

Activity Agreements Sustainability Research

Final Report for YouthLink Scotland

February 2018



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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Background

In October 2017, YouthLink commissioned Blake Stevenson Ltd to conduct research exploring what young people need to keep them in employment, education or training beyond the duration of their Activity Agreement.

In place in local authorities since 2011, an Activity Agreement is a contract between a young person (aged between 16 and 19) and their advisor or Trusted Professional, outlining their commitment to take part in a programme tailored to help them prepare for employment, training or further education.

YouthLink wanted to find out whether young people are staying in training, work or education after their Agreement has ended, and if not, what is preventing their involvement and how they can be supported to overcome these barriers and continue participation.

Research approach

The research focused on the 1,733 young people who completed an Activity Agreement between July 2016 and June 2017, as well as Trusted Professionals and national and local stakeholders. Blake Stevenson sought the answer to the question of sustaining involvement in positive destinations through:

- an online survey of the cohort of young people signed up to an Activity Agreement (176 valid responses);
- an online survey of Trusted Professionals (82 valid responses);
- talking to young people in face-to-face interviews, phone interviews or focus group discussions (50 participants); and
- interviewing various stakeholders, including Trusted Professionals, Opportunities for All coordinators, national stakeholders and employers (16 participants).

Young people's experience of Activity Agreements

Young people fed back that the learning and activities they accessed as part of Activity Agreements were:

Varied. They were able to explore activities related to employment, developing life skills and expanding their social and personal experiences. The most popular activities were those that focused on social development and group work activities, one-to-one support from their Trusted Professional and employability sessions.

Tailored. Helped by their key worker or Trusted Professional, young people were able to take part in activities that addressed individual need.

Employment-focused. Just over half of the activities young people identified they had participated in were specifically aimed at helping young people develop the skills for work. Some looked at general workplace skills, while others were sector-specific, such as construction or digital skills.

Skills-focused. The activities and learning undertaken as part of the Activity Agreement enabled young people to work on life, core and personal skills as well as employability skills. They learned about timekeeping, budgeting, money-management: communications, team work and problem solving; and built confidence and motivation.

In this research all the young people, after leaving their Activity Agreements, entered training, further education or employment and 78% had sustained a positive destination. However, it appears that those who went into training were the least likely to be in a positive destination after the Activity Agreement ended.

Post-Activity Agreement support

Ninety per cent of the young people had received some support after their Activity Agreement had ended. Of those that did not, a high proportion (80%), said they had neither wanted nor needed it.

Over half of the young people involved had been supported by family and friends since their Agreement ended. Some of this was in the form of encouragement and reassurance, some was more practical, such as help with money and resources.

Similarly, over half the young people we spoke to had been supported by their Trusted Professional after their Agreement had ended. The majority (62%) were still in contact, offering an open-door policy based on the need of the individual participant. The most common way to keep in touch was checking in by text or instant messaging. The Trusted Professional often acted as a bridge to other support services or professionals for the young person, enabling them to find appropriate help.

Enablers: what helps young people stay in a positive destination after their Agreement has ended?

The relevant skills and experience gained during the Activity Agreement and the aftercare support helped young people to navigate and support their new positions within training, employment or further education.

Tailored activity: Ninety-eight per cent of young people agreed or strongly agreed that Activity Agreements helped them move on to employment, training or education, with a similar proportion stating that the programme had helped them stay in their chosen field after it had finished. Many cited the tailored activities, responding to their individual needs, as being significant. One-to-one support, personal and social development activities and group work were seen as most beneficial.

Skills development: As well as core employment and sector-specific skills, young people found they gained greater confidence (82%), were more motivated (69%) and found greater resilience

(49%). Both young people and their Trusted Professionals see learning and using these skills as crucial to sustained involvement in positive destinations.

Sustained support: Most of the young people surveyed identified the role of their Trusted Professional as the key to the programme’s success. Seventy per cent saw that one-to-one relationship as being their greatest support, with 95% of young people agreeing or strongly agreeing that their Trusted Professional helped them remain in work, education or training.

Creating partnerships: Trusted Professionals outlined the importance of building partnerships in helping young people stay engaged in their chosen field. Signposting them to the right support, making introductions and passing on helpful information to other agencies well-placed to help young people all made transitioning from the Activity Agreement more likely to be sustained.

Barriers: what prevents young people sustaining participation in positive destinations?

When asked to consider the barriers to continuing in education, work or training post-Activity Agreement, young people and Trusted Professionals cited a range of personal and professional reasons.

Mental health challenges: Although identified as a barrier by far more Trusted Professionals than young people, mental ill health was also recognised by young people as having a great impact on other areas of their lives, with anxiety and other mental health issues preventing them from sustained engagement. Trusted Professionals pointed out the sparsity of specialised services to help young people with complex mental health issues, something they felt they themselves were not qualified to assist with.

Lack of confidence, motivation or readiness for work: Despite tailored development and participation in employment training, some young people lacked confidence or readiness to move into the working world. Trusted Professionals mentioned that some young people found behaving professionally challenging. Over half of Trusted Professionals cited lack of motivation as a barrier to sustained involvement, evident at every stage from getting out of bed in the morning, to searching for a job and attending interviews or placements.

Limited job and training opportunities: Seventy per cent of Trusted Professionals highlighted a lack of opportunities in the local labour market as a barrier, adding that where work was available, it was not suitable for young people. Trusted Professionals also pinpointed a lack of quality Stage 3 provision that young people could move into.

Lack of support: Whilst sustained support was widely mentioned as an enabler to staying in employment, training and education, so the converse is true. Of the 10% of young people who identified lack of support as a barrier, over a quarter had left a job or training programme as a result. Trusted Professionals commented that for those young people with chaotic lives, facing peer pressure or limited support from family and friends, it can be a struggle to sustain their positive destination.

Financial barriers: Although entering the workplace offers financial incentives, they are not always sufficient to keep young people in work. Low paid placements and delayed or reduced support

payments can deter young people from continuing, particularly if they have no financial support from family or friends.

Future considerations

Based on the findings from this research, there are some issues that could be considered by the relevant partners that would strengthen the young people's experience on their Activity Agreements and help support them to progress and sustain their positive destinations. These are

Activity Agreement content – local authorities should consider reviewing the opportunities on offer to the young people to ensure that employability sessions and activities that help improve their work readiness are an even stronger feature of the Activity Agreements. Given the identification of mental health issues, they should also consider what mental health support can be accessed during the Activity Agreement period that could help reduce the mental health challenges that are affecting some young people's ability to sustain their post-Activity Agreement destinations.

Work experience and tasters– whilst the local labour market dictates the availability of certain sectors, engaging and supporting more organisations that can provide tasters and placements could improve the availability of these experiences.

Stage 3 provision – there needs to be work done at a national and a local level to understand how this shortage of good quality Stage 3 provision can be addressed.

Exiting the Activity Agreement – a structured exit should ensure that the aftercare role of the Trusted Professional is discussed, that the support network that will be available to the young person is explored and, where possible, the young person is linked into the various professionals that will play a role in the sustainability of their new destination.

Continue to strengthen local partnerships with employers, training and further education providers – More networking and even greater partnership working could help to expand the work experience, employment, training pathways offered to young people. It could also help establish regular communication and liaison about post-Activity Agreement progress so that those young people that need further support can be timely identified.

A formal aftercare support model – The Activity Agreement model would benefit from being broadened to incorporate a formalised resourced aftercare component. This would still be personalised support but with careful consideration of the parameters of the support and time frame for providing the aftercare.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2017, YouthLink commissioned Blake Stevenson Ltd to conduct research exploring what support young people need to sustain their participation in the labour market beyond the period of their Activity Agreement. This report presents our findings.

Policy context

- 1.2 In June 2017, Skills Development Scotland demonstrated that, in March of that year, 91% of all 2015/16 school leavers had progressed to positive follow-up destinations. However, this figure nevertheless indicated that 4,482 young people across Scotland remained unemployed, and this proportion of unemployed school leavers had risen by 0.4% since 2014/15.¹ Furthermore, The Life Chances of Young People in Scotland: A Report to the First Minister, published in July 2017, indicated that youth unemployment is higher than that among prime age adults, noting that one in ten young people aged 16–24 were unemployed in the year to March 2017.²
- 1.3 Activity Agreements have been in operation in all 32 local authority areas since 2011. The model is based on an Agreement between a young person, aged 16–19, and an advisor – or ‘Trusted Professional’ – that the young person will engage in a programme tailored to their needs and strengths, with defined outcomes and progression that will help them prepare for employment, training or further education.
- 1.4 In 2012, the Scottish Government committed to offering numerous training or education opportunities to all 16–19 year olds who are not in employment, education or training through Opportunities for All.³ As part of this commitment, Activity Agreements have been incorporated into the senior phase of the Curriculum for Excellence with the aim of providing vulnerable young people who are not engaged in the labour market with a tailored programme of activities and learning.

Research into the impact of Activity Agreements

- 1.5 YouthLink conducted research that found that 79% of a sample of young people involved in Activity Agreements were sustaining their participation in the labour market beyond the end of the Agreement, and that 84% of those who entered the workforce after their Agreement finished indicated that the programme helped them to get the job.⁴
- 1.6 Blake Stevenson’s previous research (2013) for YouthLink on participants’ experiences of Activity Agreements found that young people continued their engagement with the programme because of the support they received from their Trusted Professionals and

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00521269.pdf>

² <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00522051.pdf>

³ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0040/00408815.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/1151/aasurveyreportfinal-1.pdf>

because they were able to try new things and develop new skills. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of focusing on progression beyond the Activity Agreement by working more closely with employers, colleges and employability organisations, and through those in Trusted Professional roles undertaking individual coaching.

- 1.7 An evaluation of five small pilot projects – which received government funding between November 2015 and March 2016 and which tested different ways of delivering support through Activity Agreements – noted that in order to sustain impact after the end of Activity Agreements, Trusted Professionals should provide the young person with greater ‘aftercare’ support and that more accurate data should be gathered, meaning that young people can be effectively tracked and identified as soon as possible, should they disengage.⁵

Research requirements

- 1.8 Building on this previous research, Blake Stevenson was commissioned to conduct further research centred on the support young people require to sustain their engagement in the labour market during the post-Activity Agreement period. The key objectives were:
- Are young people sustaining participation post-Activity Agreement?
 - What are the issues and barriers to sustained participation beyond the Activity Agreement?
 - How are Activity Agreements supporting young people to overcome these issues/barriers and sustain participation post-Activity Agreement?
 - What outcomes and impact are they having on young people’s ability to sustain participation (including both intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes)?
 - How relevant/replicable are outputs to other employability settings?

Research approach and methodological challenges

- 1.9 A mixed methods approach explored young people’s experiences of the post-Activity Agreement period and considered their destinations, sustainability and support. The focus was on the cohort of young people who had completed an Activity Agreement between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017 and then entered a positive destination.
- 1.10 The approach to gathering evidence involved:
- distributing an online survey, via local authority contacts, to the specific cohort of young people; 198 responses were received, of which 176⁶ were valid;

⁵ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/1894/enhanced-tp-evaluation-final-sept-2016-2.pdf>

⁶ Amongst the responses 22 were invalid because they were either duplicates or the young person had not entered a positive destination

- sending an online survey, via Opportunities for All Co-ordinators, to Trusted Professionals, which received 82 responses;
 - consulting 50 young people through telephone interviews (33), face-to-face interviews (4) and focus groups (13); and
 - carrying out 16 telephone interviews with various stakeholders, including Trusted Professionals, Opportunities for All Co-ordinators and national stakeholders.
- 1.11 A breakdown of the profile of all young people and Trusted Professionals who responded to our surveys is provided in Appendix 1.
- 1.12 At one of the focus groups, an illustrator, Jenny Capon, produced visual minutes during the discussions with the young people and provide a visual account of some of the themes discussed. These illustrations are included in this report.
- 1.13 In undertaking our research, we encountered some challenges in engaging the young people in this research. Firstly, it took time to recruit them for the face-to-face interviews and focus groups. This was impacted by the time of year (the busy festive period), the availability of young people during the day and their motivation to participate. These were partly addressed by offering interviews/focus groups during the evening as well as the day, offering telephone interviews as an alternative, and one local authority incentivised the focus group with a voucher for participants, meeting travel costs and providing refreshments.
- 1.14 The other main challenge was completing telephone interviews with young people. Some survey respondents volunteered to take part in a telephone interview and local authorities provided many names and contact details but telephone numbers had changed in some cases and many did not respond to our messages or want to take part in an interview when the call did get through. From the 77 young people that were contacted, 33 interviews were completed.
- 1.15 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:
- Chapter 2 explores the young people’s experience of the Activity Agreement and post-Activity Agreement support.
 - Chapter 3 consider the enablers to sustaining participation in a positive destination.
 - Chapter 4 describes the barriers to sustaining that participation.
 - The final chapter summarises the research and outlines considerations for future content of the Activity Agreements, post-Activity Agreement support and the factors that help sustain positive destinations.

2. Young people's experiences of Activity Agreements and aftercare

2.1 This chapter describes the activities undertaken by young people as part of their Activity Agreements, identifies the range of destinations they progressed to once the Agreements ended and explores the post-Activity Agreement support offered to young people.

2.2 In exploring these areas, the information is drawn from local authority data, the survey responses, interviews and focus group discussions with young people, the Trusted Professionals' survey and interviews with stakeholders.

Profile of the cohort of young people for this research

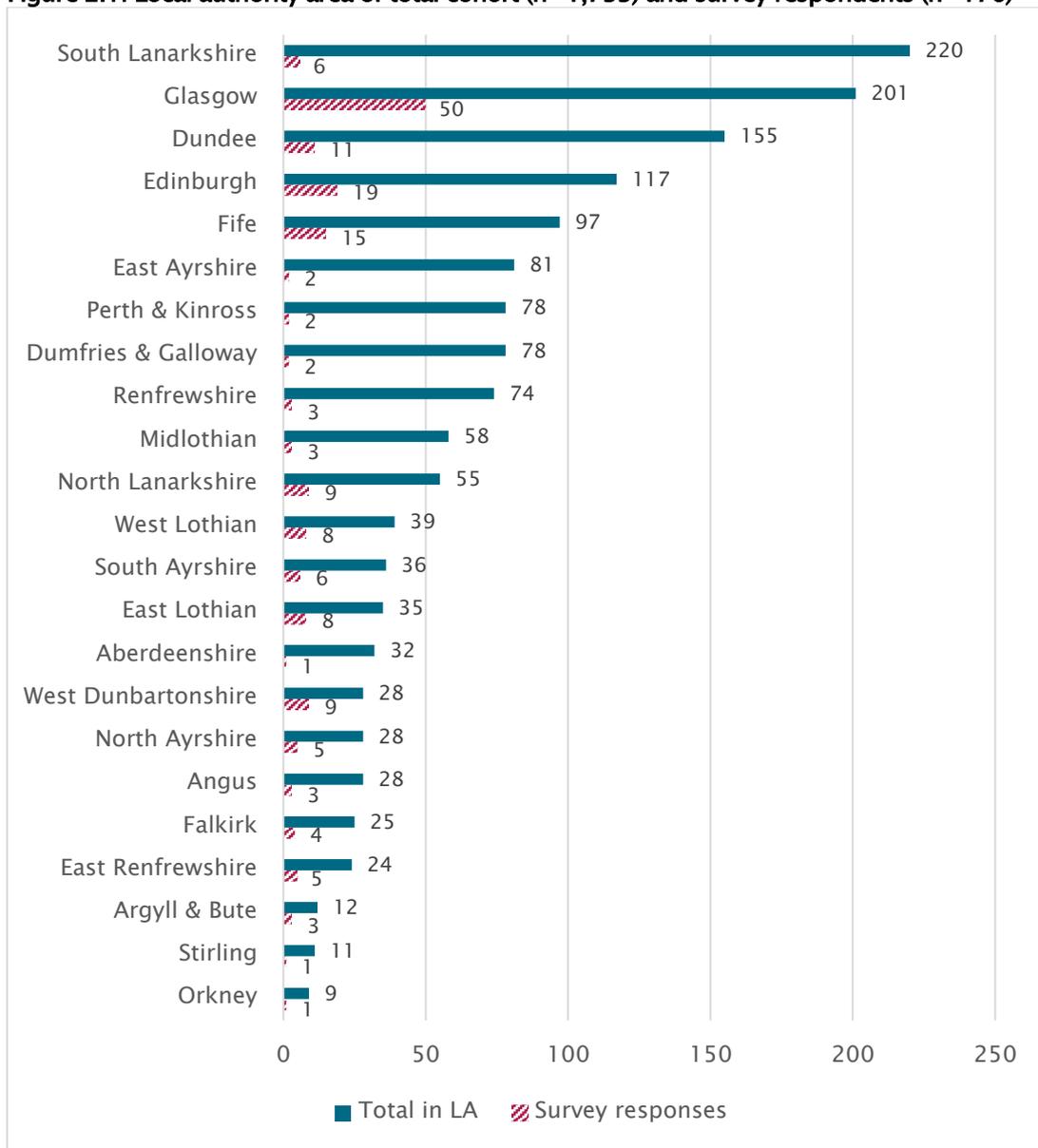
2.3 This research focuses on the cohort of 1,733 young people who completed an Activity Agreement between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017 and entered a positive destination.

2.4 The survey of young people from this cohort received a total of 176 responses between November and December 2017, which represents a sample of 10% of the full cohort. A more detailed profile is in Appendix 1, however, the respondents lived in 23 local authority areas and:

- the majority of respondents (74%) were aged 18 or under, and identified their ethnicity as white (97%);
- there was an almost even split between male (48%) and female (50%) respondents, with the remaining 2% not responding to the gender question;
- 21% of respondents said that they had a disability;
- just over half (55%) had started their Activity Agreement straight from school; and
- more than half of survey respondents (59%) took part in their Activity Agreement for between one and six months, and most (93%) had completed their Activity Agreement.

2.5 Figure 2.1 shows the breakdown of responses by local authority area and also compares the number of responses to the total number of young people in the cohort in that local authority area.

Figure 2.1: Local authority area of total cohort (n=1,733) and survey respondents (n=176)



2.6 As shown in Figure 2.2, West Dunbartonshire had the highest proportion (32%) of their Activity Agreement cohort represented in the survey. The responses from young people in Argyll & Bute, Glasgow, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire and West Lothian are at least a fifth of their total cohort.

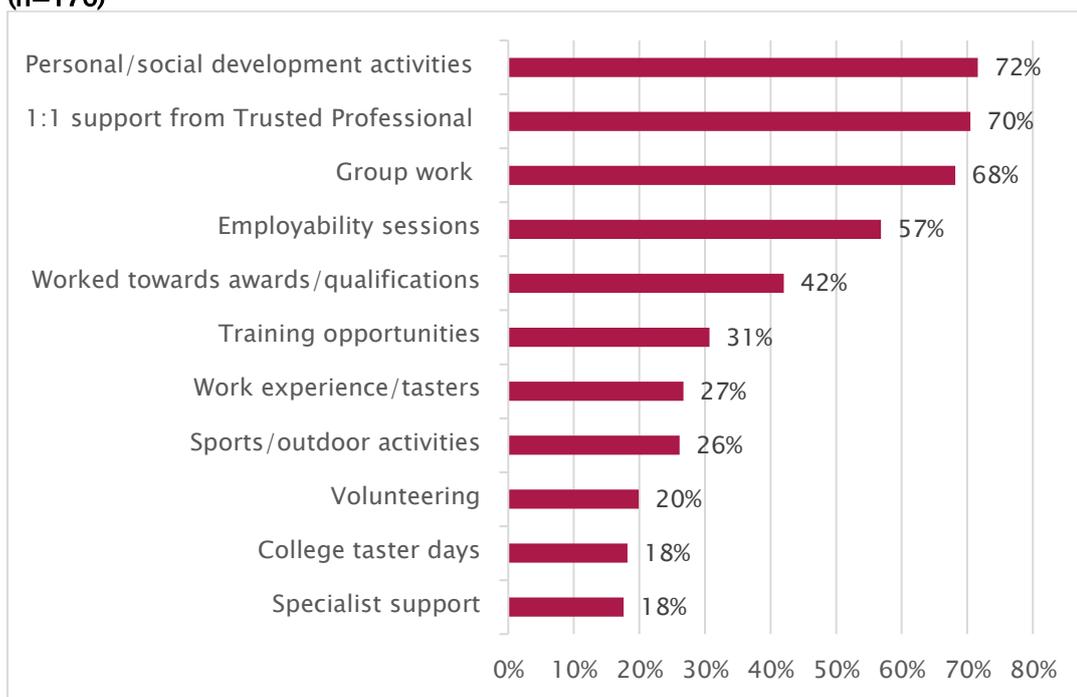
Figure 2.2: Proportion of total cohort who responded to the survey

Local authority	% of total cohort who responded to survey	Local authority	% of total cohort who responded to survey
West Dunbartonshire	32%	Angus	11%
Argyll & Bute	25%	Orkney	11%
Glasgow	25%	Stirling	9%
East Lothian	23%	Dundee	7%
East Renfrewshire	21%	Midlothian	5%
West Lothian	21%	Renfrewshire	4%
North Ayrshire	18%	Aberdeenshire	3%
South Ayrshire	17%	Dumfries & Galloway	3%
Edinburgh	16%	Perth & Kinross	3%
Falkirk	16%	South Lanarkshire	3%
North Lanarkshire	16%	East Ayrshire	2%
Fife	15%		

Activities undertaken during Activity Agreements

- 2.7 The activities that survey respondents experienced as part of their Activity Agreements were varied and tailored to the young people’s needs. The most common activities were personal/social development such as confidence-building activities, health and wellbeing/ life coaching (72%), one-to-one support from their Trusted Professional (70%), and group work (68%).

Figure 2.3: What activities did you get involved with as part of your Activity Agreement? (n=176)



Employability sessions

- 2.8 The purpose of the Activity Agreement is to prepare young people to make a successful transition to work, further education or training and just over half (57%) identified specific employability-focused sessions amongst the activities they had undertaken. The young people who were interviewed discussed these employability sessions and described some of the skills they developed that prepared them for work or study such as CV writing, searching for jobs, writing college applications and preparing for interviews.
- 2.9 One interviewee also explained that they had received advice on how to start their own business, including learning about the equipment to use, how to market the business and more general areas like communication and money management skills to support their new venture.

Training opportunities

- 2.10 Almost a third (31%) of young people surveyed took part in training opportunities and they provided further information about their experiences. Responses were varied and included:
- skills development such as first aid, food hygiene and local employability programmes; and
 - sector-specific skills, such as construction, mechanics, digital skills and horticulture.
- 2.11 The focus group participants offered more detail about taking part in residential courses and outdoor activities designed to build team-working and communication skills as well as motivation. These activities included rock climbing, fire building, kayaking and abseiling.
- 2.12 The wide variety of activities described by research participants reinforces the aim of the Activity Agreement programme to tailor the support provided to the individual employability needs and goals of young people.

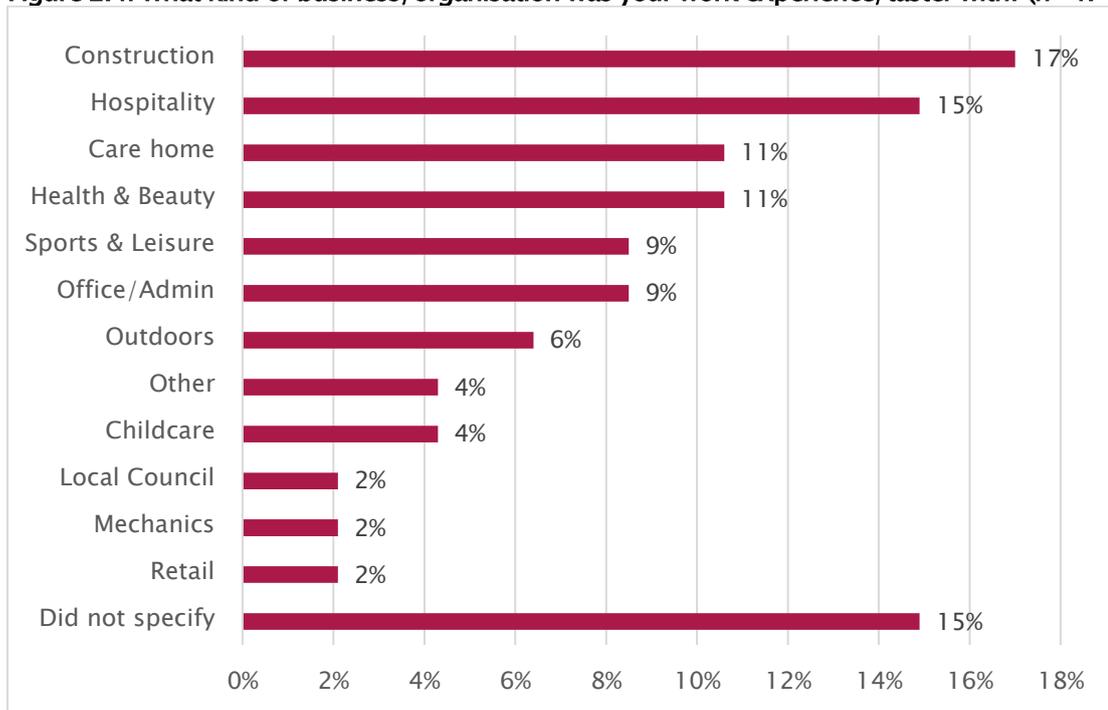
Work experience and tasters

- 2.13 In the survey, 27% of respondents had undertaken work experience and tasters as part of their Activity Agreement. These young people were drawn from 17 local authority areas.⁷ The local authority with the highest number of young people taking part in work experience was Glasgow, accounting for 23% of young people who had participated in work experience and tasters but this is reflective of the higher survey response rate from this area.
- 2.14 Because work experience and tasters are driven by local employment opportunities, respondents identified a wide variety of organisations that offered the taster work

⁷ Aberdeenshire, Angus, Dundee, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian.

experience. Across the respondents, Figure 2.4 shows that construction was the most popular and offered in several local authority areas. This was followed by hospitality. There were also examples of work experience in hairdressing and care home settings. One respondent described the impact of the work experience: *“During the Activity Agreement with the group I had, we got the chance to work with Tom Kitchin which inspired me to go into Hospitality at college.”*

Figure 2.4: What kind of business/organisation was your work experience/taster with? (n=47⁸)

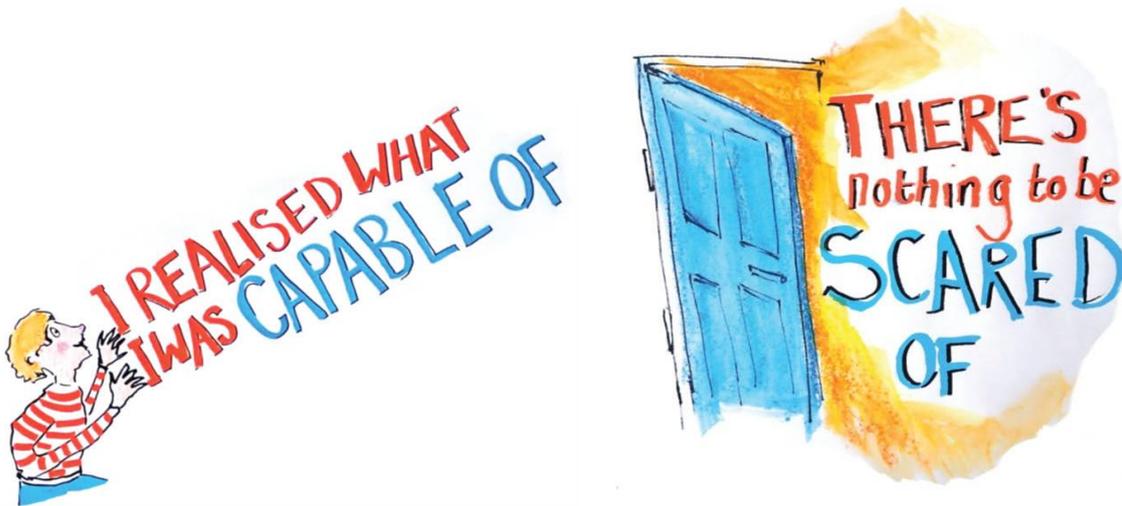


Skills developed through Activity Agreements

- 2.15 Young people who responded to our survey highlighted a range of life and employability skills that they had developed and that support them in their post-Activity Agreement destinations. As already mentioned, employability sessions improved their CV writing, job searching and interviewing skills, as well as understanding their roles and responsibilities in terms of timekeeping. Developing their money management and budgeting skills helped some young people to understand bills and bank statements, while others acquired life skills such as cooking.
- 2.16 The activities that young people experienced also helped to develop their core skills around communication, problem solving and team-working. Some identified improved personal skills, like confidence and motivation, with one young person saying that *“it gave me an idea of what I could do if I put my mind to it.”* A number of participants felt that their Activity Agreement helped them to manage their mental and/or physical health, particularly in cases where they experienced anxiety.

⁸ Some participants selected more than one type of business/organisation.

- 2.17 The Trusted Professional survey respondents explained how they helped young people to develop these skills and qualities. These included tailored one-to-one support, praise, and encouragement, using confidence-building language and motivation, and helping to establish routine into the young person's life.
- 2.18 During one of the focus groups, when asked about the main things that they learned on their Activity Agreement, one young person responded that they learned *"to have something to strive for."*

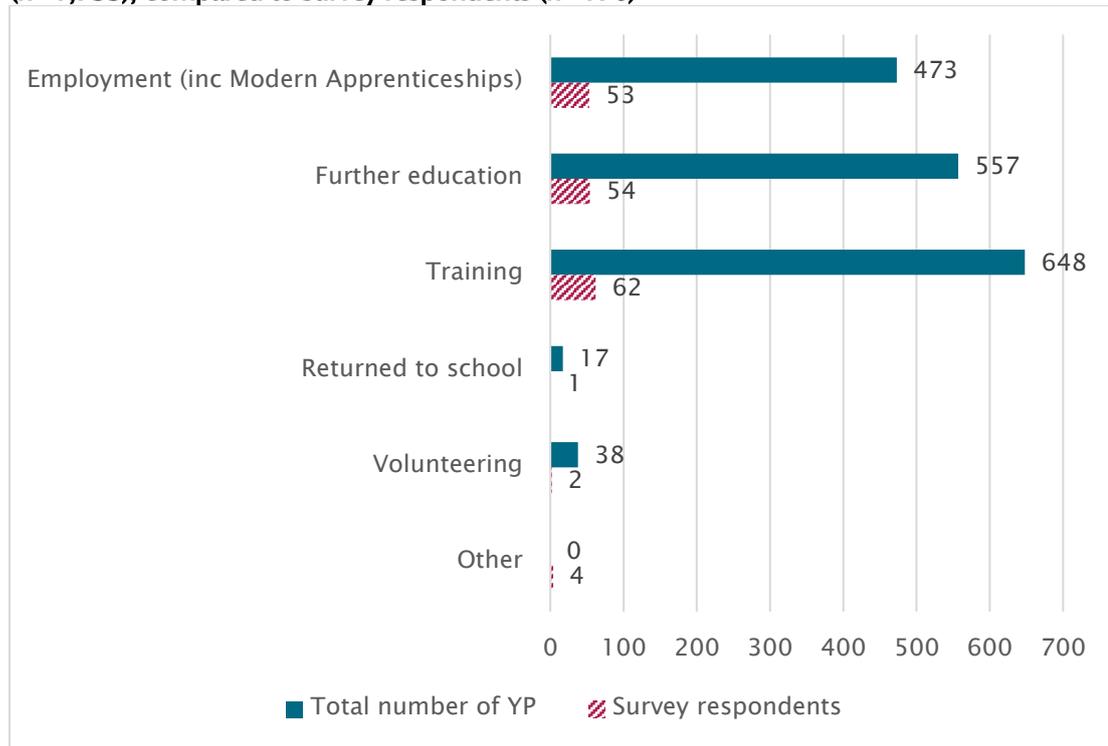


- 2.19 As part of the interviews with stakeholders, they were asked how they measure the extent to which young people have developed the skills required to move on and sustain a positive destination after their Activity Agreement. Most reported that they use particular tools, for example the Outcomes Star, at regular intervals and assessment methods to record progress which included baseline and future skills assessments, self-assessments, personal progress evaluations, simple discussions with the young person, and three-stage evaluations, where data is collected at key intervals throughout the Agreement.
- 2.20 Stakeholders used these tools not only to help monitor progress but to support young people to reflect on and recognise the progress that they had made and the skills they had developed. They reinforced success and provided the opportunity for the Trusted Professionals to offer words of encouragement by saying to the young people *"look how far you've come"* and *"last week you couldn't do this, this week you have."*

Post-Activity Agreement destinations

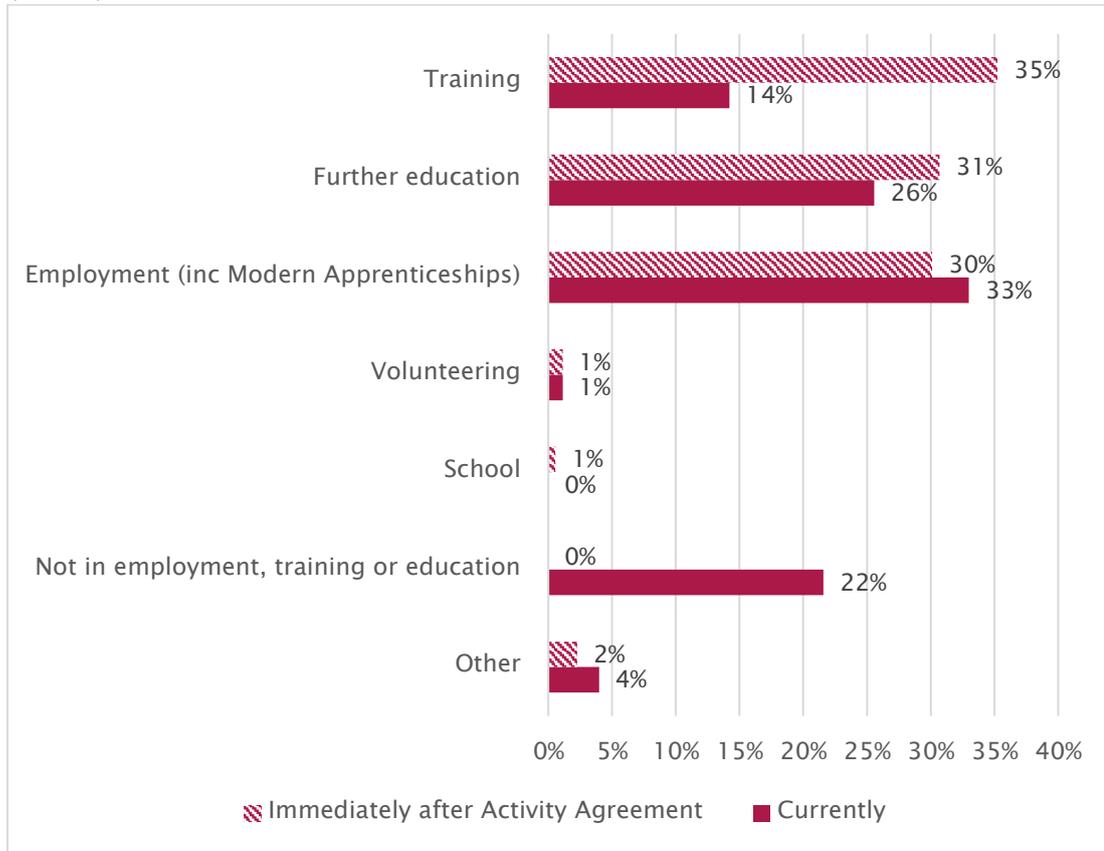
- 2.21 The post-Activity Agreement destinations of survey respondents largely mirrored the destinations of the total Activity Agreement cohort. Figure 2.5 shows the first destinations of the total Activity Agreement cohort, compared to the first destinations of survey respondents.

Figure 2.5: Destinations of total Activity Agreement leavers 1 July 2016 – 30 June 2017 (n=1,733), compared to survey respondents (n=176)



- 2.22 Training was the most common destination for the total cohort of Activity Agreement leavers (37%), and was also the most common destination amongst the survey respondents (35%). Similarly, further education and employment were popular destinations for both the total cohort and survey respondents. Thirty-two per cent of the total cohort and 31% of survey respondents had moved into further education, while 27% of the total cohort and 30% of survey respondents had entered employment after their Activity Agreement.
- 2.23 The survey of young people provided opportunities to explore changes in destination amongst respondents in the time since they finished their Activity Agreement. Figure 2.6 shows a number of differences between what the young people did at first, and what they were doing at the time of taking the survey.

Figure 2.6: Destinations of survey respondents after Activity Agreement compared to now (n=176)



- 2.24 As Figure 2.6 shows, most respondents (78%) remained in positive destinations, and the number of respondents in employment increased, although only by three percentage points. A similar proportion of the young people who were consulted through interviews had also remained in a positive destination.
- 2.25 The destination with the biggest change in involvement amongst survey respondents was training programmes. Thirty-five per cent of young people stated this was the main thing they did after their Activity Agreement ended, but only 14% said that they were participating in a training programme at present. This shift is not unexpected, given the time-limited nature of training programmes.
- 2.26 When we explore the current destinations of those respondents who went into a training programme immediately after their Activity Agreement ended:
- 31% remained on a training programme;
 - 23% were employed;
 - 7% were either volunteering or doing something else related to employment, education and training; and
 - 8% were in further education.

- 2.27 The remaining 31% stated that they were not currently in employment, education or training. By comparison, 20% of respondents who were initially in further education and 11% of respondents who were in employment (including Modern Apprenticeships), have moved out of positive destinations since finishing their Activity Agreement.
- 2.28 This could suggest that young people who initially entered a training course after completing their Activity Agreement might find it more difficult to sustain a positive destination than their peers who entered other positive destinations.

Post-Activity Agreement support offered to young people

- 2.29 Most young people (90%) who took part in the survey had received some support since finishing their Activity Agreement. Of the respondents who had not received support, 88% said that they had not needed or wanted any support, and only 12% said that they had needed support, which they did not receive.
- 2.30 Since they completed their Activity Agreement, over half (57%) of survey respondents



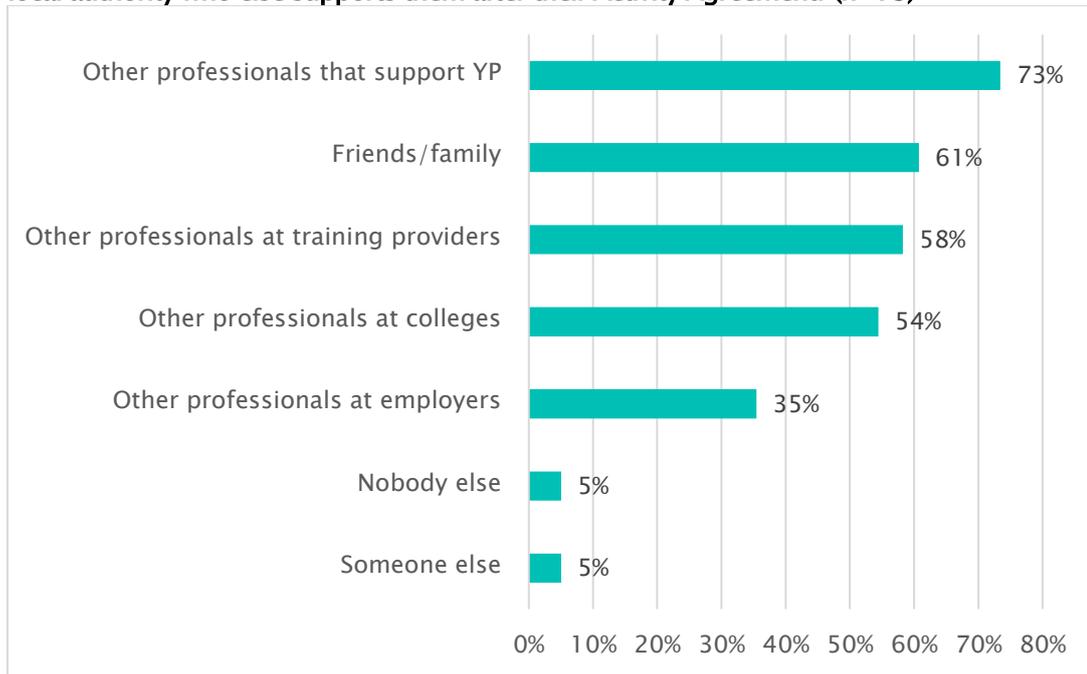
cited their family and friends as a source of support, representing the primary source for the young people who were surveyed. Trusted Professionals were identified as a source of support by a slightly smaller proportion (53%), since their Activity Agreement ended.

2.31 Amongst the young people interviewed, the majority (62%) confirmed that they were still in contact with their Trusted Professional, explaining that they had been in touch at least once to “*check-up*” on them and to find out how they are getting on.

2.32 As well as family, friends and Trusted Professionals, young people, who responded to the survey, identified that post-Activity Agreement support also came from people at workplaces, colleges and training providers (31%), and professionals who provided support to families, such as social workers (6%).

- 2.33 In their survey, Trusted Professionals also commented on the support that young people received after their Activity Agreement had ended. As shown in Figure 2.7, their responses echoed those of the young people, although a higher proportion (73%) identified other professionals as providing that post-Activity Agreement support.

Figure 2.7: Drawing on your experiences of the young people that you have supported, in your local authority who else supports them after their Activity Agreement? (n=79)



2.34 The Trusted Professionals provided examples of the types of support offered. From family and friends this could be “*helping with money and resources such as clothing*” and ensuring the young person attends work, college or other commitments, such as appointments and meetings. With other professionals, like staff at college, training programmes or work, the Trusted Professionals described the processes around handover and liaison about the young people. One participant explained that “*information is usually passed onto colleges outlining the young person’s needs, this is usually picked up by student support services to continue to provide support where necessary.*” Others said that young people could also be mentored or given a ‘buddy’ for support.

Post-activity support offered by Trusted Professionals

2.35 As already described, there can be a wide range of support available to young people. The aftercare offered by the Trusted Professionals should help to embed and reinforce the learning and experiences during the Activity Agreement period and complement the support provided by others.

Method and frequency of contact with Trusted Professional

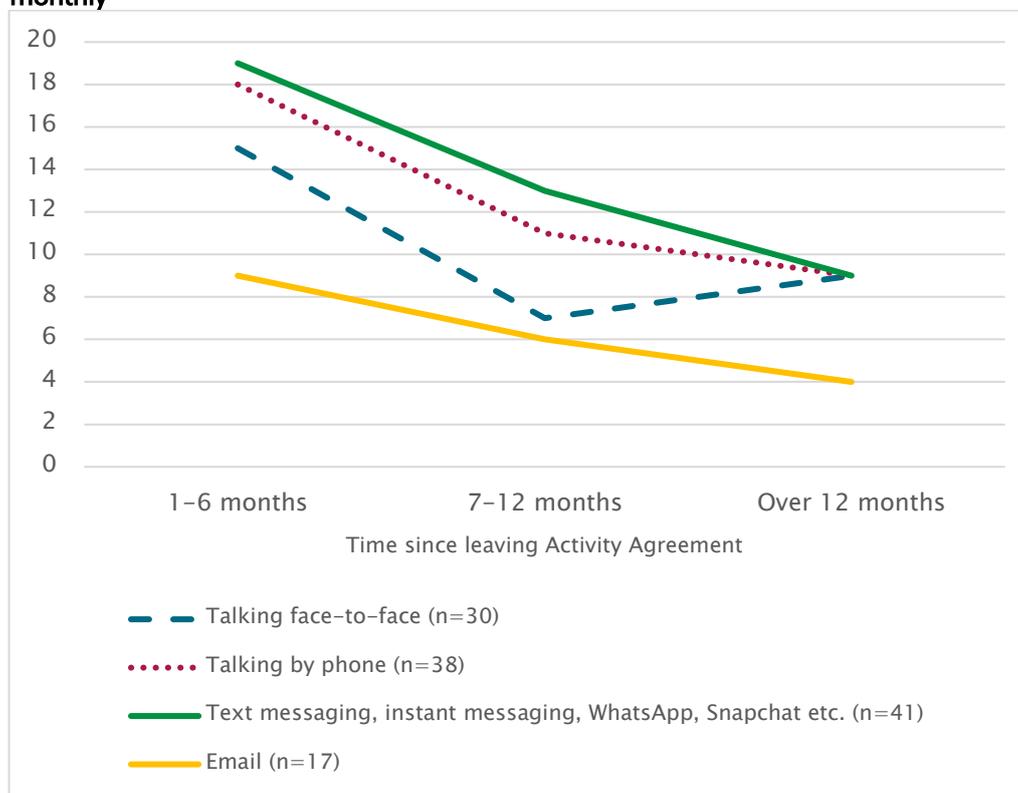
2.36 The aftercare approach offered by Trusted Professionals depends on the individual local authority or agency providing the support but it is based on the individuals’ needs. Fifty-three per cent of young people surveyed received support from their Trusted Professional after the Activity Agreement ended. The period of time in which this support is provided also varies but most Trusted Professionals who were interviewed said that it usually lasted between three and six months, although in some cases support was provided for longer.

Trusted Professionals described having a ‘doors open’ policy that encourages young people to contact them for support when needed.

2.37 In the survey, Trusted Professionals were asked about the method of contact with young people after the Activity Agreement ends. Most survey respondents (90%) indicated that they contacted young people primarily through text or instant messaging services. This was reinforced by the young people who responded to the survey, with 57% who indicated that they used text/instant messaging to communicate with their Trusted Professional, saying that they did so on at least a monthly basis.

2.38 In terms of frequency of contact, generally, this decreased the longer the young person had been out of their Activity Agreement. In Figure 2.8, the number of young people who maintained contact with their Trusted Professional at least monthly is shown.

Figure 2.8: Aftercare: Young people who communicate with their Trusted Professional at least monthly



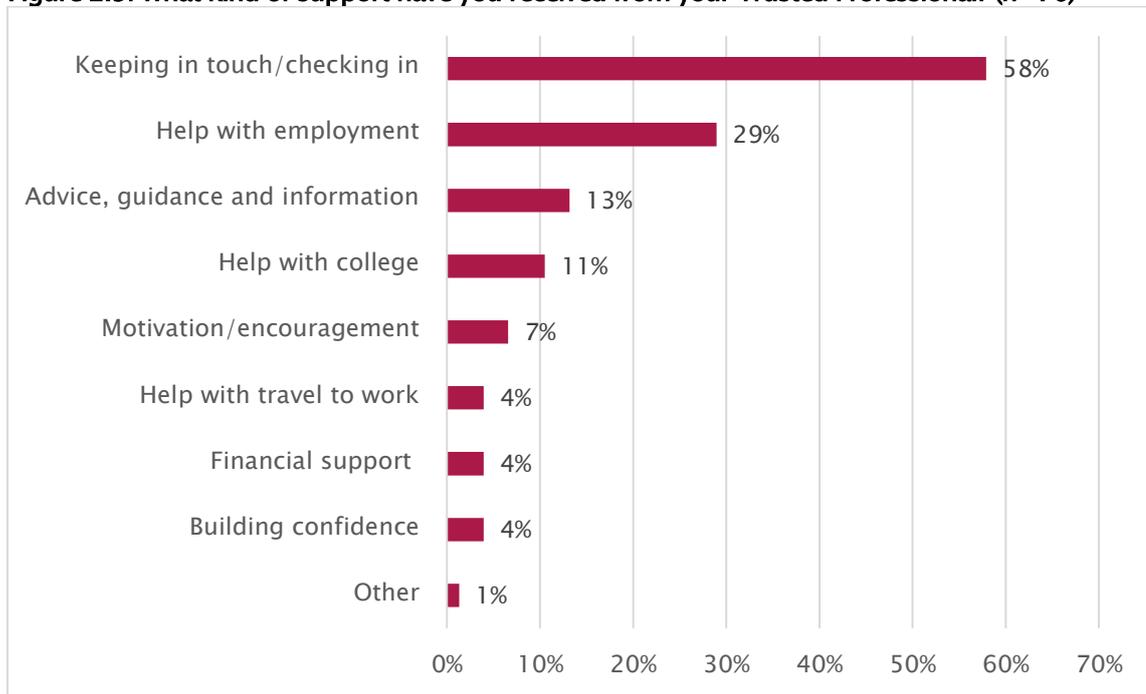
2.39 The one exception to this trend was talking face-to-face, which decreased over the first 12 months after the Activity Agreement ended, but then slightly increased again after 12 months. It is unclear why this increase occurred.

Types of post-Activity Agreement support

2.40 The survey asked young people about the types of post-Activity Agreement support they received from their Trusted Professional. Forty-four per cent of the respondents to the survey of young people were able to give examples. As shown in Figure 2.9, the most

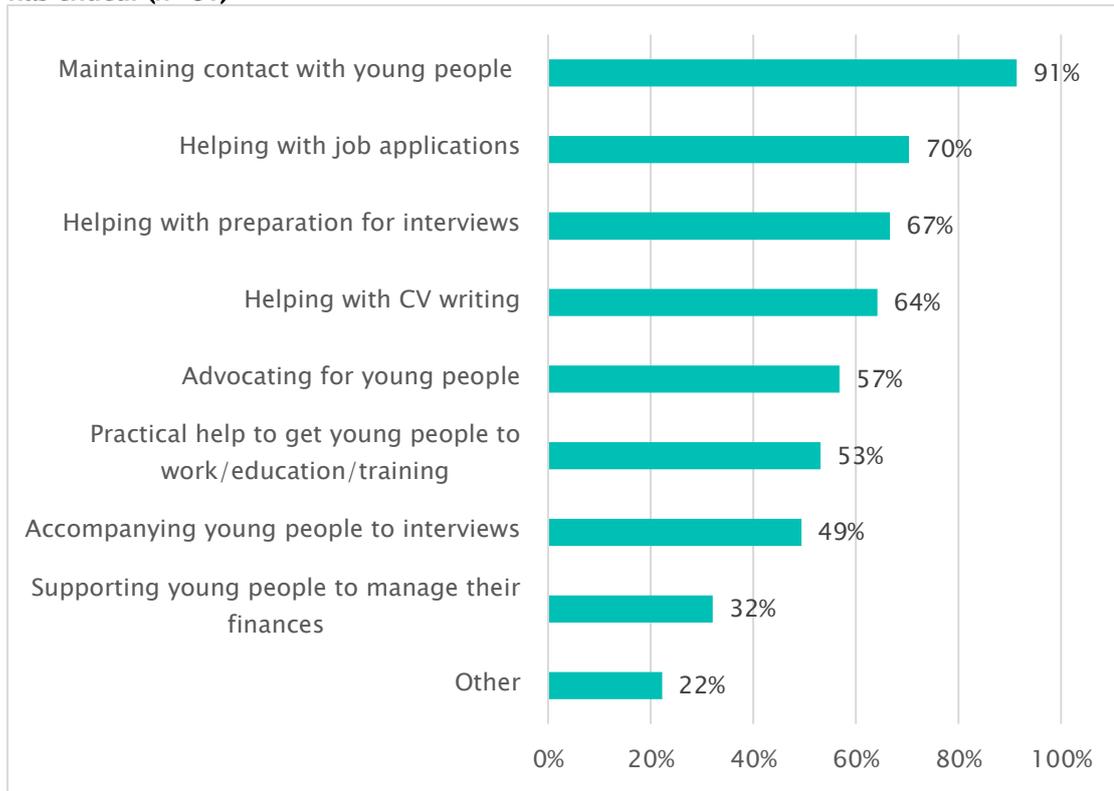
common example was keeping in touch/checking in (58%). Other support included help with employment and providing advice, guidance and information.

Figure 2.9: What kind of support have you received from your Trusted Professional? (n=76)



- 2.41 Young people who were interviewed also explained that Trusted Professionals continue to be a source of advice, guidance and help, after their Activity Agreement ends. For example, one interviewee described how their Trusted Professional directs them towards job opportunities, while another spoke about the relationship with their Trusted Professional as being more reactive: *“if I have a problem I can text them.”* A focus group participant reinforced this aspect of the support by saying that their Trusted Professional is *“sort of a safety net.”*
- 2.42 The types of post-Activity Agreement support identified by Trusted Professionals mirrored the young people’s responses with maintaining contact (91%) being the key form of support. However, as Figure 2.10 shows, a high number of Trusted Professionals continue to provide employability-type support such as help with job applications (70%), interview preparation (67%) and CV writing (64%), after the Activity Agreement ends. This is similar to the support and activities undertaken during the Activity Agreement.

Figure 2.10: What kind of support do you give to young people after their Activity Agreement has ended? (n=81)



- 2.43 One interviewee identified the encouragement and motivation that they had received from their Trusted Professional, who had helped them to find a placement *“tailored to [their] likes.”* This placement later became a paid job. Another interviewee recalled that their Trusted Professional helped with their college application and wrote down what the young person had done during their Activity Agreement, giving the young person ideas of what to speak about at their college interview.
- 2.44 Just over half of the Trusted Professionals surveyed (53%) said they offered practical help to the young people they support by helping to get them to work, college or training. This included giving them lifts or ensuring they are up and prepared on time.
- 2.45 Trusted Professionals maintained contact with young people to hear about their progress and to offer guidance and encouragement. Many respondents said that they also offered emotional support with one explaining that, *“sometimes, they just need an independent adult who cares to give them a shoulder to cry on or a good talking to.”* Another felt that this form of support *“allowed them to have a space to continue to air their struggles, successes and concerns.”* These, and other examples, show that post-Activity Agreement support from Trusted Professionals extended beyond employability-related assistance.

Summary

- 2.46 The activities within the Agreement are varied but personal and social development to develop core skills and support from the Trusted Professional were the most common for this cohort of Activity Agreement participants. More than half of the young people had

employability sessions within their Activity Agreement which developed a range of skills and knowledge to improve their employability but less than a third had the opportunity of tasters or work experience.

- 2.47 Most respondents (78%) sustained a positive destination but for those young people who went into training at the end of their Activity Agreement, they appear to be less likely to sustain a positive destination, compared to their counterparts who entered employment or further education.
- 2.48 A high majority of young people had received some support after their Activity Agreement had ended. Of those that did not, 80% said they had neither wanted nor needed it. Over half of the young people had been supported by family and friends in practical ways such as help with money as well as advice and encouragement. Similarly, over half the young people had been supported by their Trusted Professional and the majority were still in contact with them. This aftercare support ranged from checking in and reassurance to employability support or acting as a bridge to other support services or professionals for the young person.

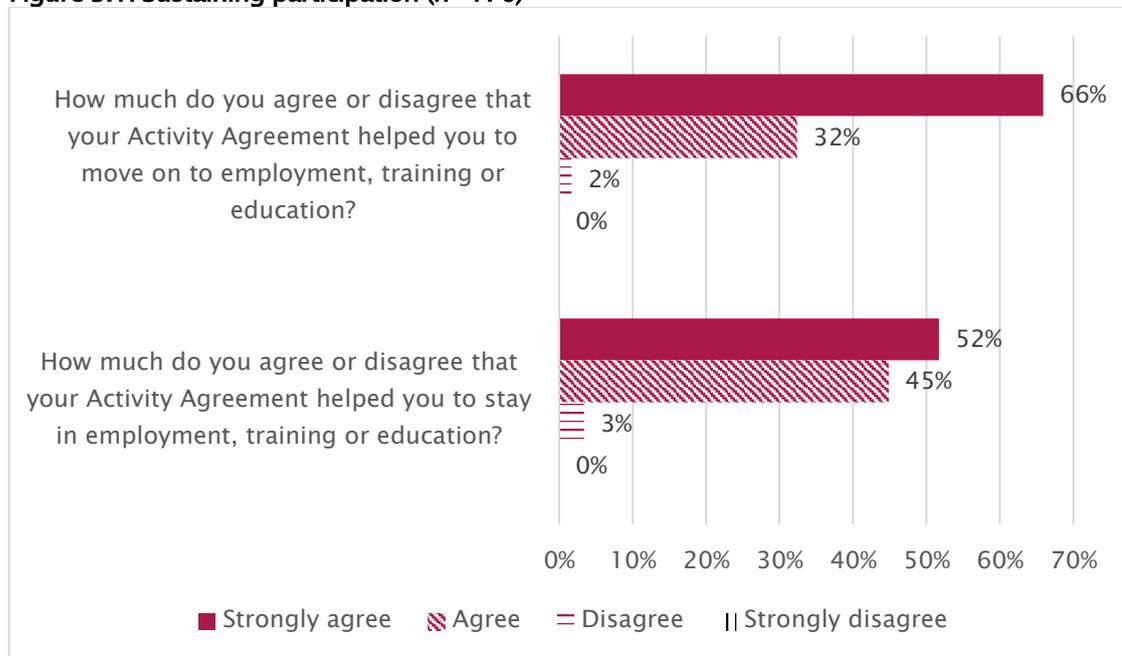
3. Enablers to sustaining participation post-Activity Agreement

3.1 In this chapter, we explore the main enablers to young people sustaining their participation in the labour market, in further education and training after the Activity Agreement ends and the experiences of Trusted Professionals and other stakeholders in their support of young people post-Activity Agreement.

Sustaining participation

3.2 In the survey, young people were asked whether their Activity Agreement helped them to move on to employment, training or education. Figure 3.1 shows that, overwhelmingly, 98% agreed or strongly agreed that their Activity Agreement helped them in this way. When asked whether they felt that their Activity Agreement helped them to sustain their destination, the survey respondents returned very similar (97%) positive results.

Figure 3.1: Sustaining participation (n=176)



3.3 For the 3% of young people who did not agree that their Activity Agreements helped them to sustain their participation in employment, training or further education, a few provided an explanation for their response. These related to their experience of a placement being 'not the right fit', whilst others felt that they had not been helped to develop the self-motivation required to sustain their participation, for example to stay on at college.

Activities undertaken during Activity Agreements

3.4 The survey indicates that many of the activities young people took part in supported their positive progression in the labour market, further education and training. The survey asked the young people a multiple choice question about the aspects of their Activity Agreements that were particularly important in helping them to move on to a positive

destination. The most common response (69%) was the one-to-one support that young people received from their Trusted Professional. Other significant activities were:

- personal and social development activities (57% of this group of young people);
- group work (51%);
- working towards awards and qualifications (30%);
- employability sessions (28%); and
- training opportunities (23%).

Developing skills and abilities

3.5 The interview and focus group participants expanded on the importance of these activities and they often referred to the development of personal and life skills described in Chapter 2. For example,

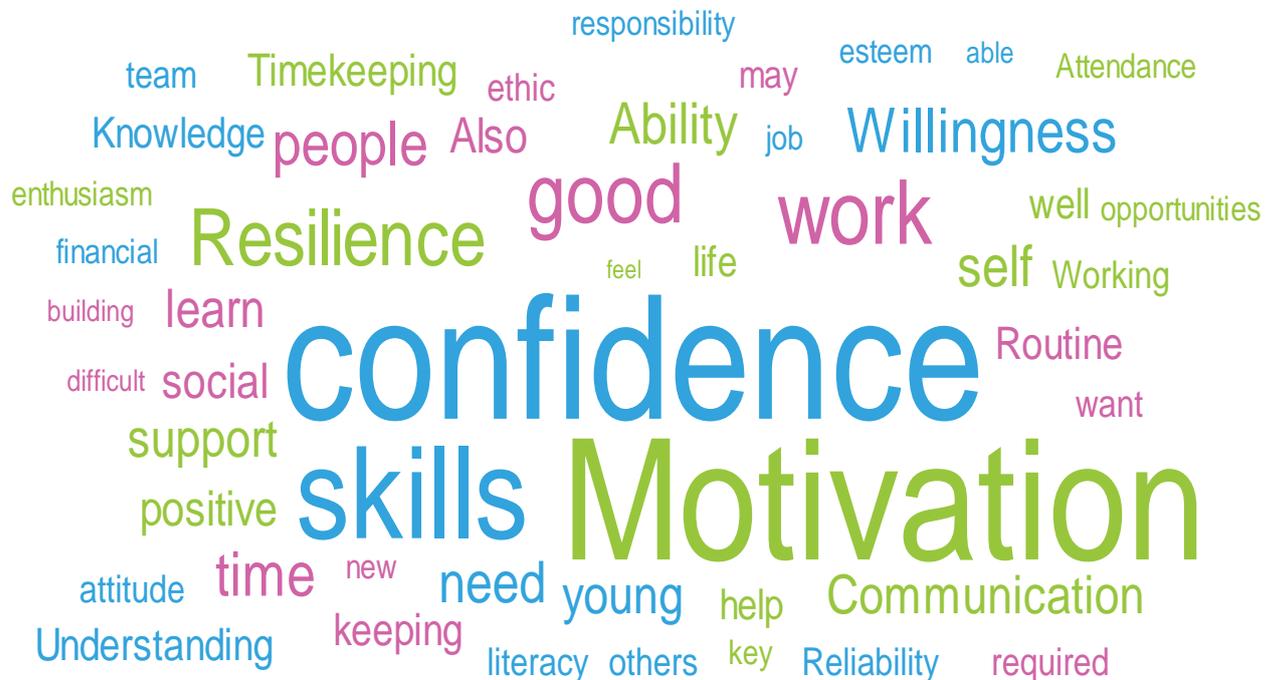
one young person said during an interview that *“without [the Activity Agreement] my confidence wouldn’t be as high as it is, which is important working in retail”*, while another interviewee mentioned that *“it got me talking to people”* and another young person said that *“it’s made me realise that if you put in the work you’ll get a good outcome.”*



3.6 The survey explored young people’s views on whether their Activity Agreement had helped them to sustain their participation in a positive destination and how it had helped. They identified that it had given them:

- more confidence, as indicated by 82% of these respondents;
- motivation (69%);
- new skills (51%);
- more resilience (49%);
- support to overcome barriers or problems (47%); and
- qualifications (30%).

- 3.7 Developing the appropriate personal and social skills during the Activity Agreement is crucial in sustaining destinations. In the interviews and focus groups young people emphasised the importance of the skills they developed. Some young people referred to their determination and motivation to work, one young person said that while they were previously not in regular attendance at school, *“now I want to further myself.”* Others stressed confidence, independence and having the right mind-set as being important in helping them to sustain their participation.
- 3.8 As part of the survey of Trusted Professionals, we asked questions about the key skills and qualities that young people require to sustain their participation in a positive destination. The responses are presented in the word cloud below and it demonstrates that there is significant overlap between the skills and qualities that young people and Trusted Professionals feel have helped to progress and sustain positive destinations.



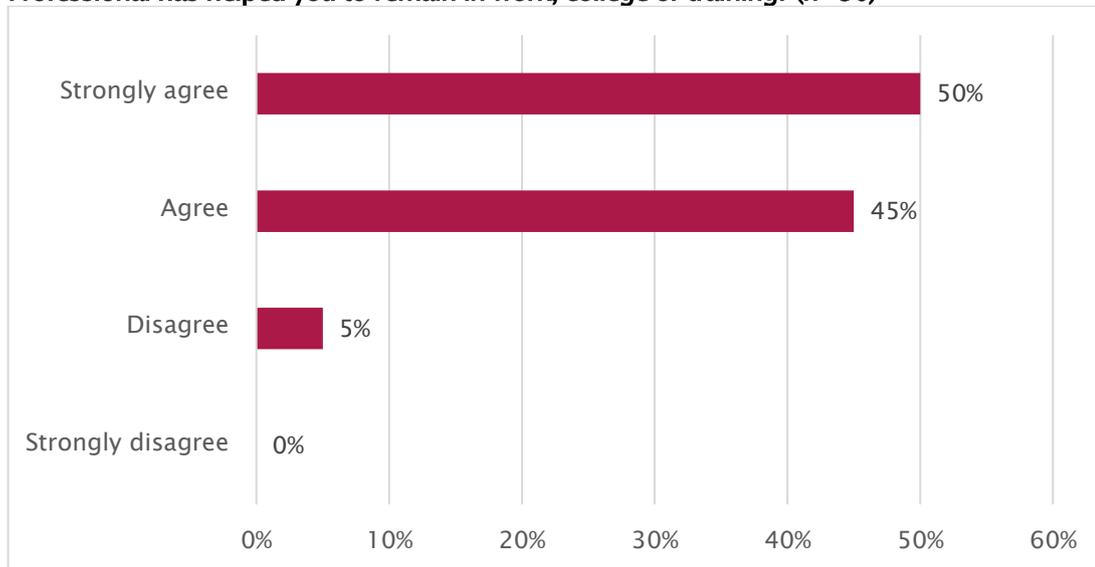
Aftercare support provided by Trusted Professionals

- 3.9 At present, Trusted Professionals deliver support throughout the entirety of a young person’s Activity Agreement journey, which begins at the point of referral, and continues through the stages of assessment, planning, monitoring and reviewing and, finally, progression. At this final stage, they support the young person in their preparations for re-engaging with, or entering, employment, education or training⁹.

⁹ YouthLink Scotland, ‘Providing Support for all Scotland’s Children and Young People: The Activity Agreement approach to providing person support in the senior phase’ (February 2015); ‘The Activity Agreement Model: How the Activity Agreement approach can support flexibility’ and choice in the development of Curriculum for Excellence senior phase learning and pathways

- 3.10 Having the right support during the Activity Agreement, which encourages the development of skills and identifies an appropriate plan, is an important enabler to sustaining participation. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, 70% of young people identified the one-to-one support of their Trusted Professional as being important. This suggests that the supportive role of a Trusted Professional during the Activity Agreement is key to successful progression beyond it.
- 3.11 The Trusted Professionals continue to play a supportive role once the Activity Agreements end. As shown in Figure 3.2, the young people surveyed who had been supported by their Trusted Professional identified the importance of that support. Most of these young people (95%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their Trusted Professional helped them to remain in work, college or training. Evidently, there is a high level of satisfaction amongst young people about the level of support they have received from their Trusted Professional since they finished their Activity Agreement.

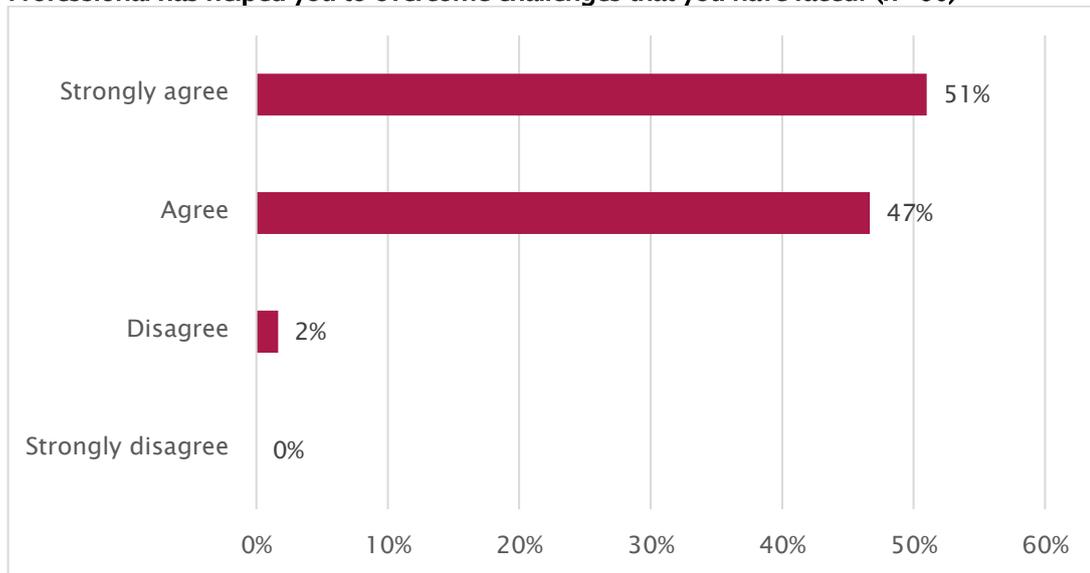
Figure 3.2: How much do you agree or disagree that the support from your Trusted Professional has helped you to remain in work, college or training? (n=90)



- 3.12 The young people explained that their Trusted Professional was a valuable source of advice or guidance after they had finished their Activity Agreement. Research participants indicated that they have *“been delighted”* with the support they received, that it *“went above and beyond”* what they expected, and that *“it helped me when I needed help.”* One young person explained that it was important that *“they don’t cut you off”*. Their Trusted Professional was in contact frequently and several months after their Agreement ended they arranged a voluntary placement for them; *“because they checked up, they kept me in. It’s thanks to them.”* There were several examples of how the contact with the Trusted Professional was an important factor in *“keeping them going”* and highlight the significance of maintaining that contact with young people after their Activity Agreement has ended.

3.13 The 60 young people who had been supported by their Trusted Professional since their Activity Agreement ended, and who had faced some challenges in that time, were asked if their Trusted Professional had helped them to overcome these challenges. Almost all young people (98%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their Trusted Professional had helped (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: How much do you agree or disagree that the support from your Trusted Professional has helped you to overcome challenges that you have faced? (n=60)



3.14 The interviews, focus groups and survey explored how the aftercare from Trusted Professionals helped the young people to address challenges and sustain their participation.

Reinforcing self-confidence and motivation

3.15 There were many examples of the Trusted Professional encouraging and reassuring young people in situations that would impact on sustainability or when helping them to transition to another destination. One Trusted Professional provided an example of this when asked in interview about the type of aftercare support they provide. They had recently been contacted by a young person who had completed their Activity Agreement and progressed to college. Due to family circumstances, the young person felt they could no longer cope with college and they were considering dropping out of their course. The young person contacted the Trusted Professional for advice and they discussed what options they had and what support they could access.



Providing advice and advocacy

- 3.16 The example reflects others that were described by young people and the Trusted Professionals. Again, support from a Trusted Professional helped one of the participants to solve problems in their workplace. This survey respondent explained that there was a situation at work where they were prepared to *“walk out”* over concerns with another colleague. Their Trusted Professional suggested a way of addressing the conflict and this resolved the problem the young person was having. There were other similar examples from Trusted Professionals in that they supported young people *“to speak to the right people at work or in college about the issues they are experiencing.”*
- 3.17 In one interview a Trusted Professional said that a young person came to them 12 months after they had completed their Activity Agreement, when a member of the family was dying. They spoke to the young person’s employer to arrange time off from work in order for the young person to have time to process the situation and to make necessary arrangements. The result was that the young person was able to sustain their employment.
- 3.18 The availability of the Trusted Professionals to provide these forms of aftercare support, in response to the young people’s individual circumstances, is a valuable aid to sustaining positive destinations.

Signposting and partnership–working with other professionals

- 3.19 As well as advising and advocating on behalf of the young people after their Activity Agreements have ended, the discussions with young people and Trusted Professionals identified their role in signposting to and collaborating with other professionals to support young people.
- 3.20 In the survey, when asked an open-ended question about how their aftercare support had helped young people to stay in a positive destination, Trusted Professionals highlighted the significance of signposting to others. Although not all respondents named the organisations, several did mention professionals who could offer support around specific issues like housing and health, for example, one said *“[I] have supported young people to engage with CAMHS and other health professionals so that they are receiving the help they need to help them to sustain their positive destination.”* Another, in relation to careers advice, said *“I would signpost them to another service and give them the number for SDS or book [an] appointment for them.”*
- 3.21 The interviews and survey with Trusted Professionals highlighted the regular liaison with other professionals that engaged and supported young people after their Activity Agreements ended. These positive working relationships between themselves and young people’s employers, colleges and/or training providers often provided an important avenue for discussing the young person’s progress as well as the opportunity to resolve issues which may arise. For example, one respondent reported that they had attended meetings with colleges to support those young people who were struggling with their

courses, while another frequently meets with employability providers to discuss young people's progress at work.

- 3.22 In one of the interviews, one Trusted Professional illustrated the positive effect that partnership working can have on a young person's ability to progress and sustain after their Activity Agreement. They explained that they had a young person who had completed their Activity Agreement and moved on to college. As part of that transition they arranged for that young person to meet with student support services at the college to ensure they had a support network in the new setting. After a month the young person was back in touch because they were struggling with college; the Trusted Professional contacted the college and learned that the young person was no longer receiving support and so they agreed an alternative support arrangement in the college. The young person was able to settle back into college and completed their course to then move on to further study.

Summary

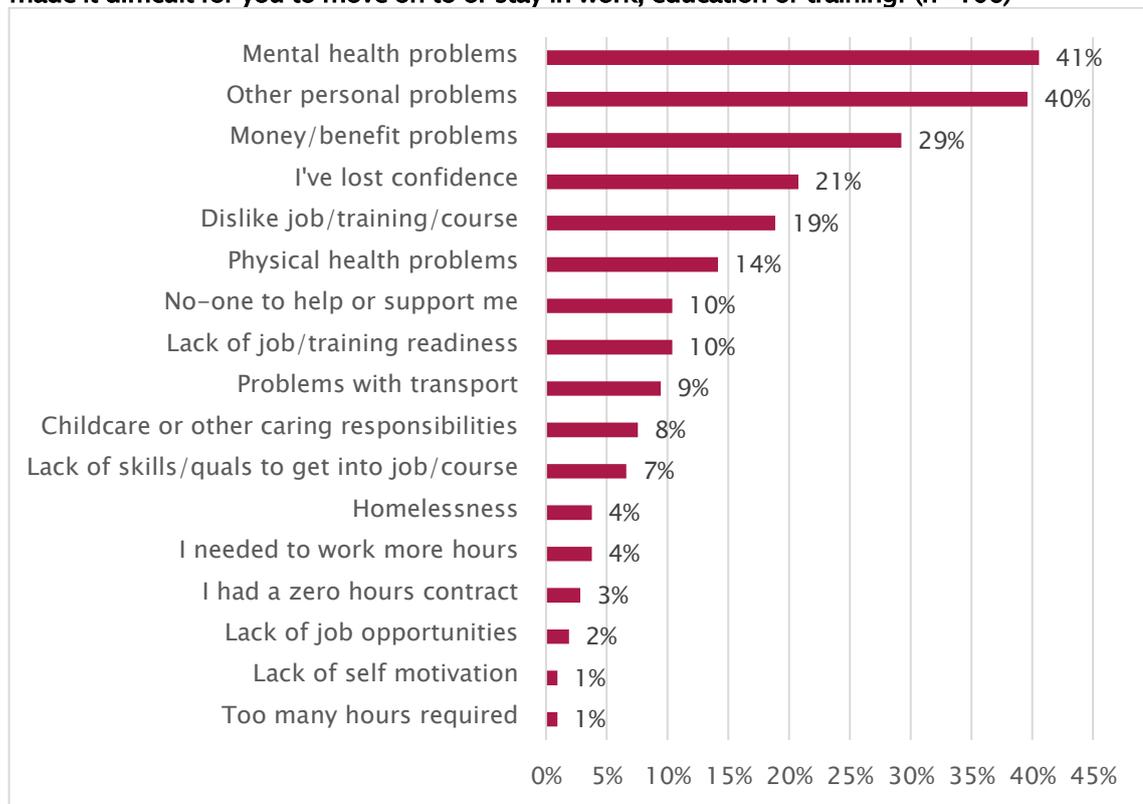
- 3.23 The content of Activity Agreements is key in developing young people's skills and abilities and the opportunities to experience work. This prepares them to successfully transition into their chosen destination. Ninety-seven per cent of young people agreed that their Activity Agreement had helped them to stay in employment, training or education.
- 3.24 The role of the Trusted Professional is key in supporting the young person to be ready to move on from the Activity Agreement and in providing the aftercare to reinforce the learning, help address employment, further education and training challenges when required, and providing that extra encouragement that some young people need. There are still examples of aftercare support that resembles the support during the Activity Agreement, and it is important that the young people are aware of, and the signposting continues to, the other professionals who can support the young people in their new destination or in addressing particular issues.

4. Barriers to sustaining participation post-Activity Agreement

4.1 As well as considering the enablers to post-Activity Agreement sustainability, the research also explored the barriers. Various questions were posed to the young people and the stakeholders in order to identify the main barriers to young people’s ability to sustain their participation in their positive destinations.

4.2 Most survey respondents (60%) reported a range of challenges relating to personal circumstances and employment/training/college requirements that had made it difficult for them to move into or stay in a positive destination. These are depicted in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Since your Activity Agreement has ended, what challenges have you faced that have made it difficult for you to move on to or stay in work, education or training? (n=106)



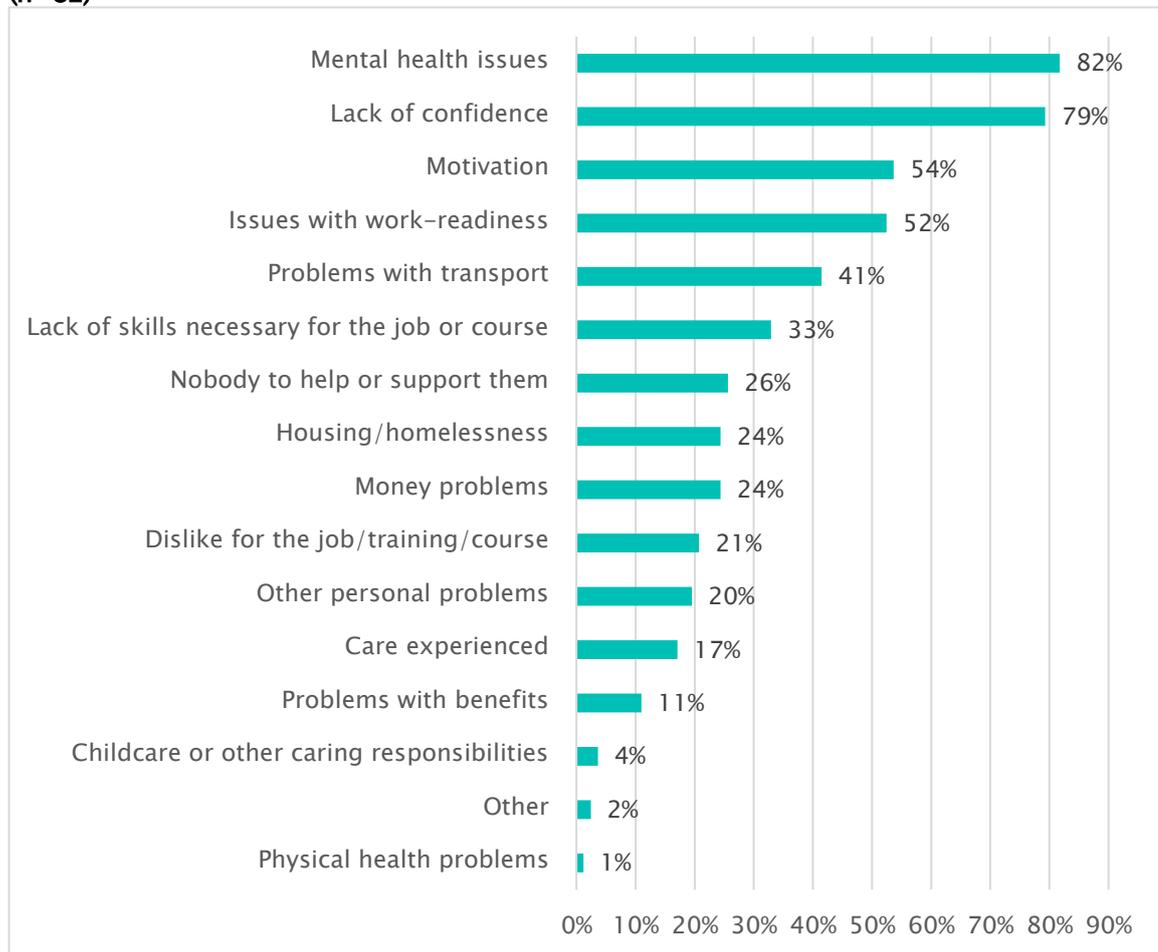
4.3 For some, these issues prevented sustainability and for those young people who indicated that they have experienced at least one of the challenges listed in Figure 4.1, 34% said that at least one of these issues had resulted in them leaving a job, training programme or college.

4.4 Of these young people, when asked what was the key reason:

- 41% said that they left because of mental health issues;
- 28% left because they did not like the job, training or course; and
- 22% left because of other personal problems or due to a loss of confidence.

4.5 When the Trusted Professionals were asked about the different barriers to sustaining a positive destination, as Figure 4.2 shows, when considering personal issues, their survey responses identified similar barriers to those acknowledged by the young people.

Figure 4.2: More specifically, what are the most common personal issues for young people? (n=82)



Mental health challenges

4.6 Mental health was the most common factor, but a much higher proportion of the Trusted Professionals considered this to be a barrier compared to the young people.

4.7 A few young people expanded upon mental health issues during the interviews and focus groups. They recognised that their mental health had a direct impact on their motivation, their ability to seek employment and attend interviews, as well as presenting challenges in the workplace. As one young person said during the focus groups, *“in my job, obviously I’m helping folk, but at the same time I’ve got ... issues myself, so it’s difficult ... having to deal with other people’s problems when I’m trying to deal with mine.”* This young person reported that they were receiving support from their GP and from their line manager.

4.8 In the survey of Trusted Professionals, some offered commentary on how mental health issues were impacting on the young people they supported, for example anxiety that

affected the young people’s ability to travel independently and enter a workplace. They also felt that there was a shortage of appropriate specialised support to address their mental health issues. One Trusted Professional explained that *“we are finding young people have increasingly complex mental health issues that require professional intervention and support, which we are not trained to deal with.”*

Lack of confidence and motivation

- 4.9 A loss or lack of confidence was another key barrier reported by both young people and Trusted Professionals that negatively impacted on post-Activity Agreement progression.
- 4.10 Just over half of Trusted Professionals (54%) also considered a lack of motivation as a barrier to young people sustaining participation. This lack of motivation was at all levels – from looking for jobs and attending interviews to getting up in the morning to go to college or work. As one young person highlighted, *“it is quite hard to keep going when you’re getting turned down.”*



Lack of support

- 4.11 The previous section showed that support is an enabler to young people’s post-Activity Agreement progression. Therefore, a lack of support can be a barrier for some. Around one quarter of the Trusted Professionals (26%) responding to the survey felt that having nobody to help or support young people was a common issue affecting young people’s ability to participate and sustain the post-Activity Agreement destination. When considering support as an external factor, 50% of the Trusted Professionals (see Figure 4.4) identified this as a barrier.
- 4.12 Although 90% of young people said they did receive support after they finished their Activity Agreement, when young people considered the challenges they faced, 10% identified a lack of support as a challenge. Of these young people, just over a quarter (27%) reported that they had left a job, training programme or college course because of it.
- 4.13 The type and amount of support offered to a young person varies considerably. Some Trusted Professionals commented in the survey that, for those young people with chaotic lives, facing peer pressure or limited support from family and friends, it can be a struggle to sustain their positive destination. As one Trusted Professional explained, *“friends and family in some instances will continue to encourage the young person to keep going with employment or college, in some instances they will not.”* Another noted that it is particularly challenging for young people to remain in positive destinations when they are *“living within families that do not value education, training or employment.”*

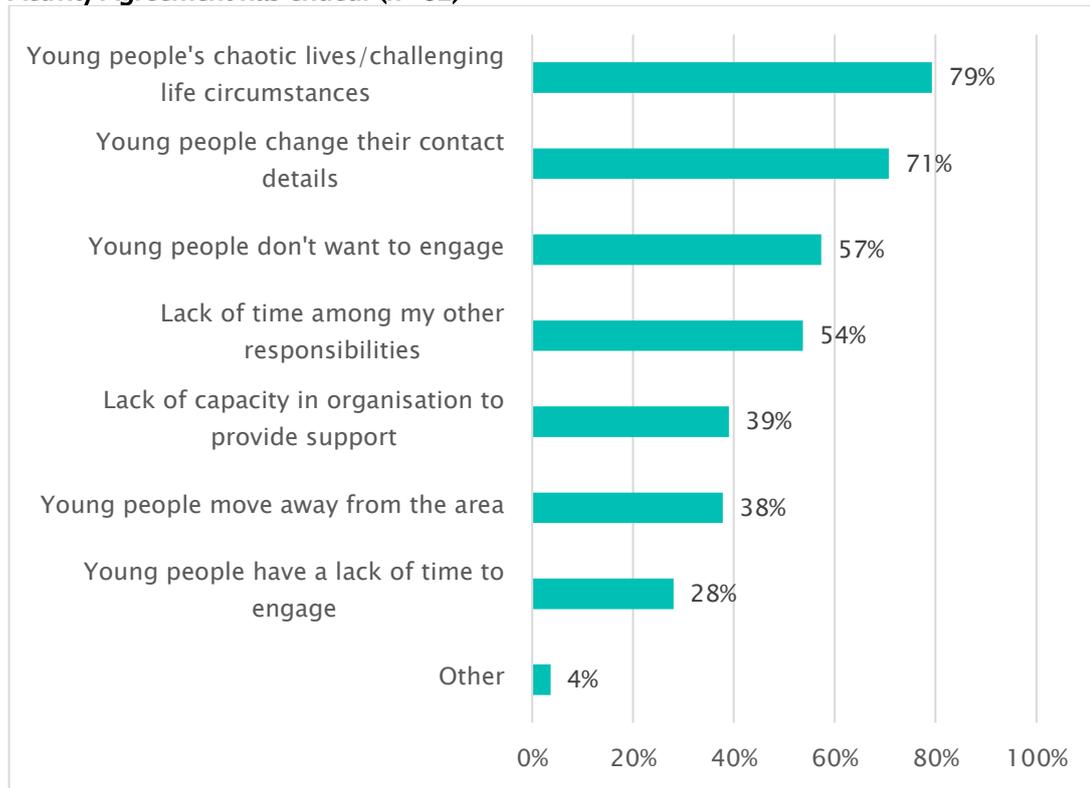
Reliance on the Trusted Professional

- 4.14 During the interviews with Trusted Professionals a few mentioned the challenge that young people can face when the Activity Agreement has ended, but where the young has become reliant on their Trusted Professional that continued engagement can act as a barrier. One participant felt that *“it may influence [the young person] to give up on what they are doing and come back to [us].”* Another respondent commented that *“the difficulty with the support after the Activity Agreement ends is that the young people sometimes find it hard to let go. They are used to receiving high quality support daily, weekly whatever is required and then they realise that they don’t see their worker quite as often. Sometimes this can be a scary time for the young people. The transition can sometimes be difficult.”*
- 4.15 It could also be the case that the Trusted Professionals, who are keen to make sure that the young people who they have supported over a sustained period of time progress into a positive destination, may also find it difficult to adjust to the aftercare model of support rather than the wide range of support they provide during the Activity Agreement period.

Difficulties in providing aftercare support

- 4.16 Chapter 2 explored the nature and format of support offered to young people by their Trusted Professionals and by other individuals. As Chapter 3 showed, support is a key enabler to young people sustaining their participation in the post-Activity Agreement destination and a barrier to those who do not receive it. Therefore it is important to understand some of the barriers that Trusted Professionals face in supporting young people during this aftercare phase.
- 4.17 The responses to the Trusted Professionals survey provided important insight into the main challenges that they experience in supporting young people after their Activity Agreements end.
- 4.18 As Figure 4.3 shows, the most common issues relate to young people’s chaotic lives and challenging circumstances (79%), young people changing their contact details (71%), and young people not wanting to engage (57%). As one Trusted Professional commented in the survey, communication with young people is often via text message and *“young people often lose or break their phones and can sometimes go without a phone for a while – that proves challenging.”*

Figure 4.3: What challenges have you experienced in supporting young people after their Activity Agreement has ended? (n=82)

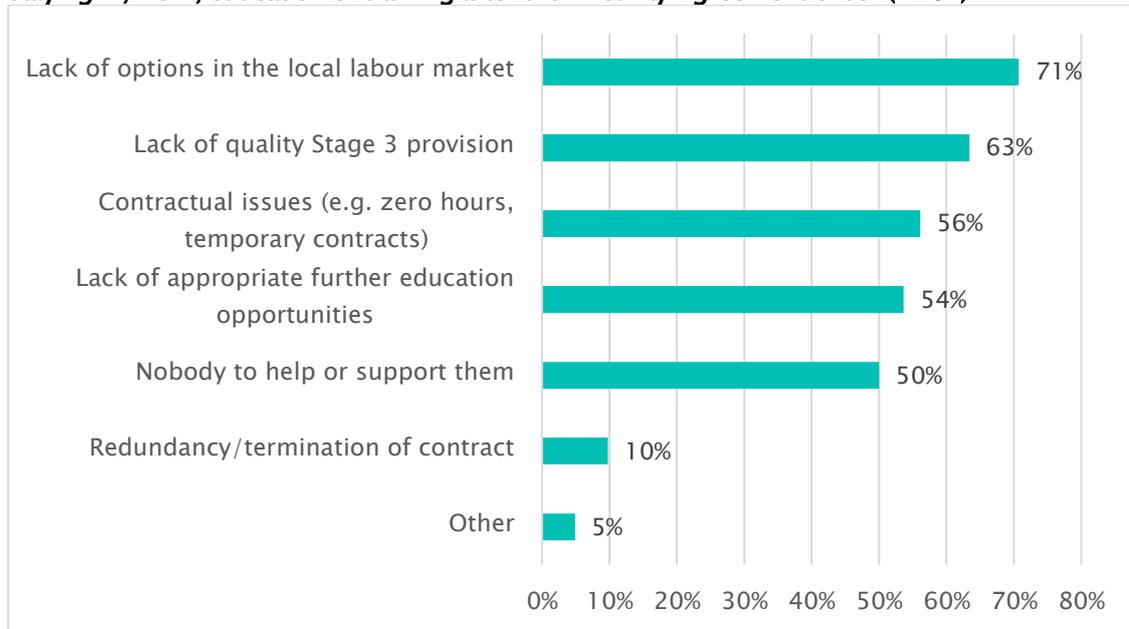


- 4.19 Whilst young people not wanting to engage is the third most common barrier, as one Trusted Professional pointed out, there is not necessarily a reason for young people to engage with them after they have completed their Activity Agreement, unless they require further support to sustain. This participant felt that it was important for young people to *“be allowed to move on [from an Activity Agreement] and only be provided with aftercare if it is their wish”*, and ongoing contact could *“inhibit the young person putting an often difficult life stage behind them and letting them move forward.”*
- 4.20 Lack of time to support young people after their Activity Agreements was also identified as a challenge. Some Trusted Professionals commented on this, highlighting *“you want to do more”* but heavy caseloads and not having the capacity or time to offer continued support beyond the Activity Agreement was a barrier. One Trusted Professional captured that frustration, saying that the young people *“may require more support than I can offer.”*
- 4.21 Whilst there were many examples of partnership working with other professionals, a few Trusted Professionals commented in the survey on the need for better communication with others that supported the young people so that their aftercare is relevant and complements the support being provided by others.

Limited labour market options

4.22 There were also external factors that play a role in affecting young people’s ability to progress and sustain a positive destination. Figure 4.4 lists the external issues that affect young people entering or staying in a positive destination after their Activity Agreement.

Figure 4.4: What are the external issues that prevent young people from getting into, or from staying in, work, education or training after their Activity Agreement ends? (n=82)



4.23 The availability of relevant and appropriate options in the local labour market is one key factor that impacts on young people’s ability to progress and sustain employment. In the survey, 71% of Trusted Professionals highlighted the lack of options in the local labour market as a barrier to sustained participation.

4.24 Trusted Professionals also pinpointed a lack of quality Stage 3 provision as a significant barrier to progression and sustainability with many observing that there are limited opportunities for young people to move to the next stage after their Activity Agreement. As one survey respondent said, there is a “*lack of realistic training opportunities that actually lead to employment for young people.*” When the profile of these respondents is examined further by local authority area, there is no clear difference between this view of the Stage 3 provision and opportunities whether in urban areas or rural areas.

4.25 Trusted Professionals from across the local authorities commented on the scarce employment opportunities for young people, explaining that where there were options, those that were available were not always appropriate for the young people. This situation was further exacerbated by the seasonal nature of employment opportunities and the time of year that a young person completed their Activity Agreement.

4.26 Even where opportunities for work, training and further education are found, a mismatch between a young person and a particular destination is often a barrier to sustaining participation. Nineteen per cent of those young people who reported facing challenges in

the survey agreed that a dislike for their job, training programme or course made it challenging for them to continue and 21% of Trusted Professionals echoed this view.

Financial barriers

- 4.27 While money can provide an incentive for young people to work, as the previous section of this report showed, on the other hand it can also act as a barrier to participation. Indeed, as Figure 4.1 shows, 29% of those young people who reported facing challenges in the survey, indicated that money and benefit problems in particular have made it difficult for them to move into or sustain a positive destination, and 24% of Trusted Professionals identified this issue as well (Figure 4.2). At one of the focus groups, a young person said that with a limited income it did make them wonder “*what’s the point in me sticking this out?*”
- 4.28 There were a few comments from the Trusted Professionals about the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). They felt that the allowance amount was insufficient to enable a young person to live comfortably and in addition there could often be delays processing the EMA. They explained that these delays are particularly significant in that it places a financial strain on young people and their families and that young people can be put off from participating as a result.

Readiness for work

- 4.29 This research highlights that despite the skills developed and the experiences gained during the Activity Agreement, some young people lack the skills required for work and this acts as a barrier to labour market participation beyond the Activity Agreement. As indicated in Figure 4.1, 10% of those young people who have faced challenges affecting their ability to progress and sustain felt that they were not prepared for work, training or education after their Activity Agreement, which made it difficult for them to move on or stay in a positive destination. Similarly, as Figure 4.2 shows, 52% of Trusted Professionals felt that young people had issues with work-readiness, and 33% indicated that young people often did not possess the skills necessary for the job or course.
- 4.30 Further responses to the Trusted Professionals’ survey shed light on the skills and attributes that were lacking. These included literacy and numeracy skills, confidence and being prepared. As a few young people explained, their limited maths and English skills meant they could not meet the minimum criteria required to secure a job or a place at college.
- 4.31 Trusted Professionals also described a lack of professionalism as a barrier to sustained participation in the labour market. There were several comments about timekeeping, absence from work and mobile phone usage with one Trusted Professional commenting that the working environment can be a “*culture shock*” for some young people.

Summary

- 4.32 As this Chapter has shown, the barriers that young people face that prevent sustainability in a positive destination are a result of many factors, some of which stem from the experiences and learning during their Activity Agreements. Other challenges relate to their personal circumstances and the support network and the extent to which they enable young people to address challenges that they face.
- 4.33 Crucially, however, young people's sustainability in a positive destination can be determined by extrinsic factors outwith their control. The local labour market and quality Stage 3 provision are key to providing the relevant opportunities for young people to progress into, and remain in, appropriate training and employment destinations.

5. Summary and key considerations for Activity Agreement sustainability

- 5.1 Activity Agreements are designed to engage young people in a tailored programme that will help them prepare for employment, training and further education. This research has helped to reaffirm that activities undertaken during the Agreement are key to enabling young people to transition and sustain a positive destination.
- 5.2 It has highlighted that the support of the Trusted Professional during and after the Activity Agreement aids and then reinforces young people's ability to sustain their participation. This report also shows that there are some key barriers within and outwith the young person's control that prevent them from continuing in employment, further education or training.
- 5.3 This chapter reflects on the enablers and barriers to entering and sustaining participation beyond the Activity Agreement and how the Activity Agreements and aftercare supports young people to overcome those intrinsic and extrinsic issues.

Sustaining participation post-Activity Agreement

- 5.4 The research surveyed 10% of the cohort of young people that completed an Activity Agreement between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017 and entered a positive destination. 78% of these young people had sustained their participation in employment, training or further education. With this cohort, the young people who entered training programmes at the end of their Activity Agreement, were least likely to sustain a positive destination.

Activity Agreements and how they develop and support young people

- 5.5 The varied activities within the Agreement provide learning and development opportunities that enhanced personal and life skills. The one-to-one support of the Trusted Professional was highly valued in helping to advise, encourage and develop the young people. For those respondents that accessed employability sessions and work experience or tasters this helped to understand the behaviours and skills required for the workplace. Although work tasters were not available to the majority of young people.
- 5.6 The skills development, confidence-building and experiences of the Activity Agreement provided the foundation for addressing the post-Activity Agreement challenges and 97% of the young people agreed that the Activity Agreement helped them to stay in employment, training or education.

Post-Activity Agreement support

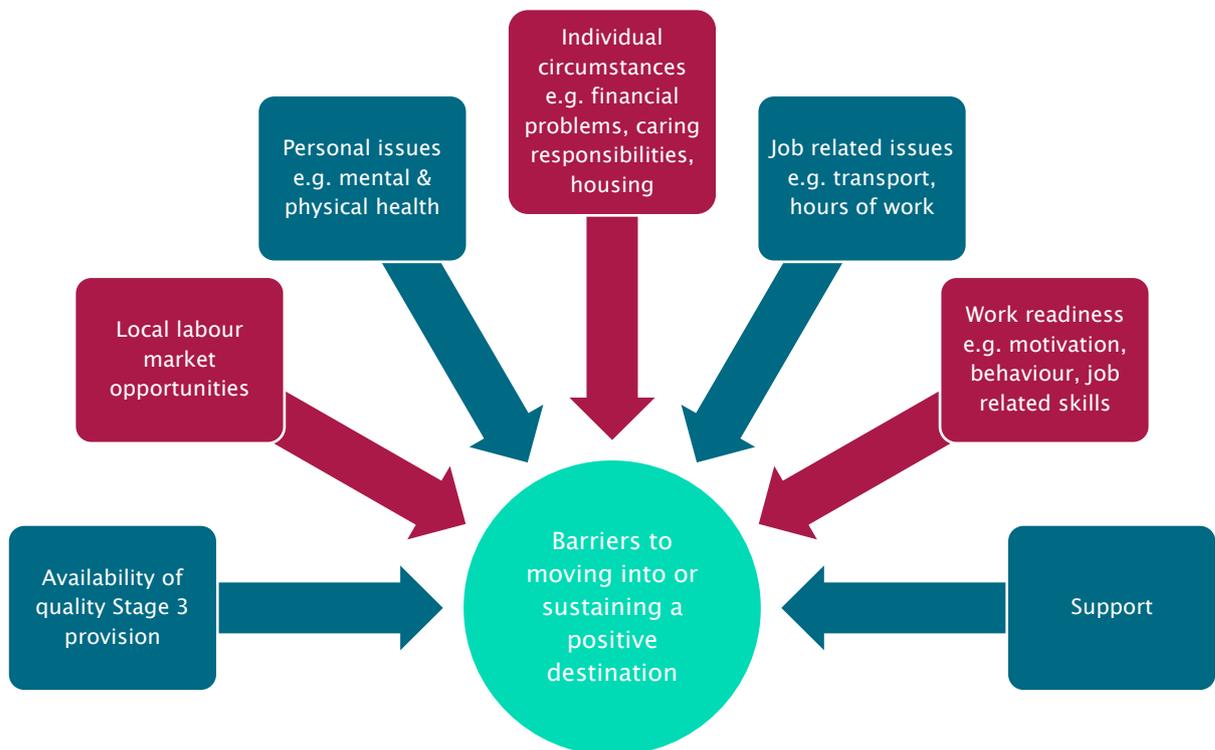
- 5.7 A large majority of young people had received some support after their Activity Agreement had ended from family and friends and/or their Trusted Professional. The majority of young people were still in contact with their Trusted Professional and this

aftercare support ranged from checking in and reassurance to employability support or acting as a bridge to other support services or professionals for the young person.

Enablers and barriers to sustaining participation in a positive destination

- 5.8 The research has highlighted that the key enablers to sustaining participation in a positive destination are the experiences of the Activity Agreements that help the young people develop skills and abilities, tailored to their needs, which can support them in their new destination. This is further enabled by the continued support of either family and friends or their Trusted Professional who acts as an encourager, advisor, problem solver and advocate to help them remain in work, education or training.
- 5.9 The barriers to the sustainability of the positive destination are summarised in Figure 5.1 and highlight the range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can impact on a young person.

Figure 5.1: Barriers to moving into or sustaining a positive destination



Future considerations

- 5.10 Based on the findings from this research, there are some issues that could be considered by the relevant partners that would strengthen the young people's experience of their Activity Agreements and help support them to progress and sustain their positive destinations.

Activity Agreement content

- The most common activities in the Agreements focus on the personal and social development of the young people. Whilst this is a crucial development area, local authorities should consider reviewing the opportunities on offer to the young people to ensure that employability sessions and activities that help improve their work readiness are an even stronger feature of the Agreements.
- Mental health issues were identified as an issue by the young people and Trusted Professionals. If this is such a prevalent issue then accessing support, where possible, during the Activity Agreement period could help reduce the mental health challenges that are affecting some young people's ability to sustain their post-Agreement destinations.

Work experience and tasters

- The work experience and tasters play a valuable role in helping young people identify the type of employment that might suit them, know what to expect and understand the behaviours and skills required to be part of a workplace. Whilst the local labour market dictates the availability of certain sectors, engaging and supporting more organisations that can provide tasters and placements could improve the availability of these experiences.

Stage 3 provision

- After the Activity Agreement ends, there needs to be more appropriate opportunities for training/employment progression so that those young people can move through the next stages and eventually on to employment. There needs to be work done at a national and a local level to understand how this shortage of good quality Stage 3 provision can be addressed.

Exiting the Activity Agreement

- Local authorities should consider opportunities to reinforce the process for exiting the Activity Agreement. A structured exit should ensure that the aftercare role of the Trusted Professional is discussed, that the support network that will be available to the young person is explored and, where possible, the young person is linked into the various professionals that will play a role in the sustainability of their new destination. These would include those that will address issues like health, financial support so that the Trusted Professional in providing aftercare could more uniquely focus on employability related matters.

Continue to strengthen local partnerships with employers, training and further education providers

- The Opportunities for All Co-ordinators and Trusted Professionals work well with their contacts in further education settings, employers and training providers. More

networking and even greater partnership working could help to expand the work experience, employment, training pathways offered to young people. It could also help establish regular communication and liaison about post-Activity Agreement progress so that those young people that need further support can be timely identified.

A formal aftercare support model

- The variation in young people's and Trusted Professionals' experiences of post-Activity Agreement support is indicative of the range of support and time frame over which it is delivered. This reflects the high degree of autonomy in local authorities as to how post-Activity Agreement support is delivered. The Activity Agreement model would benefit from being broadened to incorporate a formalised and resourced aftercare component. This would still be personalised support but with careful consideration of the parameters of the support and time frame for providing the aftercare.

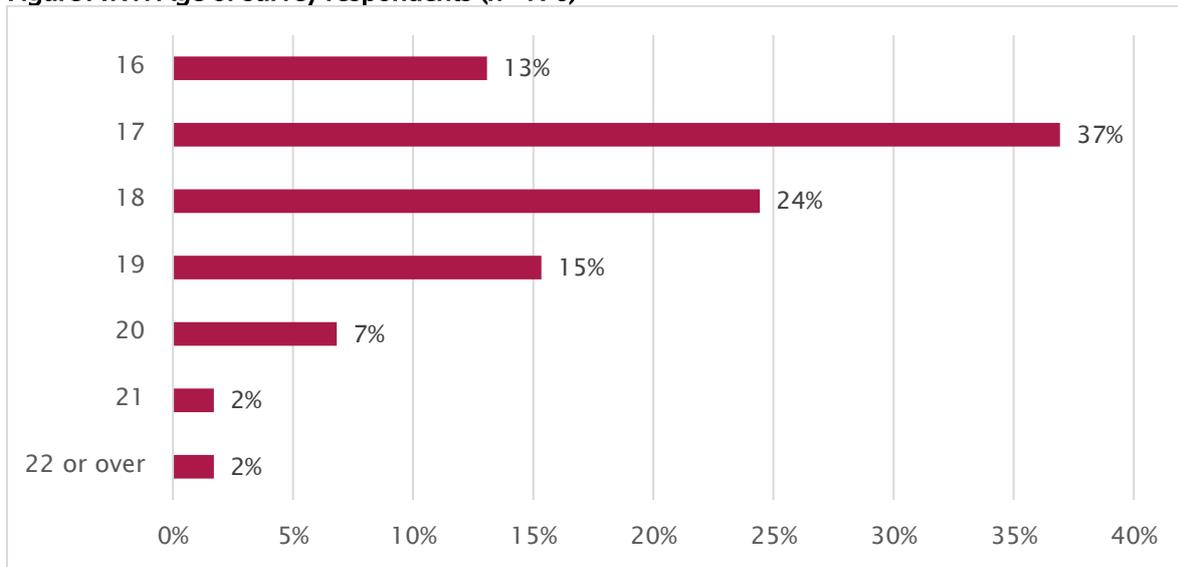
APPENDIX 1 – PROFILE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND TRUSTED PROFESSIONALS

Young people

Survey respondents

The largest group of participants in our research were respondents aged 17 (37%), while only 4% were aged 21 or over (Figure A1.1).

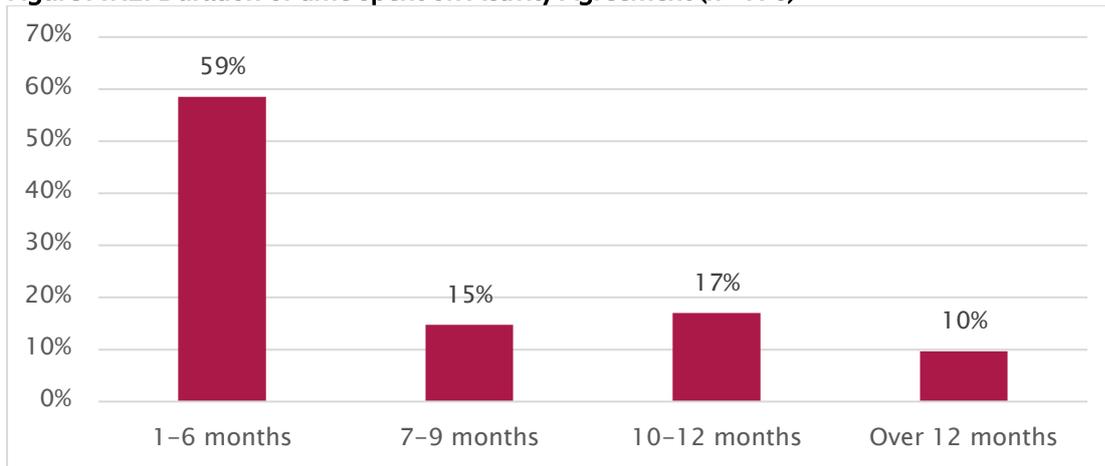
Figure A1.1: Age of survey respondents (n=176)



Almost all young people who responded to the survey were white (97%), and most respondents (75%) did not have a disability. Twenty-one per cent of young people said that they considered themselves to have a disability, and the remainder preferred not to answer.

Just over half (55%) of the young people stated that they had commenced their Activity Agreement straight from school. Of the 45% young people who did not start their Activity Agreement straight after school, 28% stated that they were in further education or training during the time between school and their Activity Agreement, and 8% were in employment. However, 46% stated they had not done anything during this time.

Figure A1.2: Duration of time spent on Activity Agreement (n=176)



Most participants spent between one and six months on their Activity Agreement (59%), while only one in ten were on the Agreement for over 12 months (Figure A1.2).

A majority of the respondents (93%) had completed their Activity Agreement. The main reason given for non-completion was a successful transition to employment, education or training.

Interviews and focus groups with young people

We engaged with a total of 50 participants during our interviews and focus groups with young people. Figure A1.3 breaks this figure down by local authority.

Figure A1.3: Interview and focus group participants broken down by local authority

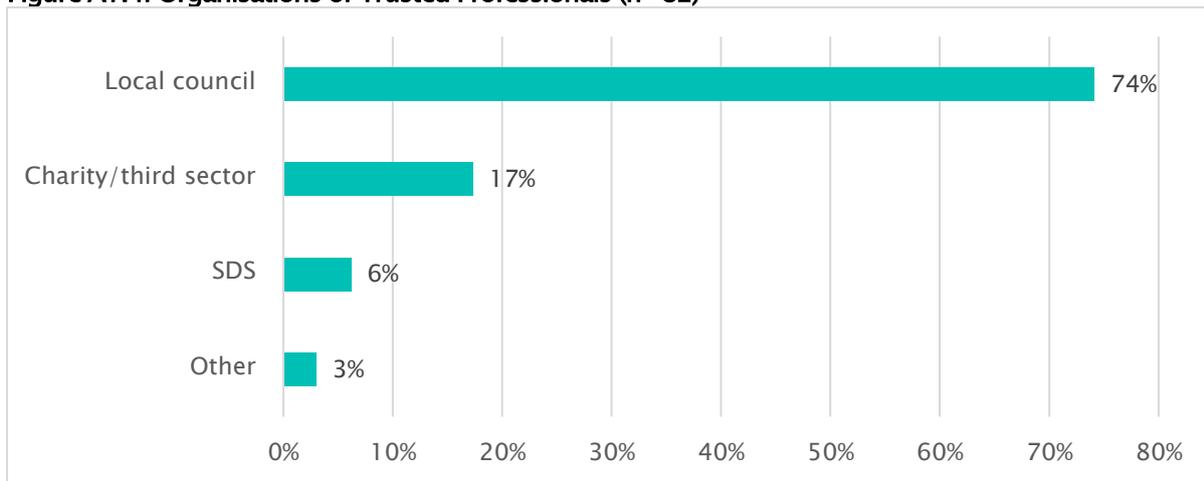
Local authority	Number of participants
Glasgow	13
South Lanarkshire	8
West Lothian	8
Highland	6
Falkirk	4
South Ayrshire	4
North Ayrshire	2
East Lothian	1
Edinburgh	1
North Lanarkshire	1
West Dunbartonshire	1
East Ayrshire	1
Total	50

Trusted Professionals

We received a total of 82 responses from across 25 local authorities, with most responses from Edinburgh (13%), and a high number also from Highland (10%) and West Lothian (10%).

Of the 82 participants, 56% described being a Trusted Professional as their main role. Figure A1.4 shows that many participants worked for their local council (74%), including public services such as education, while a smaller number worked for charities such as the Bridges Project and Aspire Scotland (17%).

Figure A1.4: Organisations of Trusted Professionals (n=82)



There were many similarities noted between the Trusted Professionals' descriptions of their roles. Similarities across roles involved young people, employability, skills development, vulnerable people (such as disabled or homeless people) and education.