

Blackpool Opportunity Area Evaluation

Strand 2

Report for Blackpool Council

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Blackpool Council commissioned a consortium between Edge Hill University and the University of Cumbria to evaluate the Blackpool Opportunity Area programme Strand 2. The overall purpose of the Opportunity Area programme is to improve the experience, engagement and employment outcomes of young people transitioning from compulsory education into Post 16 education, employment or training (EET). The Strand 2 element of this programme involved the *Blackpool Engagement Journey* consisting of two projects, the 'Pathways for All' and the 'Targeted NEET' project.

The overarching objectives of the evaluation were to:

- 1) Measure the impact of the programme, identifying best practice within each distinct project, guided by the questions: how does the programme work, for whom and under which circumstances?
- 2) Assess the strengths and weaknesses, and the enablers and barriers, to support the effective implementation of the programme as a whole, as well as for each of the two projects
- 3) Identify the wider benefits of the programme for Blackpool

To achieve the objectives of this evaluation, a mixed-methods approach was undertaken. In summary, the following methods were incorporated into the evaluation:

- 1) Evaluability assessment – including a review of available data and interviews with project stakeholders
- 2) Semi-structured interviews with young people, individual support officers and engagement coaches and with Blackpool Council employees involved in NEET strategy development
- 3) A workshop with frontline staff from both projects
- 4) Secondary data analyses of routinely collected project data
- 5) A Social Return on Investment (SROI) Analysis

We found that there has been a clear, if differential, impact on young people by both the Targeted NEET and Pathways for All interventions. Both projects showed a positive impact on the career development, career planning and actual employment outcomes of some young people. Young people reflected positively on the nature and scope of the activities delivered by Targeted NEET and Pathways for All.

In particular, using a Social Return on Investment analysis, the evaluation produced evidence of a clear overall cost benefit by the Targeted NEET project to the Opportunity Area programme. We recommend continuing both projects with a view to make their activities an integral part of Blackpool's long term NEET Strategy.

Recommendations

Programme wide recommendations

(feed into emerging town wide strategy)

- Continue both Pathways for All and Targeted NEET projects
- Ensure transfer of learned programme skills and competencies into existing educational and career support system capacity in the long term
- Consider using co-production models with young people, stakeholders and schools to design and deliver future engagement support services
- Track young people's overall journey through both projects, identifying beneficiaries that transition from the Pathways for All to the Targeted NEET project
- Consider collecting demographic data of programme beneficiaries, including their ethnicity
- Establish a shared measurement framework to assess the impact of programme activities undertaken as part of the future NEET prevention strategy
- Develop a joint SROI model for both Pathways for All and Targeted NEET projects as a routine measure to evaluate Blackpool's NEET Strategy outcomes
- Create a forum for shared learning for project staff across projects
- Continue to explore links with other programme sites for additional learning

Pathways for All project recommendations

(feed into NEET prevention strand of emerging town wide strategy)

- Review effectiveness of Pathways for All delivery structure utilising Educational Diversity staff for mainstream schools
- Build on existing data recording and analysis used to provide commissioner progress reports by ensuring activity recorded by engagement coaches complies with conventional data management standards
- Strengthen the link between the Pathways for All project and any statutory transition processes at school where appropriate
- Consider the potential benefits of peer-to-peer support activities
- Conduct further analysis whether or not the young people receiving the highest number of engagement coach sessions also improved most in terms of reducing their risk of NEET

Targeted NEET project recommendations

(feed into NEET action strand of emerging town wide strategy)

- Develop young people's needs profiles to identify individuals benefitting most from IPS Lite support
- Assess programme legacy for BYPS staff in terms of their ability to continue working with young people based on IPS Lite model
- Celebrate success with young people and staff