

PILOT STUDY PLAN

Branching Out Evaluation

Sheffield Hallam University

Principal investigators: Sarah Pearson and Elizabeth Sanderson

Pilot study plan - Branching Out Evaluation

Wakefield Metropolitan Council
Sheffield Hallam University

PROJECT TITLE	Branching Out Evaluation
DEVELOPER (INSTITUTION)	Wakefield Metropolitan Council Youth Work Team
EVALUATOR (INSTITUTION)	Sheffield Hallam University
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)	Sarah Pearson, Elizabeth Sanderson
EVALUATION PLAN AUTHOR(S)	Sarah Pearson, Elizabeth Sanderson
EVALUATION SETTING	Youth organisation, community and school-based settings
TARGET GROUP	Young people aged 10 to 14 (KS2 and KS3)
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	

Study plan version history

VERSION	DATE	REASON FOR REVISION
1.0	09/04/2021	

Intervention

Branching Out is a complex, multi-strand project which brings together interventions to support young people in three targeted communities in Wakefield. It includes:

- School based social and emotional learning programme – Skills for Adolescence (SFA)
- Street-based delivery of Youth Work in the school’s catchment areas
- Branching Out activities – six-week lead in period prior to activity week which includes “keep warm activities”, mentoring, and small group and one to one work. Each activity week is followed by a six week exit period which leads to a social action project devised, planned, and delivered by the young people.

Referrals to the project are made by schools, the community, and agencies. The project has a partnership approach bringing together the following organisations: Wakefield Council Youth

Work Services, Lions Quest, local schools, Youth Offending Team, Wakefield Council Countryside Service, Wakefield Children's Services and West Yorkshire Police Force.

The Wakefield Youth Services Team have continuously adapted the programme to accommodate changing public health restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Delivery adaptations have included:

- remote engagement with young people (using social media platforms such as Whatsapp and Youtube)
- SFA videos for use in schools and on social media
- smaller group sizes for outdoor activities and revised programmes for local outdoor activity weeks, reducing the need for travel and allowing for social distancing
- home-based family activities supported by resources delivered to young people's homes
- continued presence in the community through street-based work
- door-step visits to maintain contact and support signposting for struggling families.

There are four remaining phases of programme delivery which fall within the pilot study period (the Gantt chart on page 14 provides more detail on the timings of these phases and associated delivery and evaluation activities). These phases are as follows:

- Easter 2021 phase (this phase commenced during the feasibility stage (22nd February 2021) and runs to 21st May 2021)
- Summer 2021 phase (14th June 2021 to 8th October 2021)
- October 2021 phase (13th September 2021 to 10th December 2021)
- February 2022 phase (10th January 2022 to 8th April 2022).

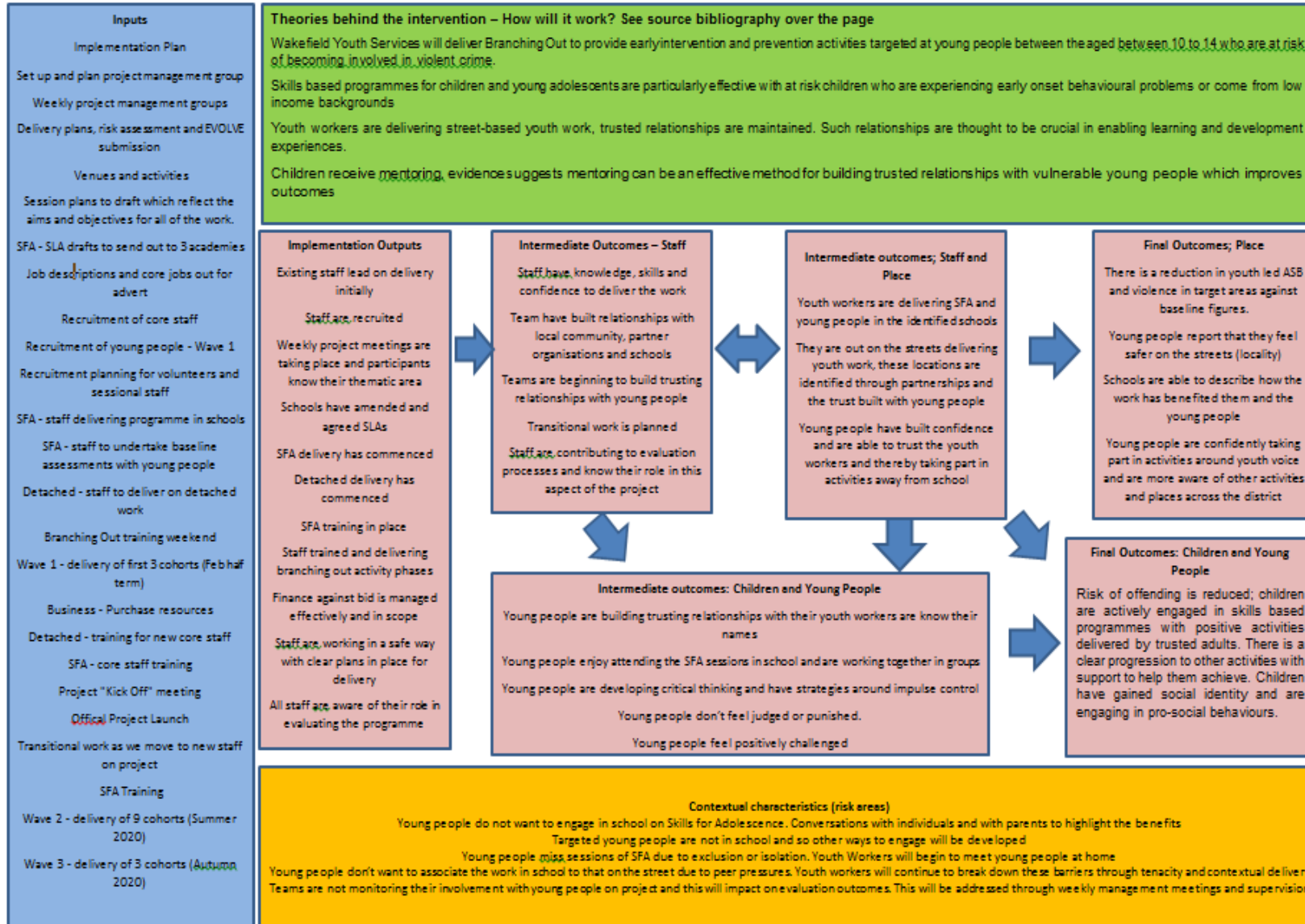
The evaluation methodology and research questions are informed by the project's Theory of Change: participation in Branching Out will support young people to develop skills and decision-making capabilities which mean they are less likely to engage in crime and anti-social behaviour, leading to reductions in youth-led violence and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the target areas (see logic model below). Lions Quest SFA has been evaluated in the USA¹ (to EIF Level 3) and locally, suggesting some positive impacts for young people. Other elements of the programme have not been evaluated, although there is contextual information to suggest reductions in youth crime and ASB in communities where detached youth work and/or activity and social action projects have been delivered previously.

¹ More information on the evidence available can be found here:

<https://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/lions-quest-skills-for-adolescents#about-the-evidence>

Logic model

Wakefield Youth Services Logic Model for Branching Out, funded through Youth Endowment Fund



Research questions and/or objectives

The overall research question identified by the project is:

How does Branching Out achieve sustainable positive change for children and their communities by reducing the number likely to become involved in violent crime?

A feasibility study is currently in the process of being completed for the Branching Out project. This has focused on the early implementation of the project, exploring any barriers and challenges in terms of the project design and delivery, including the adjustments made in response to Covid-19. This feasibility stage has also involved 'testing' how well the outcome measures required (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Problem Behaviour Frequency Scale (PBFS)) have been put in place and work for this group.

The pilot study will move on to focus on the outcomes achieved by young people as a result of their participation in the programme and the effectiveness of the measures used to capture these.

Research questions for this phase include the following:

- a) what measures are in place to determine the impact of the programme and how effective are these?
- b) do these measures capture the relevant outcomes in terms of increased resilience, improved decision making and reduced engagement in risky behaviours, as articulated in the programme's ToC?
- c) what evidence is there of positive outcomes for programme participants?
- d) is there any evidence of statistically significant positive outcomes for programme participants?
- e) what level of confidence is there that any identified positive outcomes will contribute to reductions in crime and ASB in targeted communities?
- f) what are the implications for scaling up and a more rigorous evaluation study?

Success criteria and/or targets

The target is to collect outcomes data via the SDQ and PBFS on all participants engaged with the programme. If this is achievable, or close to achievable, a more rigorous evaluation of the project is likely to be more feasible in the future.

Methods

Methods and data collection

The Pilot study will conform to EIF Level 2 and involve a pre- and post-intervention survey of young people participating in the programme, administered once before they start activities, and again after they have completed the intervention. This will be accompanied by analysis of qualitative research undertaken with young people and programme providers (project leads, youth workers and agencies).

The pilot study will utilise the following methods:

Pre- and post- intervention outcomes data

Pre- and post-intervention data will be collected on all young people participating in the programme. Young people will be asked to complete a questionnaire (featuring the SDQ and PBFS measures) when they first engage with the project and at the end of the intervention. This will allow us to identify positive outcomes in terms of improved decision making and reduced engagement in risky behaviours over time. We will also use the pilot stage to reflect on the degree to which available tools capture the outcomes identified in the programme's Theory of Change.

The Gantt chart on page 14 of this document details the weeks when Wakefield Council have indicated they will collect data on young people. During the feasibility stage we provided the Council with both paper copies of the questionnaire measures and an online version to help facilitate the capture of responses. The feasibility study has, however, identified a number of issues with the completeness of data provided. We therefore propose undertaking a further training session with staff at the start of the pilot stage to reemphasise the importance of data collection for the evaluation and to work with staff to understand the reasons for any issues and put in place actions/systems to prevent these continuing. We will also reemphasise that ongoing support from the evaluation team is available to help them with data collection.

We are currently looking into the possibility of providing an offline version of the questionnaire, enabling responses to be collected electronically when access to the internet is unavailable. If feasible, we envisage this will allow all responses from young people to be collected. This should help address issues with the completeness of data as staff will no longer need to store, keep track of and transfer data from paper copies. Instead, data will be transferred directly and securely to ourselves on submission of a response. In addition, all fields of the online questionnaire have been set to mandatory, meaning issues with questions being missed will also be avoided.

Data sharing and archiving of quantitative outcomes data

During the feasibility stage a data sharing agreement was not put in place between Wakefield Council and SHU as only anonymised data was transferred and data was not shared with any third parties (including YEF). The pilot stage, however, requires data to be archived at the end

of the project and transferred securely to the Department of Education. This means the data collected needs to include identifying information (such as name, DOB etc.) to enable participants to be followed-up and their outcomes assessed against criminal justice records in future years.

We are currently in the process of putting in place two data sharing agreements; one between Wakefield Council and SHU, to allow un-anonymised data to be shared, and a second between SHU and YEF to allow the archiving of the data. We will also ask Wakefield to update their project consent forms to collect parental consent for young people's personal data to be shared for archiving. This will involve making clear who data will be shared with and why. The questionnaire documents (online and paper version if still required in the interim) also need to be updated to collect the appropriate consents from young people to enable their data to be shared.

The first phase of delivery which falls within the pilot study period (Easter 2021 phase) commenced during the feasibility stage. Pre-intervention data for young people engaging during this phase has not, therefore, been collected with the appropriate consents in place. We will look into the possibility of collecting retrospective consent from parents/guardians and young people involved in this phase for their pre-intervention data to be shared. The post-intervention data on these young people is scheduled to be collected during w/c 17th May 2021.

Interviews with project delivery staff

We will undertake quarterly interviews with project delivery staff (project leads and youth workers) to help provide an ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the process of delivery and an opportunity to gather views on the quality and impact of the support being delivered. Interviews will explore perceptions of the effectiveness of the different elements of support provided (detached youth work, SFA, one-to-one mentoring; the outdoor activity programme and social action planning) and how well these have worked in combination to achieve outcomes. During the feasibility stage Covid-19 restrictions meant interviews with staff were conducted remotely either via video or telephone call. This worked well and allowed greater flexibility than face-to-face methodologies. We envisage undertaking interviews with staff remotely again during the pilot stage, with individual interviews taking place with project leads and group interviews with youth workers.

Interviews with project partners

We will conduct a round of interviews with project partners towards the end of project delivery (e.g., local schools, Youth Offending Team, Wakefield Council Countryside Service, Wakefield Children's Services and West Yorkshire Police Force). Many of these organisations will have been interviewed during the feasibility stage and these later interviews will provide an opportunity for them to reflect on how the project has progressed and the impact the service has had, and any outcomes achieved. We will also aim to interview those who were unable to take part in the feasibility stage (e.g., schools) providing them an opportunity to

also give their views on the quality and impact of the support provided. As above, we envisage undertaking interviews with individuals via remote methods.

Group interviews with young people

We will undertake group interviews with young people participating in the programme on up to six occasions during the remaining phases of delivery. We propose these take place through a combination of inclusion in activity weeks and in the final weeks of delivery phases when social action is scheduled to take place. This will allow us to speak to young people during the key elements of delivery and pick up on their experiences of the support (e.g., what they have liked, disliked etc.). Engaging with young people at the end of the intervention period will also allow us to ask young people about any positive changes they might have experienced and the extent to which these can be attributed to their engagement in the programme.

A number of online group interviews with young people were conducted during the feasibility stage, and while useful data was gathered, there were some challenges in terms of building rapport with young people and generating responses to questions. The anticipated easing of Covid-19 restrictions will hopefully allow us to conduct some of the planned group interviews face-to-face (with approx. 6 participants per group, dependent on public health restrictions). We would also hope to include some light touch engagement between researchers and young people prior to interviews to help build rapport, for example researchers participating in some activities with young people during activity week before then conducting any interviews. If remote engagement is necessary (which is likely for at least some of the earlier interviews) we would suggest limiting the groups involved to 2-4 participants maximum. As before, prior engagement with the young people will be used to help develop rapport.

Methods overview

Research questions	Data collection methods/analysis	Participants/ data sources
What measures are in place to determine the impact of the programme and how effective are these?	We will examine the quality of the data collected via the SDQ and PBFS measures to determine how effective these measures have been in practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-and post-intervention questionnaires collecting data on all participants.
Do these measures capture the relevant outcomes in terms of increased resilience, improved decision making and reduced engagement in risky behaviours, as articulated in the programme's ToC?	<p>Pre- and post- intervention outcomes data will be examined to see what changes have been captured.</p> <p>Qualitative interviews will used to assess the degree to which the quantitative tools have captured the outcomes identified in the programme's ToC and whether there are any further impacts uncaptured which could be picked up by additional tools in the future.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-and post-intervention questionnaires collecting data on all participants. • Quarterly interviews with core staff delivery team. • Group interviews with young people. • Interviews with project partners.

Research questions	Data collection methods/analysis	Participants/ data sources
What evidence is there of positive outcomes for programme participants?	<p>Pre- and post- intervention outcomes data will be examined to see if any positive changes have been captured.</p> <p>Group interviews with young people will also examine positive changes experienced by participants.</p> <p>Staff and partner interviews will provide an opportunity to pick up on their perceptions of the impact of the programme on young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-and post-intervention questionnaires collecting data on all participants. • Quarterly interviews with core staff delivery team. • Group interviews with young people. • Interviews with project partners.
Is there any evidence of statistically significant positive outcomes for programme participants?	<p>We will utilise statistical tests such as T-tests to determine if any statistically significant improvements have occurred between pre- and post-intervention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-and post-intervention questionnaires collecting data on all participants.
What level of confidence is there that any identified positive outcomes will contribute to reductions in crime and ASB in targeted communities?	<p>We will draw on existing evidence on the relationship between the types of activities delivered by the Branching Out and reductions in crime and ASB to help determine if any outcomes identified are likely to contribute to reductions in the targeted areas.</p> <p>Interviews with staff and partners will provide an assessment of the local context and the extent to which they believe the outcomes observed will lead to reductions in crime and ASB in the targeted communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing evidence. • Quarterly interviews with core staff delivery team. • Interviews with project partners.
What are the implications for scaling up and a more rigorous evaluation study?	<p>We will draw on all the above analysis and data sources to help determine if the project could be scaled up and whether an efficacy study for example, should be recommended.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing evidence. • Pre-and post-intervention questionnaires collecting data on all participants. • Quarterly interviews with core staff delivery team. • Group interviews with young people. • Interviews with project partners.

Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis

Ongoing checks will be made on the data received throughout the pilot stage to assess the completeness and validity of the data provided. At the end of the period of project delivery we will undertake analysis on all the pre- and post-intervention data collected. We will use the data as indicated in the methods overview table above to help answer the research questions set out for the pilot study.

Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative interviews will be undertaken at various points during the pilot study (see Gantt chart on page 14 for timescales). Initial analysis will be undertaken during and shortly after these interviews in the form of note taking, writing up, transcription, identifying themes and areas to follow-up etc. A more extensive period of analysis will then be conducted following the end of project delivery. We will draw on the data as indicated in the methods overview table above to help answer the research questions set out for the pilot study.

The methods overview table also indicates how data sources will be triangulated to provide a fuller assessment of the changes experienced by young people and the extent to which the measures put in place have been able to capture any outcomes.

Outputs

We will produce the following reports during the pilot study:

- a draft report submitted by 31 May 2022.
- a final, peer reviewed report, including recommendations for the next phase, submitted by 31 July 2022.

Ethics and registration

The study has received overall ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee. An amendment will be submitted to the ethics committee to account for proposed changes to data collection during the pilot phase.

Sheffield Hallam University has established research ethics procedures in place to ensure research is undertaken in accordance with commonly agreed standards of good practice and academic integrity. These processes are in line with BERA and BSA guidelines and operate through the University Research Ethics Committee (SHUREC) and Faculty Research Ethics Committees (FREC).

The project team will follow these procedures at all times, including operating to standardised protocols concerning anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, rights to withdraw, and secure (electronic and physical) data storage. The research team is experienced and committed to working in an ethically appropriate and sensitive way and are familiar with the ethical issues arising when working with diverse groups of participants.

Copies of our ethics policy, principles and procedures are available at: www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice.

Sheffield Hallam University ensures that professional standards and the wellbeing of research participants are protected and maintained at all times. A strong emphasis is placed on the design and use of research instruments which are proportionate: we do not seek to place an undue burden on research participants. Informed consent will be sought from all interviewees. Information about study purpose (including who the data is being collected for and on behalf of), data usage, consent and the right to withdraw from the study and have all information destroyed at any stage will be given in a form appropriate to the participants' needs. The researchers are all highly experienced interviewers and will ensure that no participant's involvement will continue if negative effects of the study can be identified for that individual. Ethics policies are renewed and monitored on an ongoing basis by the University Research Ethics Committee: project directors for all projects are responsible for monitoring ethical issues as part of normal project management processes.

Data protection

The processing of personal data through the evaluation is defined under GDPR as a specific task in the public interest. Therefore, the legal basis for processing personal data will be 'Public Task' (Article 6 (1)(e)).

The University has a detailed set of guidelines in place to enable staff to ensure that their work meets the requirements of the 2018 EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Sheffield Hallam has worked closely with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to ensure we are fully complaint - full details are available at our dedicated website at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy>.

Hallam will adhere to high standards with regards to all aspects of data privacy, security, storage, transfer and processing. No information about an identified individual will be reported or made available beyond the project and evaluation teams, with the exception of sharing the final participant dataset with the Department of Education at the end of the project for the purposes of archiving the data.

Our established principles for managing data include: all staff who will work on the project being aware of their responsibilities in terms of personal data; electronic data only accessible to the research team and their immediate line managers and stored within password protected electronic files; personal data can only be stored on encrypted portable media in password-protected files (and only when absolutely necessary); hard copy data kept under lock and key, consent forms, digital recordings, and transcripts/interview reports stored separately; secure access to premises providing two locks to public access and buildings are locked and alarmed out of office hours. In disseminating findings, names of respondents will appear as pseudonyms, and any other potentially identifying data will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Other safeguards will be put in place in accordance with the University Guidance Notes.

Data protection policy statement:

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research>

Personnel

The core delivery team for the project consists of the following members of staff from Wakefield Metropolitan Council Youth Team:

Darrel Robinson: project manager, responsible for all aspects of project delivery and its overall direction.

Simran Jandu: youth and community development project worker, leading on delivery in the South East Wakefield target area.

Jane Russell: youth and community development project worker, leading on delivery in the Airedale target area.

Martin Andrew: youth and community development project worker, leading on delivery in the Wakefield Central target area.

Emily Deguil: youth and community development support worker, supporting delivery in the South East Wakefield target area.

Rosie Cooper: youth and community development support worker, supporting delivery in the Airedale target area.

Rob Chadwick: youth and community development support worker, supporting delivery in the Wakefield Central target area.

The evaluation team for the project consists of the following members of staff, all from Sheffield Hallam University:

Prof Sarah Pearson: project director, responsible for all aspects of the study and its overall direction; lead on reporting.

Elizabeth Sanderson: project manager and quantitative lead, responsible for day-to-day management and communications with YEF, delivery partners and other stakeholders; quantitative research tool development, support for data gathering, quantitative and statistical data analysis.

Elaine Batty: qualitative researcher, responsible for remote, face to face and telephone interviews, focus groups, observations, and initial analysis.

Dr Sadie Parr: qualitative researcher, responsible for remote, face to face and telephone interviews, focus groups, observations, and initial analysis.

Dr Richard McHugh: qualitative researcher, responsible for remote, face to face and telephone interviews, focus groups, observations, and initial analysis.

Melissa McGregor: project administrator, supporting the smooth running of the project including recruitment to evaluation activities and supporting the project manager.

Prof Mike Coldwell: oversight of all four universal school-based programme evaluations currently being undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University.

Sean Demack: statistical oversight of all four programmes.

Risks

Risk identified	Likelihood of occurring	Potential impact	Mitigation
Failure of data collection resulting in insufficient sample size	Medium	High	providing a further training session for project workers; providing ongoing support; reviewing data collection after each phase of delivery; ensuring that there is a long enough period for data collection; collecting data for all young people engaged in the core elements of the project.
Ongoing impact of Covid-19 limits number of young people able to access programme thus reducing sample size	Medium	High	project extension should allow time to engage enough young people in project activities and to collect enough meaningful data; the end of each phase of delivery provides a review point.
Ongoing impact of Covid-19 continues to limit access to schools and results in continuation of a reduced/online SFA element	High	Medium	project extension may allow some delivery of SFA in schools in the 2021/22 academic year; collecting data for all young people engaged in the core elements of the project should enable a meaningful sample size in absence of SFA delivery; the end of each phase of delivery provides a review point.
Staff illness/absence	Low	Medium	SHU have several researchers working across YEF evaluations and have additional research staff who could step in where necessary.

Risk identified	Likelihood of occurring	Potential impact	Mitigation
Lack of engagement from young people	Medium	Medium	engaging Wakefield staff in facilitating engagement; engaging with young people before interviewing to build rapport; using face-to-face methods where possible.
Lack of engagement from project partners	Low	Medium	relatively small number of stakeholders highly engaged and committed to evaluation and learning; we will aim to be flexible in terms of the times we offer for interview; use of remote methods will aid flexibility.

Timeline

Timescales for evaluation activities are shown in the following table and Gantt chart:

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ leading
Apr 21-Apr 22	Quantitative data collection (SDQ and PBFS)	Wakefield with support from SHU
Apr/May 21	Training session on quantitative data collection	Delivered by SHU, attended by Wakefield
May 21-Apr 22	Group interviews with young people	SHU with support from Wakefield
Jun 21-Apr 22	Quarterly interviews with project delivery staff	SHU with Wakefield participating
Feb 22-Apr 22	Interviews with project partners	SHU with support from Wakefield
Apr 22-Jul 22	Data analysis; reporting, data archiving.	SHU with support from YEF



youthendowmentfund.org.uk



hello@youthendowmentfund.org.uk



[@YouthEndowFund](https://twitter.com/YouthEndowFund)

The Youth Endowment Fund Charitable Trust

Registered Charity Number: 1185413
