saw that as a significant step forward. Young people said that going out and meeting people had helped their social skills, by placing them in different environments, and speaking to a range of people. As a typical example, one young person said:

"It broke the tension with my anxieties of like talking to people, and it really helped me out... If it wasn't for [MYA], I don't think I would really be communicating with you right now."

Participant

Often, young people explained that it had been useful for them to connect with other young people in the same situation. It had made them realise that other people were going through the same problem, and that it was possible to overcome. Some participants explained how this had immediately made them happier. For instance, a young person said:

"At MYA, they're people going through the same situation as me. I guess, seeing people similar to myself, it's a bit of a confidence booster, I think... Understanding why they're in that situation, what they are doing now." Participant

Some young people said the increased confidence had helped them achieve important job or education related skills or achievements, such as talking to customers, apply to university, applying for jobs and attending interviews, or attending courses and placements. For instance, the young

participate who had been emboldened to apply to university attributed this to their improved confidence and calm, and reflected:

“They brought up loads of confidence in me, and due to my anxiety they opened up my mind, and showed me other ways to explore and do it in a calm manner, where I’m not stressing.” Participant

Case Study: Zak

(See Appendix G for the full version of Case Study 1)

Before joining LTM, Zak was isolated without a social circle of friends, and spending most of his time in his room. After working with a mentor and counsellor, Zak made new friends, and the different activities he engaged with helped increase his confidence. His communication skills and work readiness improved. Zak felt LTM had a profound impact, describing himself as a completely different person from when he started.

“Before MYA I would say very closed down as a person, very private. I wouldn’t allow myself to feel things almost and I felt like I was undeserving of such. I didn’t know how to interact with people properly, lacking so many skills like socially and, you know, the things that would go through my head over and over the years I just felt like I could never release them. But to comprehend them and to like be okay with them (...) MYA has done a lot for me.” -Zak

For some young people, this confidence was also built up through labour market opportunities accessed as part of the programme. For instance, a young person said their placement in a café made them realise that they were capable of doing the job, and excelled even in pressured situations. This had made them confident about their way forward, especially their ability to step up to more demanding work in the future:

“I quickly learnt after a few weeks, and after settling in, that I can definitely do this as a job. Because I found myself, especially on days when we were really, really busy, I still coped really well and managed to keep my head down and keep going.” Participant

Other people said the improved confidence felt like the beginning of a process. The LTM programme had worked “like a catalyst, to start me off, to get back on track”. For those people, the prospect of taking steps to enter work felt less daunting.

However, in other cases, the improved confidence and interpersonal skills had not yet led to results in terms of jobs or education opportunities. For instance, a young person said that while they had become more confident and were now doing things they normally wouldn't, this had still not translated to an improved confidence around employment. However, they felt that the programme had given them the foundation and tools to take that step in the future. Mentors also described these small, gradual improvements as an important step for participants, such as coming to the appointments on their own or booking time to get a haircut.

Another common theme was that the programme had improved young people's mental wellbeing. This was done through the one-to-one mentoring, activities, placements, and especially through the provision of counsellors and therapists. For instance, one young person said the counselling had “lifted a lot off my shoulders”. Another young person explained it had made them realise “a lot of things buried down”, which they had forgotten about because they were “so horrible”. They found it useful to interrogate those experiences, and it had given them information and approaches to develop as a person. They reflected:

“It's given me a new mindset of how to think about things, and how to go against it.” Participant

Some of the MYA strategic staff and mentors reflected that the counselling was a “gamechanger for a lot of our young people”, as they had not previously met thresholds to receive counselling sessions. However, in some instances, reliving the trauma again could have a negative impact in the shorter term.

Other activities also focused specifically on improving mental wellbeing. This included residential, which a senior leader described as powerful due to removing a person entirely from their normal environment.

Another common theme was a change to young people's motivation and desire to change their life. For instance, a young person described how the

Fitness for Work course had made them realise they needed to change some habits and take a strong grip on themselves, including to benefit their physical and mental wellbeing. They said this had made them “healthier and happier and fitter”.

3.4.2 Impact on mentors, local employers and service providers

This section addresses RQ4: “To what extent does the programme develop the skills and knowledge of employment coaches, local employers and service providers?”.

This is particularly important as it allows us to understand whether the programme supports staff to work more effectively with participants and adopt a trauma-informed mentoring approach, which is a key contextual factor for the successful delivery of the programme. Ensuring participants work with highly skilled and trained staff is anticipated to be crucial for achieving the positive outcomes outlined in the programme's ToC. This chapter draws on the findings from qualitative interviews with strategic staff, delivery staff, as well as employers.

Findings from qualitative interviews with MYA staff suggest that taking part in the programme allowed them to develop existing and learn new skills, through training opportunities and through ongoing support. MYA mentors and strategic staff reiterated the importance of undertaking training in trauma-informed practice. All programme staff had to receive trauma-informed training, which was key to ensure mentors understood and knew how to approach participants' personal circumstances and needs.

“There's a lot of ongoing training. The major driver was to get everybody trauma-informed trained and to really work on that and implement that.” Strategic staff

All staff are also provided with safeguarding training, Mental Health First Aid and personal safety training, in light of the nature of the support they provide and the needs of the cohort they support. These training courses focused on working with risk and further aimed to protect mentors' own mental health, as it helps them establish healthy relationships with participants. The training courses were combined with an intense induction process where staff could shadow and work alongside other staff members, to understand the wide range of needs participants might have.

Counsellors also worked with mentors to train them to better understand the objectives and limitations of counselling they provide in-house, so that young people were referred appropriately. This training helped ensure that participants attending counselling are willing to take part in it, which can positively impact their engagement and facilitates counsellors' work.

"We've done a lot of work around that with sort of training, so mentors explaining what counselling is. So now they [participants] only come if they actually do want to give it a go. They might not really understand it, they might not know what they want from it, but we haven't got anyone who doesn't want to." Counsellor

MYA also provides e-learning courses on health and safety, GDPR and data protection. MYA strategic staff also mentioned they are working to develop an Intensive Mentoring Qualification, which brings together the skills they perceive as crucial to intensive mentoring, such as skills to engage young people while reaching positive outcomes.

In explaining the development of the training programme available to mentors, MYA strategic staff described taking into account staff expertise and needs. For example, opportunities can be created to consider how existing staff expertise can be incorporated into the programme as a whole.

"If you a member of staff feels that they've got skills that are being utilized, there's an opportunity to practice with them and to see how they can be incorporated." Strategic staff

At the same time, strategic staff reported reacting to gaps in staff skillsets and described providing training to staff individually, where needed.

"When issues come up, we train staff around those issues. If training issues come up individually for staff members, we'll do that." Strategic staff

Findings from interviews with employers provide some evidence that by engaging in the programme, employers could also develop new ways of working and develop their knowledge. For instance, one employer providing health services across the region, mentioned that working with MYA and employing LTM young people has supported their organisation in moving towards its goal of diversifying the workforce. This has been supported not

only through the employment of young people on LTM but also by providing the organisation with a greater understanding of what it means to recruit from local communities. Another employer from an organisation that uses arts as an informal education tool, mentioned that working with LTM participants allowed them to understand what young people's projects are, and how they can support them.

3.4.3 Monetary benefits associated with the impact of LTM on employment and education outcomes

This section aims to respond RQ 7 "What are the costs and benefits of the programme?".

As shown in Section 3.4.1.4, it is estimated that LTM is associated with an additional 58 young people entering employment and 37 fewer young people entering education or training. The estimated economic benefit associated with one move into employment for Liverpool Talent match is £71,031, and the equivalent estimate for one move into education or training is £16,273.²³

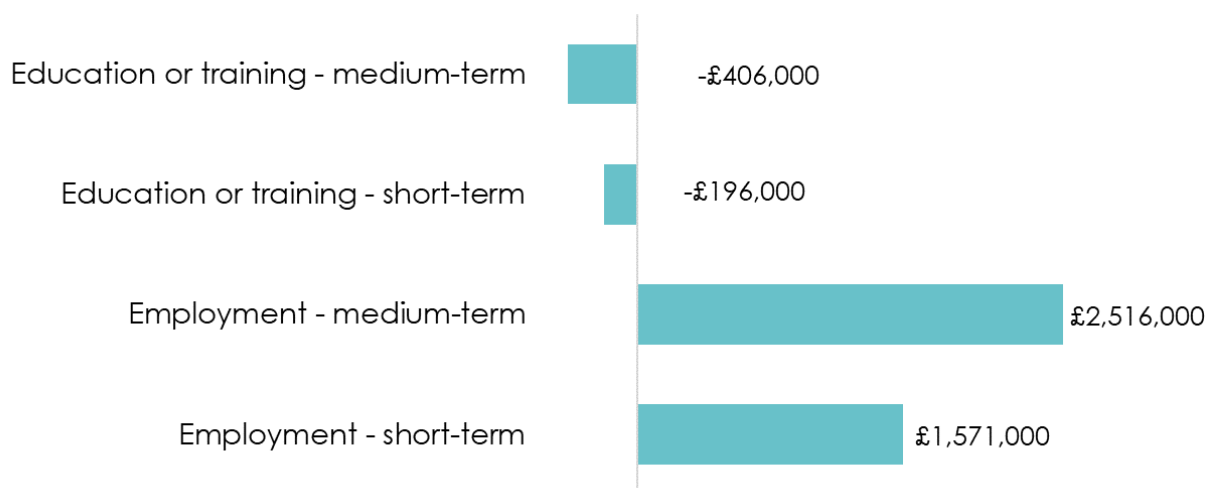
Assuming that the results from the quantitative outcomes analysis show approximately the true impacts of the programmes, the resulting aggregate economic benefits and disbenefits relating to LTM are as shown in Figure 19. There is a total disbenefit associated with the reduction in the number of young people in education or training of £602,000, which is mostly driven by lost medium-term benefits (£406,000).

However, a relatively much larger aggregate benefit can be seen relating to the increase in the number of young people in employment associated with LTM that is suggested by the quantitative outcomes analysis. The economic benefits in the short term are estimated to be £1,571,000, with a further economic benefit of £2,516,000 estimated in the medium-term as employment is expected to be sustained.

²³ Economic benefit relates to the total monetary value of a number of potential benefits associated with an individual entering employment or education or training, such as increased output, better health outcomes and reduced crime. The total value of these benefits for one individual participating in Liverpool Talent Match, subtracting any costs associated with entering employment or education or training, is £71,031 for employment and £16,273 for education or training. More detail on these benefits and the methodology used to calculate them is presented in Appendix E.

As mentioned above, the results suggest that LTM may have helped people find employment who otherwise would have entered education or training. The quantitative outcomes analysis estimated that LTM is associated with an additional 21 young people exiting NEET status, which is smaller than the 58 additional young people estimated to enter employment. If these estimates are similar to the actual impacts of the programme, this suggests that some of the increase in the number of young people estimated to enter employment is associated with the decline in the number of participants entering education or training, rather than those participants moving from education or training to being NEET. If this assumption holds, then due to the greater economic benefit associated with employment compared to education or training, a reduction in the number of young people in education or training due to those young people entering employment would therefore result in greater aggregate economic benefits.

Figure 19: Aggregate economic benefits and disbenefits associated with LTM



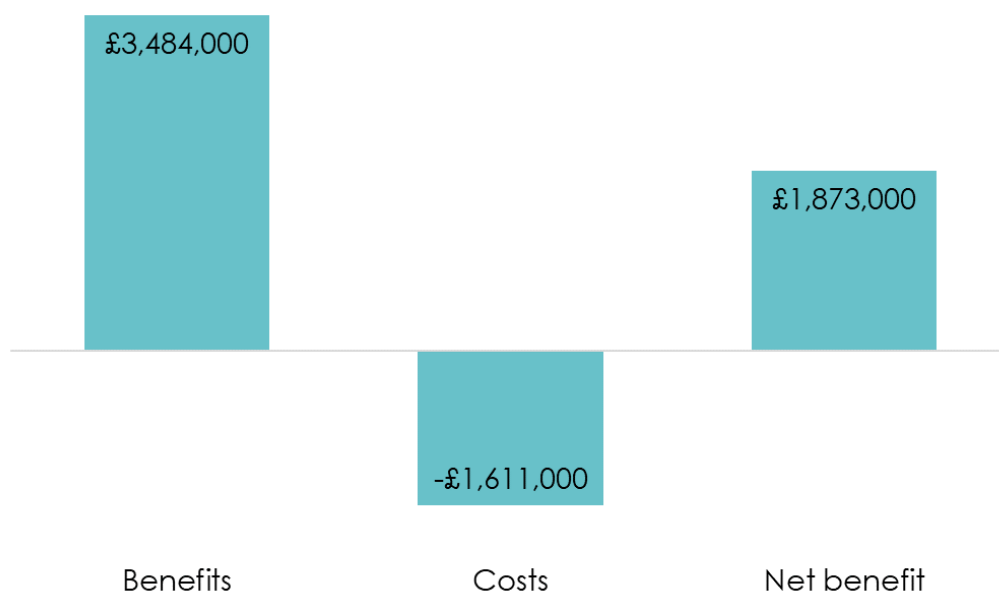
Source: London Economics' analysis

The total economic benefit associated with LTM is therefore estimated to be £3,484,000 (Figure 20), which is equivalent to £9,500 per participant. In comparison, the YFF-related costs associated with LTM across the two years of funding are £1,611,000, equivalent to £4,400 per participant. This results in a

net benefit associated with LTM of £1,873,000 (equivalent to £5,100 per participant), and a benefit-cost ratio of 2.2²⁴.

A benefit-cost ratio is the total economic benefits associated with a programme or intervention divided by the total cost. Any benefit-cost ratio greater than 1.0 means that the benefits of the programme are greater than the costs. This would suggest that the programme is a success from an economic evaluation perspective; it constitutes value-for-money as the benefits outweigh the costs. The central estimate of 2.2 for LTM is similar to other employment programmes. For example, the central estimate is slightly lower than the benefit-cost ratios presented in an evaluation of Fair Start Scotland (a programme aimed to those with extreme labour market disadvantage in Scotland, with a central benefit-cost ratio to society of 3.6),²⁵ but greater than those presented for Group Work (a programme offering jobs search skills workshops to benefits claimants in England, with societal benefit-cost ratios between 0 and 0.67).²⁶

Figure 20: Total benefits and costs associated with LTM



Source: London Economics' analysis

²⁴ A benefit-cost ratio is the total economic benefits associated with a programme or intervention divided by the total cost. Any benefit-cost ratio greater than 1.0 means that the benefits of the programme are greater than the costs.

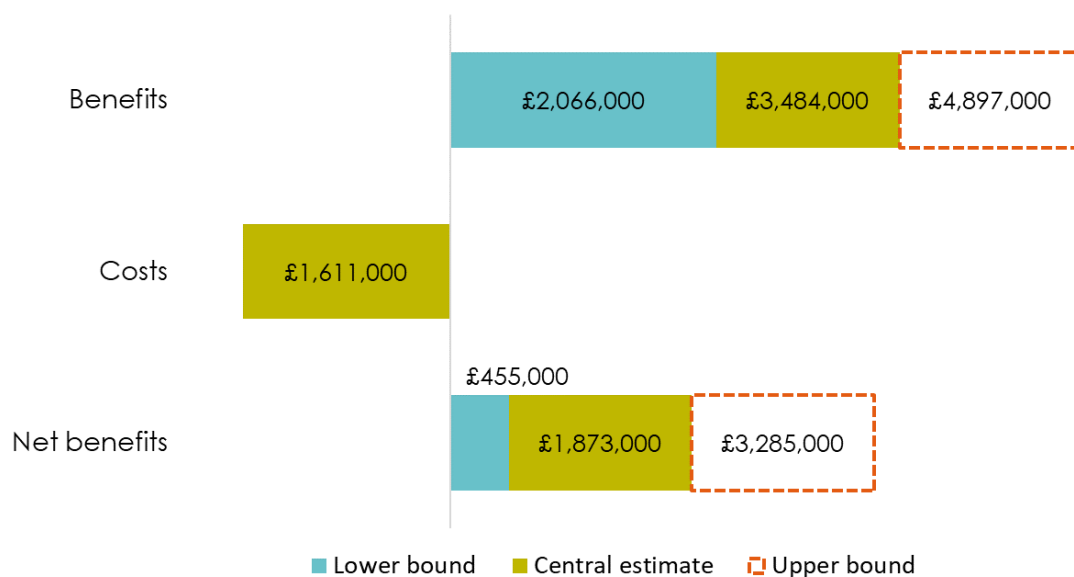
²⁵ Alma Economics (2022).

²⁶ ICF (2021).

As there is uncertainty in relation to the impact estimates, a sensitivity analysis is conducted using estimates based on a 95% confidence interval around the central estimate. A lower bound estimate of the impacts of the programme shows an estimated increase in the number of people in employment as a result of LTM of 41, and 51 fewer people in education or training. This results in a total economic benefit of £2,066,000, as shown in Figure 21, which is equivalent to £5,600 per participant. This is still greater than the total YFF-related costs of the programme, resulting in a net benefit of £455,000 (or £1,200 per participant) and a benefit-cost ratio of 1.3.

Similarly, the upper bound estimate suggests that a further 74 individuals entered employment and 24 fewer individuals entered education or training, which results in a total economic benefit of the programme of £4,897,000 (£13,400 per participant). This is equivalent to a net benefit of £3,385,000, equivalent to £9,000 per participant, and a benefit-cost ratio of 3.0.

Figure 21: Central estimate, upper bound and lower bound of benefits associated with LTM



Source: London Economics' analysis

3.5 Readiness for further evaluation

MYA's LTM could be a suitable programme for further evaluation. As explored in the programme theory section, it is well defined and has clear mechanisms of change that could be investigated. The central role of the youth hub in MYA's delivery model is particularly interesting – this element of the programme is replicable and therefore generating evidence of its efficacy

could be valuable. Furthermore, MYA's ability to recruit a sufficient sample size, for a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) or a Quasi-Experimental Design (QED), is not in doubt. During the pilot evaluation they worked with approximately 400 young people each year.

However, as is reflected in the feasibility reports produced for YFF, and a further paper that specifically considered the use of the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset in evaluating LTM, there are several barriers that mean LTM is not feasible for further evaluation at this time.

Firstly, and critically, MYA staff are not comfortable with randomly allocating treatment to LTM. As many participants enter the programme at or near crisis point, strategic and frontline staff were not comfortable with the idea of arbitrarily denying access to the service. This concern was not mitigated by proposals such as a waitlist or exclusion criteria that would allow the most vulnerable participants to access the service immediately. Consequently, an RCT to measure the efficacy of LTM is not possible.

The prospect of a QED was also explored at length with MYA and YFF. The main barriers relating to these approaches were costs and data availability. In the absence of random allocation, a counterfactual would have to be created by identifying a control group that couldn't work with MYA. As the delivery organisation would not have contact with these individuals, recruiting them and gaining consent to use their data would be resource intensive. Securing outcome data from this group would also be difficult. As MYA focuses on a range of soft outcomes, not just hard EET outcomes, it would be preferable to collect survey data that could capture changes in outcomes like confidence, mental well-being, and work readiness as part of a full evaluation. However, there would be prohibitively high costs in collecting survey data from a hard-to-reach control group that had no prior relationship with the service or research team. Attrition rates were also assessed in order to assess the feasibility of using survey measures. Although response rates from referral to baseline were consistently high, numbers rapidly decreased to subsequent waves of data collection (midline and endline). This means that further studies would likely need to use resource intensive measures to engage young people in data collection. As such, this was deemed to not be feasible.

Alternative sources of outcomes data were considered that could be used to facilitate a quasi-experimental trial. LEO was identified as bringing together key outcomes linked to LTM, such as EET status and access to benefits. Whilst this dataset wouldn't allow a trial to capture all the intended outcomes of LTM, using this data in a QED would overcome the barriers to data collection and still allow for analysis on the core outcomes of interest. However, access to this dataset has proved impossible in the short-medium term. As it is controlled by multiple government departments, it is exceedingly difficult to gain access at the individual level which is necessary for analysis of a specific programme like LTM. Whilst other datasets were considered, it was decided that completing a high quality, robust trial would be impossible without access to a reliable dataset such as LEO.

Whilst these discussions were ongoing between King's, YFF and MYA, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) released its own quasi-experimental evaluation of the Talent Match programme using historic MYA data and the LEO dataset.²⁷ This study, which used propensity score matching to create a counterfactual, found that LTM did not have a statistically significant impact on employment outcomes, but did increase participants' engagement with education and training. The existence of this study meant that there was not a strong case for conducting an additional quasi-experimental evaluation, which might have increased the robustness of the findings somewhat, but not sufficiently to justify the time and cost.

It is our view that LTM could be suitable for further evaluation, either using random allocation of treatment or a matched difference-in-differences approach to create a counterfactual and measure impact. However, at this time, it is not viable due to the constraints explained above.

²⁷ Department for Work and Pensions, The. Employment Data Lab analysis: Merseyside Youth Association Talent Match Plus. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/employment-data-lab-analysis-merseyside-youth-association-talent-match-plus-programme/employment-data-lab-analysis-merseyside-youth-association-talent-match-plus>

4 Policy and practice insights

By combining learnings from the quantitative, qualitative, and economic strands of the pilot evaluation, we have produced several insights relating to policy and practice in the youth employment support place. These recommendations are presented tentatively, given the limitations of our research detailed in Section 4. Nonetheless, there are valuable lessons to be taken from the data we analysed. It should be noted that the following recommendations are also informed by our evaluation of another employment support programme that was completed concurrently, please see [here](#) for further details.

Tailored and personalised support was seen as effective among all participants; this approach helped build trust between mentors and participants and maintained engagement, contributing to outcomes.

The person-centred, holistic, and no-wrong doors approach that underpins LTM is welcomed among all types of participants. This one-to-one support was considered one of the most important and effective parts of the programme, by both participants and staff. To ensure this approach is successful, it is necessary to not only adjust the type of support offered to individual participants, but also the working style. LTM staff emphasised the importance of ensuring that the frequency and type of communication was tailored to participants' preferences, as this helped build trusted and healthy relationships between mentors and participants and maintain engagement of young people. Pairing each young person with a mentor who has time to get to know them and consequently provide personalised action plans was also crucial to this approach. In order to provide meaningful support to disadvantaged young people with complex barriers, the evidence we gathered suggests this person-centred ethos should be central to support programmes in the sector.

Strategic partnerships with employers and local service providers can be crucial in providing opportunities for young people.

Our evidence also highlighted that providing participants with ring-fenced opportunities and access to networks that they would not otherwise be able

to reach was significant to participants' journeys towards EET outcomes. Interviews with participants indicated that being given access to opportunities were a crucial first step towards sustained employment. The relationships that MYA have with employment partners gave their service users enhanced access to opportunities that they would not be able to access independently. Importantly, these opportunities are tailored to the needs and context of the individual young people. A key learning, therefore, is that services should prioritise building strategic relationships with employers and other local service providers to provide these opportunities for excluded young people, in order to improve EET outcomes.

Reducing material barriers can increase engagement with EET support.

The value in addressing physical or material barriers was also a key takeaway from our analysis. LTM participants reported the benefits of having even relatively low material and physical barriers removed for them. With these barriers removed, participants and staff reported that young people would engage with support more freely, and therefore had a higher chance of moving towards EET. Given the difficulty that many of the young people in this cohort have had with engaging with services or education in the past, all possible steps should be taken to lower barriers to engagement.

MYA's strong relationships in the sector benefitted from the programme substantially, demonstrating the value in investing time and resources into relationship building.

The operational benefits of building strong relationships with referral agencies and other stakeholders in the sector was another crucial learning emerging from the study. MYA enjoy strong working relationships with local JCPs, other DWP staff, local employers, and other third sector organisations, like the Prince's Trust. These links clearly improved the service that MYA were able to offer their participants. Information sharing with referral agencies was reported to lead to more successful engagement with young people, whilst their networks with other service providers allowed them to provide the varied, person-centred support that underpins the programmes. As such, the value in investing time and resources into relationship building is emphasised by the delivery of LTM.

Adequate resourcing is necessary to build and provide effective and meaningful support to young people facing multiple disadvantages.

From a policy perspective, these insights place an emphasis on proper resourcing and funding for services that are targeted at young people facing multiple disadvantages. It does not appear to be easy to provide meaningful support for this group, so service providers need the time and space to build productive relationships with the young people and external organisations. The flexibility that adequate resourcing offers staff is critical to providing services such as these.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Interpretation

Table 15 summarises the key findings of the evaluation under each research question. Following the table, we consider each question in detail.

Table 15: Summary of findings

Research question	Findings
Research question 1: What is the association between increasing levels of engagement with Liverpool Talent Match and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uptake of employment, education or training opportunities? • retention of employment opportunities? • labour market experience? • self-esteem? • resilience? • mental wellbeing? • work-related skills? 	<p>Overall, we find associations between higher levels of engagement (as measured by impact-weighted hours of engagement, See Appendix D “Development of the dosage indicator”) and outcomes for LTM. In addition, compared to a comparator group drawn from Understanding Society, participation in LTM is associated with increased likelihood of transition into education, employment and training (EET). Data collection constraints meant the analysis was unable to capture whether employment opportunities were retained. It should also be noted that these estimates are correlational and do not imply a causal effect.</p> <p>Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that many LTM participants achieved positive outcomes. These include perceived improvements to confidence and self-esteem, social and interpersonal skills, as well as improvements in knowledge of the job market and job searching skills.</p>

Research question	Findings
	<p>The research also demonstrated that some participants achieve EET outcomes, but it is worth noting that some participants start their journey far away from the labour market, and that it is not realistic for all participants to achieve EET outcomes. In some cases the focus of the intervention was on stabilising life circumstances.</p>
<p>Research question 2: What are the drivers of the associations (or absence of association) observed?</p>	<p>The qualitative interviews show that positive outcomes are especially driven by the personalised and holistic approach of the intervention, centred on the mentor-mentee relationship. External barriers include a lack of motivation, family breakdown and bereavement, disruptive peer groups, and poor mental health.</p> <p>Findings from the quantitative outcomes analysis show that previous educational attainment can be a driver of positive outcomes, as it is positively associated with transitions away from NEET status and into employment.</p>
<p>Research question 3: To what extent was the programme delivered as intended, and in what ways did implementation vary?</p>	<p>The programme was delivered as intended. LTM provided tailored, person-centred support that matched participants' needs and preferences. Both the focus of the sessions as well as the type of communication were tailored to each participant's needs. Although journeys can substantially vary across participants, the phases described in the programme's participant journey map were consistent with the delivery.</p>
<p>Research question 4: To what extent does the programme develop the skills and knowledge of employment coaches, local employers and/or service providers?</p>	<p>Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that staff from MYA have been able to access ongoing training opportunities to gain new skills and ways of working with vulnerable young people. Interviews with employers also suggest that recruiting young people from these programmes has had some positive effects on employers. However, given the small sample of employer interviews, these findings should be treated with caution.</p>

Research question	Findings
Research question 5: How does the programme develop strategic relationships with programme partners and service providers, and how does this affect young people's support journeys?	<p>At MYA relationship building generally takes place on a very local level and is completed autonomously by frontline and strategic staff. Building formal and informal relationships with referral partners and employment providers was key, and this was facilitated by the fact that MYA is a well-established organisation dating back to 1890. Having a Youth Hub in central Liverpool was seen as an enabler to building strong relationships.</p> <p>The external relationships built with local employers and organisations have a significant effect on their participants, as they often contribute to their employment journeys starting, and support progress towards suitable employment.</p>
Research question 6: To what extent does the programme adopt a No Wrong Doors approach, and how does this affect young people's support journey?	<p>MYA offers a range of services to support participants with different levels of need, which is in line with the No Wrong Doors approach. The MYA youth hub, which brings together an integrated range of services, is at the centre of this approach.</p>
Research question 7: What are the costs and benefits of the programme?	<p>Whilst it is important to note that the results from the quantitative outcomes analysis are purely correlational and do not imply a causal effect, the programme was found to have positive associations on the probability of transitioning away from NEET status and on finding employment.</p> <p>Assuming that these results reflect the actual impacts of the programme, there are positive net benefits associated with it (i.e. the benefits were greater than the costs of each programme). The total net benefits were worth £1.9 million for Liverpool Talent Match, equivalent to a net benefit per participant of £5,100. These figures correspond to a benefit-cost ratio of 2.2 for Liverpool Talent Match (i.e. the total benefit associated with Liverpool Talent Match was 2.2 times greater the total cost).</p>

Below, we consider each research question in more detail.

Research question 1: What is the association between increasing levels of engagement with Liverpool Talent Match and uptake of employment, education or training opportunities; retention of employment opportunities; labour market experience; self-esteem; resilience; mental wellbeing and work-related skills?

- We find evidence of associations between increasing engagement and most of the outcomes studied. For LTM, an increase of one impact-weighted hour of engagement was associated with an increase of around 0.3 percentage points' likelihood of being recorded as EET. Higher engagement was also associated with higher levels of wellbeing and self-esteem.
- Consistent with this, the intervention was found to be positively associated with the probability of transitioning away from NEET status and on finding employment, compared to a comparator group drawn from Understanding Society. The estimated association between participation in the programme and employment outcomes was 15.7 percentage points for LTM.
- However, it is important to note that these analyses are purely correlational, and cannot provide evidence for any causal relationship between the programmes and employment and education outcomes.
- Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that many LTM participants felt they have achieved positive outcomes because of engaging with the programme. One of the most prominent perceived outcomes among participants was an improvement in confidence and self-esteem, in particular building young people's social and interpersonal skills. Another prominent perceived outcome was improvements in participants' knowledge about the job market, and in their skills and confidence in writing CVs, applying for jobs and attending job interviews. This was achieved through support from their mentor and training sessions. Finally, the qualitative research also pointed to harder outcomes among participants, such as uptake of EET opportunities.
- However, the findings also suggest that it is important to acknowledge that some programme participants start their journey far away from the labour market, and for them the focus should be on reaching the smaller,

intermediary outcomes (such as stabilising their life circumstances, or improving their confidence), rather than aiming to achieve EET outcomes.

Research question 2: What are the drivers of the associations (or absence of association) observed?

- The qualitative interviews show that positive outcomes are especially driven by the personalised and holistic approach adopted by the programme, and that the close and trusted mentor-mentee relationship is at the heart of this. This means that the activities offered to young people are often well-received and impactful, leading to a range of impacts on confidence, resilience, and uptake of EET opportunities. Given the vulnerable position of participants, there are a range of external barriers that can hinder the effectiveness of the programmes, including lack of motivation, family breakdown and bereavement, bad influences from peer groups, and poor mental health.
- Findings from the quantitative outcomes analysis show that previous educational attainment can be a driver of positive outcomes, as it was positively associated with transitions away from NEET status and transitions into employment. The LTM analysis suggested that young people with A Level or equivalent qualifications were 20.1 percentage points more likely to transition away from NEET status than those with no formal qualifications or pre-GCSE qualifications. The magnitude of the association between education level and NEET status was larger for higher level qualifications. However, this analysis can only provide evidence of correlational relationships between the outcome variables and previous educational attainment and cannot assert a causal relationship.

Research question 3: To what extent was the programme delivered as intended, and in what ways did implementation vary?

- LTM was delivered as intended. As anticipated in the programme's theory, and confirmed by the research, the programme provided holistic, person-centred support. The support was tailored to each participant, and therefore, participants' journeys throughout the programmes often differed, as intended. As outlined in the ToC, LTM offered and delivered a range of activities to young people besides the core one-to-one support with intensive mentors.

- When needed, LTM participants were able to receive advocacy support to stabilise their personal circumstances – such as housing or financial situation – as well as employment support to explore employment opportunities and develop employment skills. Those who were ready to enter the labour market and secured a job also received follow-up in-work support.
- While small updates were made to LTM's version of the ToC created at the beginning of the evaluation to include and clarify additional programme details, the programme was largely delivered as intended and as depicted in its ToC.

Research question 4: To what extent does the programme develop the skills and knowledge of mentors, employment coaches, local employers and/or service providers?

- Findings from qualitative interviews with staff from LTM suggest that, as outlined in the programme's ToC, they received ongoing training opportunities to gain new skills and learn appropriate ways of working with vulnerable young people. For instance, LTM staff reported undertaking training in trauma-informed practice, safeguarding and Mental Health Aid.
- Interviews with employers from LTM also suggest that recruiting young people from these programmes has had some positive effects on employers. For instance, an employer mentioned that employing young people from the programme has supported their organisation in moving towards its goal of diversifying the workforce. These findings, however, should be treated with caution given the small sample of employer interviews.

Research question 5: How does the programme develop strategic relationships with programme partners and service providers, and how does this affect young people's support journeys?

- Referral partners are central to the LTM programme, as the majority of LTM participants were referred from a third party. Relationship building happened on a very local level, and was completed autonomously by frontline and strategic staff, usually over a long period of time. LTM employed an Employment Engagement Officer tasked with reaching out

to employers and developing opportunities. Their work was supported by employment coaches and mentors, on an ad hoc basis.

- External relationships have a significant effect on participants as they often contribute to their journeys starting. At the same time, relationships with employers were crucial in providing meaningful and suitable opportunities for participants. Because of the complex barriers faced by many LTM participants, finding the right opportunity for each individual is central to success.

Research question 6: To what extent does the programme adopt a No Wrong Doors approach, and how does this affect young people's support journey?

- As outlined in LTM's programme theory, a No Wrong Doors approach is considered to be a key contextual factor that underpins the support provided in the programme. Findings show that MYA offered a wide range of services to support participants with different levels of needs, which is in line with the No Wrong Doors approach. The youth hub, which brings together an integrated range of services to support young people was central to this approach, as centralising the different services in one hub allowed mentors to offer young people a range of internal and external opportunities – from personal development to counselling sessions – that were tailored to their needs and are easily accessible.

Research question 7: What are the costs and benefits of the programme?

- Combining the correlational findings from the quantitative outcomes analysis with estimates of the economic benefits associated with entering employment and education or training, the benefits associated with additional young people entering employment or education were found to be greater than the costs of each programme. This resulted in positive net benefits, worth approximately £1.9 million for LTM, equivalent to £5,100 per participant. These net benefits resulted in benefit-cost ratios of 2.2.²⁸

²⁸ A benefit-cost ratio is the total economic benefits associated with a programme or intervention divided by the total cost. Any benefit-cost ratio greater than 1.0 means that the benefits of the programme are greater than the costs. This would suggest that the programme is a success from an economic evaluation perspective; it constitutes value-for-money as the benefits outweigh the costs.

- More specifically, the total economic benefit associated with LTM is estimated to be £3,484,000 (equivalent to £9,500 per participant). In comparison, the YFF-related costs associated with LTM across the two years of funding are £1,611,000, equivalent to £4,400 per participant. This results in a net benefit associated with LTM of £1,873,000, equivalent to £5,100 per participant.

5.2 Limitations

This section highlights the limitations of this pilot study, particularly regarding the quality of the data, and the quantitative findings.

The main limitation of our analysis is that we are unable to make causal claims about the impact of LTM. In order to assess the potential impacts of the programme, we used a combination of analysis of the association between dosage and outcomes, combined with qualitative research. The results should be treated cautiously, and not interpreted as the causal effect of LTM.

Dosage-response models can give some sense of whether the relationship between uptake of a treatment and the outcomes is in the expected direction, but it is impossible to eliminate confounders that might either exaggerate or attenuate the effect. For instance, it is quite possible that participants who are close to the labour market might require less intervention, while those who are further require more. This would look like no, or a negative, effect of increasing dosage, but in fact it relates to the unobservable characteristics of the participants. Likewise, it is possible that more motivated participants take up more opportunities and have better outcomes, but the main driving force here is the motivation not the opportunities. We have tried to account for this in our analysis; for instance, by including person fixed effects in several of our analytical specifications, but it is impossible to completely rule out.

Likewise, we expect that LTM participants differ from the Understanding Society comparator used in the quantitative outcomes analysis for the economic evaluation, across several dimensions. Indeed, examining the descriptive statistics for the treatment group, we observe a number of systematic differences with the comparison group (see Table 4 in Appendix E). These differences between the treatment and comparator groups were

expected. The programme is focussed on young people with extreme labour market disadvantage, such as those with Special Educational Needs or those that attended AP. In contrast, Understanding Society is designed to represent the population as a whole. Particularly, Liverpool is a city region with considerably worse labour market conditions than the national average overall. The economic inactivity rate in Liverpool was 27.5% in 2023, considerably higher than the national rate of 21.6%. Similarly, the employment rate in Liverpool was 69.4% in 2023, compared to a 75.5% reported for the same period for Great Britain²⁹.

Whilst the comparator group was constructed to be as similar to the treatment group as possible (by only considering people aged 16-24 who were NEET in wave 12), and various control variables were used in the econometric models, other factors relating to extreme labour market disadvantage could not be included in the analysis. As with the dosage-response analysis, the impact of omitted variables is impossible to quantify, either in direction or magnitude. It may mean that the analysis underestimates the impacts of the programme, because the design of the programme means that those in the treatment group are more likely to have characteristics that bring extreme labour market disadvantage than those in the comparator group. Not controlling for these characteristics means that some of the disadvantage experienced by those in the programme is not accounted for in the modelling.

However, we are conscious that the Employment Data Lab study of LTM³⁰ found no impact on employment of engagement with LTM; therefore it is also possible that our analysis in this report has overestimated the impact of LTM. It is possible that some confounding factors not controlled for, such as motivation, are driving a part of the effect that is mistakenly attributed to the programme, therefore biasing the estimation. A further threat to identification

²⁹ ONS Annual Population Survey (Apr-Mar 2023), ONS Claimant County July 2023. Retrieved from <https://liverpool.gov.uk/council/key-statistics-and-data/headline-indicators/labour-market/>

³⁰ Department for Work and Pensions, The. Employment Data Lab analysis: Merseyside Youth Association Talent Match Plus. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/employment-data-lab-analysis-merseyside-youth-association-talent-match-plus-programme/employment-data-lab-analysis-merseyside-youth-association-talent-match-plus>

of the causal effects of interests is the non-overlapping time periods for the treatment group intervention relative to the comparator group.

In addition, the available data had limitations that required us to make a number of assumptions in preparing it for analysis. These limitations include missing data, inconsistency of recording activities, and sample attrition.

Attrition, particularly, was a key parameter assessed to evaluate the readiness for trial of the pilot. Although response rates from referral to baseline were consistently high, numbers rapidly decreased to subsequent waves of data collection (midline and endline). While this limited the information we could analyse, this also means that further studies should include several mechanisms and incentives to engage young people in data collection or rely more substantially on administrative datasets and national surveys. We discuss this further in Appendix E.

There are also a number of limitations related to the findings from the qualitative research. Firstly, we used a purposive sampling approach to recruit and sample participants for interviews. Steps were taken to ensure a diversity of participants, including in terms of gender, ethnicity, qualifications, age, disability, and employment history. However, they are a relatively small proportion of all participants. The qualitative findings therefore may not necessarily reflect the views of the wider population; rather its strength is to provide rich insights based on a range and diversity of views. At the same time, self-selection bias (only those participants who wanted to take part in the interviews did so) could mean that those participants less satisfied with the programme did not want to take part in the research.

Secondly, qualitative research relies on self-report, which is affected both by the fact that participants may not themselves be able to accurately identify the causal relationships between the activities they undertook and the outcomes they achieved, or may misreport or exaggerate the impact out of gratitude to the people providing the support.

Although qualitative data provides a rich and useful understanding of how participants viewed and experienced the programme, and can support the making of causal claims, caution should be exercised in making causal claims based on qualitative data specifically.

5.3 Future research and publications

5.3.1 Feasibility for a full-scale impact trial

As part of the evaluation, the research team has produced three internal reports to the YFF about the feasibility of progressing the programme to full-scale impact trials (McGannon et al, 2023a; McGannon et al, 2023b; Summers et al., 2023). The feasibility reports propose and discuss in detail several options for potential RCTs and QEDs, depending on the availability of administrative data, as well as willingness and ability of programme to randomise and recruit enough participants.

For various reasons, YFF has decided not to take forward any of these options, but the learnings from these feasibility reports could be applied to evaluating other similar youth employment programmes in the future. The options discussed in the reports are: a) conducting a randomised controlled trial, randomising at the individual level; b) conducting a matched difference in differences (DiD) using participants' data in the LEO dataset to measure outcomes relating to employment, education and access to benefits; c) if not possible to access LEO, conducting a survey-based matched comparator QED, recruiting comparator participants from DWP, Jobcentre Plus and/or other Youth Hubs.

5.3.2 Feasibility for a comparison study

As discussed in Chapter 4, this evaluation was initially part of a larger evaluation intended to compare the effectiveness of a hub-and-spoke model (in which support was supplied through a case management and partnership approach) and an integrated hub model (in which delivery was focused on a youth hub and service delivery was centralised). The comparison study would involve the LTM programme described in this report, as well as another youth employment support programme called DurhamWorks Futures (DWF) described in a companion report (Lawton-Summers et al., 2024). However, a comparison study was not possible in practice. First, our research showed that the two interventions did not neatly fit into those models that were envisaged from the start. Participants accessed the services in similar ways, through multiple access points in the regions they operated, and participants frequently referred to internal and external service providers in both programmes. Secondly, the two interventions were too different across other factors, in particular there were

key differences in the target group (LTM worked with more disadvantaged groups than DWF) and the focus of delivery (LTM is considerably more focused on stabilising personal circumstances than DWF). As such, in Chapter 4 we only discussed common lessons on the effectiveness of youth employment support programmes, rather than providing an in-depth comparative analysis on the effectiveness of two different models.

If YFF or others are still interested in such a comparative study in the future, we see two potential options to do this effectively. The first option is to still use existing programmes, but this will require a more thorough assessment process to identify appropriate interventions that are suitably similar across all characteristics, but different on the model of delivery. This may require commissioning a research team to conduct a detailed scoping project, including discussing the potential evaluation with providers of youth employment support programmes across the country, and then assess any potential pairs that could be used for a comparative study. The second option is to commission two programmes from scratch to provide consistency across, except on the one distinguishing factor. This would likely have much higher start-up costs, but ensure a very strong evaluation design, especially if the evaluator was brought in early in the process.

Appendices

Appendices are provided in a separate document.