

## EVALUATION PROTOCOL

# **United Borders' Building an Understanding of Self (B.U.S.) programme: A randomised controlled trial efficacy study.**

**Cordis Bright**

Principal investigators: Matt Irani, Emma Andersen, Dr Stephen Boxford, Professor Darrick Jolliffe, Keiran Manners, Kam Kaur, Olivia King.

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## Evaluation protocol

Evaluating institution: Cordis Bright

Principal investigators: Matt Irani, Emma Andersen, Dr Stephen Boxford, Professor Darrick Jolliffe, Keiran Manners, Kam Kaur, Olivia King



Project title	United Borders' Building an Understanding of Self (B.U.S.) programme: A randomised controlled trial efficacy study.
Developer	United Borders
Evaluator	Cordis Bright
Principal investigator(s)	Matt Irani, Emma Andersen, Dr Stephen Boxford, Professor Darrick Jolliffe, Keiran Manners, Kam Kaur, Olivia King.
Protocol author(s)	Matt Irani, Emma Andersen, Dr Stephen Boxford, Professor Darrick Jolliffe, Keiran Manners, Kam Kaur, Olivia King.
Trial design	Two-armed parallel randomised controlled trial with random allocation at the young person level.
Trial type	Efficacy study with integrated implementation and process evaluation (IPE)
Evaluation setting	B.U.S. takes place on a mobile recording studio bus, parked in neutral <sup>1</sup> London locations, at a fixed site in a community venue in Brent, or at referral sites like schools or pupil referral units (PRUs).
Target group	Young people aged between 10 and 17 at risk of, or already involved with, violence and crime across Greater London.
Number of participants	684 young people (342 in the B.U.S. group, 342 in the Signposting group).

<sup>1</sup> 'Neutral' refers to locations that are not affiliated with statutory services or schools, and that are considered safe and accessible by young people, outside of perceived postcode boundaries.

Primary outcome and data source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the volume of self-reported offending, measured by the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (SRDS) volume score (Smith &amp; McVie, 2003).</li> </ul>
Secondary outcomes and data sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved pro-social values and behaviours measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) pro-social behaviour subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• Reduced behavioural difficulties, measured by the SDQ externalising behaviours score (combining conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention subscales) (SDQ) (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• Improved peer relationships, measured by the SDQ peer relationship problems subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• Improved emotional functioning, measured by the SDQ emotional symptoms subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• Improved wellbeing, measured by the Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (S-WEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009).</li> <li>• Reduced variety of self-reported offending behaviour, measured by the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (variety score) (Smith &amp; McVie 2003).</li> </ul>

## 1 Protocol version history

Version	Date	Reason for revision
1.1	November 2025	Updates made during the study set-up phase to reflect finalised evaluation processes. All changes were agreed before trial delivery commenced.
1.0 <i>[original]</i>	June 2025	-

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### 3 Abbreviations and definitions

#### Abbreviations

General abbreviations	
B.U.S.	Building an Understanding of Self
FSM	Free School Meals
IPE	Implementation and process evaluation
REDI	Race equity, equality, diversity and inclusion
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
SAP	Statistical Analysis Plan
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SRDS	Self-Reported Delinquency Scale
S-WEMBWS	Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SSRS	Social Support and Rejection Scale
T1	Time 1; baseline before randomisation
T2	Time 2; follow-up at 10 weeks post-randomisation
T3	Time 3; follow-up at 20-22 weeks post-randomisation
YEF	Youth Endowment Fund

#### Definitions

- **B.U.S. (Building an Understanding of Self) group.** The B.U.S. programme is an eight-week, music-based mentoring intervention combining one-to-one mentoring with structured creative modules delivered in neutral, safe spaces (mobile recording studio buses or a community venue). It aims to support young people aged 10–17 who are involved in, or at risk of involvement in, violence or offending. This is the intervention tested in this randomised controlled trial. The B.U.S. group therefore refers to young people who are randomly allocated to receive the intervention.
- **Signposting group.** In this evaluation, “Signposting group” refers to young people allocated to business-as-usual support. Young people in this group do not receive the B.U.S. programme during the 10-week trial period, but instead receive light-touch check-ins from their allocated mentor and signposting to existing statutory or voluntary services (such as school pastoral support, youth offending teams, community organisations or early help). This pathway aims to maintain engagement and ensure an ethical duty of care while preserving trial integrity.
- **B.U.S. mentors.** B.U.S. mentors are trained United Borders practitioners, many with relevant lived experience, who deliver the B.U.S. programme directly to young people. They conduct one-to-one sessions, build trusted relationships, support creative work, complete monitoring data, contribute to data collection for the evaluation, and uphold safeguarding and fidelity to the programme model. Each mentor supports young people across both the B.U.S. and Signposting pathways.
- **United Borders programme management team.** The programme management team provides strategic oversight and operational leadership for the B.U.S. programme. This includes the Chief Executive Officer, Head of Strategy Development, Programme Manager, and colleagues coordinating peer researchers. They are responsible for ensuring safe and consistent delivery, supporting mentors, liaising with partners, and embedding learning from the evaluation.

#### Note on use of terms

- **Racially minoritised groups.** Throughout this report, we use the term “racially minoritised” to describe groups who experience structural disadvantage and systemic inequity due to racialisation. This term acknowledges that marginalisation is produced by social and institutional structures, rather than being an inherent characteristic of individuals or communities. We recognise that terminology and self-identification vary, and different individuals prefer different

descriptors for their racial, cultural and ethnic identity. Where possible, we will use the specific ethnic categories provided by young people or referral partners, in line with ONS standards.

- **Marginalised groups.** We use the term “marginalised groups” to refer to young people who face disadvantage linked to socioeconomic inequality, exclusion from education, experiences of violence or exploitation, racialisation, disability, or other structural factors. We recognise that these categories are broad and that language should always be guided by the preferences and identities of the individual where known.
- **Young people.** Throughout this report, we use the term young people to reflect the age range of participants in the B.U.S. programme and evaluation. This aligns with the programme’s eligibility criteria and avoids implying adult-level agency or culpability. However, readers are reminded that the young people participating in this study are children aged 10 to 17. Maintaining child-appropriate language is important to avoid adultification, a well-documented issue that disproportionately affects Black children and that can shape how children are perceived by policing, education and youth justice. We therefore take care to use terminology that reflects participants’ developmental stage, lived experiences and rights as children throughout.

## 4 Introduction

This is an efficacy study protocol for a two-armed parallel randomised controlled trial (RCT) with integrated implementation and process evaluation (IPE) of United Borders' Building an Understanding of Self (B.U.S.) programme.

The efficacy study began in August 2025, with trial delivery beginning in January 2026 and running until April 2028. Final reporting will take place in Autumn 2028.

## 5 Study rationale and background

This section provides:

- An overview of the local and systemic context in which the B.U.S. programme operates.
- The rationale for the B.U.S. programme model, including its theoretical and empirical underpinnings.
- The rationale for testing the programme through an efficacy RCT, to establish causal evidence of impact.

### 5.1.1 Local and systemic context

United Borders is a London-based charity, that seeks to support children and young people involved, or at risk of involvement in youth violence and offending. Its work originated in the London borough of Brent, where United Borders is based, but has since expanded to operate across multiple boroughs in Greater London through both its mobile and site-based delivery models. While local needs and service infrastructure vary, many of the communities in which B.U.S. operates experience overlapping challenges associated with poverty, inequality, and community safety.

This section sets out the local and systemic context in which United Borders operates, specifically:

- a) High rates of youth violence, exploitation, and school exclusion across London.
- b) Territorial conflict and postcode boundaries may limit safe access to services.
- c) Youth violence and exploitation disproportionately impact racially minoritised, care-experienced and disadvantaged young people.
- d) Limited availability of trauma-informed, culturally relevant early intervention, compounded by long-term reductions in youth service capacity.

- e) Fragmented statutory systems and low trust in services among the most affected young people.

### *High rates of youth violence, exploitation and exclusion across London*

Across London, including in Brent and the other areas in which B.U.S. is delivered, young people are often exposed to multiple and compounding risks, including interpersonal violence, domestic abuse, school exclusion, contact with the youth justice system, and exploitation through gangs or county lines activity including sexual exploitation. These overlapping adversities create cumulative disadvantage that increases vulnerability to both victimisation and offending.

Serious youth violence in London remains concentrated in areas of high deprivation and structural inequality. The London Violence Reduction Unit (London's VRU, 2023) reports that young people aged 15 to 19 account for the highest rates of knife-enabled offences and are disproportionately represented both as victims and suspects. Similarly, the London Assembly (2020) found that young Londoners involved in serious violence frequently experience multiple forms of vulnerability, including family breakdown, exposure to trauma, and mental ill-health.

Educational exclusion and disengagement continue to be strongly associated with serious violence and exploitation. The Youth Endowment Fund (2024) highlights that young people excluded from school or not in education, employment or training (NEET) are significantly more likely to become victims or perpetrators of violence. These factors contribute to a persistent pattern of social harm and exclusion that underpins the rationale for targeted, relational, and preventative interventions such as the B.U.S. programme.

### *Territorial conflict and postcode boundaries limit access to safe spaces and services.*

Spatial and territorial factors play a significant role in shaping patterns of youth violence and exclusion across London. Research shows that postcode boundaries, gang affiliations and localised rivalries influence where young people feel safe to travel, socialise, or seek support. These divisions often reflect deeper structural inequalities, including housing segregation, historic disinvestment in particular neighbourhoods, and the erosion of shared community spaces (Coomber & Moyle, 2017; London VRU, 2023).

This territoriality can have profound consequences for service access and engagement. Young people may avoid certain areas or organisations, even those offering support, because they perceive them to be associated with rival groups or unsafe neighbourhoods. The Home Office (2022) notes that territorial disputes contribute to cycles of retaliation and constrain young

people's physical mobility, which in turn limits opportunities to build prosocial networks or engage in positive activities.

These dynamics highlight the importance of providing neutral, mobile and flexible spaces that allow young people to participate safely, without crossing perceived boundaries or encountering stigma linked to place. Addressing territorial barriers is therefore central to ensuring equitable access and sustained engagement among those most at risk.

### *Disproportionate impacts on racially minoritised, care-experienced and disadvantaged young people*

Evidence consistently shows that youth violence, exploitation, and exclusion do not affect all young people equally. Young people from racially minoritised backgrounds, care-experienced settings, and those with additional learning or social needs are disproportionately exposed to the intersecting risks of victimisation, criminalisation, and service disengagement. These inequalities reflect broader patterns of structural disadvantage, including poverty, racism, and differential access to support and opportunity.

The Youth Endowment Fund (2024) found that 27% of 13 to 17-year-olds in England and Wales had been victims or perpetrators of violence, and 10% had been both. However, young people from racially minoritised communities were significantly overrepresented in these figures, reflecting the cumulative effects of deprivation, racialised policing, and educational inequality. Similarly, research by the Lammy Review (2017) and the Youth Justice Legal Centre (2023) highlights that Black and mixed-heritage boys remain overrepresented at every stage of the youth justice system, from school exclusion to sentencing.

Research also suggests that educational exclusion is a critical driver, with young people who have been permanently excluded from school twice as likely to commit serious violence within a year compared to their peers who have experienced a fixed-term suspension (Cornish & Brennan, 2025). Those attending alternative provision are more likely to face ongoing exclusion, stigma, and reduced access to pastoral or mental health support (Ofsted, 2023).

These inequalities are compounded by care experience, SEND status, and socio-economic disadvantage. Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and care-experienced young people face heightened vulnerability to exploitation and criminalisation, and are often underserved by mainstream support systems (National Youth Agency, 2022; Ofsted, 2023). A lack of sustained, trusting relationships with safe adults further increases the risk of disconnection and exposure to harm.

Many of the boroughs served by United Borders, including Brent, combine high levels of ethnic diversity with persistent deprivation. In Brent, 64% of residents identify as Black, Asian or from other minority ethnic backgrounds (Brent Council, 2021), and 43% of children live in poverty after housing costs (Trust for London, 2021). When racial inequality and material deprivation intersect, they can compound disadvantage in ways that increase the likelihood of exclusion and serious youth violence.

### *Limited availability of trauma-informed, culturally relevant early intervention*

The need for effective early-intervention support in London has intensified over the past decade. Reductions in youth provision and local authority funding have created significant gaps in the services available to young people facing multiple risks. Between 2011 and 2021, local authority youth service spending fell by over 40% in real terms across London (Greater London Authority, 2021; YMCA, 2022). These cuts have particularly affected preventative and relationship-based provision, which is vital for young people experiencing exclusion, violence, or exploitation.

Mainstream services are often perceived as reactive, overstretched, or culturally disconnected, leaving many young people without consistent, trusted support. Research highlights that trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches, grounded in empathy, lived experience and positive identity, are more effective in re-engaging young people who have disengaged from formal systems (Wilson et al., 2022; NYA, 2022). In this context, there may be a need for community-led models that can bridge these gaps and provide early, accessible support that reflects young people's lived realities.

### *Fragmented systems and low trust in services*

Fragmentation across education, social care, youth justice and community provision further compounds the problem. Young people and families frequently experience disjointed or inconsistent support, where multiple agencies are involved but information-sharing and relational continuity are limited. This fragmentation undermines trust and can reinforce perceptions of statutory services as punitive rather than supportive, particularly among racially minoritised and marginalised young people (Lammy, 2017).

Rebuilding trust requires provision that is credible, identity-affirming, and rooted in lived experience. Evidence from community-led initiatives, such as the MyEnds programme, funded by the London Violence Reduction Unit, demonstrates that locally embedded, culturally competent approaches can improve engagement, community safety, and wellbeing outcomes (Cordis Bright, 2023). These findings reinforce the value of trusted, non-stigmatising provision that is co-designed with and delivered by local practitioners.

United Borders is embedded within this ecosystem of community-led practice. Through partnerships with schools, youth offending services, children's social care and the police, the organisation identifies and supports young people at highest risk of violence and exclusion. Its mobile, creative and trauma-informed model directly addresses barriers such as postcode tensions, mistrust in statutory services, and disengagement from formal systems. This foundation provides the rationale for testing the B.U.S. model through a robust and equitable efficacy trial, capable of demonstrating how community-based, relational approaches can deliver measurable impact at scale.

### 5.1.2 Rationale for the B.U.S. programme model

The B.U.S. programme has been developed by United Borders to respond to the complex and overlapping needs of young people at high risk of involvement in violence, criminal exploitation, and serious youth offending. These young people often face a convergence of challenges, including trauma, school exclusion, exposure to community violence, family instability, and socio-economic disadvantage. Many are known to statutory services but have disengaged from traditional forms of support due to prior negative experiences, perceived stigma, or a lack of cultural relevance in service provision.

The B.U.S. programme addresses this by positioning mentoring within a creative, strength-based process that emphasises identity, belonging, and self-efficacy. It combines one-to-one mentoring with creative music production, delivered in custom-fitted buses, or community venues, that serve as neutral and flexible safe spaces. Mentors, often with lived experience of similar contexts, support young people to explore their identity, process emotions, build aspirations, and develop positive coping strategies. Music is used as both a hook for engagement and a medium for reflection, creativity, and emotional expression.

The B.U.S. programme model is grounded in evidence that:

- **Trusted mentoring relationships can reduce offending and improve wellbeing**, particularly when mentors receive structured training and supervision (DuBois et al., 2011; Gaffney et al., 2022). A meta-analysis of 46 studies found that mentoring can significantly reduce aggressive behaviour and offending, especially when mentors receive adequate training, the programme is structured and monitored, and relationships are sustained over time (DuBois et al., 2011).
- **Creative and arts-based interventions promote emotional regulation, self-expression, and engagement among high-risk young people** (Daykin et al., 2013; MacDonald et al., 2017). Research shows that music production can support identity formation, emotional regulation, and self-expression – all protective factors for young people at risk of, or already involved in, violence and/or crime (Daykin et al., 2013;

MacDonald et al., 2017). Creative approaches can be particularly effective in reaching young people who are disengaged from more traditional services, especially when they are co-produced and tailored to young people's cultural and social realities. A systematic review by Daykin et al. (2013) found that music-based interventions were associated with improvements in emotional wellbeing, reductions in risk-taking behaviours, and increased engagement in education or employment. There is also evidence from evaluations of music-based interventions similar to the B.U.S. programme which suggests that they may improve mental wellbeing (Noise Solution, 2023) and encourage engagement with statutory services (e.g. an increased likelihood of young people attending YOT appointments) (Caulfield et al. 2020).

- **Culturally competent and trauma-informed approaches improve accessibility and outcomes for racially minoritised and marginalised young people** (Lammy, 2017; NYA, 2022). Trauma-informed practice emphasises safety, trust, and empowerment, recognising that many young people affected by violence and exclusion carry histories of trauma and loss (SAMHSA, 2014). Evidence shows that when mentoring relationships are built on empathy, predictability, and non-judgement, they can help young people re-establish a sense of control and belonging, reducing behavioural risk and improving emotional wellbeing (Bath & Seita, 2018). Embedding these principles within culturally relevant practice ensures that support feels authentic, respectful, and responsive to the lived experiences of racially minoritised and disadvantaged young people, increasing both engagement and impact.
- **Community-led and mobile delivery models are effective in overcoming postcode barriers and rebuilding trust in services.** The findings from the pilot evaluation of the programme highlighted that this neutral, mobile delivery allowed mentors to reach young people in spaces they felt safe, without requiring them to cross perceived boundaries or enter unfamiliar institutional environments (University of Birmingham, 2024). This design feature may therefore be integral to the programme's mechanism of engagement and retention.

B.U.S. incorporates these best practice features through structured supervision, mentor training, and a consistent 8 week engagement pathway focussed on music and creative approaches. The mobile delivery format is a structural innovation, providing a practical response to the postcode boundaries that shape violence, mobility and access to services in parts of London.

### 5.1.3 Rationale for an efficacy study RCT

The B.U.S. programme has now undergone both a YEF-funded [feasibility study](#) and [pilot trial](#) (University of Birmingham, 2023; 2024). These studies demonstrated that the programme is clearly defined, delivered with a good level of fidelity, and is acceptable to young people, families, programme staff, and delivery partners. They also confirmed that it is possible to recruit and randomise participants to the intervention, and to collect outcome data at multiple timepoints. These findings establish proof of concept and implementation readiness for a full efficacy trial.

The pilot trial (University of Birmingham, 2024) provided promising indications that the B.U.S. programme can achieve meaningful engagement with young people at high levels of risk. The evaluation recruited 83 young people across a range of London boroughs, with high completion rates for the programme and positive feedback from participants, mentors and referring partners. Young people described the programme as supportive, empowering and transformative, with mentors seen as relatable and trustworthy. Referral partners highlighted the programme's ability to engage young people who were otherwise disengaged from services. The feasibility and pilot trials demonstrated that randomisation was both feasible and acceptable, with high rates of consent and no evidence of systematic bias or attrition because of treatment or control group allocation.

The pilot trial suggests that the B.U.S. programme model is now sufficiently articulated and standardised to be delivered consistently across multiple boroughs. Delivery is supported by clear referral criteria, a structured engagement pathway, and defined expectations around session content, dosage and mentor practice. These features ensure implementation fidelity and support external validity across delivery contexts. As a result, the programme is now in a position such that an efficacy study can test whether the programme leads to measurable improvements in its intended outcomes in comparison to conditions similar to business as usual.

The B.U.S. programme is designed and delivered using a trauma-informed framework developed by United Borders, which underpins the mentoring model and the relational approach to engagement. This includes conscious attention to power dynamics, emotional safety, and trust-building with young people affected by structural disadvantage. The evaluation design similarly draws on Cordis Bright's [EDI Toolkit](#), which promotes inclusive and anti-discriminatory research practices, including accessible data collection methods, co-productive design, and equitable analysis planning. These approaches help ensure that diversity, equity and inclusion are embedded throughout the design, delivery and evaluation of the trial. They enhance both ethical integrity and external validity, ensuring that evidence

generated reflects the experiences of those most affected by the issues the intervention seeks to address.

## 6 About the B.U.S. programme

### 6.1 Overview

This section provides an overview of United Borders' B.U.S. programme. It covers:

- The B.U.S. programme's Theory of Change.
- Who the B.U.S. programme aims to work with.
- What is required to deliver the B.U.S. programme.
- How the B.U.S. programme works with young people.
- What the B.U.S. programme aims to achieve.
- The support that will be received by the Signposting group.

### 6.2 Theory of Change

Figure 1 presents the B.U.S. programme's Theory of Change. It summarises the rationale for the programme, the population it seeks to support, the core activities and mechanisms through which change is expected to occur, and the intended short-, medium- and long-term outcomes.

Figure 1: B.U.S. programme's theory of change

WHY		
	<b>Problem observation</b>	<p>The B.U.S. programme was developed in response to overlapping and persistent challenges affecting some young people in London, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) High rates of youth violence, exploitation, and school exclusion.</li><li>b) Territorial conflict and postcode boundaries that may limit safe access to services.</li><li>c) Youth violence and exploitation disproportionately impact racially minoritised, care-experienced and disadvantaged young people.</li><li>d) Limited availability of trauma-informed, culturally relevant early intervention services, compounded by long-term reductions in youth service capacity.</li><li>e) Fragmented statutory systems and low trust in mainstream provision among the most affected young people.</li></ul>
	<b>Need</b>	<p>Evidence shows that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Trusted mentoring relationships</b> can reduce offending and improve wellbeing, particularly when mentors have lived experience and receive structured training and supervision (DuBois et al., 2011; Gaffney et al., 2022).</li><li>• <b>Creative and arts-based interventions</b> are associated with improved emotional regulation, self-expression and engagement among high-risk young people (Daykin et al., 2013; MacDonald et al., 2017).</li><li>• <b>Culturally competent and trauma-informed approaches</b> increase accessibility and effectiveness for racially minoritised and marginalised young people (Lammy, 2017; NYA, 2022).</li><li>• <b>Community-led and flexible delivery models</b>, including mobile provision, are effective in overcoming postcode barriers and rebuilding trust in services (Cordis Bright, 2023).</li></ul>

		<p>This evidence base highlights a need for robust causal evidence on the impact of such relational and creative mentoring models to inform future violence reduction strategies.</p>
<p><b>WHO</b></p>	<p><b>Target population</b></p>	<p>The B.U.S. programme works with young people aged between 10 and 17 years living in London, referred by police, local authorities, social services, youth offending services, schools and pupil referral units, and who have been impacted by violence (interpersonal, domestic, social media threats, associated with other young people who have criminal or gang affiliations) as victims or perpetrators.</p> <p>B.U.S. supports young people who:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Have been charged with or cautioned for a criminal offence (but who are not currently in custody);</li> <li>2) Have received an out-of-court disposal (such as a Youth Caution or Community Resolution); or</li> <li>3) Are considered at medium or high risk of offending, due to experiencing a range of risk factors.</li> </ol> <p>Young people will not be eligible for B.U.S. if they a) are currently serving a custodial sentence or are subject to remand; b) have previously served multiple (i.e. more than one) custodial sentences; or c) are currently involved in formal court proceedings.</p>
<p><b>HOW</b></p>	<p><b>Intervention activities</b></p>	<p>The B.U.S. programme combines one-to-one mentoring with structured creative music production, delivered in neutral<sup>2</sup>, safe and mobile spaces. It is designed to build trust, encourage emotional reflection and promote prosocial identity development. It consists of the following core activities:</p>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Neutral' refers to locations that are not affiliated with statutory services or schools, and that are considered safe and accessible by young people, outside of perceived postcode boundaries.


- **Pre-intervention engagement** with the young people and their families to ensure young people are in a position to begin the programme. At this stage a risk assessment is conducted, and young people are paired with an appropriate mentor.
- **An 8-week music and mentoring programme delivered across 14 one-to-one sessions**, centred on producing music, which consists of the following key activities:
  - **Four creative and reflective programme modules**, each followed by a “listening party” where young people review their work and reflect on progress.
  - **A graduation ceremony** to mark the end of the programme, where young people can perform some of the songs they have produced and reflect on their achievements – this takes place with family, friends and other United Borders supporters present.
- **Additional wrap-around support** is also provided outside of the programme to support young people as necessary, including engaging with other organisations.
- **At the end of the programme**, there are opportunities for young people to remain engaged with United Borders; this can take a number of forms, including signposting and onwards referrals, and becoming peer mentors or ambassadors within United Borders.

**Intervention mechanisms**

The programme is underpinned by the following key mechanisms and approaches:

- **The creative nature of the programme.** Music is the “hook” which encourages young people to engage with the programme, builds relationships with mentors, and provides a way to reflect and process previous trauma and experiences through music.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The neutral space in which the programme takes place.</b> This provides young people with a safe space to build positive and trusting relationships, as an alternative to being ‘on the road’ and ‘something to look forward to’.</li> <li>• <b>Building trusting relationships with mentors with lived experience.</b> This includes mentors meeting young people ‘where they are’, and being willing and able to work with young people on the individual issues and needs they have and focusing on empowering young people. Mentors have lived experience of violent areas and violence, and this helps young people and mentors find common ground and build a trusting relationship.</li> <li>• <b>Taking a trauma-informed approach to the programme.</b> This can help young people to understand the impact their past and current experiences have on their wellbeing and identify how they can transform their own opportunities.</li> </ul>
<b>WHAT</b>	<b>Short-term outcomes</b>	<p>Young people have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced behavioural difficulties.</li> <li>• Improved emotional functioning.</li> <li>• Improved prosocial values and decision-making.</li> <li>• Improved wellbeing and self-esteem.</li> <li>• Improved confidence and self-efficacy.</li> <li>• Improved peer relationships.</li> <li>• Enhanced readiness to pursue constructive life pathways (e.g. education, employment, volunteering).</li> </ul>
	<b>Medium-term outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people are able to take ownership of their own positive pathways.</li> <li>• Trust is built between young people from different areas.</li> </ul>
	<b>Long-term outcomes</b>	<p>Young people have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced involvement with gangs.</li> <li>• Reduced involvement in violent crime.</li> <li>• Reduced volume and variety of offending.</li> <li>• Improved personal and community safety.</li> </ul>

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- Reduced victimisation and exploitation.
  - Increased participation in education, employment and community life.
- 

### 6.2.1 Broader causal pathways and mechanisms of change

The intervention is underpinned by a multi-component Theory of Change in which engagement, relational, social and psychological mechanisms interact to support behavioural change. While these mechanisms are presented separately for clarity, in practice they are mutually reinforcing and are expected to operate together.

#### 1. Engagement mechanisms: initial and sustained participation

A central feature of the intervention is the use of music as a primary engagement hook. Music provides an intrinsically motivating, culturally relevant and non-stigmatising entry point, particularly for young people who may be disengaged from formal services. This increases the likelihood of initial participation and supports sustained attendance over time.

Delivery in neutral, community-based spaces further supports engagement by creating a clear distinction from statutory settings (e.g. school, youth justice environments), while also reducing barriers linked to postcode tensions, stigma and prior negative experiences of services. These spaces are intended to feel psychologically safe and accessible, helping to overcome barriers to participation.

Together, these elements are expected to support both uptake and retention, which are important preconditions for downstream change.

#### 2. Relational mechanisms: trust, safety and emotional engagement

Consistent, supportive relationships with practitioners (including mentors and facilitators) are central to how change is facilitated. The intervention emphasises a trauma-informed approach characterised by:

- Emotional safety and predictability
- Non-judgemental interactions
- Sensitivity to past experiences of adversity
- Support for emotional regulation

These relational dynamics are expected to build trust over time, enabling young people to engage more openly in the programme. This includes increased willingness to express emotions, reflect on experiences, and consider alternative perspectives and behaviours.

### **3. Social mechanisms: peer interaction and pro-social norms**

Structured and informal peer interaction, including through collaborative activities such as 3PEAT, listening parties and graduation events, is a further key component of the intervention. These aspects of delivery create opportunities for:

- Shared experiences and mutual understanding
- The development of pro-social peer relationships
- Exposure to alternative norms and behaviours

For young people who may experience isolation or be embedded in harmful peer networks, this can support a sense of belonging and social connection. Over time, this is expected to contribute to the normalisation of non-offending behaviours and reinforce positive identity development.

### **4. Psychological mechanisms: emotional processing, regulation and identity formation**

Through the combined influence of engagement, relational and social mechanisms, the intervention aims to support a set of interrelated psychological changes, including:

- Improved emotional processing (e.g. recognising and articulating emotions)
- Enhanced self-regulation (e.g. managing impulses and responses)
- Increased self-efficacy and sense of agency
- Identity development, including movement away from offence-related identities towards more positive self-concepts and future orientations

Creative processes, including music production and expression, are expected to play a particularly important role in facilitating emotional expression and identity exploration.

These psychological changes are hypothesised to be key pathways through which programme participation may contribute to behavioural outcomes.

## 5. Behavioural outcomes: reduced offending and wider outcomes

The mechanisms described above are expected to contribute to reductions in offending and related risk behaviours. This may occur through:

- Improved decision-making and impulse control
- Reduced association with harmful peer networks
- Increased engagement in constructive activities (e.g. education, training, employment)

Secondary outcomes may include improvements in wellbeing, relationships, and broader social functioning.

While the full Theory of Change includes multiple interacting mechanisms, the efficacy trial focuses primarily on the extent to which these programme components support the development of trusted relationships and associated improvements in key behavioural and psychosocial outcomes.

The articulation of the Theory of Change presented here reflects the current understanding of how the B.U.S. programme is expected to generate change, based on existing evidence, programme design and discussions with United Borders and YEF. As part of the implementation and process evaluation, we will continue to explore and refine this Theory of Change in collaboration with United Borders colleagues, drawing on emerging delivery insights and qualitative evidence to deepen understanding of how, for whom, and under what conditions the programme is most effective.

### 6.2.2 Who does the B.U.S. programme work with?

The target group for the B.U.S. programme and the efficacy study is young people aged between 10 and 17 who meet all three of the following inclusion criteria:

1. **Criteria 1:** The young person has either:
  - a) Been charged with or cautioned for a criminal offence (but is not currently in custody); or
  - b) Received an out-of-court disposal (such as a Youth Caution or Community Resolution); or
  - c) Is considered at medium or high risk of offending, based on one or more of the following indicators:

- Carrying weapons (e.g. knives).
  - Evidence or strong concerns of criminal exploitation (e.g. burner phones, sudden changes in behaviour or finances, missing episodes).
  - Known association with peers involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour.
  - Being a sibling of a known perpetrator or victim of serious violence.
  - History of interpersonal violence, coercive behaviour, or aggressive behaviour towards peers or adults.
  - Has experienced, or is at risk of experiencing, multiple suspensions linked to behavioural concerns, persistent absence from school, permanent exclusion or being managed moved.
  - Current or prior involvement with youth justice, social care, or safeguarding services due to behavioural or contextual concerns.
  - Drug possession or known involvement in low-level dealing.
2. **Criteria 2:** The young person lives in, attends school in, or is referred by a statutory or voluntary agency operating within Greater London. Priority will be given to referrals from boroughs where United Borders is actively delivering the programme.
3. **Criteria 3:** The young person, and their primary carer, provides informed consent to participate in the evaluation, and expresses willingness to engage with the B.U.S. programme, demonstrated through:
- a) Participating in an initial face-to-face meeting with a United Borders mentor.
  - b) Verbal and written confirmation of understanding and agreement to take part in the programme and study, including follow-up data collection.

Young people will not be eligible to take part in the trial if they:

- Are currently serving a custodial sentence or are subject to remand.
- Have previously served multiple (i.e. more than one) custodial sentences, which would indicate a level of risk and complexity not matched to the support model offered by the B.U.S. programme.
- Are currently involved in formal court proceedings.
- Are already enrolled in another music-based intervention, where overlap in delivery model would impact on evaluation findings.

These are the only exclusion criteria that will be applied if a young person otherwise meets the inclusion criteria.

Referrals are expected from a range of sources, including youth offending teams, schools, pupil referral units (PRUs), community safety partnerships, early help teams, social services, and the Metropolitan Police. Based on prior delivery, the trial cohort is expected to include both a 'tertiary cohort' (i.e. young people with current or recent criminal justice involvement, approximately 15 to 20% of referrals) and a 'secondary cohort' (young people identified as at medium/high risk but not yet formally charged, approximately 80 to 85% of referrals).

### 6.2.3 What is required to deliver the B.U.S. programme?

To deliver its intended activities and outcomes, the B.U.S. programme requires the following inputs:

- Funding to cover staff costs, equipment and materials, travel and other expenses.
- Two custom-fitted mobile recording studio buses, and a permanent site in a community venue in Brent.
- A dedicated, trained team of mentors. Mentors have worked in a variety of areas, including the music industry, and some have lived experience of living in violent areas and/or being involved in violence.

### 6.2.4 How does the B.U.S. programme work with young people?

Table 1 describes the B.U.S. programme in line with the Template for Intervention Description and Replication (TiDieR) framework (Hoffman et al. 2014).

**Table 1: About the B.U.S. programme**

TiDieR item	Description
<b>Brief name</b>	United Borders Building an Understanding of Self (B.U.S.) programme
<b>Why?</b>	<p>The B.U.S. programme was developed in response to the following context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) High rates of youth violence, exploitation, and school exclusion across London.</li> <li>b) Territorial conflict and postcode boundaries may limit safe access to services.</li> <li>c) Youth violence and exploitation disproportionately impact racially minoritised, care-experienced and disadvantaged young people.</li> </ul>

TiDieR item	Description
	<p>d) Limited availability of trauma-informed, culturally relevant early intervention, compounded by long-term reductions in youth service capacity.</p> <p>e) Fragmented statutory systems and low trust in services among the most affected young people.</p>
<p><b>Who delivers?</b></p>	<p>B.U.S. is delivered by a team of trained and experienced mentors, many of whom have lived experience of the issues young people B.U.S. aims to work with face. Each full time mentor can support 5-6 young people at any given time. For the purposes of the efficacy study, mentor capacity is 10 young people at a time, i.e. 5 young people in the B.U.S. group and 5 young people in the Signposting group.</p> <p>Each young person is matched to a mentor based on a combination of need, risk profile, location, and shared interest, including musical preferences.</p> <p>Mentors play a central role in delivering the B.U.S. programme. Their responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using creative work as a vehicle for building trust and emotional safety.</li> <li>• Supporting the young person’s emotional regulation and trauma processing, including through structured discussions of lyrics and themes.</li> <li>• Acting as positive role models, offering consistent, supportive adult relationships.</li> <li>• Supporting the young person to develop personal goals and engage with education, employment, or other services as needed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is delivered?</b></p>	<p>The B.U.S. programme combines one-to-one mentoring with creative music production, structured around a sequence of themed modules referred to as B.U.S. Stops. Each “stop” represents a stage in the young person’s reflective and creative journey. These activities are designed to build trusted relationships, provide emotional regulation strategies, and promote pro-social identify development.</p>

TiDieR item	Description
	<p>Core modules include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>B.U.S. Stop, Boss Start:</b> Establishing the young person’s creative process, building early rapport, and recording initial tracks that reflect lived experiences.</li> <li>• <b>Moralising Music (M&amp;M):</b> Young people and their mentors revisit their track and its lyrics to explore alternative narratives, challenge harmful messaging, and reflect on the impact of words.</li> <li>• <b>3PEAT:</b> Young people are challenged to create music with young people who they aren’t familiar with and reside in a different postcode. They are asked to re-edit each song they create with a younger audience in mind, i.e. primary school children, introducing accountability and self-awareness. This process is repeated three times.</li> <li>• <b>B.U.S. Stop, Boss Up:</b> Young people review and edit their final tracks, producing a music video where appropriate, and preparing for graduation through a performance or celebratory event</li> </ul> <p>At the end of each module, young people participate in a structured reflective session (“<b>Listening Party</b>”) that includes a ceremonial component to honour their journey, highlight their creative outputs, and acknowledge the progress they have made. This includes reviewing recorded tracks and discussing their personal development, often in the form of a celebratory session facilitated by their mentor.</p> <p>In addition, on completing the full B.U.S. programme, young people are invited to attend one of United Borders’ larger <b>graduation events</b>, which bring together participants, families, mentors and community partners. These events offer an opportunity to showcase young people’s achievements more widely and celebrate their contributions in a shared and supportive space.</p> <p>The B.U.S. team also offers young people <b>signposting to wider services</b>, helping them to access further opportunities, including education, training, or mental health services. There is also an optional transition to become a</p>

TiDieR item	Description
	United Borders ambassador or peer mentor for those young people who are interested.
<b>When and how much?</b>	The B.U.S. programme is a structured intervention that works with young people over a minimum of 14 hour long sessions delivered across eight weeks.
<b>How?</b>	Sessions are delivered face-to-face through structured one-to-one meetings between mentors and young people. Music production acts as both an engagement hook and a therapeutic and reflective medium. Each young person follows a consistent thematic pathway while co-producing content that reflects their personal experiences.
<b>Where?</b>	<p>Sessions are delivered primarily face-to-face by trained mentors. The programme is hosted in either:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) One of two custom-fitted, mobile double-decker buses, which provide a neutral and non-threatening space for young people, as well as providing the music recording studio facilities required for the delivery of the intervention.</li> <li>2) A community venue in Brent, which also hosts the music recording studio facilities necessary to deliver the intervention.</li> </ol> <p>These locations are not affiliated with statutory services or schools, and are considered safe and accessible by young people, outside of perceived postcode boundaries. Transport to and from the locations will be provided by United Borders where appropriate.</p>
<b>Tailoring?</b>	Young people are matched to mentors based on need, risk profile, location, gender, and musical interests. Mentors adapt engagement approaches and creative content to reflect each young person’s preferences and experiences, while maintaining fidelity to the programme structure. The trauma-informed SUIT (Self-evaluation, Unification, Introspection, Transformation) and CETS (Critical Analysis, Empathy, Togetherness, Social Impact) frameworks guide reflective discussion and emotional learning.
<b>How well?</b>	Fidelity is supported through:

TiDieR item	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed delivery manuals and mentor handbooks.</li> <li>• Supervision and reflective practice sessions.</li> <li>• Monitoring data on attendance, engagement, and mentor notes.</li> <li>• Periodic fidelity reviews conducted jointly by United Borders and the evaluation team.</li> </ul> <p>United Borders also maintains a robust safeguarding framework aligned with statutory guidance, reviewed annually. All mentors hold enhanced DBS checks and follow established procedures for escalating concerns. Any safeguarding incidents related to the evaluation will be reported to Cordis Bright to assess ethical implications and adapt procedures if needed.</p>

### 6.2.5 What does the B.U.S. programme aim to achieve?

As outlined in the Theory of Change, the B.U.S. programme aims to reduce young people’s future engagement in violence and offending behaviour. The short-, medium- and long-term outcomes are described below:

#### Short-term outcomes are:

- Reduced behavioural difficulties.
- Improved emotional functioning.
- Improved prosocial values and decision-making.
- Improved wellbeing and self-esteem.
- Improved confidence and self-efficacy.
- Improved peer relationships.
- Enhanced readiness to pursue constructive life pathways (e.g. employment, volunteering, further education).

#### Medium-term outcomes are:

- Young people are able to take ownership of their own positive pathways
- Trust is built between young people from different areas

### Long-term outcomes are:

- Reduced involvement with gangs.
- Reduced involvement in violent crime.
- Reduced volume and variety of offending.
- Improved personal and community safety.
- Reduced victimisation and exploitation.
- Increased participation in education, employment and community life.

#### 6.2.6 Causal pathway tested in the efficacy study

Figure 2 presents a simplified causal pathway extract from the B.U.S. programme Theory of Change, clarifying the specific mechanisms and outcomes tested within the efficacy RCT.

While the full Theory of Change identifies multiple interrelated mechanisms through which B.U.S. is expected to generate change, the trial is designed to test a primary outcome and causal chain, alongside a set of secondary outcome pathways.

##### **Primary causal pathway (quantitative test)**

The central hypothesis of the trial is that participation in the B.U.S. programme reduces young people's involvement in violence and offending behaviour. Within the broader Theory of Change described above, this effect is theorised to operate primarily through the development of trusted mentoring relationships.

The primary causal chain tested is therefore:

**B.U.S. programme participation → Trusted mentor relationships → Reduced offending**

The B.U.S. programme provides structured one-to-one mentoring delivered through creative music production in neutral, non-statutory spaces. Through consistent contact with trained mentors, many of whom have relevant lived experience, young people are expected to develop trusted, emotionally safe relationships with a credible adult. These relationships are hypothesised to support improvements in emotional regulation, decision-making and prosocial identity development, which in turn reduce engagement in violence and offending.

The RCT estimates the total effect of programme participation on the primary outcome (reductions in the volume of offending), compared to the Signposting group.

Exploratory mediation analysis will also be conducted, to assess the extent to which changes in trusted mentor relationships (as measured by the SSRS) are associated with any observed programme impact on the volume of offending. This mediation analysis will be interpreted cautiously, as the trial is powered to detect the total effect of programme allocation rather than specific mediated effects.

### **Secondary quantitative outcomes**

In addition to the primary outcome, the trial assesses a set of secondary outcomes which are positioned alongside the pathway to reduced offending. These are:

- Behavioural difficulties
- Emotional functioning
- Prosocial values and decision-making
- Wellbeing and self-esteem
- Peer relationships

These outcomes are measured quantitatively and will be analysed as secondary endpoints. Improvements in these domains are conceptualised as outcomes in their own right. While they are theoretically related to longer-term offending risk, the trial does not formally test them as mediators of the primary effect.

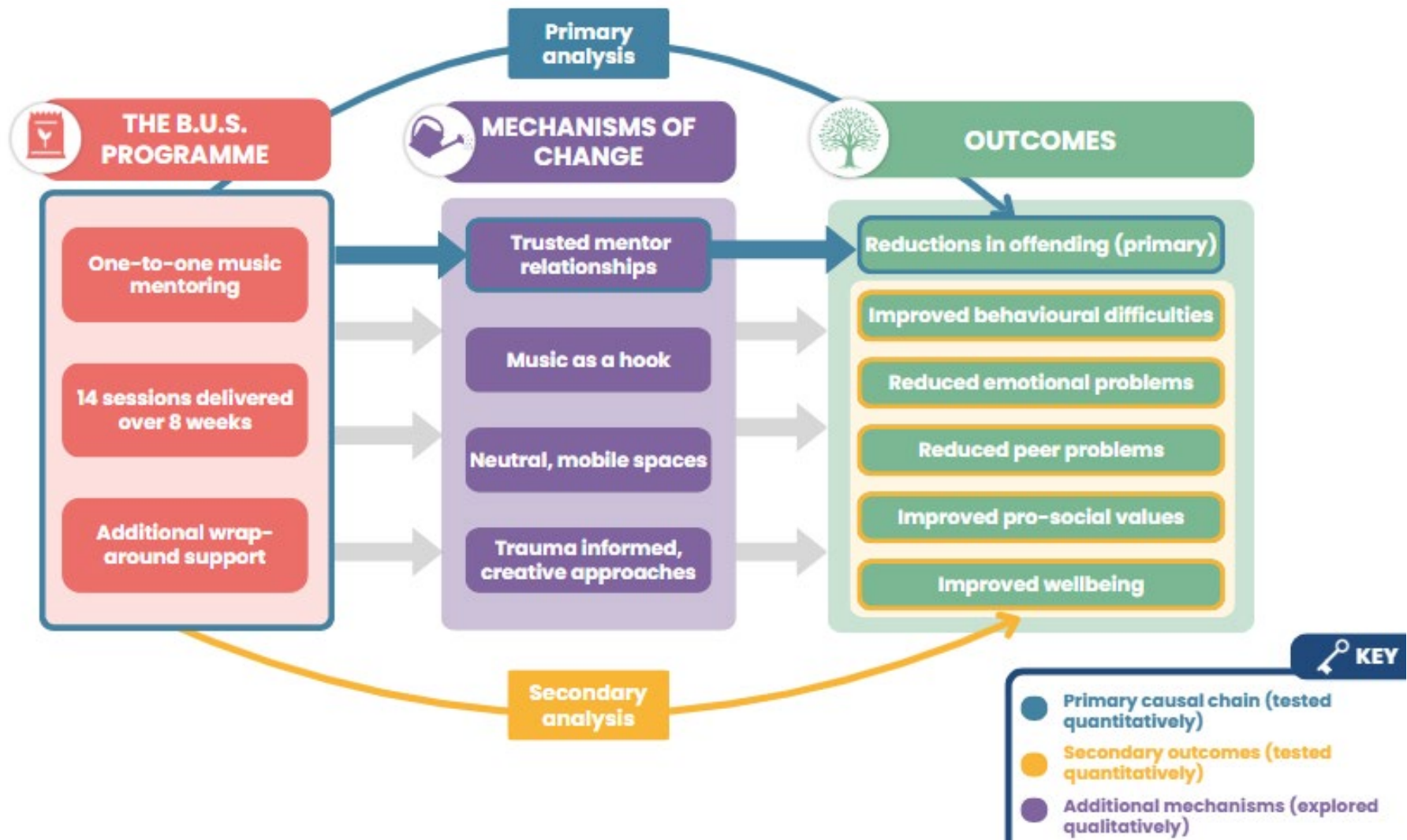
### **Supporting mechanisms (qualitative exploration)**

The broader Theory of Change identifies additional mechanisms that support the development of trusted relationships, engagement with the programme, and may contribute to observed impact. These include:

- The use of music as an engagement “hook” and reflective medium
- Delivery within neutral, mobile, non-statutory spaces
- A trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach
- Mentors with lived experience and credibility

These mechanisms will be explored qualitatively through the implementation and process evaluation to understand how and for whom the programme works, and to assess fidelity to the intended model.

Figure 2: B.U.S. programme causal pathway



### **6.3 Control group conditions**

Young people who are randomly allocated to the Signposting group (control group) will not receive the B.U.S. programme during the 10-week trial period. Instead, they will continue to receive business-as-usual (BAU) support available through existing statutory or voluntary sector services (e.g. schools, youth offending teams, early help, community or youth organisations). This approach ensures that young people in the Signposting group have access to general support while maintaining the integrity of the trial comparison.

To promote fairness, minimise attrition and preserve engagement, the same mentor who facilitated the introduction, consent and baseline data collection will remain the named point of contact for the young person throughout the trial period. This continuity is designed to:

- Maintain a sense of trust and rapport.
- Reduce disengagement and loss to follow-up.
- Support ethical duty of care to participants.

This strategy draws on learning from the pilot trial, which demonstrated that maintaining a light-touch relationship with the control group improved retention rates and acceptability of randomisation. Further detail on control group conditions, including on data collection is provided in section 7.4.4.

## 7 Impact evaluation

### 7.1 Overview

This section presents an overview of information about the impact evaluation. It covers:

- Research questions.
- Trial design.
- Randomisation approach.
- Participant journey through the trial.
- Sample size calculations.

### 7.2 Research questions

The key research question for the efficacy study is:

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*Is an 8 week music-based mentoring programme for young people aged 10 to 17 who are involved in, or at risk of involvement in, violent or non-violent offending, delivered using trauma-informed, creative approaches in neutral spaces by mentors with lived experience, an effective approach to reducing young people's engagement in offending behaviours, in comparison to business-as-usual?*

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The primary outcome measure for the evaluation will be a reduction in offending as measured by the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale volume score. More information about the outcome measures to be used in the evaluation is provided in the section "[Outcome measures](#)".

The secondary research questions are:

6. **Delivery:** Can the B.U.S. programme work under ideal circumstances?
7. **Impact:** a) What is the impact of the B.U.S. programme on secondary outcomes, including pro-social values, behavioural difficulties, peer relationships, emotional functioning, wellbeing and the variety of offending? b) Do different subgroups of young people have different outcomes, e.g. those from minoritised or marginalised groups?

8. **Unintended consequences:** a) Does the B.U.S. programme have any unintentional consequences? If so, what are these? b) Do different groups of young people experience these differently?
9. **Iatrogenic effects:** Are there any serious negative effects that can be attributed to the B.U.S. programme on any outcomes?
10. **Mechanisms:** a) How does the B.U.S. programme work to reduce young people’s future engagement in youth violence and offending behaviours? b) Which factors contribute most to the observed outcomes?

We are committed to delivering this evaluation in line with race equity, diversity, equality and inclusion. As part of this, we will explicitly assess differences in access, experiences and outcomes for young people from racially minoritised and marginalised background through the implementation and process evaluation (IPE). This will be addressed in analyses under research questions 3, 4 and 5 above. Further information on how the evaluation will be delivered to promote race equity, diversity, equality and inclusion is provided in the section [“Diversity, equity and inclusion”](#).

### 7.3 Trial design

The evaluation of the B.U.S. programme will be an efficacy study, two-armed parallel randomised controlled trial (RCT) evaluation. Figure 2 presents an overview of the efficacy study trial design.

**Figure 3: Trial design**

<b>Trial design, including number of arms</b>		<b>Two-arm parallel randomised controlled trial with random allocation at the young person level.</b>
<b>Unit of randomisation</b>		Individual young person
<b>Stratification variables</b>		B.U.S. mentor
<b>Primary outcome</b>	<b>Variable</b>	Reduction in the volume of self-reported offending behaviour
	<b>Measure</b>	Self-Reported Delinquency Scale Volume Score (Smith & McVie 2003)
<b>Secondary outcome(s)</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved pro-social values and behaviours</li> <li>• Reduced behavioural difficulties</li> <li>• Improved peer relationships</li> <li>• Improved emotional functioning</li> <li>• Improved wellbeing</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced variety of offending behaviour</li> </ul>		
	Measure(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improved pro-social values and behaviours</b> measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) pro-social behaviour subscale<sup>3</sup> (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Reduced behavioural difficulties</b>, measured by the SDQ externalising behaviours score (combining conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention subscales) (SDQ) (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Improved peer relationships</b>, measured by the SDQ peer relationship problems subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Improved emotional functioning</b>, measured by the SDQ emotional symptoms subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Improved wellbeing</b>, measured by the Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (S-WEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009).</li> <li>• <b>Reduced variety of self-reported offending behaviour</b>, measured by the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (variety score) (Smith &amp; McVie 2003).</li> </ul>		
		Variable	Volume of self-reported offending behaviour	
		Measure	Self-Reported Delinquency Scale Volume Score (Smith & McVie 2003)	
		Baseline for secondary outcome	Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved pro-social values and behaviours</li> <li>• Reduced behavioural difficulties</li> <li>• Improved peer relationships</li> <li>• Improved emotional functioning</li> <li>• Improved wellbeing</li> <li>• Reduced variety of self-reported offending behaviour</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the full SDQ scale will be administered for this evaluation.

	Measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improved pro-social values and behaviours</b> measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) pro-social behaviour subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Reduced behavioural difficulties</b>, measured by the SDQ externalising behaviours score (combining conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention subscales) (SDQ) (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Improved peer relationships</b>, measured by the SDQ peer relationship problems subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Improved emotional functioning</b>, measured by the SDQ emotional symptoms subscale (Goodman, 2005).</li> <li>• <b>Improved wellbeing</b>, measured by the Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (S-WEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009).</li> <li>• <b>Reduced variety of self-reported offending behaviour</b>, measured by the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (variety score) (Smith &amp; McVie 2003).</li> </ul>
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### 7.3.1 Participative approach to the evaluation

In line with best practice for youth-centred and co-produced evaluation, this study is adopting a participatory approach to ensure that young people’s perspectives, experiences, and expertise directly inform the design, delivery, and interpretation of the evaluation. This participatory approach builds on learning from the pilot study, in which peer researchers supported data collection and were found to help young people feel more comfortable and able to express their views openly in interviews. The use of peer researchers in the efficacy study therefore extends a method already shown to be acceptable and effective in engaging the target cohort of young people.

Working in partnership with United Borders, we have convened a group of six young people with lived experience relevant to the B.U.S. programme. These young people will act as peer researchers and co-analysts, contributing throughout the evaluation lifecycle in ways that are meaningful, supported, and properly recognised.

### *Contributing to study set-up and design*

During the initial set-up phase, we have held three participatory workshops with the young people to:

- Introduce the aims, values, and ethical principles of evaluation, with accessible discussion of RCTs and implementation and process evaluations (IPEs).
- Co-design and refine data collection tools, including questionnaires, topic guides, and consent materials, ensuring they are engaging, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant.
- Explore preferred data collection techniques (e.g. phrasing, format, and setting) to enhance comfort and authenticity in later fieldwork.
- Agree on ongoing roles, communication preferences, and expectations for participation.

These workshops were designed to be interactive, reflective, and skills-building, so that young people gain transferable understanding of research and evaluation as well as contributing to study design.

### *Ongoing engagement*

To sustain participation and ensure the approach remains reciprocal rather than extractive, young people will remain actively involved throughout the evaluation period through regular updates and reflection sessions. These opportunities will be co-designed and agreed collaboratively with the young people as part of the workshops in the set-up phase, to ensure they maintain a sense of belonging, ensure transparency, and encourage sustained engagement across the study period.

### *Co-facilitating IPE interviews and conducting analysis*

Towards the end of the study, the group will take part in two dedicated training workshops to prepare for their role as co-facilitators in the IPE interviews. Training will cover:

- Trauma-informed interviewing techniques;
- Ethical and safeguarding considerations;
- Active listening and reflexive practice; and
- Collaborative interviewing alongside professional researchers.

The young people will then co-facilitate IPE interviews with Cordis Bright researchers, supporting rapport-building and helping to elicit more open, authentic insights from participants. Their involvement will ensure that the evaluation reflects the realities and voices of those closest to the issues the B.U.S. programme seeks to address. More information about IPE interviews is provided in section 8.

### *Analysis and dissemination*

Toward the end of the evaluation, we will run an analysis and reflection workshop with the peer researchers to review early findings and co-develop interpretation of key themes from IPE interviews. This will help to ensure that conclusions are grounded in lived experience and resonate with the perspectives of young people.

Young people will also have the opportunity to contribute to dissemination activities, including blog posts, short videos, or presentations describing their role and reflections on the research process. These outputs will help to raise awareness of participatory evaluation approaches and can also contribute to participants' CVs or portfolios.

All young people involved in participatory activities will be reimbursed for their time and contributions, in line with good practice for participatory involvement. All participatory activity will be underpinned by clear ethical safeguards to protect and support the young people involved. Participation will be voluntary and fully informed, with young people able to withdraw at any time without consequence. All peer researchers will receive a comprehensive briefing on confidentiality, boundaries and safeguarding procedures, and will have access to a named support contact from both United Borders and Cordis Bright. Supervision and debriefing opportunities will be provided after training and co-facilitation activities to ensure that participation remains a positive, safe and empowering experience for all involved.

This participatory approach is designed to:

- Strengthen the relevance, accessibility, and cultural validity of the evaluation design and tools;
- Enhance trust and rapport during data collection;
- Ensure that young people's voice is embedded in analysis and reporting; and
- Provide a developmental and empowering experience for the young people involved.

### **7.3.2 Randomisation approach**

The trial will be a two-armed parallel randomised controlled trial (RCT), with random allocation at the individual level and stratification by B.U.S. mentor.

All young people who (a) meet the eligibility criteria, (b) provide informed consent, and (c) complete the baseline (T1) questionnaire will be randomly allocated to either the B.U.S. group (treatment) or the Signposting group (control) on a 1:1 basis, in accordance with established good practice for RCTs (Hutchison and Styles, 2010).

Randomisation will be conducted following baseline data collection, during Meeting 2 (baseline and randomisation meeting), and the outcome will be communicated to the young person and their primary carer at the same time (see Figure 7).

Randomisation will use randomly varying block sizes of four, six, and eight participants, with equal numbers of treatment and control allocations per block. For example, in a block of four participants, two will be allocated to the B.U.S. group and two to the Signposting group, but the order of assignment will be randomised. These block sizes were selected as they are small enough to ensure balance on a rolling basis, and large enough to reduce predictability. Randomly varying block sizes will further prevent predictability and allocation bias, in line with Nesta guidance on randomised innovation trials (Edoald & Firpo, 2016).

This design was selected for the following reasons:

1. **Individual level randomisation** was selected because it provides the highest level of statistical precision and internal validity for estimating treatment effects within the available sample size. Randomising at the individual level maximises statistical power by treating each participant as an independent observation. It is also the most operationally appropriate, as young people will be referred on a rolling basis from multiple sources. Individual level randomisation therefore allows for continuous recruitment and flexible allocation.
2. **Stratification by mentor** was selected to balance theoretical and operational considerations. Operationally, mentors will be allocated to each young person before randomisation (and will then act as their point of contact through both pathways). Stratification therefore protects against mentor effects (where individual mentor characteristics or relationships could inadvertently influence outcomes) and ensures that observed treatment effects reflect the impact of the programme model rather than individual mentor differences. It also has operational advantages, as it ensures a balanced mix of young people across the two groups for each mentor.

Randomisation will be managed using Sealed Envelope, a secure, web-based randomisation platform that automatically generates allocation sequences and ensures allocation concealment. Only the evaluation team will have access to the sequence, ensuring independence and fidelity to the randomisation protocol.

### **Managing the risk of contamination within mentor-stratified delivery**

As B.U.S. mentors will work with young people in both the intervention and Signposting (control) groups, there is a risk of contamination. Mentors could inadvertently share aspects of the intervention approach, such as relational techniques, creative tools, or therapeutic language, when supporting young people in the Signposting group. Similarly, young people in different trial arms may know each other through community networks and discuss their experiences informally. While these exchanges may be positive for participants, they could blur distinctions between groups and reduce the study's ability to isolate causal effects.

To mitigate this risk, the evaluation team will work closely with United Borders to implement the following safeguards:

- **Training and guidance.** All mentors will receive specific training on contamination risk during evaluation induction. The evaluation handbook will outline what can and cannot be shared across arms. For example, mentors should not use music-based reflective activities or structured B.U.S. session materials when meeting with young people in the Signposting group.
- **Clear pathway separation.** The two delivery pathways (B.U.S. and Signposting) will be clearly distinguished in all internal documentation, forms, and communication materials. The Signposting pathway is designed as a brief, light-touch engagement only, avoiding any overlap with B.U.S. content or structure.
- **Mentor reflection and supervision.** United Borders managers will prompt mentors to reflect on their practice in supervision sessions, specifically checking that Signposting contacts remain distinct and light-touch. Any uncertainty about boundaries will be discussed and recorded.
- **Monitoring and auditing.** Instances of potential crossover (e.g. a young person in the Signposting group attending a B.U.S. session) will be logged in United Borders' case-management system and reviewed by the evaluation team.
- **Qualitative follow-up:** Contamination will also be explored qualitatively through IPE interviews to assess whether any diffusion occurred in practice.

These combined design, training, and monitoring strategies will minimise contamination and transparently document any residual diffusion, maintaining both the ethical integrity and the internal validity of the RCT.

Randomisation will take the following steps:

### *Sequence generation*

The randomisation sequence will be generated digitally, using online software Sealed Envelope.<sup>4</sup> This will be generated at the start of the study using randomly permuted blocks of four, six and eight. The randomisation sequence will be stored securely on Cordis Bright servers and will not be accessible by United Borders colleagues.

### *Randomising and auditing*

Once informed consent and baseline measures have been collected, the B.U.S. mentor will conduct randomisation using the interface. They will input the young person's unique identifier, their own mentor ID, and confirmation that informed consent and baseline measures have been collected into the Sealed Envelope software, which will then return the randomisation outcome. The young person will then be informed of the randomisation outcome, which will also be noted and stored in the evaluation monitoring dataset. Cordis Bright will deliver training and guidance to the B.U.S. mentors on how to frame the two arms neutrally and inform young people of the result, to avoid feelings of 'winning' or 'losing'.

The evaluation team will have access to a data audit log of all randomisations which have been conducted. Throughout the study, Cordis Bright will regularly audit this log against the evaluation monitoring data to ensure the integrity of the randomisation process is intact.

### *Allocation concealment*

Allocation concealment will be ensured using the digital randomisation software Sealed Envelope, i.e., randomisation outcomes will be computer generated. Within this software, the B.U.S. mentors are able to generate randomisation outcomes, while the evaluation team are able to access the randomisation sequence and audit the randomisations which have occurred. This separation of roles through the software (combined with randomly varying block sizes) enables allocation concealment, as the B.U.S. mentors do not have access to the sequence and will therefore not be able to predict results.

### *Blinding*

Due to the nature of the trial and intervention, it will not be possible for participants or B.U.S. mentors to be blind to the allocation arm. In addition, due to the nature of the data we will

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.sealedenvelope.com/>.

be collecting in terms of activity, dosage and outcomes the analysis will also not be subject to blinding.

### **Managing the risk of predictability**

As randomisation is stratified by mentor, there is a theoretical risk that mentors could begin to infer patterns in allocation sequences over time, particularly if block sizes were small and fixed. To mitigate this risk, the following safeguards will be in place:

- **Randomly varying block sizes:** Blocks of four, six, and eight will be used and permuted randomly. This prevents mentors from anticipating when allocations will occur within their caseload.
- **Central sequence generation:** All randomisation sequences will be generated centrally using Sealed Envelope, with sequences stored securely on Cordis Bright servers and inaccessible to United Borders mentors or staff.
- **Independent oversight and auditing:** The evaluation team will have full visibility of the randomisation audit log but no involvement in day-to-day randomisation. Regular audits will compare randomisation activity against the monitoring dataset to verify that allocation patterns remain consistent with random assignment.
- **Training and clear guidance:** Mentors will receive explicit training on allocation concealment and the importance of maintaining trial integrity. Training will emphasise that even small breaches (e.g. attempting to predict or influence allocation order) can bias results.
- **Secure randomisation interface:** Randomisation will be conducted one participant at a time via the Sealed Envelope web platform, which generates outcomes independently and immediately upon entry of participant details. No pre-generated lists or advance allocations will be visible to mentors.

These combined measures will ensure allocation concealment and minimise the risk of either conscious or unconscious bias in assignment.

### **7.3.3 Outcome measures**

Figure 3 maps the outcomes from the B.U.S. programme's Theory of Change against the validated measures which will be used to measure them, and the time points at which they will be collected. Both the outcomes and measures have been discussed, prioritised and agreed through discussions between Cordis Bright, United Borders and YEF.

All measures were reviewed to ensure they are in line with Early Intervention Foundation evidence standards, i.e., that they are not amended, that they are standardised and validated, and capture the project's outcomes. In addition, measures were prioritised which were brief, use clear and age-appropriate language, and have been validated for use with young people of the same age and/or from marginalised backgrounds.

Outcomes will be measured at the individual level through the administration of online self-reported validated measures. All measures will be obtained at three time points:

- **Baseline (T1):** once informed consent has been achieved from young people and their primary carer, prior to randomisation and before any support begins.
- **Follow-up (T2):** 10 weeks following the collection of baseline data, for both the B.U.S. group (on exit from the programme) and Signposting group.
- **Follow-up (T3):** 10 to 12 weeks following T2 data collection, i.e. 18 to 22 weeks post-randomisation for both groups.

More information about each measure is presented below the table.

**Figure 4: Outcomes measures**

Outcomes	Measure	Subscale(s)	Items	Collection point(s)
<b>Primary outcome measure</b>				
Reduction in the volume of offending	Self-reported Delinquency Scale (SRDS)	SRDS volume score	19	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)
<b>Secondary outcome measures</b>				
Improved wellbeing	Shortened-Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale	Full measure	7	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)
Improved pro-social values and behaviours	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	Pro-social behaviour subscale	5	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)
Reduced behavioural difficulties	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	Externalising behaviours score	10	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)

Outcomes	Measure	Subscale(s)	Items	Collection point(s)
Improved peer relationships	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	Peer relationship problems subscale	5	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)
Improved emotional functioning	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	Emotional symptoms problems subscale	5	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)
Reduction in the variety of offending	Self-reported Delinquency Scale	SRDS variety score	19	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)
<b>Mechanism of change</b>				
Strength of relationship with trusted adults	Social Support Rejection Scale	All items	22	Baseline (T1); Follow-up (T2); Follow-up (T3)

### *Primary outcome*

The primary outcome for the evaluation of the B.U.S. programme is a reduction in the volume of self-reported offending between baseline (before young people start the B.U.S. programme) and follow-up (T2) 10 weeks after baseline (when young people finish the B.U.S. programme). This will be measured by the SRDS volume score, as highlighted in Figure 3. The primary outcome timepoint is T2, i.e., 10 weeks after randomisation, and the efficacy study explores the impact of the B.U.S. programme in comparison to the Signposting group on the SRDS volume score.

### **About the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (SRDS)**

The SRDS is a 19-item scale developed as part of the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (Smith and McVie, 2003). It covers a range of antisocial and offending behaviours, has been validated for use with young people in the UK, and has been used with those aged between 10 and 17.

The SRDS has been shown to have good psychometric properties; reported internal consistency is between 0.87 to 0.92 with an inter-item correlation of 0.19 (Fonagy et al., 2018; Humayun et al., 2017) and the measure correlates with official police arrests (89.5% to 95.2%; McAra & McVie, 2005). More information on the subscales, psychometric properties and validity of the SRDS is available in the [YEF outcomes framework and measures database](#)

(Youth Endowment Fund, 2022a) and in the [YEF core measurement guidance](#) (Youth Endowment Fund, 2021a).

Responding to feedback regarding the SRDS collected during the feasibility and pilot studies, in which young people and mentors reported that the follow-up questions felt intrusive, burdensome and overly detailed, we have agreed with YEF and United Borders to use a shortened version of the scale. This version focuses on questions relating to the volume and variety of behaviours, but removes the more intrusive follow-up questions (such as “*were you caught?*”, “*what did you steal?*”) which would not be used for analysis. All items that directly contribute to the validated SRDS volume and variety scores have been retained, and these map directly onto the published scoring structure used in previous UK studies and within YEF’s outcomes framework. As such, these changes ensure that the psychometric properties of the SRDS volume and variety scores should remain intact, while improving acceptability and reducing burden for participants.

### *Secondary outcomes*

The secondary outcomes that we are investigating are whether young people receiving the B.U.S. programme have:

- **Improved pro-social values and behaviours** measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) pro-social behaviour subscale (Goodman, 2005).
- **Reduced behavioural difficulties**, measured by the SDQ externalising behaviours score (combining conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention subscales) (SDQ) (Goodman, 2005).
- **Improved peer relationships**, measured by the SDQ peer relationship problems subscale (Goodman, 2005).
- **Improved emotional functioning**, measured by the SDQ emotional symptoms subscale (Goodman, 2005).
- **Improved wellbeing**, measured by the Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (S-WEMWBS) (Stewart-Brown et al. 2009).
- **Reduced variety of self-reported offending behaviour**, measured by the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (variety score) (Smith & McVie 2003).

In addition, we will include an exploratory outcome relating to offending and contact with the criminal justice system, measured using linked police administrative data (subject to data access, consent and data sharing agreements).

All secondary outcomes will be collected at baseline, T2 and T3. Further information about each of the measures is provided in the box below.

### **About the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**

The full SDQ is a 25-item questionnaire measuring behaviours, emotions and relationships for 4- to 17-year-olds. It contains five subscales with five items in each:

1. Emotional symptoms
2. Conduct problems
3. Hyperactivity/inattention
4. Peer problems
5. Prosocial behaviours

Each item is scored on a three-point Likert scale from 0 to 2, such that the scores for each subscale ranges from 0 to 10. For the prosocial values subscale high scores are desirable (i.e., greater prosocial values), but for the conduct problems subscales high scores are not desirable (i.e., greater conduct problems). For this study, the full SDQ will be administered, and analysis will be conducted of the emotional symptoms, peer problems, and pro-social behaviours subscales, as well as the externalising behaviours scores (which is the sum of the hyperactivity/inattention subscale and the conduct problems subscale).

The SDQ has been shown to have good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73), cross-informant correlation (mean = 0.34), and retest stability after four to six months (mean = 0.62) (Goodman, 2001). The YEF aims for common outcome measures to be used, where possible to maximise learning and comparability, whereby the SDQ has been endorsed for measuring behaviours, emotions and relationships. Previous research has found the SDQ correlates with the level of offending in young offenders (van Domburgh et al., 2011).

### **About the Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (S-WEMWBS)**

The S-WEMWBS is a validated, positively worded 7-item scale that captures a range of aspects of mental wellbeing, such as feeling useful, relaxed, and able to think clearly. Respondents rate how often they have experienced each item over the past two weeks on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = None of the time to 5 = All of the time). Total scores range from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater wellbeing.

The S-WEMWBS has demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83) and is suitable for use with adolescents in community and school-based settings (Tennant et al., 2007; Clarke et al., 2011). Its brevity, positive framing, theoretical link to the programme and accessibility make it appropriate for the B.U.S. cohort.

### *Mechanism of change*

In addition to the secondary outcomes mentioned above, we will examine the extent to which positive relationships between the young person and B.U.S. mentor (for young people in the B.U.S. group) or significant non-parental adult (for young people in the Signposting group) influenced the primary outcome over and above the impact of the B.U.S. programme. This analysis is proposed because the B.U.S. programme Theory of Change suggests that a key mechanism of change for the intervention is that it has its effect through building a trusted relationship with their B.U.S. mentor. The length and the quality of the relationship that develops between young people and their mentors is considered the central avenue through which mentoring can benefit (or, in some instances inadvertently, harm) young people (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010).

These relationships will be measured by using the Social Support and Rejection Scale (SSRS) (Roffman et al., 2000) to measure the quality of the relationship with a mentor for those in the B.U.S. group or a significant adult for those in the Signposting group. This will be administered at baseline, T2 and T3 to enable assessment of change over time and difference across groups.

#### **About the Social Support Rejection Scale (SSRS)**

The SSRS is a 22 item scale which involves four dimensions; 'Feels valued', 'Trust', 'Mentoring', and 'Negativity'. Each item is scored from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Each subscale score is the average of the items that make up the subscale. Higher scores on the negativity scale reflect higher levels of stress and negativity within the relationship, while higher scores on all other scales are interpreted positively.

The SSRS has good internal reliability for each of the 4 subscales across ratings of adults from clubs, school, and extended family (Cronbach's alpha = 0.67 to 0.76 for Negativity, 0.74 to 0.81 for Mentoring, 0.74 to 0.78 for Trust, and 0.81 to 0.88 for Feels valued (Roffman et al., 2000)). More information about the SSRS (including its subscales and validity) is available in the National Mentoring Resource Center's 'Measurement Guidance Toolkit'.

### *Administrative data*

In addition to the self-report measures described above, we will seek to collect police data from the Metropolitan Police. If the evaluation is able to obtain this data, it will be used to conduct exploratory analysis. This will explore whether B.U.S. has an impact on the contacts young people have with the Police in comparison to the Signposting group. The analysis will be exploratory in nature as it is likely the sample size calculated on the basis of using the SRDS volume score as the primary outcome measure in relation to reduced offending will be under-

powered to detect statistically significant differences between the B.U.S. and Signposting groups.

In the pilot study, administrative data from the Metropolitan Police Service was accessed for consenting participants, including data from CRIS (crime reports), CRIMINT (intelligence and Stop and Search records), and Merlin (records relating to vulnerable young people, including missing person reports and safeguarding concerns). Subject to feasibility and appropriate approvals, we would aim to access similar data in the efficacy study to explore whether the B.U.S. programme has an impact on police contacts, including being named as a suspect, subject to intelligence reports, and contacts in relation to offending behaviour.

### 7.3.4 Sample size calculations

Our approach to estimating the sample size for this efficacy study using power calculations is conservative and has been influenced by the following:

- **YEF guidance.** YEF guidance suggests that efficacy study RCTs should have a Minimum Detectable Effect Size (MDES) of below 0.20 to achieve a security rating of level 4.
- **Pre-test/post-test correlation.** We have suggested a pre-test/post-test correlation of 0.5 based on values obtained from unpublished data from an RCT using the same outcome measure and in a similar population of adolescents (Humayun et al., 2017).
- **Block randomisation and stratification.** The below calculations have also accounted for block randomisation and stratification by mentor (57 young people for each of the 12 mentors), assuming a fixed effects design in line with the analytical plan for the study.

Based on the above, Figure 4 below shows that a randomisation target of 684 (342 in each group) would result in an MDES of 0.186, assuming power = 0.80 and a two-tailed test ( $p < 0.05$ ). This is a conservative estimate and is in line with the literature on mentoring. These calculations were made with the Powerup! software package (Dong, N. and Maynard, R. A., 2013).

**Figure 5: Sample size calculations based on the randomisation sample**

		Parameter
Minimum Detectable Effect Size (MDES)		0.186
Pre-test/ post-test correlations	Level 1 (participant)	0.5
	Level 2 (cluster)	N/A

		Parameter
Alpha		0.05
Power		0.8
One-sided or two-sided?		Two-sided
Number of randomised participants	B.U.S. group	342
	Signposting group	342
	Total	684

### 7.3.5 Recruitment rates

The recruitment target for the efficacy study is 684 young people in total, i.e. with 342 young people allocated to the B.U.S. group and 342 to the Signposting group.

This recruitment target was derived from modelling based on the B.U.S. programme's previous recruitment and attrition data. Estimated programme recruitment rates are based on United Border's experience of delivering B.U.S. to date, recruitment rate and attrition data from the feasibility and pilot studies, and internal demand modelling conducted by United Borders. Estimated attrition of 10% from recruitment (completion of baseline T1 data collection) to follow-up (T2) data collection, has also been factored into recruitment targets, in line with YEF guidance.

Recruitment to the study will take place over 21 months, followed by a further six months for programme completion and T2 and T3 data collection. As shown in Figure 6, modelling of referral flows indicates that United Borders can achieve the target of 684 recruited participants within this timeframe. Based on the assumed 10% attrition between T1 and T2, approximately 610 young people (305 per group) are expected to complete both baseline and follow-up data collection. This suggests that the MDES for the primary analytical sample will be 0.197.<sup>5</sup>

Recruitment will remain fixed at 684 randomised participants. Attrition rates will be monitored quarterly. Where attrition exceeds projected levels, mitigation strategies (e.g.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) guidance uses the Minimum Detectable Effect Size (MDES) calculated at the point of randomisation as part of its security rating criteria. Figure 4 therefore presents the MDES based on the planned sample at randomisation. However, in line with complete case analysis, the MDES ultimately achieved will depend on the number of participants included in the final analytical sample, which will in turn be influenced by attrition rates. For this reason, alternative MDES estimates are also presented throughout this section to support scenario planning under different attrition assumptions.

enhanced follow-up protocols, flexible data collection approaches) will be implemented. However, recruitment targets will not be revised to offset attrition during the trial period.

**Figure 6: Recruitment rate modelling**

	Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
	Months	Jan 26 - Mar 26	Apr 26 - Jun 26	Jul 26 - Sep 26	Oct 26 - Dec 26	Jan 27 - Mar 27	Apr 27 - Jun 27	Jul 27 - Sep 27	Oct 27 - Dec 27
Target number of young people referred into the programme	Quarterly	144	124	120	138	144	124	120	0
	Cumulative	144	268	388	526	670	794	914	914
Target number of young people recruited to the programme and evaluation (completed baseline data collection and randomised)	Quarterly	108	92	90	104	108	92	90	0
	Cumulative	108	200	290	394	502	594	684	684
Target number of young people who complete T2 data collection, assuming 10% attrition	Quarterly	0	96	82	80	94	96	82	80
	Cumulative	0	96	178	258	352	448	530	610

We also recognise that higher attrition would represent a risk to the trial. If attrition rates were to rise above 10%, and efforts to minimise attrition rates were unsuccessful, the MDES achieved by the primary analytical sample for the trial would increase. The impact of increases in attrition rates from 10% to 15% and 22% on the randomisation MDES and analytical MDES is shown in Figure 6. This shows that, in practice, an attrition rate of 22% would increase the analytical MDES to 0.210.

**Figure 7: Attrition scenarios based on fixed recruitment, and resulting MDES**

	Total participants	MDES
<b>Scenario 1a: Assuming 10% attrition from recruitment to T2 data collection</b>		
Target number of young people <b>referred</b> into the programme	914	-
Target number of young people <b>recruited</b> to the programme and evaluation and complete baseline data collection	684	0.186
Target number of young people who <b>complete T2 data collection</b>	610	0.197
<b>Scenario 2a: Assuming 15% attrition from recruitment to T2 data collection</b>		
Target number of young people <b>referred</b> into the programme	914	-
Target number of young people <b>recruited</b> to the programme and evaluation and complete baseline data collection	684	0.186
Target number of young people who <b>complete T2 data collection</b>	587	0.201
<b>Scenario 3a: Assuming 22% attrition from recruitment to T2 data collection</b>		
Target number of young people <b>referred</b> into the programme	914	-
Target number of young people <b>recruited</b> to the programme and evaluation and complete baseline data collection	684	0.186
Target number of young people who <b>complete T2 data collection</b>	534	0.210

## 7.4 Participant journey

Figure 7 presents the trial diagram for the RCT. This shows the following key steps:

- Referral and screening processes.
- Collecting informed consent.
- Data collection at baseline and conducting randomisation.
- The treatment phase for both groups and disengagement protocol.
- Follow-up data collection points at T2 (10 weeks post-randomisation) and T3 (10 to 12 weeks later).

Each of these steps is then discussed in more detail throughout the rest of this chapter.

**Figure 8: Trial pathway**



### 7.4.1 Referrals and eligibility screening

United Borders have established varied referral routes in partnership with a range of key referral organisations to ensure that they reach their intended cohort for B.U.S. programme effectively. Referring organisations will include statutory and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations. These will include (but are not limited to):

- Local authorities.
- Youth offending services.
- Metropolitan Police.
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Local VCSE youth organisations.

Referrers are required to gain initial verbal consent from both the young person and their primary carer before making a referral, confirming that:

- The referral is being made into a research trial rather than United Borders' standard service offer.
- Participation will involve potential random allocation to either receive the B.U.S. programme or to business-as-usual.
- The young person and family will receive further information and the opportunity to give full written consent if the referral progresses.

To support this process, information sheets for referrers have been developed and distributed. These clearly explain the study's aims, eligibility and exclusion criteria, the randomised trial design, and the commitments involved for participants. These materials are designed to ensure referrers can confidently explain the study to families, manage expectations, and make informed, appropriate referrals aligned with the trial's inclusion criteria.

Referrals are made through an online B.U.S. referral form, which has been designed to map directly onto the eligibility and exclusion criteria set out in Section 6.2.1. This ensures

referrers provide sufficient information for screening and supports accurate identification of young people who meet the study's inclusion profile.<sup>6</sup>

Each referral is reviewed by the B.U.S. programme team, either during scheduled weekly meetings or on an ad hoc basis for urgent referrals. The team checks the referral against eligibility criteria and assesses whether B.U.S. can meet the young person's needs and conducts a risk assessment.

Screening decisions are informed by:

- The young person's presenting risks and needs;
- Programme capacity; and
- Suitability of mentor match (based on experience, gender, risk level and musical interests).

United Borders aims to complete eligibility screening and referrer feedback within two working days of receiving a referral. All referrals and eligibility decisions are recorded in United Borders' internal Client Relationship Management (CRM) system, which captures referral data, eligibility outcomes, and allocation of mentors. This provides an auditable record for monitoring reach, diversity, and recruitment flow, and supports regular data sharing with the evaluation team for oversight.

Following this process, an update is provided to the referrer about the progress of the referral. If a referral is considered ineligible, signposting to other support services is considered. If a referral is considered suitable, the assigned mentor will contact the young person and their primary carer to introduce themselves and the programme, and arrange an initial meeting.

United Borders have experience of recruiting and engaging with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds. They will work with referral partners to ensure diversity in the recruitment of young people by:

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<sup>6</sup> Siblings who independently meet the eligibility criteria will be eligible to participate in the study and will be randomised individually on a 1:1 basis. This approach ensures that each participant's allocation remains independent, preserving the integrity of the randomisation process and minimising potential bias. The presence of siblings within the sample will be recorded in United Borders' case management system and monitored throughout recruitment. The prevalence of this based on United Borders' experience from previous studies is expected to be low. However, if a higher-than-anticipated number of sibling pairs or groups is observed, the evaluation team will assess whether any adjustment (e.g. sensitivity analysis or clustering adjustment) is required to account for the potential non-independence of observations.

- Confirming referring organisations are fully informed about the B.U.S. programme offer, and how B.U.S. will modify its delivery approach to accommodate the needs and preferences of different groups of young people. This will enable referral partners to clearly and fully explain the programme to young people prior to making the referral, and remove any barriers to engagement.
- Ensuring that the B.U.S. programme team understand the different cohorts/demographics of young people supported by referral organisations, so that the programme can effectively support the young people that these organisations are likely to refer into the programme. This will be achieved via an effective communication strategy and ongoing communication with referral partners.
- Establishing referral routes with organisations where young people from minoritised backgrounds are over-represented (such as youth offending services and schools referring young people at risk of exclusion).
- Recording and scrutinising referral data in collaboration with Cordis Bright, including young people's demographic information, via monitoring data, and proactively taking steps to address any concerns that may be identified. This may include additional training for staff around engaging with young people of different genders and sexual orientations, and from a diverse range of backgrounds, reflection in supervision sessions, and proactive engagement with referral partners where appropriate.

#### 7.4.2 Collecting informed consent

Obtaining informed consent is an ethical requirement of the B.U.S. efficacy study. The process has been developed collaboratively with United Borders colleagues, and refined with peer mentors during the set-up and mobilisation phase to ensure that it is clear, empowering, and appropriate for the target cohort, while maintaining rigorous ethical and data protection standards.

If a young person is referred into B.U.S., screened and assessed as suitable for the programme, and assigned a mentor, that mentor will arrange an initial meeting with the young person and their primary carer. United Borders aim for contact with a young person and their primary carer to be made, and for an initial meeting date to be set, within four working days of a referral being accepted. This meeting will take place in an appropriate venue for the young person (i.e. school, home, or in the community). This meeting has two primary aims:

- To introduce the B.U.S. programme and the evaluation.

- To obtain informed consent for both participation in the B.U.S. programme, and in the evaluation.

If either the young person or their primary carer does not give consent, their involvement in the project and the evaluation ends at this stage, i.e., the young person will not be randomised, and will not be eligible for the B.U.S. programme. Where appropriate, mentors will discuss other available support and refer on.

All consent materials will be provided in accessible formats. These materials have been developed collaboratively by Cordis Bright and United Borders colleagues, including United Borders peer researchers, during the evaluation set-up and mobilisation phase. These include:

- Brief, accessible information sheets for both young people and primary carers explaining the purpose of the evaluation, what participation involves, and data protection assurances.
- Age-appropriate consent forms for young people and a separate form for primary carers.
- A privacy notice, setting out how the evaluation will process their information if they decided to take part in the trial.

Mentors will explain these materials in person, giving young people and primary carers time and space to ask questions and make informed decisions. Consent will be collected using digital forms on secure devices provided by United Borders mentors, with backup paper copies available if needed. Young people and primary carers will be sent an electronic copy of the signed consent forms by email for their records.

Mentors will be trained and supported to communicate the aims of the evaluation clearly and confidently, using language appropriate to the young person's needs. Drawing on learning from the feasibility and pilot evaluations, the emphasis will be on ensuring the process feels collaborative, respectful, and non-intrusive. Mentors will be encouraged to:

- Emphasise that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences for saying no.
- Reinforce the confidentiality of data collection for the evaluation, including that data will be anonymised and that neither United Borders staff nor external agencies will see individual responses.
- Explain randomisation in simple, neutral terms and clarify what participation in either group will involve.

Where needed, a second meeting with the primary carer may be arranged to obtain consent if only the young person is present initially. The programme team will make at least one further contact attempt before concluding that consent cannot be obtained.

Young people may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Mentors will be trained to recognise and respect withdrawal and to communicate this to the evaluation team. Consent forms will include a clear explanation of withdrawal rights.

Training and a co-developed evaluation handbook will be provided to B.U.S. managers and mentors which will support practitioners to administer informed consent materials, including the privacy notice.

### 7.4.3 Data collection

This section outlines the approach to quantitative data collection in the trial. This includes both outcome data and monitoring data.

Figure 8 presents an overview of the different data types that will be collected at each stage of the study. These include:

- Eligibility, demographic and socio-economic data.
- Outcomes measures.
- Activity and dosage data.
- Evaluation monitoring data.

**Figure 9: Data types and data collection sources**

Data type	Data collection source	Data collection point				
		Referral	Baseline (T1)	Delivery phase	Follow-up (T2)	Follow-up (T3)
Eligibility, demographic and socioeconomic data	Referral organisations and United Borders	✓				
Outcomes measures	B.U.S. participants, with support from B.U.S. mentors		✓		✓	✓
Activity and dosage data	United Borders			✓		

Data type	Data collection source	Data collection point				
		Referral	Baseline (T1)	Delivery phase	Follow up (T2)	Follow-up (T3)
Evaluation monitoring data	United Borders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### *Eligibility, demographic and socioeconomic data*

As discussed in section 7.4.1, eligibility, demographic and socio-economic data will be captured through the referral form. This includes:

- Referral information, including referral reason, date and source.
- First and last name
- Date of birth
- Ethnicity
- Sex
- Gender identity
- Age
- Post code
- School year
- Special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)
- Neurodiversity
- Care status
- Free school meal eligibility
- English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- Education, employment or training status
- Confirmation that the young person meets the inclusion criteria, and does not meet the exclusion criteria, as outlined in section 6.2.1.

Ethnicity, sex and age are sought in line with [YEF's policy on collecting demographic data](#). For the YEF Data Archive, first and last name, date of birth, postcode and a young person reference number is needed to ensure data linkage can take place between ONS and Department for Education.

All eligibility, demographic and socio-economic data will be stored and collected securely on United Borders' servers. This will then be shared via secure transfer with Cordis Bright and stored securely and in line with the Data Protection Act and GDPR on Cordis Bright's servers.

### *Outcome data collection*

Following informed consent at the initial meeting, data collection will take place at a second in-person meeting (referred to as *Meeting 2: baseline and randomisation meeting* in the trial pathway diagram in Figure 7). This meeting will be arranged by the assigned mentor and typically take place within four working days of the first meeting, subject to the availability of the young person and their primary carer. The data collected at this stage will serve as the baseline (T1) for the impact evaluation.

Meeting 2 will take place either on the B.U.S. programme bus, or at a location that is convenient for the young person (such as a community venue). Mentors will facilitate the meeting and administer the baseline questionnaire using a secure digital device (tablet, laptop or smartphone), with paper copies as backup where required. Mentors will receive training and an evaluation handbook from the evaluation team on administering the questionnaire in a standardised but supportive way, ensuring the process is consistent across participants and mentors, sensitive to the young people's needs and communication preferences, and delivered in an accessible, young person-friendly format. Young people will be supported to complete the questionnaire independently. Mentors will be on hand to provide reading support or clarifications if needed, without influencing responses.

Follow-up (T2) data collection will take place 10 weeks after baseline (T1) data collection for all participants, and then again 10-12 weeks later (T3). All follow-up data collection will be carried out by the same mentor who supported the young person at T1, to maximise continuity and minimise the risk of attrition. The follow-up data collection meeting will again take place on the B.U.S. programme bus, at a fixed Brent community venue site, or at a separate location familiar to the young person in the community. For young people in the Signposting group, community settings will be prioritised for these meetings, to minimise any perception of exclusion or disappointment which may be associated with the United Borders bus.

Young people will be offered a £10 high street voucher for completing the baseline (T1) data collection, and an additional £20 high street voucher for completing follow-up data collection

at T2 and T3, to thank them for their time. Vouchers will be provided to young person at each different time point, i.e. once after baseline (T1) data collection, and twice more after each subsequent follow-up.

To minimise attrition between follow-up (T2) data collection and T3 data collection, mentors will conduct a light-touch check-in approximately five weeks after T2, by phone, text, or in-person, and a warm-up text or phone call approximately one week prior to T3 data collection. This mirrors the approach taken with young people in the Signposting group between baseline (T1) and follow-up (T2) data collection, described in more detail below.

### *Activity and dosage data*

Activity and dosage data will be collected by United Borders B.U.S. mentors who are responsible for delivering the B.U.S. programme. After each contact, mentors will input the following information into United Borders' CRM system:

- Name of mentor
- Date
- Contact type (i.e. B.U.S. programme session, Signposting check-in, evaluation meeting)
- Contact format (i.e. in person, phone call, video call, text message, etc.)
- Location (if in person)
- For B.U.S. sessions, which module the session was for.
- Attendance status (i.e. did the session go ahead as planned)
- Any referrals made to other organisations
- Case closure date and status.

### *Evaluation monitoring data*

Throughout the trial, United Borders colleagues will collect data on the following which will be shared with and regularly reviewed by the Cordis Bright research team:

- Date informed consent achieved for both young person and parent/carer
- Baseline survey status and randomisation outcome
- T2 and T3 survey status and date of completion

- Trial withdrawals and attrition.

This data will be collected and stored on United Borders' secure servers and shared with Cordis Bright on a regular basis. We will then use it to audit the integrity of randomisation processes, data collection and to assess recruitment, retention and exit through the trial. We will also use it to monitor any differences in participation across groups, for example young people from marginalised or minoritized backgrounds.

#### 7.4.4 Treatment phase

##### *B.U.S. group*

Following allocation to the B.U.S. group, all young people will receive the B.U.S. programme as set out and described in section 6.2.3.

##### *Signposting group*

Following allocation to the Signposting group, mentors will arrange a one-hour check-in meeting with the young person. The meeting will include:

- A discussion of the young person's current situation, interests and aspirations.
- A light-touch risk assessment to identify any immediate safeguarding or wellbeing concerns.
- Information and signposting to relevant statutory or community-based services where appropriate (e.g. education, mental health, youth services).
- Reassurance and recognition that the young person's participation in the evaluation contributes to improving future support for others.

Following this initial meeting, all young people in the Signposting group will then receive the following:

- **At five weeks post-randomisation**, mentors will conduct a brief mid-point check-in, delivered flexibly (by phone, text or in-person, depending on the young person's preference). The purpose of this contact is to maintain engagement, confirm participation, and identify any changes in circumstances that may require additional signposting to further support.
- **At nine weeks post-randomisation**, mentors will make a "warm-up" contact by text or phone call to remind the young person about the upcoming follow-up meeting and

confirm practical arrangements. This proactive step is intended to strengthen retention by building on existing rapport and ensuring that young people feel supported.

- **At ten weeks post-randomisation:** mentors will conduct the follow-up T2 data collection meeting, mirroring the structure and setting of the baseline meeting. Meetings will typically take place in a convenient and comfortable location for the young person (e.g. school, community venue or home). In this meeting, mentors will:
  - Administer the follow-up questionnaire in line with standardised evaluation procedures.
  - Conduct a brief **wellbeing check**, offering space for the young person to raise any issues or concerns.
  - Provide further **signposting or referrals** to relevant support services, where appropriate, based on the young person's preferences.

All contact and referrals to other agencies will be recorded in United Borders' secure case management system, including the date, location, and purpose of each interaction. These records will provide a transparent and auditable account of the support and engagement received by young people in the Signposting (control) group. This information will enable the evaluation team to build a detailed picture of the "business-as-usual" context, i.e. capturing the type and intensity of other services accessed during the trial period, and to assess how this compares to the structured support provided through the B.U.S. programme. The resulting data will be used descriptively, supporting interpretation of trial outcomes and providing insight into the wider ecosystem of provision available to young people at risk of violence or exclusion.

## 7.5 Quantitative analysis

This section outlines our high-level approach to:

- Primary outcome analysis.
- Secondary outcomes analysis.
- Exploratory analysis.
- Compliance analysis.
- Data quality monitoring and support.

All analyses will be conducted in line with the YEF Analysis Guidance, and our approach will be reported transparently in the Statistical Analysis Plan (SAP), which will be developed and agreed with United Borders and YEF following the completion of baseline data collection.

### 7.5.1 Primary outcomes analysis

Analyses will follow an intention-to-treat (ITT) approach, meaning that all participants will be analysed in the groups to which they were originally randomised, regardless of the level of engagement or 'dose' received.

The primary analysis will use an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) model on complete cases, comparing the B.U.S. and Signposting groups on the Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (SRDS) volume score at follow-up (T2), controlling for:

- Baseline SRDS volume score,
- Randomisation allocation, and
- Mentor (to account for stratification).

This approach adjusts for any baseline differences and increases precision in the estimated treatment effect. The resulting effect estimate will be expressed as Hedges'  $g$  with 95% confidence intervals, providing a standardised measure of impact.

### 7.5.2 Secondary outcomes analyses

Secondary outcome analyses will mirror the primary analytic approach, using ANCOVA models on complete cases to estimate the effect of the B.U.S. programme on all secondary outcomes (e.g., SDQ scores, SRDS variety score and S-WEMWBS scores) in comparison to business-as-usual.

We propose mirroring the analytic approach used for the primary outcome (e.g., ANCOVA) to assess the impact of the programme on secondary outcomes

Models will include baseline scores, allocation group, and mentor as covariates. All results will be reported as Hedges'  $g$  with associated confidence intervals and p-values. These analyses will also be conducted on an ITT basis. Further detail, including model specification and handling of missing data, will be outlined in the SAP.

### 7.5.3 Exploratory analysis and robustness checks

If sufficiently powered, exploratory and sensitivity analyses will be conducted to enhance understanding of mechanisms, differential impacts, and data robustness. Exploratory analysis may include:

- **Longitudinal analysis.** Exploratory analysis will also be undertaken to assess the extent to which any change on primary and secondary outcomes has been sustained, decayed, or may emerge over time. The primary timepoint for the trial is T2; as such it is likely that this analysis will be underpowered and will therefore be exploratory.
- **Mechanism analysis.** As a key mechanism of change, we will examine the extent to which scores on the SSRS may account for any differences observed between B.U.S and the Signposting group on the primary outcome measure. This may also include the extent to which SSRS scores at T2 are predictive of improved SRDS scores at T3. In addition, if the analysis would be sufficiently powered, the impact of support from the B.U.S. programme on the other secondary outcomes (e.g., S-WEMWBS or SDQ scores) could provide an interesting explanation for any differences observed between the B.U.S. and Signposting groups in terms of involvement in offending.
- **Race equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.** We will explore differences in outcomes by ethnic group to identify any patterns that may suggest differential experiences or impacts. These exploratory analyses will not assume a specific reference group (e.g. White British), and any grouping decisions (e.g. collapsing categories for statistical purposes) will be made transparently and with reference to the ethnic diversity of the recruited sample. This analysis is not intended to imply that ethnicity is a causal mechanism, but to support equity monitoring. Full specifications will be included in the Statistical Analysis Plan.
- **Additional subgroup analysis.** In addition, we will explore further subgroup differences where sample size and statistical power allow, particularly in relation to key characteristics such as sex, age, SEND status and neurodiversity. These analyses will be exploratory and used to generate insights on potential differential impacts. Detailed specifications for subgroup analyses will be set out in the Statistical Analysis Plan.
- **Police data.** We will explore how useful police contact data is for use in RCTs like this. That is, if we can secure robust, reliable and valid data for all young people in the treatment group and the Signposting group from this source. If these data can be obtained, we may be able to evaluate the impact of the B.U.S. programme on official data concerning police contacts and triangulate the findings with regards to the SRDS.

- **Robustness and sensitivity analyses.** We will conduct robustness checks around missing data in line with YEF guidance. We will also assess baseline equivalence across groups. If imbalance is observed, models including these covariates (e.g. age, gender, borough) may also be used as a robustness check.

#### 7.5.4 Analysis in the presence of non-compliance

The primary analysis will follow an intention-to-treat (ITT) approach. However, this may underestimate the programme’s true efficacy if some young people do not adhere fully to their assigned treatment. To complement the ITT analysis, we therefore plan to conduct an exploratory Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE) analysis.

The CACE analysis will estimate the average treatment effect among those who engage with the B.U.S. programme as intended, providing insight into the potential impact of “full participation.” This analysis will be exploratory and interpreted cautiously, as the trial is not powered to detect statistically significant subgroup effects.

At this stage, no formal compliance threshold has been defined, as there is currently insufficient evidence to determine the minimum effective dose or attendance level required for impact. Instead, we will use observed patterns of session attendance and mentor records to explore alternative definitions of compliance (e.g. proportion of sessions attended) during the development of the Statistical Analysis Plan (SAP).

The CACE will be estimated using a two-stage least squares (2SLS) instrumental variable approach (Gerber & Green, 2012):

- In the first stage, we will model compliance (e.g. session attendance) as a function of randomisation assignment and relevant baseline characteristics.
- In the second stage, we will use this predicted compliance to estimate the impact of the programme among those who complied, generating the CACE estimate.

We will report the full model specification, including the strength of the randomisation instrument (F-statistic), and present results alongside the ITT findings to aid interpretation.

These analyses will be exploratory and descriptive, intended to illuminate potential patterns of effect rather than to establish definitive conclusions about dosage thresholds or mechanisms of change. The SAP will set out further detail on model specification, treatment of missing data, and sensitivity testing to assess robustness where sample size permits.

### 7.5.5 Data quality monitoring and support

To ensure that data collected during the evaluation is accurate, consistent and complete, a structured data quality assurance process will be implemented throughout the study. This will take the following form:

- **Training and resources.** All B.U.S. programme staff involved in data collection will receive comprehensive training delivered jointly by Cordis Bright and United Borders. Each staff member will be provided with an evaluation handbook outlining procedures for obtaining consent, administering questionnaires, recording data, and managing queries or safeguarding concerns.
- **Data quality audit.** A data quality review will be conducted after the first 20–30 young people have completed baseline (T1) data collection. This initial audit will check for completeness, consistency, and correct use of data collection tools, and will identify any training or procedural refinements needed. Feedback from mentors and young people will be used to make minor adjustments to administration techniques and ensure that the process remains clear, accessible, and reliable.
- **Ongoing monitoring.** Regular internal data audits will be undertaken by the evaluation team to review completeness and accuracy of data, adherence to protocols, and timeliness of entry. Any data quality issues identified will be logged, reviewed with United Borders, and followed by targeted support or refresher guidance where required. All changes to procedures or materials arising from quality reviews will be documented to provide a clear audit trail and ensure transparency.

This approach will help maintain high-quality, consistent data collection across mentors, sites and time points, supporting the reliability and validity of the trial findings.

## 8 Implementation and process evaluation

### 8.1.1 Overview

This section presents information about the implementation and process evaluation (IPE). We intend to deliver a mixed-methods IPE alongside the efficacy study.

We will conduct an implementation and process evaluation (IPE) alongside the RCT to provide complementary insights into the implementation, delivery and perceived impact of the B.U.S. programme. In line with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2022) and Youth Endowment Fund (YEF, 2021) guidance on implementation and process evaluations, the IPE has been designed to understand how the intervention was delivered in practice, identify contextual enablers and barriers, and explore participants' experiences of support.

The rest of this section covers:

- Research questions.
- Research methods.
- Approach to analysis.

### 8.1.2 Research questions

The primary objectives of the IPE are to:

- Understand the association between aspects of the B.U.S. programme's implementation and successful outcomes.
- Gather data to support guidance for successful implementation of the B.U.S. programme in future.

As such, key research questions for the efficacy study IPE are as follows:

**1. Dimensions of implementation:** How effectively has the B.U.S. programme been implemented?

- a. *Reach:* How well has the B.U.S. programme reached its intended cohort?
- b. *Dosage:* How much of the B.U.S. programme has been delivered? How much of the B.U.S. programme needs to be delivered to have an impact?
- c. *Fidelity:* To what extent has support been delivered in line with the B.U.S. programme's Theory of Change and protocols?

- d. *Quality*: How well have the different components of the B.U.S. programme been delivered?
- e. *Responsiveness*: To what extent have young people engaged with the B.U.S. programme?
- f. *Intervention differentiation*: How is the B.U.S. programme different from existing practices?
- g. *Adaptation*: Are any changes needed to accommodate context and need?

**2. Factors affecting implementation:** Which factors have acted as enablers or barriers to implementation of the B.U.S. programme?

- a. *Locality level factors*: Which factors have impacted implementation at the locality level? For example, level of need, readiness for change, and/or policy practice and funding context?
- b. *Organisation level factors*: Which factors have impacted implementation at the organisational level? For example, capacity, skills and training, co-ordination and resources?
- c. *Unexpected factors*: Which other factors have had an impact?

**3. Experiences of support and perceived outcomes:** What are young people's experiences of support? What difference has B.U.S. made for young people, including an unintended or adverse effects, as perceived by young people, primary carers, practitioners and wider stakeholders?

- a. *Moderators/mechanisms*: Which aspects of the B.U.S. programme have supported positive outcomes?
- b. *Differential experiences*: How have experiences of support differed across subgroups, e.g., those from racially minoritised/marginalised backgrounds, low-income households or with SEND?
- c. *Perceived outcomes*: What perceived positive and negative outcomes (including any unintended or adverse effects) are reported by young people, their primary carers, practitioners and other stakeholders?

**4. Guidelines for future implementation:** What are the implications for future replication, scale and spread?

### 8.1.3 Research methods

The IPE will adopt a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of implementation. The approach draws on established process evaluation frameworks (Carroll et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2015) that emphasise fidelity, dose, reach, quality and context as key dimensions of implementation quality.

Consistent with EEF and YEF IPE guidance, qualitative evidence from interviews and observations will be triangulated with quantitative monitoring data from the RCT to assess how the B.U.S. has been delivered, experienced and adapted in context. This mixed-methods approach will support the development of evidence-informed recommendations for future delivery and evaluation.

Figure 9 summarises the IPE methods and their contribution to the evaluation questions. The rest of this section outlines these methods in more detail.

**Figure 10: IPE methods overview**

Research methods	Participants	Analysis	Research questions	Implementation relevance
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	Interviews with 18 young people in the B.U.S. group	Thematic analysis	RQ1 to RQ4	Dimensions of implementation; factors affecting implementation; experiences of support; Guidelines for future implementation.
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	Interviews with 12 programme staff	Thematic analysis	RQ1 to RQ4	Dimensions of implementation; factors affecting implementation; experiences of support; Guidelines for future implementation.
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	Interviews with 24 wider programme partners, referral partners and primary carers	Thematic analysis	RQ1 to RQ4	Dimensions of implementation; factors affecting implementation; experiences of support; Guidelines for future implementation

Research methods	Participants	Analysis	Research questions	Implementation relevance
<b>Data analysis</b>	Activity and dosage data for all young people in both groups (n=592)	Descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis	RQ1	Dimensions of implementation

### *Interviews with young people*

We will conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a total of 18 young people participating in the B.U.S. programme (i.e., those from the B.U.S. group). These interviews will be used to help understand experiences of the B.U.S. programme, including its fidelity to the Theory of Change.

We will work with B.U.S. programme staff to identify young people who are interested and provide informed consent to take part in an interview. We will work with them to identify a purposive sample that is as representative as possible of the groups of young people they are working with, considering characteristics such as age, ethnicity, level of engagement, and postcode area. This will help ensure that interviews reflect the diversity of experiences within the programme, while recognising the practical limitations of voluntary participation.

Cordis Bright will liaise with United Borders colleagues to organise a suitable time, place and method for a member of the Cordis Bright team to talk to the young people. If a young person requires the interview to be conducted in a language other than English, we will work with United Borders colleagues to provide an appropriate interpreter service to ensure that this is not a barrier to participation. Young people will be provided with a £20 high street voucher to thank them for their time.

Interviews will be conducted by a member of the Cordis Bright research team who is experienced in conducting sensitive research and interviews, and/or a peer researcher who will receive training and support from Cordis Bright on conducting semi-structured interviews.<sup>7</sup> Interviewer allocation (i.e., whether an interview is conducted by a Cordis Bright researcher and/or a trained peer researcher) will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Decisions will be informed by the young person's preferences, any known communication or

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<sup>7</sup> Further detail about the peer researchers, including who they are, their role on the project and the support and training provided to them is set out in section 7.3.1.

support needs, gender considerations where relevant, and any safeguarding or sensitivity factors identified by United Borders or the mentor. The overarching principle will be to select the interviewer who is most likely to support the young person's comfort, engagement and ability to speak freely. These decisions will be made collaboratively between Cordis Bright and United Borders, working closely with their assigned mentor as appropriate.

We will work with United Borders colleagues to decide whether telephone interviews or face-to-face interviews would be most appropriate for each individual young person. To minimise bias, the interviewer will be external (i.e., from Cordis Bright or a peer researcher rather than a United Borders member of staff) and where possible interviews will take place in a different room to the young person's B.U.S. mentor (although they will have the option to have their mentor present if they wish).

Topic guides for all interviews will be designed by Cordis Bright in collaboration with peer researchers and will explore the key implementation and process evaluation research questions identified in Figure 9. We will discuss and refine the guides with United Borders and YEF colleagues before use in the field. We will draw upon United Borders staff and peer researcher's knowledge of the young people they are working with to ensure that interview guides for young people are as accessible as possible and can be easily understood by young people, including those with SEND and/or literacy support needs. We will also use Cordis Bright's internal Equality Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit<sup>8</sup> to ensure that all topic guides are designed with racial and cultural sensitivity and are accessible to all participants.

If any safeguarding issues arise in these interviews the interviewer will discuss them with the B.U.S. programme lead. They will follow the United Borders and Cordis Bright safeguarding policies as appropriate.

#### *Interviews with B.U.S. programme staff and wider partners, including primary carers*

We will conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a total of 12 B.U.S. programme staff. We will also conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a total of 24 wider partners, including referral partners and primary carers. Mentors and programme staff who participate in these interviews will be considered participants in the Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) component only, and will provide informed consent prior to interview. Their participation in interviews is voluntary and distinct from their professional role in programme delivery.

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<sup>8</sup> Available here: <https://www.cordisbright.co.uk/news/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-in-projects>

We will agree a purposive sample of professional stakeholders with United Borders colleagues based on partners' level of involvement with the B.U.S. programme. Once nominated for interview, the research team will contact wider partners giving them more information about the purpose of the research and interview and what it will involve. All invitees will receive tailored information explaining the aims of the research, confidentiality, data storage and withdrawal rights, before any interview is arranged. They will be asked for their consent to be involved in the interview and then organise a time to speak with them. Informed consent will then also be obtained verbally at the start of each interview.

For primary carers, we will work with B.U.S. programme staff to identify primary carers who are interested and provide informed consent to take part in an interview. All primary carers will be provided with an in-depth information sheet and consent form that sets out what taking part in a research conversation will involve and that taking part is optional. Ideally, this sample will be the primary carers of the young people who have also agreed to take part in an interview.

These interviews will be conducted virtually, either by video call or telephone, and will take around 45 minutes to one hour. We will design and agree topic guides for the semi-structured conversations in collaboration with colleagues from United Borders and YEF. These conversations will explore views and perspectives of how successfully the B.U.S. programme has been implemented, including dimensions of implementation, factors affecting implementation, experiences of support and guidelines for further implementation. These will inform our understanding of implementation and support future replication, scale and spread of both the evaluation and intervention.

We will ask at the start of interviews if participants consent to the interview being recorded. Participants will be informed that recording is optional and that notes will always be taken, even when recordings are made. If they do, we will store the recording for six months after we have delivered the final report. If they do not consent, we will not record the interview and will take contemporaneous notes. All recordings and notes will be stored securely on Cordis Bright's password-protected server, accessible only to authorised research team members. We will delete the notes six months after we have delivered the final report.

### *Activity data analysis*

Data collected through the above methods will be triangulated against activity and dosage data collected as part of the impact evaluation. Analysis of this data (including number of sessions, modules received, types of topics covered) will be used to assess the dimensions of implementation, including fidelity, dosage, and reach. This data will be collected for both the B.U.S. and the Signposting group.

#### 8.1.4 Analysis

Qualitative data will be coded using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts and interview notes will be entered into a matrix mapping responses against the IPE research questions. A hybrid coding framework will be applied, combining a priori codes based on the theory of change and implementation framework (Carroll et al., 2007) with inductive coding to capture emergent themes. This is an iterative process, using initial data collected to establish themes, and using these themes to continue to code further data. This allows for constant comparison of the themes and ensures that any theories or judgements are closely linked to the data they developed from.

The quantitative evidence will be analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis, i.e., frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations.

Evaluation reports are strongest when a range of evidence is used to answer each evaluation question. To ensure that data is not presented in 'silos', we will take a rigorous approach to triangulating both qualitative and quantitative data. We will map both quantitative and qualitative data against the research questions to assess how effectively the B.U.S. programme has been implemented and the extent to which experiences of support have differed across groups. This information will inform decisions around future scale, replication and spread.

## 9 Cost data reporting and collecting

### 9.1.1 Principles

Our approach to cost data collection, analysis and reporting will be informed by YEF guidance on cost reporting (available [here](#)).

Our approach will be rooted in the following YEF cost reporting principles:

- Estimates are the costs of delivery only.
- Cost estimates will be derived using a 'bottom-up' approach.
- Cost estimates will be informed by the perspectives of all organisations involved in delivering the intervention.
- Estimates will capture the nature of the resource used, the quantity and monetary value in delivery the intervention.

### 9.1.2 Capturing cost data

We intend to work with United Borders to report on the pre-requisite, set-up and recurring costs of the B.U.S. programme. We will explore appropriate approaches for obtaining this information as part of the set-up and mobilisation phase. We anticipate that the primary sources of information to inform our calculations will be:

- United Borders’ B.U.S. programme budget.
- Discussions with key United Borders staff.

In line with YEF guidance, Figure 10 presents the information from the budget which will be used to report against each category:

**Figure 11: List of items to be recorded in cost estimates**

Category	Information to be used for analysis (upfront, recurring, total costs)
<b>Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.U.S. programme staff budgets, e.g., for mentors and managers.</li> <li>• Training costs.</li> <li>• Administration and preparation costs (may be costed as zero if delivered as part of base salary).</li> </ul>
<b>Programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of providing a programme handbook (i.e., printing costs if hard copies provided).</li> <li>• Cost of any software and licenses required for the delivery of the programme.</li> <li>• Travel to appropriate settings for young people.</li> </ul>
<b>Building and facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs of buildings and facilities needed to deliver the B.U.S. programme, including running costs for the bus itself.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials and equipment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laptops/tablets/computers used as part of delivery or for monitoring data purposes.</li> <li>• Cost of printing any handbook materials.</li> <li>• Equipment used as part of the music production activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Incentives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs of incentives provided by United Borders (e.g. cost of food and drink provided).</li> </ul>

### 9.1.3 Reporting results

We will take the following approaches to reporting cost information, in line with YEF guidance:

- All costs relating to both evaluation and programme development and adaptation will be excluded from cost estimates.
- All costs will be adjusted to constant prices using GDP deflators, using 2026 (the year in which delivery is starting) as the base year. This will account for any data around cost being collected at different points across the study period. We will not discount cost estimates based on time preferences.
- Any costs relating to durable inputs will be pro-rated in line with the proportion of project participants who have benefitted. However, we do not anticipate that there will be durable inputs with benefits to those outside the project.
- All cost estimates will be generating assuming full compliance (i.e. that all participants received the full B.U.S. programme dosage of 14 sessions over an 8-week period).
- Each estimate will be disaggregated into set-up and recurring costs.

Total costs will be presented for an appropriate time period, (e.g. one cohort across 12 weeks, 6 months or a year) of delivery of the B.U.S. programme. Total costs and average costs per participant will then be presented for set-up, recurring and total costs, using the mandatory tables in YEF guidance, i.e. all assumptions and estimates will be set out in full.

## 10 Diversity, equity and inclusion

This evaluation has been designed with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, in line with Cordis Bright's principles and the core principles of the B.U.S. programme and YEF evaluation guidance. The approach is informed by United Borders' longstanding practice in working with racially minoritised and marginalised young people,<sup>9</sup> as well as a co-design process that explicitly considered race equity, diversity and inclusions (REDI) principles at each stage.

All of Cordis Bright's evaluation work is delivered in line with our EDI strategy (available [here](#)) and EDI project toolkit (available [here](#)). This sets out our commitment, principles and approaches to ensure that our work is accessible to all. We commit to:

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter 3 provides further discussion on definitions and the use of language throughout this study protocol.

1. Providing equal opportunities in all aspects of employment and ensuring that we do not discriminate in recruitment or employment on the basis of a protected characteristic or any other characteristics or identities.
2. Opposing discrimination in all its forms, be it at a structural or institutional level or an inter-personal level. This includes direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, discrimination by association, discrimination by perception, victimisation, harassment and bullying.
3. Seeking to build our understanding of the barriers created by discrimination and inequality and ensure fair, equal and inclusive treatment for our staff, clients and the people whom our work aims to support.

In line with these commitments, to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion in this efficacy study we will:

- **Design the evaluation to be inclusive, welcoming and accessible.** The evaluation has been co-designed with United Borders colleagues to be inclusive and accessible to all eligible young people. Key features of this approach include:
  - Accessible language, young person-friendly evaluation materials, including content developed with input from United Borders mentors and peer mentors.
  - Flexible, face-to-face consent and data collection processes, adapted to each young person's preferences and needs (e.g. pace, language, presence of a trusted adult).
  - Digital and paper formats available for questionnaires, with trained mentors offering neutral support where needed.
  - Trauma-informed and culturally competent communication, underpinned by United Border's expertise and Cordis Bright's internal EDI guidance and toolkit.

These features aim to ensure the evaluation is engaging, ethical, and empowering for all young people, particularly those who may have had previous negative experiences with services such as education, the police, social care, or housing.

- **Ensure lived experience is central to both the programme and its evaluation.** This will be reflected through our participative evaluation approach including:
  - The involvement of United Borders mentors and peer researchers in developing evaluation materials and shaping evaluation design decisions.

- The inclusion of young people’s voices through qualitative interviews, ensuring their feedback directly informs conclusions and recommendations.
- Co-designing REDI features in the trial pathway (e.g. the tone and style of consent conversations, the presence of trusted adults, and accessibility of language used).
- Working with peer researchers to share learning about the co-design process, for example through podcasts, blog posts and social media content.

This approach ensures that the evaluation is not only about young people, but with and for them.

- **Recruit a diverse sample.** Recruitment for the trial will be supported by:
  - Referral pathways that target organisations working with racially minoritised and those facing marginalisation related to poverty, exclusion from education, contact with the youth justice system, mental health needs, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation, including youth justice services, Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and local VCSE organisations.
  - A screening and CRM system that monitors demographic data and highlights where additional outreach may be needed.
  - United Border’s established trust and credibility in racially minoritised communities, which helps secure participation from young people who may be wary of formal research or statutory services.

Cordis Bright will regularly review demographic monitoring data and will work with United Borders to identify and address any emerging imbalances in participant recruitment.

- **Accommodate support needs.** The evaluation design accounts for potential additional needs by:
  - Offering flexible pacing and delivery of data collection activities.
  - Using interpreters or translated materials where needed, including drawing on United Borders existing LanguageLine interpretation service where appropriate.
  - Providing accessible options for young people with SEND, including paper-based questionnaires (where preferred), and one-to-one support from the mentor where appropriate.

- Building in re-engagement strategies to minimise attrition, such as offering follow-up contact and flexible rescheduling for young people who miss programme sessions.

These strategies reflect by ethical responsibilities and a commitment to producing valid, inclusive evidence.

- **Draw on the training and experience of the evaluation team.** The evaluation team includes researchers with direct experience of:
  - Delivering research with racially minoritised communities and young people facing marginalisation related to poverty, special education needs, exclusion from education, involvement with statutory services, or other systemic barriers.
  - Using culturally competent, strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches in both qualitative and quantitative research.
  - Designing and delivering REDI-focused evaluations for youth justice interventions.

Cordis Bright researchers also receive cultural competency training and have access to guidance materials and tools to support inclusive and ethical evaluation.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we will discuss and reflect with United Borders and YEF colleagues on the most effective ways to conduct research and evaluation in as equitable, inclusive and accessible a way as possible. We will also engage with the YEF-appointed race equity associate to draw on their expertise and insights to further refine our proposed approach. In particular, we would welcome their input into the accessibility and framing of participant-facing materials (such as consent materials and information sheets), the communication and relational aspects of the consent and data collection process, and the interpretation of findings through a race equity lens.

## 11 Ethics and registration

Ethical approval has been obtained from the University of Portsmouth Research Ethics Committee, reference: 25/ETHICS/014. This involved submitting a detailed ethics application (alongside research tools and consent tools) which was subject to review and scrutiny from YEF and United Borders colleagues.

There will be no delivery of the project prior to ethical approval being obtained and confirmation of this provided to YEF.

The trial will also be registered on the International Standard Randomised Controlled Trial Number (ISRCTN) website.

## 12 Data protection

For this study, Cordis Bright is the data controller of personal data throughout, as well as the processor of data, as specified in YEF data guidance (available [here](#)). Cordis Bright will deliver the evaluation in line with its Data Protection and Information Governance Policy, which sets out its approach to storing and handling personal data (available [here](#)). Cordis Bright is also registered under the Data Protection Act, has Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation, and is registered under the NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit.

Cordis Bright will conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment and agree and sign a Data Sharing Agreement with United Borders before accessing activity and monitoring data.

For this evaluation, there is:

- A clear legal basis for sharing data with Cordis Bright, e.g., public interest/public task/informed consent.
- A robust process to transfer data, i.e., United Borders will transfer data by secure methods such as secure email (CJMS) or using Switch Egress.
- Secure storage of data, i.e., data will be saved on Cordis Bright's secure, cloud-based Microsoft 365 servers. Personal or sensitive data will have additional encryption with access only to designated/authorised members of the Cordis Bright team. Participants will be informed that all information about them will be stored in this way. All personal data will be separated from questionnaire data and stored separately.
- Anonymisation and pseudo-anonymisation where possible including separating personal data from questionnaire data and separate storage. All participants will be assigned a unique ID number, and pseudonyms will be used for interview notes. Published reports will not identify the research participant at any time.

Participants will be informed, through the privacy notice, of their data protection rights. Young people will have consented to having their data shared with the evaluator.

Once the final evaluation report has been signed off, Cordis Bright will share the data with YEF for data archiving in line with YEF guidance (Youth Endowment Fund, 2022c). Cordis Bright will then anonymise all data (by securely deleting names and other personal data) and hold it on the Cordis Bright server until six years after the final report has been submitted to the YEF.

### 13 Stakeholders and interests

This section provides information about the B.U.S. programme delivery team and the evaluation team from Cordis Bright. There are no conflicting interests which we are aware of that may be perceived to influence the design, conduct, analysis or reporting of the trial. The approach to evaluation is being led by Cordis Bright and takes a collaborative approach with input from United Borders and YEF. Details of key B.U.S. programme delivery and Cordis Bright evaluation team members are presented below.

#### B.U.S. programme delivery team:

- **Justin Finlayson, Chief Executive Officer, United Borders.** Responsible for programme management and deputy safeguarding lead.
- **Ceri Foster, Head of Strategy Development, United Borders.** Safeguarding and operations lead.
- **Nimo Hussein, Programme Manager, United Borders.** Responsible for day-to-day management of delivery.
- **Juliette Foster, United Borders.** Peer researcher co-ordination and support.
- **Mentors, United Borders.** Work directly with young people to deliver the B.U.S. programme.

#### Cordis Bright evaluation team:

- **Matt Irani, Principal Investigator, Project Director.** Responsible for ensuring the evaluation is delivered to a high standard and specification.
- **Emma Andersen, Co-Principal Investigator and Project Manager.** Responsible for overseeing day-to-day project delivery, acting as the main point of contact for the YEF and the project delivery team, and conducting analysis and reporting.
- **Dr Stephen Boxford, Co-Principal Investigator, Quality Assurance.** Responsible for providing quality assurance throughout the project.
- **Professor Darrick Jolliffe, University College London, Co-Principal Investigator.** Responsibilities include evaluation design, shaping approaches, designing tools, and reviewing analysis and quality assuring evaluation outputs.

- **Keiran Manners, Co-Principal Investigator.** Responsibilities include supporting evaluation design, methods including participative methods, conducting fieldwork, and QA of all tools and outputs.
- **Kam Kaur, Head of Safeguarding and Co-Principal Investigator.** Provides expert input on safeguarding and consultation with young people, and leads on delivering consultation with young people.
- **Olivia King, Researcher.** Provides ongoing support to B.U.S. programme practitioners, conducting fieldwork and support with analysis and reporting.

## 14 Risks

The following table outlines a number of key risks to the evaluation. We will be using this risk register to support the delivery of the evaluation. It will be reviewed regularly by Cordis Bright and United Borders, and updated to reflect progress.

Risk	Likelihood Impact	Mitigation
<b>Lack of clarity around theory of change and pathways</b>	<u>Likelihood:</u> low  <u>Impact:</u> high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with UB to confirm the existing B.U.S. theory of change;</li> <li>• mapping participant pathways;</li> <li>• understand entrance and exit criteria;</li> <li>• ensuring a screening and assessment approach that is fit for purpose.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges with randomisation/BAU approaches</b>	<u>Likelihood:</u> high  <u>Impact:</u> high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with UB and peer mentors to explain the benefits of RCTs;</li> <li>• discussing embedding randomisation in project approach;</li> <li>• face-to-face staff training and ongoing support; a co-developed evaluation handbook;</li> <li>• understanding treatment as usual for the Signposting group;</li> <li>• exploring alternative quasi-experimental designs should randomisation not be feasible.</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment and attrition</b>	<u>Likelihood:</u> high  <u>Impact:</u> high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing clear and accessible information and consent materials to young people and parents/carers;</li> <li>• embedding recruitment and data collection into everyday practice;</li> </ul>

Risk	Likelihood Impact	Mitigation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing high street vouchers as a thank you for young people’s time in completing outcomes tools/interviews;</li> <li>• reviewing data capture progress regularly;</li> <li>• regular data monitoring and audits;</li> <li>• allocating resource to follow-up participants who may have moved-on; exploration and application of keep-in-touch techniques used in longitudinal studies, for instance regular contact points with participants in the Signposting group;</li> <li>• staff training to explain the study to young people and support engagement including the evaluation handbook;</li> <li>• factoring in school holidays to recruitment and impacts of this on reaching recruitment rates;</li> <li>• allocating resource to support engagement of referral partners to explain the trial and referral process.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Police data becoming unavailable during the evaluation</b></p>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> medium</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> high</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work collaboratively with UB and the Police, drawing on existing networks from the pilot study;</li> <li>• collaborate on Data Protection Impact Assessment and Information Sharing Agreement;</li> <li>• scoping and ensuring Police have resource to draw the necessary data off;</li> <li>• checking first cuts of Police data to ensure they are fit for purpose;</li> <li>• using Police data to measure offending as a secondary outcome, while making use of self-report data to measure offending as a primary outcome.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenges engaging young people from diverse backgrounds with the evaluation</b></p>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> low</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear accessible information to participants that adhere to good practice guidelines, including YEF’s and the Government Social Research Unit’s, to ensure they are accessible, inclusive and culturally competent;</li> <li>• co-producing information sheets and other materials and processes with peer mentors;</li> <li>• ensure all research methods and tools are accessible for all participants;</li> </ul>

Risk	Likelihood Impact	Mitigation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deploy staff who have completed cultural competency training and experience working with young people from minoritised backgrounds in similar projects;</li> <li>• provide support to enable young people with SEND, literacy support needs or who speak other languages to participate in the evaluation as required. This may include support tool use and/or translation services;</li> <li>• CB to work with UB to ensure that young people from a range of minoritised and marginalised backgrounds are sampled in IPE qualitative interviews;</li> <li>• regular data monitoring and audits to ensure young people from a diverse range of backgrounds are being reached.</li> </ul>
<b>The project changing its delivery approach during the evaluation.</b>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> medium</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> high</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working closely with UB to understand changes;</li> <li>• flexibility in research design where possible; working to ensure changes are reflected in monitoring data collection processes;</li> <li>• ensuring all stakeholders are aware of the impact changes have on evaluation;</li> <li>• inclusion of comprehensive staff training around changes and YEF specific context.</li> </ul>
<b>Data collected not addressing the questions</b>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> low</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> high</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research tools designed and agreed collaboratively with UB and YEF colleagues (including race equity associate) before use, including involvement of peer mentors;</li> <li>• all research tools designed in line with our EDI project toolkit and YEF race equity principles;</li> <li>• tools designed with young people’s needs in mind using accessible language.</li> </ul>
<b>Data breach</b>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> low</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take actions as agreed with YEF/project protocols;</li> <li>• ensure that there is learning across the team about what happened and what steps could be taken to avoid in future;</li> <li>• introduce additional training if required; re-visit methodology if required;</li> </ul>

Risk	Likelihood Impact	Mitigation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>re-allocate team members if appropriate; agree an appropriate communications strategy;</li> <li>both delivery &amp; evaluation organisations have robust data protection practice and regularly review policy &amp; risk</li> </ul>
<b>Safeguarding/ disclosure</b>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> low</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation team have ongoing safeguarding training; take actions as agreed with YEF/UB/CB protocols;</li> <li>ensure that there is learning across the team about what happened and what steps could be taken in future;</li> <li>take these relevant steps going forward;</li> <li>introduce additional training if required;</li> <li>re-visit methodology if required;</li> <li>agree an appropriate communications strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>Illness or attrition in the evaluation team</b>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> medium</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project team includes multiple team members to avoid reliance on an individual.</li> <li>Contingency plan is (1) Re-deploy other members of the team to undertake tasks. (2) If absence is longstanding, draw on wider team members/network of associates and agree with client before doing so (details available on the Cordis Bright website). (3) As a last resort, consider extending timescales.</li> </ul>
<b>Project staff recruitment, retention and illness</b>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> medium</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UB will use the lead-in time of the set-up phase to recruit staff if required and recruitment packs to be completed well in advance;</li> <li>UB will utilise its extensive partner network to advertise vacancies to ensure a wide audience is reached;</li> <li>UB will offer a competitive employment package including competitive salaries and wider employment benefits such as flexible working agreements and staff development.</li> </ul>
<b>Safeguarding/ public safety</b>	<p><u>Likelihood:</u> low</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UB's Safeguarding policies have clear procedures for reporting concerns;</li> <li>UB ensure that all staff on the project receive a range of safeguarding training in induction or prior to direct work with young people, including how to use the</li> </ul>

Risk	Likelihood Impact	Mitigation
		<p>Safeguarding policy. This will be refreshed throughout the project;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff working with those in the Signposting group will conduct a risk assessment with all young people at the start of the project which will be revisited at regular intervals;</li> <li>• staff will receive regular supervision with reflective spaces with a focus on safeguarding.</li> </ul>

## 15 Timeline

Dates	Activity	Responsible
August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up and mobilisation period begins</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright and United Borders
August to September 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping consultation with key programme stakeholders</li> <li>• Participative approach to co-produce data collection approaches with peer-mentors</li> <li>• Research tools agreed and finalised (including outcome tools and IPE topic guides)</li> <li>• United Borders approach to recording monitoring data agreed and finalised</li> <li>• Consent materials agreed and finalised</li> <li>• Randomisation approach agreed and finalised</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright and United Borders
August to November 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings with key police and project stakeholders to agree access to police data</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright and United Borders
October 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics application submitted to the University of Portsmouth research ethics committee</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright
October to December 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine Trial Protocol</li> <li>• Develop practitioner evaluation handbook and deliver practitioner training</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright, YEF and United Borders
December 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical clearance achieved</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright

Dates	Activity	Responsible
January 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efficacy phase begins</li> <li>Delivery of B.U.S. begins</li> <li>Baseline (T1) data collection begins</li> </ul>	United Borders
July to September 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IPE interviews with young people, stakeholders, and project staff</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright
October 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completion of all baseline (T1) data collection</li> <li>Referrals stop</li> </ul>	United Borders
December 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of B.U.S. ends</li> <li>Completion of all follow-up (T2) data collection</li> </ul>	United Borders
March 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completion of all follow-up (T3) data collection</li> </ul>	United Borders
April to August 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efficacy study analysis and reporting</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright
30 <sup>th</sup> August 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submission of draft final evaluation report</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright
September to November 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report reviewed by YEF, peer review, and United Borders</li> </ul>	YEF, United Borders
30 <sup>th</sup> November 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submission of final revised evaluation report incorporating feedback</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright
30 <sup>th</sup> January 2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare and submit data to the YEF data archive</li> </ul>	Cordis Bright

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