



Progress BBO Phase 2 Evaluation

Learning from
programme delivery
during Covid-19

On behalf of Groundwork UK



July 2020

Prepared for Groundwork UK

**Progress BBO Phase 2 Evaluation: Learning from delivery
during Covid-19**

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New Skills Consulting is a leading UK economic regeneration and funding consultancy. Combining expert knowledge with a practical hands-on approach, we help our clients develop and deliver successful projects.

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Contents

| | | |
|----------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Introduction | 4 |
| 1.1 | Programme overview | 4 |
| 1.2 | Programme evaluation | 5 |
| 2 | Programme delivery | 6 |
| 2.1 | Support provided / accessed | 6 |
| 2.2 | What has worked well and why? | 9 |
| 2.3 | What has worked less well and why? | 12 |
| 2.4 | Key findings | 13 |
| 3 | Impact on young people | 15 |
| 3.1 | Key findings | 17 |

1 Introduction

1.1 Programme overview

Progress provides bespoke support to young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET in Coventry and Warwickshire. Funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and The National Lottery Community Fund (formerly the Big Lottery Fund) through the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Programme, Progress started delivery in November 2016 and was due to end in June 2019. However, the programme was subsequently extended, with a new end date of March 2022.

This second phase of Programme delivery, which began in July 2019, aims to support at least 849 young people aged 15-24 years old.

Progress is targeted primarily at the 'hardest to reach' young people NEET with more complex barriers, who experience long-term disengagement or who may be dissatisfied with opportunities or who are most vulnerable to economic downturn and shifting labour market requirements. The Programme's primary aims are:

- To help young people overcome the personal barriers and challenges preventing them from engaging positively in learning or work.
- To provide a clear pathway for young people to increase their skills and take the first steps on their future career path through training or employment.

Groundwork UK is the lead partner of Progress, responsible for overall Programme management. It is supported by four end-to-end partners, who are responsible for programme delivery, employing Progress Coaches and providing support to young people from engagement on to sustained progression. The partnership also includes seven specialist partners, who provide support to address specific client barriers and needs, including functional skills, mental health problems, emotional and behavioural issues and job search. Clients are referred to specialists by end-to-end partners.

Progress Coaches, who are experienced youth workers or employment advisers, are at the heart of the model. Progress Coaches build strong, trusted relationships with each young person to develop an individual action plan, which is reviewed on a regular basis, and to positively challenge them throughout the process.

Table 1: Progress Partnership

| Role | Organisations |
|---------------------|--|
| Lead partner | Groundwork UK |
| End-to-end partners | Groundwork West Midlands; Positive Youth Foundation (PYF); Prospects; Numidia Education and Training. |
| Specialist partners | Coventry Job Shop; Innovating Minds; Learn2 Group; Motorvate UK; Team Springboard; Values Education for Life; Voluntary Action Coventry. |

1.2 Programme evaluation

Groundwork UK commissioned New Skills Consulting in Summer 2019 to independently evaluate the second phase of Progress. This builds on our work evaluating the first phase of Progress. The aim of the evaluation is to understand the impact and effectiveness of Progress in supporting disadvantaged young people to make changes in their lives and move closer to the labour market.

The original purpose of this phase of the evaluation was to review performance to date across the first 12 months of Programme delivery (July 2019 to June 2020); assess the efficacy of the delivery model arrangements; and identify any key lessons learned and recommendations to improve delivery. However, the outbreak of coronavirus in the UK and the subsequent lockdown had a significant impact on the delivery of Progress.

In discussion with Groundwork UK, it was agreed that the scope of the evaluation should be revised to reflect the context in which Progress is currently being delivered, and should focus on the impact of Covid-19 on both Programme delivery methods and on the young people it is supporting.

The contents of this report are extracted from the full Progress Phase 2 Second Evaluation Report. In the following sections it provides an overview of:

- The effectiveness of Programme delivery arrangements, with a particular focus on how delivery has been adapted during lockdown; the efficacy of steps taken to maintain the engagement of young people; and any examples of good practice and innovation in delivery.
- The impact of the current situation on young people, including whether lockdown has created additional barriers and challenges; if it has exacerbated existing problems; and any impact on how young people feel about finding work or achieving other positive outcomes.

2 Programme delivery

This section assesses how partners have adapted their delivery methods and models during the lockdown and considers what is working well and why.

2.1 Support provided / accessed

Young people on Progress generally receive one-to-one support from a Progress Coach, usually on a weekly basis, to help them set goals, address personal barriers, and access practical help such as developing an action plan, writing a CV and improving job search skills. Some participants access additional support from specialist providers, such as maths and English courses; and a number of Progress clients also participate in group sessions where they join in activities such as baking, gardening or gym sessions.

However, the introduction of the lockdown left Progress partners unable to deliver much of this support, which is largely delivered face-to-face either with individuals or in small group sessions. It has, therefore, been necessary for Progress Coaches to find alternative ways to maintain contact with clients and to continue to deliver support.

Feedback from Progress partners demonstrates that they have adapted delivery in a number of ways, often making use of technology to find alternative ways to deliver support. Examples include:

- Regular phone calls, emails and texts to maintain contact with young people.
- One-to-one support via video calls, for example Prospects offered clients the option of having one-to-one sessions via Teams.
- Emailing / posting work to young people to complete at home. For example, Motorvate has developed remote learning materials such as driving theory test quizzes; and Learn2 has sent out maths and English practice tests.
- Supporting young people to access online learning resources from education and training providers.
- Remote delivery of employment support, including CV development, emailing job advertisements, support with completing job applications and practice interviews by phone and online. Where clients are considered to be more job ready, coaches have been encouraging them to apply for jobs where vacancies have increased, for example in supermarkets, warehousing and delivery.
- Dropping off packages to young people at home to encourage them to take up activities and hobbies. For example, Groundwork West Midlands has delivered kits for colouring and crochet; and Team Springboard has delivered Ready, Steady, Grow packages of seeds, compost and pots, with an accompanying online instruction video.
- Delivering a range of online group sessions, from practical activities such as CV workshops to more informal and fun activities such as fitness and yoga sessions. This includes Positive Youth Foundation, who have been delivering online yoga groups; and Voluntary Action Coventry, who have delivered online sessions in mindfulness, meditation, and arts & crafts.

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- Setting up groups on social media, such as the Numidia Facebook Group, to provide information, guidance, tips and positive messages; and to encourage conversation and peer support between young people.
- Setting up a weekly timetable of support from specialist providers, with activities that are open to all Progress clients. For example: a weekly webinar on mental health topics from Innovating Minds; online interview skills and CV workshops from Job Shop; and drop-in telephone discussions on coping with anxiety from Values Education for Life.

Feedback from coaches indicates that the main focus of support provided has been on wellbeing and mental health, for example talking to young people about their anxieties and worries; helping them to develop coping strategies; and encouraging them to develop and maintain a weekly routine through exercise, healthy eating and participating in support activities. They have also focused on sustaining participants' engagement with Progress by delivering informal and fun activities to maintain interest and motivation. Where young people have been able to participate and are receptive to it, coaches have also been delivering more practical support such as working on action plans, job search and CV development.

This is reflected in feedback from young people. Of the 41 who responded to the online survey, 63% said that they had been taking part in one-to-one discussions with their Progress Coach and 54% have received mental health or wellbeing support. Meanwhile 49% have had help to develop a CV and the same proportion have been supported to look for a job, while 41% have worked on their action plan.

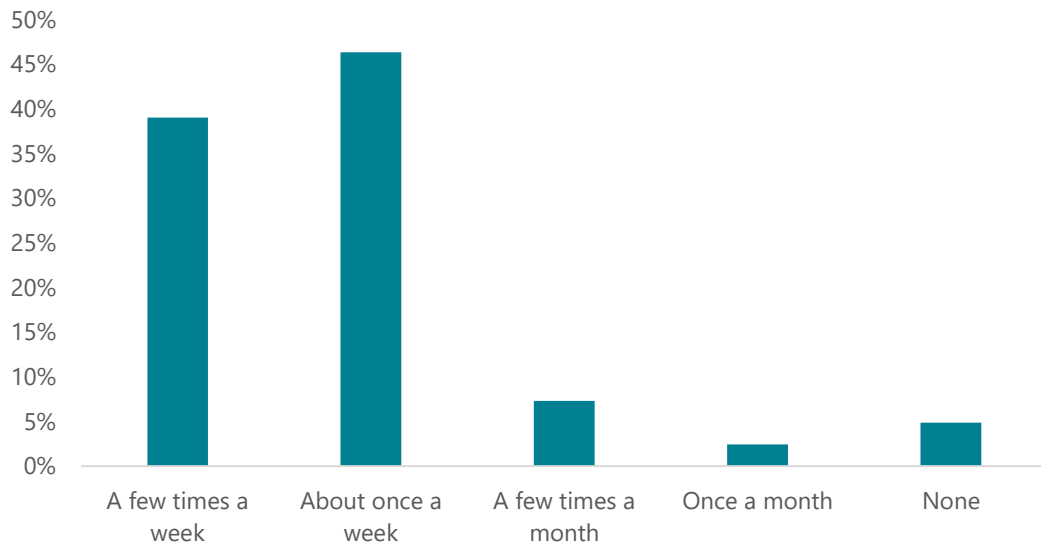
Figure 1: Main types of support accessed



Feedback suggests that, overall, coaches have been able to maintain regular contact with many of their clients. Of the 41 survey respondents, 46% said they had been in contact with their Progress Coach once per week, while 39% had been in contact a few times per week. A much smaller proportion had been in contact with their coach a few times per month (7%) or only once per month (2%), while 5% said they had not had any contact with their coach during lockdown.

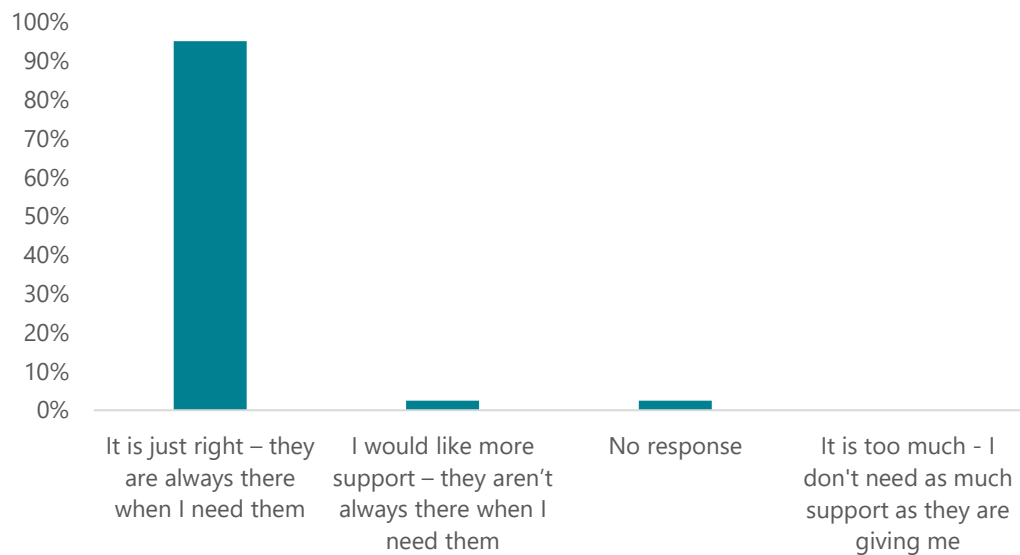
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Figure 2: How much contact have you had with your Progress Coach during lockdown?



The feedback from young people indicates that they are happy with the amount of support they have received from Progress during the lockdown, with 95% opting for 'It is just right – they are always there when I need them'. Meanwhile, only 2% felt they would like more support, and none felt the support had been too much.

Figure 3: Please tell us what you think about the amount of support you have received from Progress during the lockdown.



2.2 What has worked well and why?

It is clear from the consultations that some Progress partners have taken an innovative approach to adapting delivery during lockdown, using a process of trial and error to test out different activities. Feedback from Programme staff and young people highlights a number of the approaches and initiatives have been successful.

Frequency of contact

In many cases coaches have been in contact at least once per week with their clients, ensuring they maintain the relationship and reassure young people that support is still available and accessible when they need it. This approach to providing support 'little and often' has helped to keep young people interested and engaged in Progress without overwhelming them.

In some cases, coaches have been able to increase the amount of support they are delivering to clients due to the different delivery methods used. For example, clients who may have been accessing support for 1 to 2 hours per week via face-to-face meetings and / or group activities, have been able to access four to five hours of support through regular telephone contact and online group activities.

Feedback from young people themselves suggests that having a regular and reassuring presence in their coach has been important to them. When asked to describe the best thing about the support during lockdown, responses included:

"If I'm in a bad way they are always there to help me calm down."

"Just knowing that there's someone to talk to even if I don't always need it."

"To have her call me to check that I'm ok."

"She listens, fun to work with, calls when she says she is going to call."

Creating routine

When reporting on the benefits of Progress, coaches often highlight the importance of it creating a regular routine for young people, particularly for those with chaotic lives, lack of confidence or low motivation. This is backed up by young people themselves, who feel that accessing the support gives them a reason to get up and leave the house. Given the restrictions of lockdown, therefore, there was a significant risk of this routine being lost.

Coaches have provided a range of support to help young people maintain some sense of routine in their daily lives, for example by scheduling calls at the same time as their pre-lockdown weekly appointments; or setting small challenges and goals to achieve each week, such as quizzes or taking exercise.

Fun and informal activities

Whilst it has not been possible for coaches to maintain the full range of formal and practical aspects of Progress support during lockdown, they have sought new and different ways to support young people and maintain their engagement with the Programme. This includes the delivery of less formal and more fun activities, including taking up new hobbies, joining online exercise groups, or taking part in online group chats where they can connect with peers to share ideas or vent their frustrations.

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These activities have helped to keep young people motivated and provided an opportunity to develop skills and improve their confidence in a non-threatening way. Feedback also suggests it has helped to bring young people together and fostered a sense of community and peer support, which has helped to address feelings of isolation. For example, young people have used social media groups to keep in touch, share ideas, tell others how they are feeling or post messages of support to each other.

"[The best thing was] the Zoom call. Met new people and gave me the opportunity to learn new things."

Variety

Boredom has been a particular challenge for young people during lockdown, and coaches have been testing out a wide range of activities to keep their clients occupied and feeling positive.

In particular, they have been successful in using social media such as Facebook to maintain contact and encourage clients to try out new and different activities. For example, by setting art, exercise, gardening, cooking and writing challenges and getting young people to share their work online.

Figure 4: Images from Numidia Facebook page

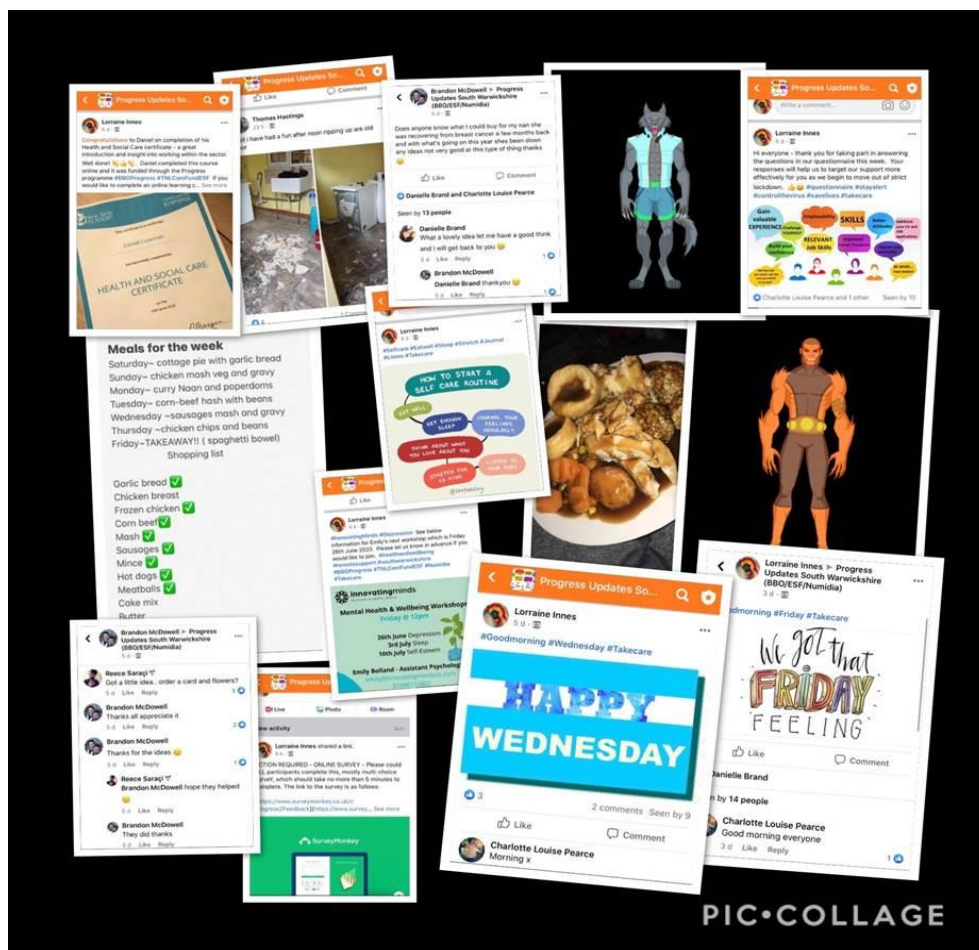
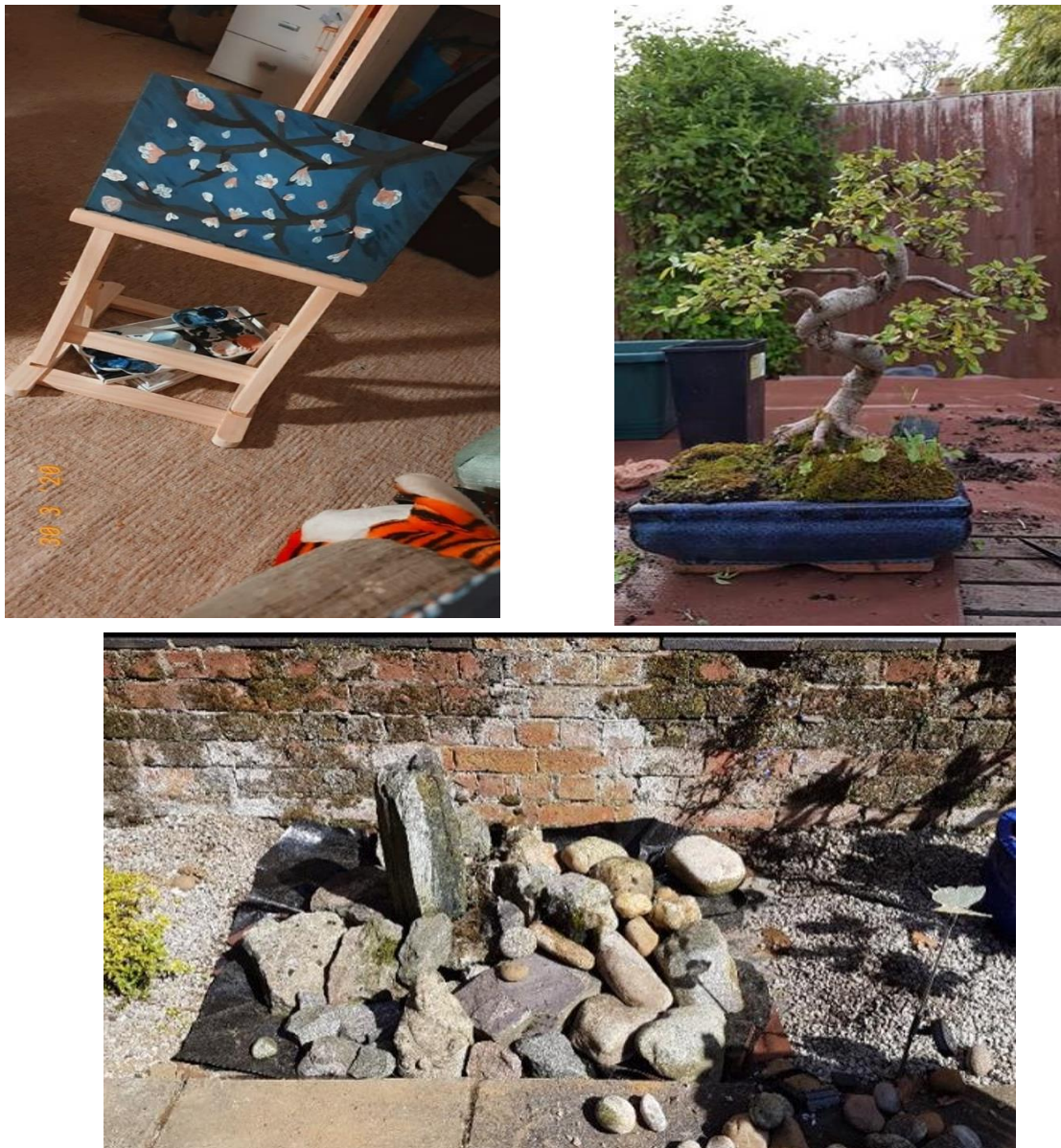


Figure 5: Hobby photographs shared by Progress clients



There have also been examples of young people being encouraged to teach their hobby or skills to their coach or to other young people, for example by creating and sharing a video. Not only has this given them a new and different task to complete, coaches report that feeling that they have something valuable to teach others has increased their confidence and feelings of self-worth.

Partner support

As well as finding new and different ways to support their clients, Progress partners have also been successful in finding alternative ways to communicate with and support each other. Feedback from delivery partners on the support provided by Groundwork UK during lockdown is very positive, with many consultees commenting that there has been regular contact, good sharing of information and that support has been highly responsive and reassuring.

Progress BBO Phase 2 Evaluation: Learning from delivery during Covid-19, NSC, 2020

In particular, partners highlighted the weekly one-to-one calls to review progress, which they have found helpful and informative. Partners also value the regular online meetings, which have given them an opportunity to share ideas, learn from each other and discuss problems and challenges. Feedback suggests the online catch-up meetings have also helped partners to feel more connected and less isolated at a time when most have been working from home.

2.3 What has worked less well and why?

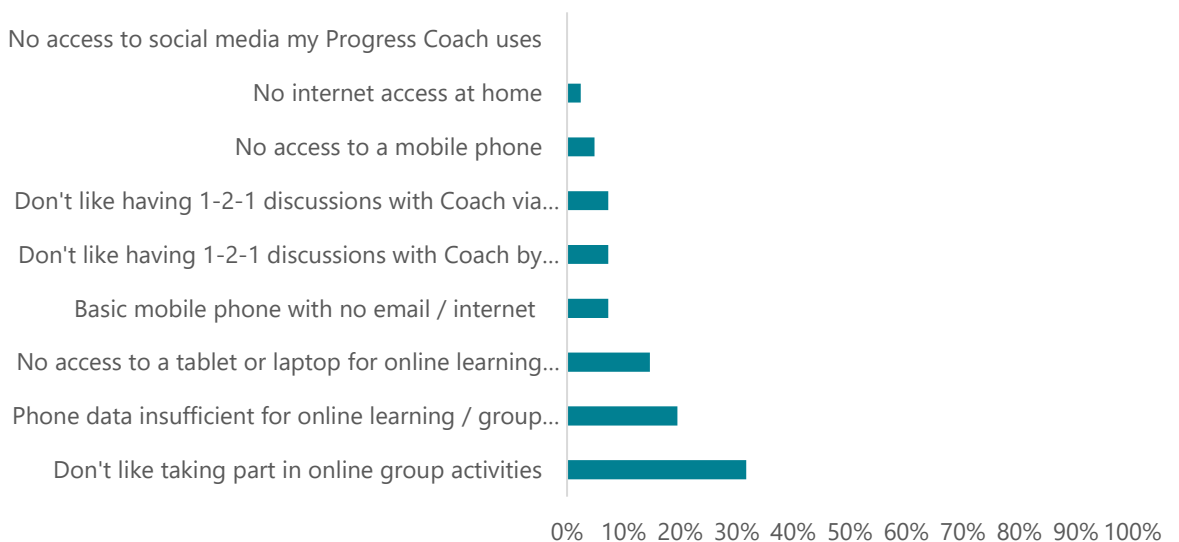
Feedback also suggests that some aspects of the support during lockdown have been more challenging, or less effective at engaging and maintaining the interest of participants.

Technology issues

Whilst technology has been used to great effect in delivering support remotely to clients, it has also presented challenges and barriers. For example, not all young people on Progress have access to a smart phone; they may have basic or outdated IT equipment; they may have no or limited internet access; and in some cases they are sharing IT equipment with school-age siblings who are learning from home. A number of coaches also suggested that, due to their wide use of mobile phones and social media, there is an assumption that young people are confident and proficient in the use of technology. However, in reality many are unfamiliar with the applications being used to deliver support, such as Zoom and Teams, and may also feel uncomfortable using them due to shyness and lack of confidence.

This is reflected in feedback from young people themselves, with just under a third (32%) of survey respondents saying that they do not like taking part in online group activities. In addition, 20% have insufficient phone data to participate in online learning or activities and 15% have no access to a tablet or laptop for online learning.

Figure 6: Have you had any problems in getting support from Progress during lockdown?



Remote learning

A number of partners have tried to maintain client participation in learning activities by sending out work by email, or by post for those who do not have access to email. However, the rates of completion of work have been very low and some clients have reported to their coach that they do not enjoy working alone without any support, therefore their motivation to complete the work is low. Feedback suggests that to encourage participants to learn in this way, some level of interaction with the coach is required. For example, one coach reported that they had been providing clients with input and support via video calls.

Specialist timetable

A timetable has been created of activities delivered by specialist partners at set times each week. These activities, which are open to all Progress clients, include online workshops, exercise classes, art and craft activities and informal drop-in chats. The timetable is shared with Progress clients by E2E partners, with the aim of giving them a wide variety of activities that they can easily access whenever they feel they need some support and contact with other people.

To date, uptake of the activities on offer has been low and very few young people have accessed the sessions available. In part, this may be because it is a relatively recent initiative that has had insufficient time to become established. In addition, many young people lack the confidence to access the sessions, which in most cases are delivered by people they do not know and in groups of other young people they have not met before. Feedback suggests that, where young people have accessed the activities, they have done so when their Progress Coach has also joined the session, providing reassurance and a familiar face.

Nevertheless, feedback on the timetable overall is positive, with E2E and specialist partners reporting that it is a good idea and one that they are keen to continue. Where young people have accessed sessions, even where only one or two have engaged, coaches report that the results have been positive, and that young people have enjoyed and benefited from the support.

2.4 Key findings

- Progress partners have **adapted delivery in a number of ways** to ensure they maintain contact with their clients, often using technology to find alternative ways to deliver support, including phone calls, emails, texts, online workshops and social media groups.
- The main focus of support provided has been on participants' **wellbeing and mental health**, as well as on **maintaining their engagement** with Progress.
- In many cases coaches have **maintained contact at least once per week** with their clients and in some cases have been able to **increase the amount of weekly support** due to the different delivery methods used.
- For young people, the most valuable aspect of the support during lockdown has been the **continued contact with their Progress Coach**, which has been reassuring and given them someone to talk to whenever they need it.
- **A number of delivery approaches and initiatives have been successful**, including providing a **variety** of support 'little and often'; introducing **fun**

and informal activities to keep young people engaged; helping young people to maintain a sense of **routine**; and encouraging a sense of community and **peer support** through online groups and social media.

- More **challenging aspects of delivery** include access to and confidence with **technology**; **low motivation to participate in remote learning** activities; and encouraging young people to participate in activities offered via the specialist timetable.

3 Impact on young people

This section explores what impact the lockdown has had on young people, for example whether it has exacerbated any existing problems they were facing or created any new challenges.

Many young people on Progress face personal challenges, barriers and issues that prevent them from progressing. These include:

- **Mental health issues**, including anxiety, and depression.
- **Isolation** due to time spent alone at home. In turn, this was making anxiety and depression worse.
- **Complex learning needs** such as a learning disability or difficulty.
- **Complex and chaotic home lives** including relationship problems with their family, bereavement, alcohol abuse, drug taking, and domestic violence within the home.
- **Negative external influences** from friends and family members.
- **Poor academic achievement** including having few or no qualifications and poor basic skills.
- **Lack of motivation** to get a job or to progress into education or training.
- **Lack of confidence** often exacerbated by other challenges and barriers being faced.

Given the complex challenges faced by Progress clients, there were real concerns among partners that the lockdown could stall the progress made by clients to date, and in some cases cause them to regress. In particular there were concerns that the lack of contact with coaches and being forced to stay at home could increase isolation, depression and anxiety; exacerbate domestic problems; and impact on motivation.

Feedback from coaches indicates that Progress clients have responded to the situation in different ways, often depending upon their individual circumstances. Some young people have reported to their coaches that they are coping relatively well with lockdown; while others have experienced negative impacts, including:

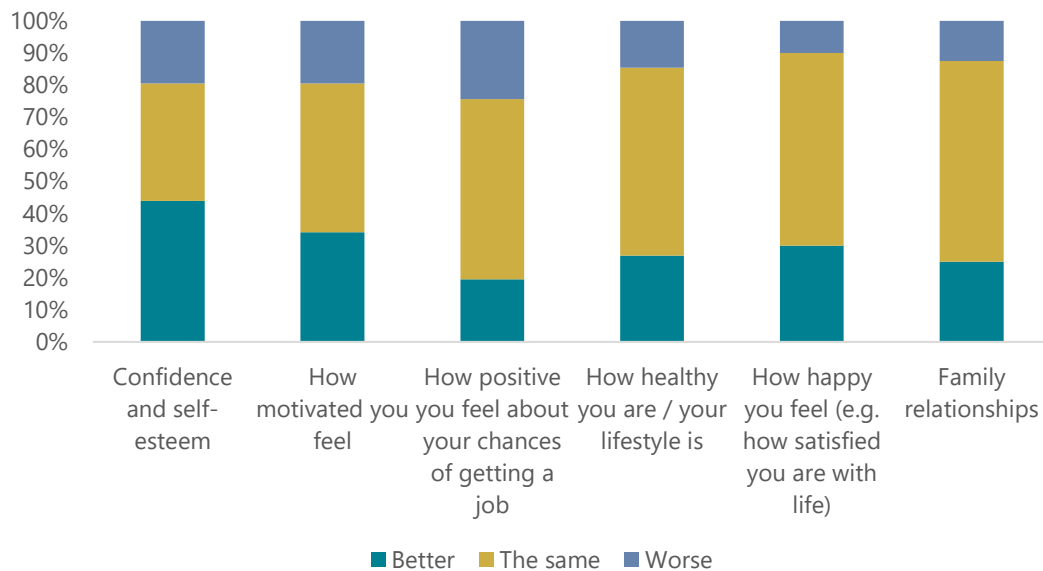
- Many Progress clients experience social anxiety, and some have seen lockdown as a legitimate reason to not leave the house. While in many cases this has temporarily reduced feelings of anxiety, coaches are concerned that it will be even more challenging for them to leave the house as lockdown is lifted.
- Some young people who have chaotic home lives and poor family relationships have experienced depression as a result of being pushed into a household space they don't want to be in.
- A number of young people have experienced increased anxiety and low motivation due to disrupted routines and sleep patterns.
- Coaches report that some young people have had problems with anger management due to boredom and feeling of lack of control over the situation.

Progress BBO Phase 2 Evaluation: Learning from delivery during Covid-19, NSC, 2020

- Prior to lockdown, a number of clients had reached a position where they felt ready to progress into employment, education or volunteering. Subsequently being unable to take this next step has left them feeling frustrated and demotivated.
- In a small number of cases coaches report that young people have experienced severe mental health problems as a result of the lockdown, and have referred them to Innovating Minds for more intensive, specialist support.

This mixed picture of the impact of lockdown on young people is reflected in feedback to the survey. Respondents were asked whether they felt things had got better, worse or stayed the same, across a range of indicators. In the majority of cases, young people said they felt things were the same, while some felt that they had actually managed to make further progress, and a small proportion felt that things had got worse.

Figure 7: Thinking about how you feel now compared to before lockdown started, please tell us whether you think things have got better or worse or stayed the same.



The area where young people felt they had made the most progress during lockdown was in confidence and self-esteem, with 44% of survey respondents saying this had improved. Meanwhile around a third (34%) said their motivation had improved and 30% said they felt happier.

The most significant negative impact has been on how positive young people feel about their chances of getting a job, with almost one quarter (24%) of survey respondents saying this had got worse during lockdown. Meanwhile, one in five survey respondents said they felt their confidence and self-esteem had got worse, and the same proportion said their motivation was worse.

To further gauge the impact of lockdown on Progress participants, survey respondents were presented with a series of statements and asked to select which one best described how they were feeling now.

Figure 8: Which one of the following statements best describes how you feel currently?



The responses indicate that the lockdown has had a negative impact for 61% of participants, although in the majority of cases (41%) this has been a less severe level of anxiety and these young people generally feel that they will be ok. However, for 20% of young people the impact has been more severe, with 10% saying that they had experienced mental health problems and would like some support; and 10% who feel they have been struggling with their mental health and feel worried about their future. Meanwhile, just over one third (37%) said that they feel happy and do not have any worries about their mental health.

This feedback from young people backs up the concerns expressed by Progress Coaches, who feel that some young people may have taken a backward step in their progress during lockdown. A number of coaches suggested that some clients will require additional support to rebuild their confidence and mental health as lockdown lifts and they begin to transition back into normal life.

3.1 Key findings

- The lockdown has **impacted on Progress clients in different ways**, with some coping relatively well, while others have experienced negative impacts such as anger, increased isolation, anxiety and worsening mental health.
- The area where young people have made the most progress during lockdown is **confidence and self-esteem**, while the most significant negative impact has been on **how positive they feel about their chances of getting a job**.
- Feedback suggests that the lockdown has had a **negative impact on 61% of Progress clients**, with 20% reporting more severe mental health impacts that require some help and support.
- As lockdown begins to lift it is likely that a proportion of Progress clients will **require additional support with mental health and confidence building** to help them make the transition back into normal life.





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