

Evaluation of SkillForce Zero Exclusions Pilot: Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

SkillForce is an education charity working with 10,000 young people in schools in Great Britain who are in danger of leaving school without the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life. Over the last ten years SkillForce has delivered qualifications and positive outcomes to over 35,000 young people with consistently outstanding results. The vision of SkillForce is that every young person, whatever their background or ability, is given the chance to fulfil their potential and become a valued member of their community.

The Zero Exclusions pilot: The Zero Exclusions pilot is made up of a series of initiatives which are being implemented with different groups of young people around the country. This report is based on data from the pilot programmes based in Birmingham, Leicester, Oxfordshire, Newcastle, Leeds, Devon, Kent and Manchester.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation: The research aimed to inform future policy examining the efficacy of the different time scales and intensity of the provision in relation to their effectiveness in supporting young people and maintaining them in education.

Methods adopted

Data were collected in relation to exclusions, attendance, behaviour, attainment and progression. Questionnaires were completed by participants and staff. They explored reactions to the programme, its perceived impact, its strengths and any weaknesses.

Questionnaires were completed by a total of seven SkillForce team leaders, 20 instructors, one link teacher, four members of school senior management teams and 96 young people.

Visits were made to six projects: Newcastle, Oxfordshire, Birmingham, Manchester, Kent and Leeds. During these visits interviews were undertaken with available school staff, SkillForce personnel, students and their parents. Interviews were undertaken with ten instructors, nine members of school staff, 28 students and four parents. Telephone or face-to-face interviews were undertaken with all of the SkillForce team leaders involved in the eight pilot projects.

Findings

The participants: The nature of the pilot projects meant that participants on some programmes tended to exhibit more extreme difficulties than those who normally participated in SkillForce programmes.

The nature of the activities: The students participated in a wide range of activities while on the programme. All programmes included a wide range of out of school activities.

Selection of participants and introduction to the programme: The nature of the Zero Exclusions pilot meant that there was a greater emphasis on schools selecting participants. These students may have been under particular pressure to participate as they were at risk of exclusion. The programme was introduced to participants and their parents adopting

normal SkillForce procedures. Parents' attendance at launch events was in some cases very poor.

Young people's attitudes towards SkillForce: The great majority of young people had very positive attitudes towards SkillForce. Eighty nine per cent indicated that they had enjoyed it. There were very high scores for enjoyment, making a real effort to attend, and preferring to be in SkillForce all of the time.

Perceptions of behaviour, attendance and exclusions: Participants agreed that their behaviour had improved, that they had fewer detentions, that they got told off less in class and that their attendance had improved. This was supported by data from the questionnaires completed by SkillForce and school staff and the interview data.

Young people's attitudes towards school and school work: There was a high level of agreement from participants that they made an effort to concentrate more in class since joining SkillForce, that their school work had improved, that they had become more confident and that their levels/grades had improved. SkillForce staff agreed that the standard of work had improved as had students' confidence and concentration.

Benefits of SkillForce on young people's skills and wellbeing: Participants strongly agreed that SkillForce had taught them important skills that they would not have learned at school, that their confidence had improved, that they were better able to work with other people as a team, that they respected other people more, that their communication skills had improved and that SkillForce had made a positive difference in their lives.

SkillForce staff strongly agreed that participation had promoted the well-being of the students and there was a high level of agreement that: participation had raised self-confidence; improved communication skills; improved pupil staff relationships, social skills and listening skills; and levels of respect. The interviews supported the data from the questionnaires.

Qualifications and future prospects: SkillForce offered a range of qualifications to participants to enable them to develop their skills, including those relating to working with others, improving their own learning and performance, basic first aid, substance abuse and misuse.

Participants agreed that the qualifications they gained with SkillForce were valued, were important and that joining SkillForce had provided an opportunity to gain additional qualifications. They indicated that being in SkillForce would help them get a job and that they had been thinking more about what they wanted to do when they left school.

SkillForce agreed that career aspirations had been raised and opportunities made available and that the standard of work and levels achieved had improved.

While most responding students believed it was important for them to do well in their GCSEs a much smaller percentage who responded to the question felt confident that they would do well. Most of the younger students did not respond to questions about examinations. Following taking GCSEs most students indicated that they would be looking to get a job with a smaller proportion looking to go to college.

SkillForce staff spent considerable time and effort on ensuring positive future pathways for students in KS4.

Parents' perspectives: The majority of students strongly agreed that their parents wanted them to join SkillForce and felt that it was important. There was also agreement that they talked to their parents about SkillForce, helped out more at home and were told off less.

SkillForce staff agreed that there had been greater communication between school and home and that parent-teacher relationships had improved as a result of SkillForce. SkillForce staff communicated with parents regularly to report progress and were available to talk to parents at all times. Parents generally were positive about SkillForce and any misunderstandings were quickly resolved because of the high level of communication. SkillForce staff were concerned that some parents showed little interest in their children.

Attitudes towards SkillForce Instructors: Key to the success of SkillForce is the instructors. There was strong agreement from the students that the instructors took time to explain things, were easy to get on with, took more time to get to know the students than their teachers and that they were treated as adults by SkillForce personnel. Instructors were seen as accessible and able to relate to participants and develop trusting relationships.

The adoption of a 'can do' approach: One of the major strengths of the SkillForce programme was the 'can do' approach of the SkillForce staff. This is particularly important in undertaking pilot work as inevitably there are things which do not work well immediately. SkillForce staff responded to this positively attempting to address the issues and improve the programme immediately. New protocols were introduced regarding behaviour and staff were proactive in responding to local issues.

Differences in young people's responses between the programmes: There were very few differences in the questionnaire responses of the participants to the SkillForce programmes. Where there were differences these seemed to relate to local issues, for instance, in one case KS3 pupils being stigmatised for being in the programme. Such issues were resolved locally as the programme developed.

Communication and relationships with schools: SkillForce staff were totally committed to working with schools. Communication was conducted by email, telephone and visits. SkillForce staff raised concerns that some schools did not engage with the programme and that this sent a negative message to the students. The schools that engaged benefitted more from the programme. The support of the schools was important for success.

Academic work: Issues were raised by some schools and SkillForce staff about the balance of academic and other activities in the programme.

Provision for different groups of students: Most of those participating in the SkillForce programme were white British boys which presented challenges for the instructors with participating girls being in a minority.

Length and intensity of programmes: A number of staff (school and SkillForce) raised issues about the length and intensity of the different programmes.

Reintegration into school: SkillForce staff had particular concerns about whether participants would be able to reintegrate back into school following completion of the programme. This was particularly the case with those on short programmes and the older students.

Location: There were issues about the location of the SkillForce provision and the logistics of getting participants to one location. When the programme was offered in a school with children being transported from other schools this sometimes created problems in relation to uniforms and differences in behaviour policies. When the programme was offered off site,

challenges emerged to ensure the relationships with the schools were strong throughout the course of the programme. SkillForce staff worked very hard to make the off site venues fit for purpose.

Selection of students to participate: SkillForce staff raised issues about the selection of young people to participate. It was important to have a balanced group and also that the young people were not coerced into participation. There was considerable variability in the young people that the schools selected.

Planning: Staff raised issues about the time needed for planning for the development of new programmes and for the implementation of existing programmes.

Conclusions and issues for consideration

The current market environment in education, particularly in relation to Alternative Provision (AP) means that increasingly schools are the 'customers' rather than local authorities or government. More and more funding is being devolved to schools to spend as they wish.

Schools themselves are under pressure to deliver high academic standards. Pupils with behaviour problems disrupt the work of other pupils, frustrate teachers and have an impact on the school's academic standards.

SkillForce is a highly successful programme which has the potential to turn around the lives of disaffected young people. The strengths of SkillForce staff were demonstrated throughout the pilot programmes. Staff's 'can do' and problem solving approaches meant that difficulties in implementation were tackled and new ways of working devised to address issues.

The KS3 and KS4 programmes presented different challenges to the SkillForce staff. Schools had different expectations of the students and what the programmes should be aiming to achieve. SkillForce needs to ensure clarity in their offering to avoid schools being dissatisfied.

Programmes where students were drawn from different schools faced a wide range of challenges including location, the quality of accommodation, transport and difficulties when one school acted as the home of the programme. These issues need to be resolved locally in relation to each individual implementation.

Where students were moving in and out of the programme it was important that there was a critical mass of existing good behaviour when new students were introduced.

Particularly, where students came from several schools, school staff were not always sufficiently committed to their students. This is critical if there is an expectation that the young people will be re-integrated back into the school. Although schools are the 'customers' there needs to be a recognition on their part that if they wish students to return to school they must demonstrate their commitment and interest in that student. The SkillForce teams have recognised this issue and systems have already been put in place to address it.

To ensure reliable communication every individual school with participating students needs to have an individual contact person.

Schools need to understand the ethos of SkillForce and the principles on which it is based to ensure consistency in treatment of students. It may be helpful if these principles were set out clearly and schools informed of them when they were considering engaging with SkillForce.

There was considerable variability in the extent to which parents supported their children. Ideally, parents need to be involved from the outset, but there may be circumstances where families are so dysfunctional that engaging parents in the process would be extremely difficult and in some cases could be detrimental. SkillForce staff need to assess this in relation to each individual case.

Running a workshop for parents on managing challenging behaviour was successful in engaging parents in one pilot programme and might be worth introducing more widely.

There may be issues in the wider community from which the students are drawn which impinge on students' progress, for instance, drug abuse. SkillForce staff need to be aware of these and adapt the programme accordingly.

The implementation of the pilot programmes raised issues relating to the selection of students to participate. Many students exhibited more extreme problems than had been the case in the past and in some cases disrupted the programme. The selection of students is therefore crucial for successful outcomes. The particular activities that SkillForce engages in and the approach adopted are not appropriate for every individual. This needs to be acknowledged.

In continuing to develop and pilot new programmes it might be useful to specify for each programme the extent to which participants are expected to re-integrate back into school or whether this is unlikely and the role of SkillForce is to support progress into Further Education or Employment.

The issue of re-integration is closely related to the length and intensity of programmes and the Key Stage which they are catering for. To gain the trust of some older students took a long time. A way forward might be to develop flexibility where it was deemed necessary for individuals to continue with a programme over a longer period of time.

Where students are to re-integrate from a full-time programme a phased re-integration is more likely to be successful than immediate immersion back into the school environment. For some students a college placement may be a better alternative than a return to school.

The SkillForce teams provide 'after care' for participants on an informal basis for those going on into work. This is more formal for participants in Key Stage 3 with ongoing mentoring being provided where the programme is not based in the pupil's school. There are a number of questionnaire scales which assess student's readiness for re-integration which might be used to help SkillForce and school staff to establish readiness and the level of support needed.

A range of views were expressed about the relationship between the SkillForce programme and academic work by school and SkillForce staff. It may be that there is not a single solution to this relationship and that any given implementation of the programme needs to be tailored in relation to academic work with the needs of participating schools and responsibilities established clearly at the point where schools commit to student participation.

In some of the KS3 programmes there appears to be an issue with the stigmatisation of pupils if they engaged with SkillForce. This may relate to the way that the school presents the programme. If younger students are to derive full benefit and be re-integrated back into schools ways of addressing this need to be found.

There continue to be issues relating to gender. Boys predominate. Implementations including girls need to ensure that the activities are appropriate for them to avoid drop out. Some programmes might be developed specifically for girls.

SkillForce as an organisation needs to ensure that it has appropriate support in place for staff providing training and opportunities to share experiences and solutions with other SkillForce staff to avoid burnout. Time for planning is also needed for new programmes and the implementation of existing programmes.

SkillForce staff are able to develop positive relationships with disaffected young people which can change lives and lead to positive long term outcomes in terms of education and employment. The issues arising from the pilot programmes have largely been dealt with by staff as part of their problem solving approach and their willingness to learn. SkillForce has an excellent reputation and is well placed to meet the needs of schools as they take increasing responsibility for Alternative Provision for disaffected students.

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Introduction

SkillForce is an education charity working with 10,000 young people in schools in Great Britain who are in danger of leaving school without the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life. SkillForce started life in 2000 as a pilot project through the Ministry of Defence (MOD) with two teams working in secondary schools in Newcastle and Norfolk, and specialising in Key Stage 4 pupils who were identified as “difficult to reach”. With support from the MOD and the Department for Education and Skills (now DfE) SkillForce expanded into delivering Wider Key Skills training and Life Skills development generally, working with students with diverse needs. In April 2004 SkillForce became a registered charity and company limited by guarantee and in April 2010 became self-sustaining when core grant-aid ceased.

Over the last ten years SkillForce has delivered qualifications and positive outcomes to over 35,000 young people with consistently outstanding results. Ninety percent of young people participating feel more positive, more confident and feel they have learned useful skills; 93% leave school with recognized qualifications; 97% progress into employment, further education, training or apprenticeship; 60% of students entitled to Free School Meals go into further education; 24% predicted exclusion is reduced to 4% actual exclusion; and truancy is reduced significantly. SkillForce Instructors are mainly ex-Services personnel with diverse life experiences who provide positive role models for the disaffected young people participating in the programme. The vision of SkillForce is that every young person, whatever their background or ability, is given the chance to fulfil their potential and become a valued member of their community. In partnership with schools SkillForce delivers a curriculum and activities that provide young people with knowledge, skills, experience and long term personal support and the self belief to aspire and achieve.

The Zero Exclusions pilot is made up of a series of initiatives which were implemented with different groups of young people around the country. Table 1 below sets out the details.

Table 1: Projects to be evaluated

Region	Team	Location	Key Stage	Duration	Days per week	Number of Young people
North	Newcastle	South Shields	4	1 year	5	Between 8 and 13
	Newcastle	South Shields	3	1 year	5	Up to 15
	Manchester	Harpurhey	3	2 x 1 term	5	2 lots of 15
	Manchester	Darwen	3	Spring term	3	Up to 18
	Leeds	Seacroft	3	1 year	5	Up to 15
Midlands	Birmingham	North Warwickshire	4	12 weeks	4	Up to 11
	Leicester	Melton and South Charnwood	3	12 weeks	3	Up to 10
South West	Oxfordshire	Abingdon	3	1 year	1	Up to 10
	Exeter	Exeter	3	1 year	1	Up to 15
South East	East Kent	Thanet	3	1 year	3	Rolling programme 4 lots of 16
	East Kent	Dover	3	1 year	1	20
	East Kent	Dover	4	1 year	1	20

Visits were carried out to six of these programmes. A brief outline of each is set out below:

Pilot programme 1: Pilot programme 1 was based in the North East of England. It consisted of full time provision (five days a week) designed to run for one academic year. It began in September 2011. The students were in Key Stage 4. During the year, the programme had 13 students at the most. These students were from six different schools in the local area. At the time of the data collection there were eight students on the programme, two girls and six boys. One girl and one boy were in Year 10, the other six were in Year 11. All of the students who responded to the questionnaires reported themselves to be white English. The programme was based in a community centre attached to an old school that was no longer in use. Students attended for the school day and activities included work towards certification in ASDAN Wider Key Skills, Certificate in Personal Effectiveness (COPE) and English and Maths Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy (ALAN) tests. Maths and English tuition was provided by a teacher from the local school. During the spring term, the students had the opportunity to attend a residential run by 'Youth at Risk'.

Pilot programme 2: Pilot programme 2 was based in the West Midlands. The provision was for four days a week and the programme lasted for one term, the Spring term. Wednesday was 'keep in touch' day and the students were in their schools on that day. The programme began with 11 students drawn from eight schools in the vicinity. The students were mostly from Key Stage 4. At the time of data collection, there were six Year 10 students, two Year 11 students and one participant from Year 9. All the students were boys and all those who completed the questionnaires considered themselves to be White British. The programme was based on the site of one of the schools that had bought into the programme. The programme was run by two instructors and they were responsible for the implementation of a SkillForce curriculum. The students had the opportunity to achieve certificates including First Aid and Substance Misuse Management. The students also had the opportunity to attend the residential run by 'Youth at Risk' in the latter part of the term.

Pilot programme 3: Pilot programme 3 was based in the East Midlands. The provision was for three days a week and the programme lasted for one term, the Spring term. The students attended the programme on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. The students were in Key Stage 3, Year 9. The programme began with 10 students, eight of whom were male, and two of whom were female. The students were from four schools in the local area. At the time of data collection, there were eight students on the programme, all of whom were male. They all reported themselves to be White British. The programme was based in an Army Cadet Hut. The programme was run by two instructors and they were responsible for the implementation of a SkillForce curriculum including Wider Key Skills, First Aid and National navigation awards. There was also a mentor attached to the programme who would visit the students on the days they were in school.

Pilot programme 4: Pilot programme 4 was based in Oxfordshire. The provision was for one day a week (Monday). The programme began in September 2011, and was designed for Year 7 and Year 8 students in Key Stage 3. By the time of the data collection, there had been some change with regard to the participants and they were all from Year 7. There were eight students on the programme, all of whom were male. Seven of those who completed the questionnaires reported themselves to be white, and one student reported himself to be Caribbean. The students were from one school in the Oxfordshire area and the programme was based on that school site. The programme was run by two instructors and the SkillForce curriculum focussed on activities that would encourage personal learning and thinking skills.

Pilot programme 5: Pilot programme 5 was based in Manchester. The SkillForce team in Manchester established two zero exclusion projects. These were for Key Stage 3 students.

The first one ran in the Spring term. It was for three days a week. It was in partnership with Darwen Aldridge Community Academy and it was run on their site. It provided a programme for up to 18 children. Interview data were not collected from this pilot. The second zero exclusion projects were in liaison with a consortium of schools within the Manchester local authority. These were for five days a week (full time) and there were two programmes, each lasted for a term. There was a programme in the Spring term and one in the Summer term. The data collection took place during the summer term. Each programme was designed for 15 pupils. It was run off site. SkillForce were asked to leave the first venue because the students did not respect it and there had been some vandalism. At the time of the data collection, the Manchester programme was based in a community centre. The students followed a Level 1 programme of Key Skills validated by ASDAN; students also undertook life skills and the range of SkillForce curriculum activities including trips/ visits.

Pilot Programme 6: Pilot programme 6 was based in Kent and was run off site at a training centre, which in addition to the SkillForce programme, provided vocational training for young people. It was located on an industrial estate. The participants were drawn from a number of local schools: schools had a fixed allocation of places and the schools selected the young people to attend. The six week intensive programme looked to provide a positive experience for the young people. Participants were from Years 7 and 8. At the time of the visit, this was the fourth time the programme had run during the academic year 2011-12. During the visit there were seven boys and two girls. The programme culminated in a residential experience. Prior to that the students had engaged in a range of outside activities including map reading and paint balling in addition to classroom activities which helped the young people develop self-esteem. In particular the instructors were really trying to give the young people opportunities to succeed and to enable the young people to fully understand about actions and consequences so that they might be better able to cope in a school classroom.

Pilot Programme 7: Pilot programme 7 was based in Leeds. It was a full time programme designed for Key Stage 3 students. It started in January 2012. It was run off site in a local community centre. The participants were drawn from several schools in the area. At the time of the data collection there were 10 students on the programme from five different schools. One local school acted as the main liaison between SkillForce and the other schools in the consortium. There were two instructors who were responsible for the implementation of a SkillForce curriculum. This included local community activities, trips and visits, sporting activities and life skills.

Pilot Programme 8: Pilot programme 8 was based in Devon. It was a part time programme designed for Key Stage 3 students. Participants attended for one day a week. The programme started in September 2011 and ran through the academic year. The participants were drawn from five secondary schools in Exeter and the provision was on one school site. This school acted as the liaison between SkillForce and the other schools in the consortium. At the time of data collection, there were 11 participants involved on the programme. There were two instructors for the programme and the SkillForce curriculum included first aid awareness and drug awareness, as well as personal learning and thinking skills such as team work.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The research findings will inform future policy. In particular, the research will examine the efficacy of the different time scales and intensity of the provision in relation to their effectiveness in supporting young people and maintaining them in education. Outcomes for the young people will be assessed in relation to:

- exclusion;
- attendance;

- behaviour;
- attainment;
- progression to work or further education;
- young people's perceptions of the benefits to their well-being and prospects;
- staff (school and SkillForce) perceptions of change in the young people; and
- parent/carers' perceptions of change in the young people.

Other specific research questions include:

Are there differences in the effectiveness of the SkillForce programme in relation to the intensity (number of days per week) of the implementation of the programme?

Are there differences in the effectiveness of the SkillForce programme in relation to length of the implementation of the programme?

Does the make-up or size of the group of young people have an impact on effectiveness?

What challenges have arisen in implementing the programme variations as perceived by SkillForce staff?

What are the perceptions of the implementation of the programme by school/college staff?

Is there a difference in the effectiveness of the programme depending on whether the provision is located in a school or off-site accommodation?

Is there an impact on the wider learning of the participating young people?

Methods adopted

The SkillForce teams were asked to distribute questionnaires to all of the participating young people. SkillForce team leaders, instructors and school staff were also asked to complete questionnaires. The questionnaires explored reactions to the programme, its perceived impact, its strengths and any weaknesses to facilitate enhancement of the programme in the future. The questionnaires included rating scales and some open questions to enable qualitative data to be collected.

Questionnaires were completed by a total of seven SkillForce team leaders, 20 instructors, one link teacher, four members of school senior management teams and 96 young people.

Visits were made to six projects: Newcastle, Oxfordshire, Birmingham, Manchester, Kent and Leeds. During these visits interviews were undertaken with available school staff, SkillForce personnel and students. Where possible parents were interviewed. Where this was not possible, the views of parents were sought through reports from students. Interviews were undertaken with ten instructors, nine members of school staff, 28 students and four parents. Telephone or face-to-face interviews were undertaken with all of the SkillForce team leaders involved in the eight pilot projects.

Findings

Young people participating in the pilot programmes

Overall, there was a preponderance of boys participating in the programme reflecting the predominance of boys in exclusion data nationally. The nature of the pilot projects meant

that the participants tended to exhibit more extreme difficulties than those who have typically participated in the SkillForce programme. As one team leader put it:

'Well, I think behaviour and attendance is the building blocks of what a SkillForce programme is all about. It's raising their self esteem, improving attendance, behaviour and attitude, and it depends on the student at what level that begins. So for a zero exclusions pilot or a re-engagement pilot – you are talking about the more extreme cases, whereas on a mainstream one day a week for two years programme, you might have some who are working at level 2 who are not at that point yet. The whole idea of what you are doing is to prevent them from leaving school without any GCSEs, to prevent them from becoming disengaged.' (Team Leader)

Some young people did drop out from the programmes. One team leader summarised the main reasons for drop outs:

'Drop out numbers vary but generally between 5-10% each year. There are a number of reasons that children drop out, some move to another part of the country. For most it is behaviour. Some are excluded by the school, others move to another school in the area, a small number are long term truants whilst others are placed in a PRU or YOI. Some traveller students just leave the area.' (Team Leader)

The nature of the way that some of the Zero Exclusions programmes were set up, with individual children from several schools joining the programme, meant that there were fluctuating numbers of students. For example in Newcastle the programme originally had 9 participants, which went up to 12, back to 9 and then up to 13 and finally to 8. This change occurred over a relatively short time span, between September 2011 and March 2012. Needless to say, developing team work amongst the young participants in this context was difficult.

The nature of the activities

The students participated in a wide range of activities while on the programme. These varied depending on the specific region where the programme was delivered. All programmes included a wide range of out of school activities, e.g. rock climbing, improving the environment of the local community, country walks, tracking, orienteering, laser quest, visits to historical buildings, visits to the local fire brigade, visits to the local elderly people's home, painting and decorating outdoor furniture, a variety of sports, plastering, in addition to written work reporting on the activities. More classroom based activities included designing balloon cars, games, cooking, making knots, and lessons on first aid and substance misuse. The activities were quite challenging, for instance, the map reading the teams set off at intervals with instructions not to catch each other up. One team got slightly lost.

At the time of the interviews, participants from Newcastle and Birmingham had taken part in a residential trip run by 'Youth at Risk'. The trip lasted for Monday to Friday. The residential was a combination of outdoor activities and facilitated talking. One participant said that they sat 'in a classroom for hours'. This had a major impact on some students:

'The transformation just in that short period of time is mind blowing – mind blowing. It really was worth it.' (Instructor)

'These two were like different kids. Absolutely fantastic – I mean I was sceptical. Unfortunately, only half of them went.' (Instructor)

The residential programmes offered the students opportunities to do things that they had never done before, some had never been away from home before. Lessons focused on preparation for this, including hygiene and what to take in a wash bag. Most students had no experience of this and were focused in their attention. Some expressed concern about the amount of walking they might have to do as many were not used to any physical exercise.

Introduction of the programme to young people

SkillForce is usually introduced to participants through taster days towards the end of the previous academic year. Contact is also made through Activity or Enrichment Days. There are also presentation events where the students consider the course before making a decision. Prospective participants are invited to interview and are provided with an overview of what the programme entails. They may be given illustrations of what they can attain during the programme, a typical week's activities, and an example of a one day briefing. The rules and sanctions are made clear. There are opportunities for asking questions. It is important that the young people choose to do the programme and are not allocated to it. In contrast to this, the nature of the Zero Exclusions pilot meant that some students were strongly encouraged to join the programme by their Heads of Year and members of the senior leadership teams at their schools, in some cases having no choice. School staff indicated how disengaged the students were from school. Talking of participants in Key Stage 3, one senior teacher said

'We need to try and engage these kids because these are kids that aren't engaging in education essentially and what we need is them engaged ready to get them to the final two years so that they get some qualifications at the end of it. Can we get them back into mainstream education?' (Member of school SMT).

The decision of who to place on the programme was critical. One parent described how she saw it as the last alternative for her child. Referring to the school her child attended she said

'They had me in the office... because basically it was an alternate from him being excluded from school – really, the school have been absolutely brilliant. There is a lot of schools that would have just thrown Harry out of school. But the school have tried really hard because they knew he was clever. And they wanted to give him another chance. And this was a chance, and they didn't make him do it.' (Parent)

A member of school Senior Management said

'Darren was quite disaffected at school. Ability wise, academically he's ok – probably just below average ability, but he is disaffected and kept getting himself into trouble, the normal story, hanging around with the wrong crowd. But there is a good element, there is a really good – something deep inside him – sometimes if Darren had to work he'd work but he seemed frustrated. We tried lots of different interventions, moving bands, different teachers, getting him into sport. He's also quite a leader. He was interested in the military. He always said 'ooh, I wouldn't mind going into the army, and things like that' so it married up lots of his attributes and just matched it really. Lads like Darren need it. Sometimes kids get to 14/15 and school is not for them anymore. And we, as educationalists, we have to acknowledge that and we have to be flexible enough to give them those opportunities.' (Member of school SMT)

Introduction of the programme to parents

Schools normally notify the parents about the programme and SkillForce send a letter explaining the details with a consent form which covers all aspects of the programme.

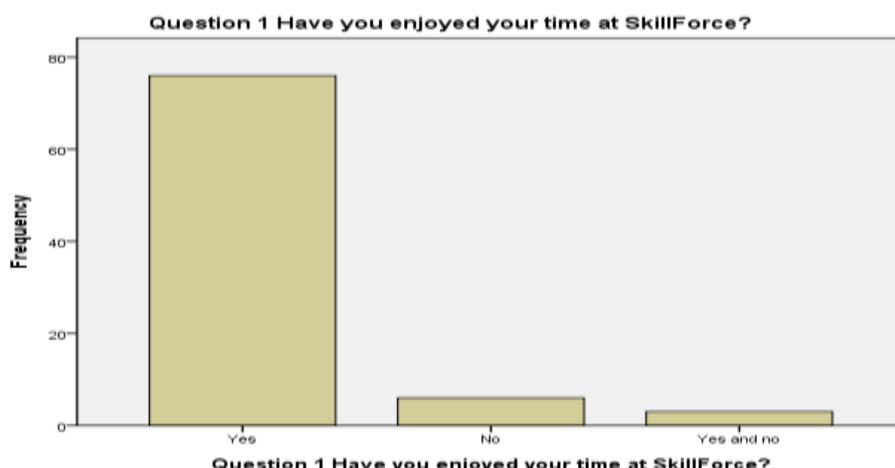
Individual meetings with young people and their parents are very effective when parents attend. Attendance varies depending on the school. Meeting with parents is important as it emphasises that there is a shared responsibility for the young people’s education with the parents. If parents attend the meeting it also sets up a strong foundation for good relationships in the future. In the Zero Exclusion pilots the parents’ response was mixed. Some of the parents seemed unaware of the difficulties that their child was experiencing in school and how close they were to being excluded:

‘When we started, when we first saw some of the students, I am not convinced that the parents or possibly the students realized that they were at the stage they were at. Or maybe there was a bit of denial. And when we spoke to parents – coz you have got to be very blunt in that meeting. You have to say this is where we are starting from. Essentially, your child is going to be excluded if they stay in school. And that I think came as a bit of a shock to some of the parents, who thought their kids were a bit tasty, but not to that degree. And so, that caused a little bit of angst early on.’ (Team Leader)

Young people’s attitudes towards SkillForce

The participating young people were asked to respond to a series of questions relating to their attitudes towards SkillForce. Eighty-five participants responded to a question about whether they had enjoyed SkillForce. Eighty nine per cent (76) responded positively, 7% (6) negatively with three individuals not sure (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Enjoyment of SkillForce



A wider range of attitudes were assessed using a five point scale with the highest score indicating the strongest agreement. Table 2 sets out the mean responses for each statement with the number of students responding and the standard deviation. The most positive response was made in relation to students making an effort to attend SkillForce (4.19) followed by enjoying the activities (4.08), and agreeing that SkillForce made education fun (4.0). The greatest disagreement was with the statement that they did not want to join SkillForce (2.17). Overall, attitudes were positive (see Table 2).

Table 2: Young people's attitudes to SkillForce

	N	Mean	SD
I was excited about joining SkillForce	95	3.67	1.14
I enjoyed the SkillForce activities	96	4.08	.92
Being in SkillForce is important to me	94	3.41	1.31
It is sad that I have to stop SkillForce	93	3.27	1.43
I did not want to join SkillForce	92	2.17	1.28
I have got a lot out of the SkillForce scheme	94	3.86	1.1
I make a real effort to attend all the SkillForce activities	94	4.19	1.04
I found it hard being in SkillForce and having to go to school	67	2.76	1.39
I would have preferred being in SkillForce all the time	68	3.81	1.34
Boys get more of our SkillForce than girls	94	3.26	1.4
SkillForce is my favourite subject	94	3.48	1.38
SkillForce makes education fun	93	4.00	1.11
I think that all school pupils should have the chance to join SkillForce	95	3.69	1.31

The interviews supported the reported positive attitudes towards SkillForce. For instance, one student described it as a 'great opportunity'. A parent reported that her son said:

'It is alright you know, Mum. Yeh, it is better than school. I prefer it than going to school'. So he's obviously – he has enjoyed it and I know he has enjoyed the trips, the rock climbing and stuff like that, and I think, although they shouldn't be rewarded for being naughty, but I think those little trips have helped to keep the kids behaving and getting on and achieving what they have achieved.' (Mother)

When asked about their experiences of SkillForce, all pupils were really positive:

'You go on trips and that. They give you more chances than a normal school do.' (Student)

'I got excluded from my last three schools. They give you chance after chance. (Student)

'You have helped us.' (Student)

'You've treated us good. I've learnt quite a lot of stuff.' (Student)

Overall, the students enjoyed all of the SkillForce activities:

'It was good. Paint-balling was well fun. We worked better as a team. Our team won 5-2.' (Student)

'It was good. I've enjoyed doing the first aid, the map reading. I'm looking forward to the residential.' (Student)

It was evident that young people enjoyed the range of activities on offer which differed from their school experiences. In some cases they had not wanted to join the programme but had done so because the school and their parents had wanted them to but once engaged the majority enjoyed it although there were some drop outs.

Perceptions of behaviour, attendance and exclusions

Participants were asked to respond on a five point scale to a series of statements about their behaviour. Table 3 sets out the details. There was agreement that since being in SkillForce there had been an improvement of behaviour in school, fewer detentions and 'telling offs', improved attendance, fewer problems with the police, less frequent exclusions, and that they got into fewer arguments and fewer fights.

Table 3: Behaviour, attendance and exclusions

	N	Mean	SD
Since being in SkillForce my behaviour has improved in school	95	3.68	1.22
Since being in SkillForce I get told off fewer times in class	95	3.44	1.42
Since being in SkillForce I have had fewer detentions	93	3.65	1.45
Since being in SkillForce I have been excluded fewer times from school	94	3.51	1.47
Since joining SkillForce I attend school more than I used to	92	3.84	1.39
Since being in SkillForce I truant less often than before	93	3.45	1.41
Since being in SkillForce I get into trouble with the police less often	95	3.49	1.37
Since being in SkillForce I get into fewer arguments than I used to	93	3.23	1.38
Since being in SkillForce, I get into fewer fights than I used to	90	3.32	1.38

In addition to the students, SkillForce staff were asked to indicate their level of agreement to a series of statements about behaviour, attendance and exclusion. Strong agreement was expressed in relation to statements about reducing fixed term (4.12) and permanent exclusions (3.92). There was also a high level of agreement that SkillForce had reduced unauthorised absence and the number of detentions and had improved punctuality and the behaviour of pupils outside school. There was less agreement that SkillForce had had an impact across the whole school (see Table 4).

Table 4: SkillForce staff perceptions of improvements in behaviour, attendance and exclusion

	N	Mean	SD
Improving the behaviour of pupils participating in SkillForce when in school	26	3.58	.98
Improving the behaviour of pupils participating in SkillForce when outside school	22	3.36	1.21
Improving the behaviour of all pupils across the schools	21	2.62	1.11
Improving the attendance of pupils participating in SkillForce	26	4.38	.75
Improving the attendance of all pupils across the school	20	3.00	1.25
Reducing fixed term exclusions among pupils participating in SkillForce	25	4.12	.88
Reducing fixed term exclusions among all pupils across the school	16	2.88	1.58
Reducing potential permanent exclusions among pupils participating in SkillForce	26	3.92	.89
Reducing potential permanent exclusions among all pupils across the school	18	2.89	1.49
Reducing unauthorised absence in pupils participating in SkillForce	27	4.22	.75
Reducing unauthorised absence in all pupils across the school	16	3.00	1.5
Reducing the number of detentions received among pupils in SkillForce	27	3.70	.77
Reducing the number of detentions received among all pupils across the school	18	2.83	1.5
Improving punctuality in arriving at school among pupils participating in SkillForce	25	3.68	.988
Improving punctuality in arriving at school in all pupils across the school	16	2.56	1.36
Improving punctuality in arriving at lessons in pupils participating in SkillForce	26	3.81	.84

School staff were asked to respond to statements about participants' behaviour. They perceived a greater improvement in participants' behaviour out of school than in school, and agreed that there had been a reduction in fixed term and potential permanent exclusions and detentions among participants (see Table 5).

Table 5: School staff perceptions of improvements in behaviour, attendance and exclusion

	N	Mean	SD
Improving the behaviour of pupils participating in SkillForce when in school	5	2.8	1.09
Improving the behaviour of pupils participating in SkillForce when outside school	5	3.4	.54
Improving the behaviour of all pupils across the schools	5	1.8	1.09
Improving the attendance of pupils participating in SkillForce	5	2.6	1.67
Improving the attendance of all pupils across the school	5	2.0	1.41
Reducing fixed term exclusions among pupils participating in SkillForce	5	3.6	.54
Reducing fixed term exclusions among all pupils across the school	4	1.5	1.0
Reducing potential permanent exclusions among pupils participating in SkillForce	3	3.3	2.08
Reducing potential permanent exclusions among all pupils across the school	5	1.2	.447
Reducing unauthorised absence in pupils participating in SkillForce	5	2.2	1.78
Reducing unauthorised absence in all pupils across the school	4	1.3	.5
Reducing the number of detentions received among pupils in SkillForce	5	3.8	.83
Reducing the number of detentions received among all pupils across the school	5	1.8	1.09
Improving punctuality in arriving at school among pupils participating in SkillForce	5	2.8	1.78
Improving punctuality in arriving at school in all pupils across the school	5	1.0	.00
Improving punctuality in arriving at lessons in pupils participating in SkillForce	5	2.4	1.34

The internal report produced by SkillForce on behaviour and attendance suggests that there is improvement in both, overall, in the longer term. However, the rate of improvement is not always consistent and the data suggest that short programmes do not allow sufficient time for change. The SkillForce report is included as an appendices.

The interviews showed that participating in SkillForce had improved attendance. Attendance improved in some cases from zero in previous interventions to 95-100%:

‘Diane was quite a big truant. One of the issues that we had was that she was wandering around school, and I couldn’t safeguard her. Obviously we were really worried about her. I heard about SkillForce and we were asked to refer students to it and I knew that Diane would be ideal because she was always working well in a small group but she found it hard to be put in a big classroom environment. I think a lot of that was to do with her self esteem and how she felt about herself. She felt that everyone was looking at her and that is why she would truant rather than go to class. And she has been a fantastic student in SkillForce.’
(Link Teacher)

Diane’s mother said:

‘I used to have to drag her out of bed to go to school and she was always late for school all the time – now she gets up herself, I don’t have to her get up, she wants to get here.’
(parent)

‘Attendance has improved. Some of the students hadn’t been in school for months and many are now at 88% attendance (Team leader)

The evidence regarding behaviour was mixed. For instance, a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) in one of the schools said of one student:

‘There was no noticeable improvement in school behaviour but good attendance was maintained. It was helpful to have a male role model but behaviour was still unpredictable’.
(Member of school SMT)

Another member of SMT said of the same pupil:

'It was a great idea and good staff but in this case the impact on behaviour was not sufficient for it to be seen as entirely successful. If anything his behaviour at school has at times been worse. I am concerned about the re-integration.' (Member of school SMT)

However, schools acknowledged that for most students there had been an improvement.

'For the majority of students negative behaviour incidents have been reduced. For a small minority there has been no measureable impact.' (Deputy Head teacher)

SkillForce staff also acknowledged that while attendance was generally good and behaviour improved for most students there were exceptions. In some cases there was an overall improvement with infrequent incidents of poor behaviour.

'We have had positive reports back from the schools saying 'we have seen a big change in so and so.... he seems to have calmed down a bit. It is a slow process, it is not like we have them and turn them around – it is two steps forward and one step back. Just when you think one student is doing really well, you will hear that there has been some atrocity at school' (Team Leader)

Some of the students had very difficult home backgrounds which exacerbated behaviour problems:

'One student is struggling due to an extremely volatile and dysfunctional home life. His situation is being monitored.' (Instructor)

'I came in very naively thinking 'oh, it isn't going to be that hard'. Within a couple of days I were like this 'oh my god!' I couldn't believe the lack of respect, no boundaries, no discipline. And it was an eye opener.' (Instructor)

The problems of the students were similar to those participating in other SkillForce programmes but were more extreme:

'The students are similar to what we would normally see in a school, but may be just more extreme. We are seeing the same problems, the lack of social skills. Possibly, the lack of literacy and numeracy, the lack of motivation, the lack of aspiration, the lack of responsibility, the lack of the ability to think for themselves – not wanting to think for themselves. They are products of their system at the end of the day. And what we are trying to do is get these young people to engage again. They are Key Stage 3 so they are going to back into mainstream and they can hopefully engage in Key Stage 4 and on we go.' (Team leader)

Interpersonal relationships were often difficult. SkillForce had some success in changing this:

'It is nice to see them all sitting in a room together. It wouldn't have happened four months ago.' (Team Leader)

The improvements in behaviour related to the establishment of a clear code of conduct and consequences for infringements of it:

'I think that as this programme has progressed – not just this one but the whole sort of zero exclusion thing, SkillForce felt that it wasn't making a big enough focus on what was the content of the programme. What these kids need is behaviour management. They need the change in their behaviours because it is that that is stopping them from engaging. And as a result of that and our intervention with the Youth at Risk charity SkillForce put together a code of conduct – a set of rules which every student has to consent to. Every parent has to

consent to. Quite traditional - draconian I suppose you would say. But they are very important and it is good for the staff coz they have got their boundaries, but it gives the students boundaries, but it is crucial that the students sign up to it.' (Team Leader)

The students learned that there were consequences if they did not follow the rules:

'I think the main thing – there are quite a few things – is the structure. They know that this... and there are signs and they have got to stick to those signs (*there is a list of regulations on the wall*) and there are consequences – but not all consequences are bad. It's taken a long time to get them to realise that not all consequences are bad. So the structure and the – I wouldn't say discipline really because the discipline is not out there... it is internal.' (Instructor).

School staff acknowledged the 'consistent approach by SkillForce staff with clear boundaries and high expectations.' (Member of school SMT)

Introducing the new rules was not always easy:

'The week after we introduced the new rules, changed the discipline and our approach, the first two weeks after that I was more like a bouncer than anything else. The boys wanted to fight me every two minutes. Eventually, they realised that if they did what the rules said they would finish at two o'clock. And slowly, it has got better. The classroom now is a much calmer place. There was a time when they were just running round the centre, and it was like trying to herd sheep. But now the classroom is a calm place. They are not angels and some days, we can come in and out of the blue it will be back to where we were.' (Instructor)

Negative consequences included staying later:

'I think the bringing in of session four (*extra time at the end of the day that can last for two hours*) has helped with attendance. I wouldn't say that kids didn't turn up. They would turn up late. They would turn up at 10 o'clock instead of half past eight when they were supposed to be here. But they would turn up, which means attendance has never been that bad. But the lateness has really improved with session four. Although some of them are still late, they have to give that time back at the end of the day. If they are not in by 8.45, I start ringing parents. Session four is a big help with discipline as well as punctuality.' (Instructor)

'We have condensed break times down and given them the incentives to finish at two o'clock. So they know that if they arrive late, they will leave late. We had issues about them running out of the classroom. When we started we would teach from the door- we don't have to do that anymore because we have said to them that if they go out of the class, it will get added on to session 4. Finishing at two o'clock is a real incentive. Everything that we have incorporated discipline wise all ties into them finishing at two o'clock.' (Instructor)

A reduction in bad language was achieved through the introduction of swear minutes:

'The language has improved markedly. Through a very simple technique of swear minutes that the guys have introduced. So they have got on top of the incessant swearing that did happen. It still does happen – but significantly less than it did. There has been a huge improvement in that.' (Team Leader)

'We have seen a particular drop in bad language. Although students relapse from time to time there has been a tangible improvement in this area. Low level disruptive behaviour, although still present has also been reduced.' (Instructor)

There were rewards for good behaviour and successful completion of work. This demonstrated to students that their actions could have positive consequences:

'They have to earn it yes... and then when Mondays come, they don't feel bad about coming because they don't mind because they had a good day on Friday and they come Monday, and as the week goes on, they are looking forward to Friday again. So I think it has psychologically, kept the kids behaving here.' (Instructor)

The rules were enforced but not by shouting at students but speaking to them calmly:

'SkillForce staff have a much better way of dealing with discipline than school teachers. Students do not get away with things but they are spoken to at an appropriate time, i.e. not at the moment when they might be kicking off but when they are calmer. There are some schools where if a pupil swears under their breath they will be chased through the school corridors by a member of staff to catch them. They will then be excluded. SkillForce is really clear about appropriate consequences of actions. They do NOT shout at pupils, in contrast to school staff.' (Instructor)

The perception of at least one student was that he 'didn't get told off so much' since being in SkillForce.

The students pushed against the boundaries and tested the instructors to see how far they could go and if they would be thrown off the programme:

'The main thing for me is the fact that we have not abandoned them. They feel they have been abandoned. Can't cope, can't get it right – can't cope, can't get it right - that type of thing. That is the sort of feeling I got off them. The first couple of weeks, they were pushing, pushing to watch me walk out the door. I wasn't here at the time. And that was the time when they were giving me a reason to walk out the door - but I gave them my word that no matter how bad it gets I am stopping here. Once they realised that, that to me is why they keep coming back.' (Instructor).

SkillForce staff commented on the difficulties of students only attending during the day and that at weekends there was often a reversion to poor behaviour:

'What I find hard is that when we have got them, they are fantastic, but then come the weekend and they are back in that social circle, so many of them get arrested at the weekend and stuff. (Instructor)

In addition to having clear rules and consequences for poor and good behaviour SkillForce staff attempted to gain an understanding of the students' behaviour, the reasons why they misbehaved and helped them develop coping strategies. This was effective for most young people. For some of the younger students the improved behaviour and motivation was attributed to 'lowered stress levels'. The main cause of poor behaviour was explained in terms of immaturity.

There were issues with participants whose behaviour was extremely violent:

'These were year 10s – they came from Pupil Referral Units – three of them were statemented which we weren't informed of. The violence was just too much and so we had to refer them back to the PRU.' (Team Leader)

Mixing students from mainstream provision with those who had previously been in PRUs or other alternative provision was sometimes problematic:

'The mix of main stream students and students, who had been effectively placed in all sorts of provision and found themselves on this course and perceived it as a last resort did not create an easy mix of students to accept academic learning of any kind in the first term.'
(Instructor)

One of the programmes experienced issues relating to the proliferation of drugs in the local area:

'The programme has been blighted with the local social problem of easy access to and wide use of drugs among young people in the area. The use of drugs before school and on site was eliminated by December 2012 after a lengthy but consistent Drugs and Risk awareness campaign/ training, delivered on a daily basis.'
(Instructor)

Attitudes towards school and school work

The young people were asked about their attitudes towards school and school work. There was a high level of agreement that they made an effort to concentrate more in class since joining SkillForce, that their school work had improved, that they had become more confident and that their levels/grades had improved. Students disagreed that they were teased because they were in SkillForce and there seemed to be have been little impact on homework (see Table 6).

Table 6: Young people's attitudes towards school and school work

	N	Mean	SD
Since joining SkillForce I make more effort to complete my homework on time	92	2.70	1.47
Since joining SkillForce I make an effort to concentrate more in class	92	3.71	1.17
Since joining SkillForce I get more of my homework in on time	88	2.77	1.42
My school work has improved since I joined SkillForce	92	3.60	1.36
I get on better with my teachers at school since I joined SkillForce	94	3.73	4.39
The teachers at school are interested in what I do in SkillForce	67	3.30	1.42
My levels/grades have improved since joining SkillForce	96	3.52	1.25
I often get teased by my school friends because I am in SkillForce	96	2.07	1.32
SkillForce has helped me to become more confident in taking part in school activities	94	3.69	1.33
Being in SkillForce has helped me to feel more positive about my time spent in school	94	3.52	1.28
I get on well with my teachers at school	93	3.12	1.46
I spend time with different friends since joining SkillForce	96	3.49	1.37

The interviews explored issues of attitude towards school and school work in greater depth. SkillForce staff indicated that they were able to offer extensive support to participants because of the instructor/pupil ratios. Students reported that SkillForce had helped them 'concentrate better and improve writing'. The young people themselves made suggestions as to why their work had improved:

'Because they help you do it when you're stuck and do it in your own time.'
(Student)

'The trips have been helpful. I have presented to the class which has helped my confidence.'
(Student)

'You don't get distracted in SkillForce and have enough time to do the work.'
(Student)

SkillForce staff were cautious in their evaluations of the success of their work in relation to academic attainment. There was high agreement that participation in SkillForce led to a reduction in the time that the school had to spend on discipline matters and that the

programme had contributed to improving staff pupil relations. SkillForce staff also agreed that the standard of work had improved as had students' confidence and concentration. However, there was disagreement that the programme had engendered positive attitudes towards school among all pupils and the value that they placed on education. Staff also felt that the impact was restricted to those participating in the programme (see Table 7).

Table 7: SkillForce staff perceptions of the impact on school relations and work

	N	Mean	SD
Engendering positive attitudes towards school among pupils participating in SkillForce	25	3.64	.99
Engendering positive attitudes towards school across all pupils	20	2.85	1.38
Improving motivation towards school among pupils participating in SkillForce	26	3.58	1.02
Having a positive impact on pupils perspectives of the value of education for those participating in SkillForce	26	3.73	.72
Having a positive impact on all pupils' perspectives of the value of education for all pupils across the school	21	2.90	1.37
Improving concentration on work among pupils participating in SkillForce	26	3.85	.73
Improving concentration on work among all pupils across the school	17	2.59	1.27
Improving staff pupil relationships among pupils participating in SkillForce	26	4.08	.84
Raising the standard of work achieved by pupils participating in SkillForce	26	3.96	1.04
Increasing staff confidence in working with pupils participating in SkillForce	25	3.84	.62
Reducing management time in school spent on discipline matters for pupils participating in SkillForce	23	3.78	.99
Reducing management time in school spent on discipline matters for all pupils across the school	18	2.61	1.42

In responding to the same statements school staff showed strong agreement that management time in dealing with discipline matters for children participating in SkillForce had reduced. They also agreed that SkillForce had been successful in engendering positive attitudes towards school among participants and had had a positive impact on the extent to which they valued education (see Table 8).

Table 8: School staff perceptions of the impact on school relations and work

	N	Mean	SD
Engendering positive attitudes towards school among pupils participating in SkillForce	5	3.6	.54
Engendering positive attitudes towards school across all pupils	5	1.0	.00
Improving motivation towards school among pupils participating in SkillForce	5	2.8	1.78
Having a positive impact on pupils perspectives of the value of education for those participating in SkillForce	5	3.4	.89
Having a positive impact on all pupils' perspectives of the value of education for all pupils across the school	4	1.0	.00
Improving concentration on work among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.0	1.15
Improving concentration on work among all pupils across the school	3	1.0	.00
Improving staff pupil relationships among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	3.0	1.4
Raising the standard of work achieved by pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.5	.577
Increasing staff confidence in working with pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.0	1.15
Reducing management time in school spent on discipline matters for pupils participating in SkillForce	4	3.8	.5
Reducing management time in school spent on discipline matters for all pupils across the school	4	2.5	1.0

In the interviews students indicated that:

'I am doing more work than I thought I would, meeting new people, learning how to listen more and get more work done.' (Student)

'I have now begun to do more work and I'm not getting sent out of lessons.' (Student)

Another said:

'I am more comfortable in asking for help and I pay more attention so I can understand the work.' (Student)

Some commented on the development of learning skills:

'It has helped me to concentrate and learn how not to be distracted.' (Student)

'I've found different ways to do things.' (Student)

Some students had excelled on the programme:

'So I have got one girl who never went to school. She was really nasty to the teachers, just a normal teenager but at the extreme and she is my top student – she is absolutely fantastic – it is really brilliant to see – really good.' (Instructor)

In general, written work improved but there were some exceptions:

'Written work has improved both in content and length of work. There is still one student who doesn't produce written work.' (Instructor)

One member of a school SMT indicated that it was hard to assess the impact on the Year 7 pupils as this would not be evident until the end of the year. Another, referring to an individual student indicated that:

'He will need to catch up on work missed when he returns to school. No school work was completed at SkillForce. Staff have had a break from dealing with him but they will have to put in additional time after school to give him one-to-one to catch up. However, having him out of lessons has been beneficial for the learning of the other students.' (Member of school SMT)

Some pupils felt that school was boring and that the work was too easy. They suggested that while they might cope for the first few lessons in the morning, after that things were just too boring which was why they felt that they got into trouble:

'School is too boring. That's why we get into trouble. The first two lessons are ok but then it gets boring.' (student)

'The work is just so easy, that is why I misbehave.' (student)

Perceived benefits of Skill Force for young people's skills and wellbeing

The participants strongly agreed that SkillForce had taught them important skills that they would not have learned at school. There was also a high level of agreement that their confidence had improved, that they were better able to work with other people as a team, that they respected other people more, that their communication skills had improved and that SkillForce had made a positive difference in their lives (see Table 9).

Table 9: Perceived benefits of SkillForce

	N	Mean	SD
SkillForce has encouraged me to take part in more sports teams	94	3.32	1.46
Since joining SkillForce, I feel more confident than I used to	92	3.83	1.18
Being in SkillForce makes me feel more grown up	94	3.56	1.33
SkillForce has taught me to respect other people more	94	3.77	1.24
SkillForce has helped me to improve my communication skills	95	3.81	1.17
SkillForce has helped me to improve my computer skills	96	2.94	1.39
SkillForce has helped me to work together with other people as a team	95	3.93	1.08
SkillForce has taught me to carry out research	96	3.40	1.31
SkillForce has taught me important skills that I would not have learned at school	96	4.05	1.14
Being in SkillForce has made a positive difference to my life	93	3.54	1.33

SkillForce staff strongly agreed that participation had promoted the well-being of the students and there was a high level of agreement that participation had raised self-confidence, improved communication skills, improved pupil staff relationships, social skills, listening skills and levels of respect (see Table 10)

Table 10: Skill Force staff perceptions of the benefits of participation in SkillForce

	N	Mean	SD
Promoting the well being of pupils participating in SkillForce	26	4.00	.74
Raising self confidence among pupils participating in SkillForce	26	4.35	.84
Improving communication skills among pupils participating in SkillForce	25	4.12	.83
Improving listening skills among pupils participating in SkillForce	25	3.92	.95
Improving social skills among pupils participating in SkillForce	25	4.00	1.0
Improving staff pupil relationships among pupils participating in SkillForce	26	4.08	.84
Raising levels of respect for people among pupils participating in SkillForce	23	4.04	.92

School staff were also asked to respond to statements about the benefits of participation in SkillForce. There was strong agreement that SkillForce promoted the well-being of the participants and recognition of the improvement in social skills and staff/pupil relationships (see Table 11).

Table 11: School staff perceptions of the benefits of participation in SkillForce

	N	Mean	SD
Promoting the well being of pupils participating in SkillForce	5	4.2	.44
Raising self confidence among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.5	1.7
Improving communication skills among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.5	1.0
Improving listening skills among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.5	1.0
Improving social skills among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	3.3	.50
Improving staff pupil relationships among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	3.0	1.4
Raising levels of respect for people among pupils participating in SkillForce	3	1.7	1.1

The interviews supported the data from the questionnaires:

‘The students have a better understanding of their own personal limitations in ability and behaviour.’ (Instructor)

‘The participants have a developing sense of self-confidence, working together as a team, empathy, understanding how their actions impact on others.’ (Member of school SMT)

‘I can see an absolute change. She never took pride in her appearance, she would never wear make-up – her hair was always up. Now when she comes in, her hair is down, she looks lovely – and she was never really bothered at one time.’ (Link teacher)

'I believe that the learners have amongst other things learnt to be more comfortable in social situations, be more comfortable with themselves and others. They have learned to control themselves and understand the impact of their decisions.' (Instructor)

'SkillForce has had a great impact on the well-being of students ensuring that they feel valued. Students have come back to full time education revitalised and this should have an impact on the end of school examinations.' (Head of Year)

Several instructors referred to the way that students had learned to manage their emotions:

'Pupils have a greater understanding of managing their emotions realising there is someone they can talk to.' (Instructor)

'The social and emotional learning activities and discussions have increased the young people's confidence and self-esteem.' (Instructor)

The SkillForce staff were supportive but also firm:

'All pupils realise that SkillForce instructors are available for help and guidance and feedback. Pupils realise that boundaries are set and that No means No. Pupils understand that they will be questioned or challenged enabling them to make the right choices.' (Instructor)

They also created a safe environment:

'Students feel safe, a sense of belonging comes from a positive relationship with the instructors. Students are involved in decision making resulting in barriers to learning being removed.' (Instructor)

'The SkillForce programme has had a major and lasting impact on the young people through strong role modelling, encouragement and a calm and stable environment in which they feel comfortable enough to learn and grow as young adults.' (Instructor)

The students themselves made reference to their enhanced social skills:

'I have learnt to help others and work in a team'. (student)

'I seem to get on better with people' (student)

'I have calmed down now and am ready to go back.' (student)

'I now know how to deal with anger and I always talk to the SkillForce staff.' (student)

'I seem to get on with other people and don't argue as much as I did with my teachers.' (student)

The enhancement of team work was marked as the programmes progressed:

'They have only just started to work together, since we went paintballing and since L came, they have only just started to merge as a group. Coz we used to take them outside to play football, basketball... and they would play with themselves – with the ball, but they would never play with each other. They would never play in a team – never, never be a team until I bought darts, cards, trying to get them to play together. No, it is only since L has come and since paintballing that they will play football together. We introduce them to lots of problems like building bridges and things like that – wider key skills and COPE, working on their own,

but they could do that anyway. For me the biggest thing is the social development the social and emotional development – you know, they share their experiences.’ (Instructor)

One of the key elements of the SkillForce programme is the way that staff forge positive relationships and trust. This enables instructors to develop a deeper understanding of the students and be in a better position to support them. For instance:

‘We have got one lad whose behaviour has been a bit strange this week and unusual, compared to what he has been like for the rest of the course and I am wondering about whether he is scared about the course coming to an end. That same pupil does get nervous about things. He went through a stage of trying to get himself removed from the course because he was scared about going on one of the trips. It was through me being in the middle and hearing conversations from different parties on the outside that I put two and two together and thought ‘hang on a minute – there is something in this behaviour change’. It turned out he was telling lies about the course in order that his mum will say ‘I don’t want my son doing that, I am taking him off’ so that he wouldn’t have to do the trip. When I spoke to his mum about it, she said that is not the first time he’d done that. So we know that he gets anxious about things. And all of a sudden, his behaviour has changed again this week, and I do suspect it is to do with the end of the course approaching. He can’t cope with that.’ (Team Leader)

‘There is one particularly vulnerable young man on the programme and he is a very unsure young year 9 student. He has got a whole host of issues in his life outside school and he has been the target of a lot of the bullying. The school said to me that they were hoping that although the kids they put on the course with him, were likely to bully him a bit, they were hoping that through doing this course, he would be able to build some kind of friendships with those other students, particularly the ones from his own school, which would then hopefully last through his time with them. I think, he has been quite well included and he has got to know people better. Time will tell as to whether or not that continues when he returns to school and although he has had issues with some of the other students picking on him I think, because we have been quite strict with it, it’s got better.’ (Team Leader)

‘We had a couple of boys who, they were the really kind of street wise kind of ‘bad lads’ if you like. One of them took a few meetings and a bit of pushing and a few conversations with his mother and him, with a bit of a boot up his bum sort of thing. He has now pulled his socks up. He’s engaging, and the thing is with him, he seems to enjoy the activities and the work that he is doing, and when he is busy and occupied and given work to do, he is very keen and enthusiastic. He puts his hands up, he answers questions, he will work independently, and he is very good. But then you get the other side of him, when he is not being so closely supervised, or when he has got a little bit more freedom, that is when he will then start to pick on the weaker members of the group, and cause trouble. But in terms of how he behaves towards staff, you know, again, if you met him and had a chat with him, he is a lovely lad to chat to and to work with and he has always been polite to the staff – he’s not a real trouble maker in that sense. But then it was more the issue of his bullying that we had to sort out with him at the start – which we did, and he has worked well now, he is going to finish the course, and he will have got something positive out of it.’ (Team Leader)

However, behaviour did not always change:

‘Well, we have had quite a few meetings with his mum and school about his general behaviour and refusal to take part in the activities – being rude to the instructors and things like that – bullying other students and it kind of culminated on Tuesday with him chasing another student around with a marker pen pinning him down and scribbling all over his face. He is completely on an alternative curriculum now but I think the next stage for him may be exclusion permanently.’ (Team Leader)

Some KS3 pupils did not always seem to understand that they had problems which needed addressing and perceived SkillForce as an opportunity for not doing any work: ‘we don’t do much’ although the instructors believed that being involved in SkillForce had impressed on some students that their schools were ‘tiring of their behaviour and that they needed to change their ways.’ (Instructor)

Qualifications and future prospects

SkillForce offer a range of qualifications to participants to enable them to develop their skills, including those relating to working with others, improving their own learning and performance, Basic First Aid, substance abuse and misuse. A variety of approaches were adopted by the pilot programmes with regard to qualifications. One programme provided opportunities for certificates in ASDAN Wider Key Skills, Certificate in Personal Effectiveness and English and Maths Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy Awards. In one programme that lasted one term students had the opportunity to achieve certificates in First Aid and Substance Misuse Management. One project was working with younger students (year 7) and the emphasis was on the encouragement of personal learning and thinking skills. In all the programmes, a range of SkillForce certificates were awarded for behaviours such as good teamwork, good attendance and punctuality. In one programme, certificates that had been achieved by the participants were framed and put on the wall for all to celebrate.

Students were asked to indicate their agreement to a range of statements relating to qualifications and future prospects. There was a high level of agreement that qualifications were valued, were important and that joining SkillForce had provided an opportunity to gain additional qualifications (see Table 12). The participants also indicated that being in SkillForce would help them get a job and that they had been thinking more about what they wanted to do when they left school. The SkillForce staff were very keen that all of the participating students should leave the programme with some qualifications. Each implementation may offer slightly different options:

‘The eight young people completing the programme are destined to gain a number of qualifications and should achieve COPEs wider Key Skills, ALAN certificates, and Sexual Health and Drug Awareness qualifications.’ (Instructor)

‘All the students completing the programme gain their first aid certificate, navigation award and a wider key skill in working with others at level 1.’ (Team Leader)

Students worked towards their ASDAN level 1 key skills qualifications whatever their age (year 7, 8 or 9).

Table 12: Qualifications and future prospects

	N	Mean	SD
I value the qualifications that I am getting with SkillForce	94	3.78	1.17
SkillForce has given me the chance to gain extra qualifications	94	3.82	1.11
The qualifications gained through SkillForce are important	95	4.01	.98
Being in SkillForce will help me to gain a job	93	3.78	1.19
Since being in SkillForce I have spent time thinking about what I want to do when I leave school	94	3.81	1.18

SkillForce staff were asked about the impact of SkillForce on raising standards, enhancing school examination results and raising aspirations and career prospects. There were high

levels of agreement that career aspirations had been raised and opportunities made available and that the standard of work had improved (see Table 13).

Table 13: SkillForce staff perceptions of standards, aspirations and opportunities

	N	Mean	SD
Raising the standard of work achieved by pupils participating in SkillForce	20	3.96	1.03
Improving the Key stage 3 levels/GCSE grades achieved by pupils participating in SkillForce	15	3.20	1.32
Improving the key stage 3 Levels/GCSE grades achieved by pupils across the school	13	2.08	1.6
Raising the career aspirations of pupils participating in SkillForce	25	3.68	.74
Improving the career opportunities for pupils participating in SkillForce	24	3.63	.71

School staff indicated that they believed that participating in SkillForce had improved the career aspirations and opportunities of participating pupils. There was less agreement relating to school work, and only one member of school staff completed the statement about KS3 and GCSE performance (see Table 14).

Table 14: School staff perceptions of standards, aspirations and opportunities

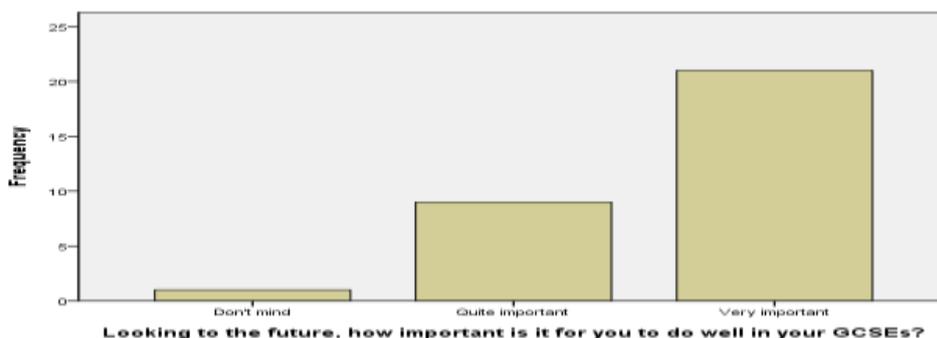
	N	Mean	SD
Raising the standard of work achieved by pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.5	.57
Improving the Key stage 3 levels/GCSE grades achieved by pupils participating in SkillForce	1	3.0	
Improving the key stage 3 Levels/GCSE grades achieved by pupils across the school	3	1.0	.00
Raising the career aspirations of pupils participating in SkillForce	4	3.3	.5
Improving the career opportunities for pupils participating in SkillForce	4	3.0	.00

Parents also commented on the qualifications that their children had acquired:

'He's got first aid, and he's got a certificate for misuse of substance – which those two alone will be brilliant for him for the job that he is going on... because they have to have... like he has got to do health and safety, first aid.. all those sort of things. They use a lot of chemicals on site, so that misuse of substance is a good thing for him to have. So really, this has just given him a little step up the ladder with his job really, which he wouldn't really get until he was actually working. So it's been good. He has got GCSE in Science... He has got a couple of things to come. So it is good really, he will have a little portfolio.' (Parent)

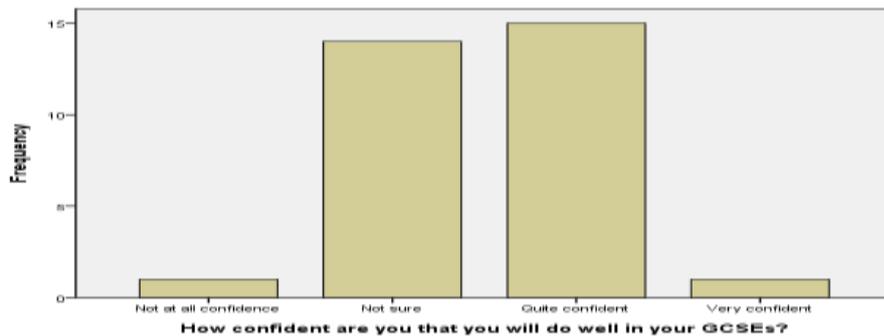
Students were asked how important it was for them to do well in their GCSEs. Of those students that responded from Year 11, 68% agreed that it was very important, 29% that it was quite important while 3% indicated that they didn't mind (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Year 11 participants' perceptions of the importance of doing well in GCSEs



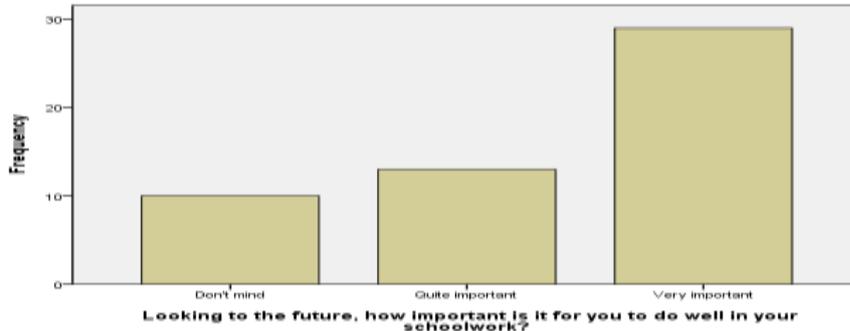
Although GCSEs were seen as important only 52% of those students who responded to the question felt confident that they would do well. One student felt very confident and 14 were not sure and one was not at all confident. Thirty one did not respond to the statement (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Year 11 participants' confidence in their GCSE performance



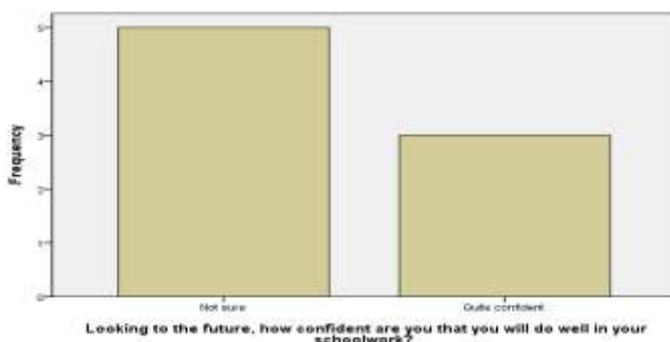
The younger students participating in the programmes were asked how important it was for them to do well in their schoolwork. Of those that responded, ten said that they didn't mind, thirteen indicated that it was quite important, twenty-nine that it was very important. Fifty two students did not respond (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Younger students' perceptions of the importance of doing well at school



When asked how confident they were that they would do well in their schoolwork, five were not sure, three were quite confident (see Figure 5). Most did not respond to this question.

Figure 5: Younger students' confidence relating to their schoolwork

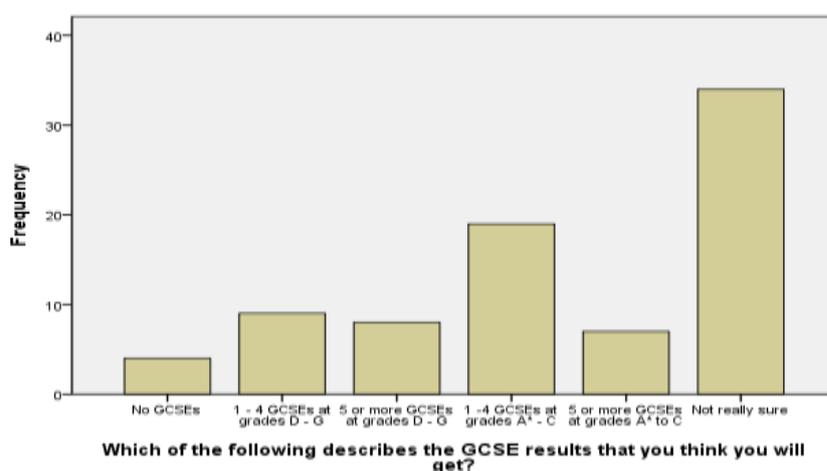


All participants were also asked specifically about which GCSE results they expected to get (see Table 15 and Figure 6). The highest percentage of students (42%) were not sure what they expected to get.

Table 15: Perceived GCSE results

	Frequency	Percent
No GCSEs	4	5%
1 - 4 GCSEs at grades D – G	9	11%
5 or more GCSEs at grades D – G	8	10%
1 -4 GCSEs at grades A* - C	19	23%
5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C	7	9%
Not really sure	34	42%
Total	81	100%

Figure 6: Perceived likely GCSE results (all participants)



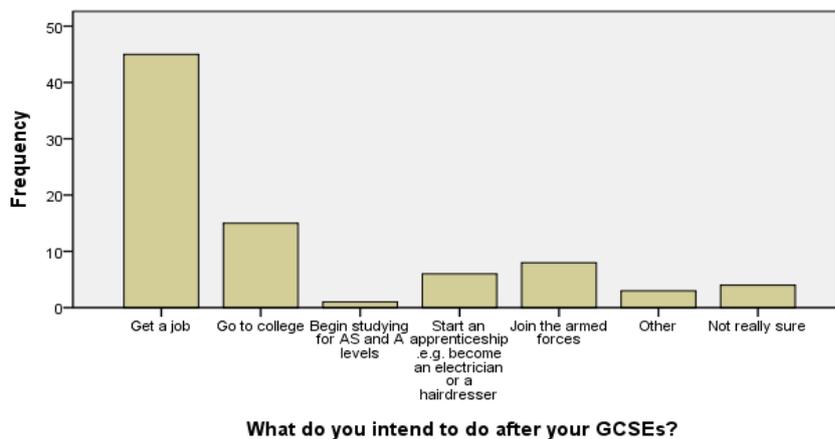
Participants were also asked what they intended to do after their GCSEs. They were able to make more than one response to this statement so percentages do not add to 100%. Table 16 and Figure 7 set out the details.

Table 16: Reported intentions after GCSEs

What do you intend to do after your GCSEs?		
	Frequency	Percent
Get a job	45	47%
Go to college	15	16%
Start an apprenticeship e.g. become an electrician or a hairdresser	1	1%
Join the armed forces	6	6%
Other	3	8%
Not sure	4	3%
No answer	14	4%
Total	96	15%

*Respondents could make more than one response so % do not sum to 100%

Figure 7: Participants' intentions after completing GCSEs



Several SkillForce staff had reservations about the extent to which the older students participating in the programme could be re-integrated back into school:

'I think they would be happier if they could continue with SkillForce and didn't have to go back to school full time. I think they have found it a more positive experience than school. They have enjoyed what they have done.' (Team Leader)

These reservations were shared by some school staff:

'In terms of re-integration, our two lads are year 11s, and we are a week away from Easter. When they come back it's a series of exam, and work experience for them, we have got a guided learning centre here. I don't think it will be as easy to re-integrate year 9s. (Member of school SMT)

The SkillForce teams were focused on ensuring a positive future for the students:

'The next term it is very much progression. They will have to finish the coursework off that they are doing. They are doing ASDAN, COPE, wider key skills, they are doing English and Maths (ALAN) tests with us... and next term is really concentrating on trying to get them – whether it is further education – whether it is an apprenticeship – whether it is a job, finding them something... so that they really have got something to go to. Because I think sadly, I think if we sort of said 'that is the end of the course cheerio' then that would be them finished - they would go and sit in the house and play xbox – do whatever they do. So it is finding them something to go to and maybe next September making sure they are going and if they are not, maybe give them a call.' (Team Leader)

SkillForce staff felt that for many what was important was to develop the skills needed for the workplace:

'There are two year 10s and I am not sure what is happening to them next year. What I have not been doing is trying to re-integrate them back into school. That wasn't the spec. There is no way that that would have happened anyway - so I have been gearing them towards the work place. How to act in the work place, responsibility that type of thing, it will be difficult for them to re-integrate back into year 11 – although they are very capable – very, very bright kids but they just don't fit in at school.' (Team leader)

SkillForce staff were proactive in trying to secure a positive future for the students:

‘So it’s trying to find that progression pathway for them. There is one lad, who is a nice lad, but he won’t put pen to paper. He just bounces off the walls, he can’t sit down. One thing we did find was that he was really meticulous about model making, so we got him on to doing that. We asked him what he wanted to do - do you want a job? ‘Will I get paid?’ ‘Yeh’. So we ended up getting him a Saturday job at a cobblers. And it is a strange thing – because these kids – and their day to day language – the f word is just part of the vocabulary. But he has done this job and these guys say his customer relations are fantastic. He is there on time, he does absolutely everything they ask him to and it couldn’t go better – so I think they are going to offer him a full time apprenticeship.’ (Team Leader)

SkillForce staff felt that it was not only finding a future pathway that was important but also maintaining the students on it:

‘The instructors have done a lot of work trying to find pathways for these kids. We are also working with ‘Made in South Tyneside’ which looks to get kids in work experience. They got one girl, who has been probably the star pupil into a nursery, to do a day a week in a nursery just as experience. I think the real success for us is if we say we had ten kids, at the end of that year 11, we got eight out of ten of them had somewhere to go and something to do and were committed to it. And I think even come next September, we have got to try and keep a link with them. I mean it is not going to be as strong but actually ‘come and see us if you’ve got a problem – give us a call sometime’ – coz I think they do... a lot of them see... J, they call her the Queen – she is a sort of motherly figure – the discipline is there... the trust is there and so from that point of view – trying to maintain that relationship for them would be good. Give them the opportunity.’ (Team Leader)

Parents’ perspectives and impact on home life

Students strongly agreed that their parents wanted them to join SkillForce and felt that it was important. There was also agreement that they talked to their parents about SkillForce, helped out more at home and were told off less (see Table 17).

Table 17: Participants’ perceptions of the impact of SkillForce at home and their parents; attitudes

	N	Mean	SD
I often talk to my parents about what I do in SkillForce	91	3.54	1.48
My parents think that SkillForce is important	92	3.86	1.21
My parents wanted me to join SkillForce	96	3.93	1.16
Since being in SkillForce I get told off by my parents less often	93	3.24	1.44
I help out at home more often than I used to	69	3.32	1.38

SkillForce staff agreed that there had been greater communication between school and home and that parent-teacher relationships had improved as a result of SkillForce (see Table 18)

Table 18: SkillForce staff perceptions of school-home relationships

	N	Mean	SD
Enhancing parent-teacher relationships among pupils participating in SkillForce	21	3.81	1.07
Encouraging greater communication between the school and home for pupils participating in SkillForce	24	3.71	.80

School staff perceived little enhancement in parent-teacher relationships and communication between school and home than SkillForce staff. This may be because it was the SkillForce staff who were responsible for the majority of communications (see Table 19).

Table 19: School staff perceptions of school-home relationships

	N	Mean	SD
Enhancing parent-teacher relationships among pupils participating in SkillForce	4	1.5	1.0
Encouraging greater communication between the school and home for pupils participating in SkillForce	4	2.5	1.0

SkillForce staff made phone calls to parents on a weekly basis to report progress.

‘I have had the people from SkillForce ring me to keep me informed and update me all the time, which I think has been brilliant. They keep very close contact – so I haven’t actually felt like David was away from the school – it’s like this was in with his schooling – you know, they have all been very good. Yeh, there has been really good contact.’ (Parent)

The teams made an effort to be available for contact with parents:

‘They ring me from 7 o’clock in the morning till half nine at night. Very regular phone calls.’ (Instructor)

Parents generally were positive about SkillForce and misunderstandings were resolved because of the high level of communication:

‘And this has been absolutely brilliant for her because she has totally changed. She loves it, she always talks about coming here where she used to hate going to school’ (Parent).

‘Most of the parents were at the end of their tether because school was forever on the phone – sending their child home and ringing up mum and saying that they have got problems and these are the issues. And with us they don’t get as many phone calls and if they do and it is a bad one, they do know that the child has gone further than they should have.’ (Team leader)

‘We had that one lad go home to his mum and make all sorts of strange comments and she phoned up to complain. And I had been with that group that day and I knew that nothing that she said was right, and it was only when I investigated it further that he’d made it all up just to try and get himself removed off the course, but other than that we have had no issues at all.’ (Team Leader)

Communication was also made by letter and some parents attended coffee mornings. Meetings with parents were arranged when there had been particular problems with behaviour. The coffee morning and telephone conversations were particularly successful as they demonstrated the commitment of SkillForce to the children’s education and development. Despite the high priority attached to communication by the SkillForce teams some parents did not engage with all the elements of the programme:

‘I know one of the students whose parents have taken a real interest in what he is doing, and so they have contacted the instructors, to discuss the concerns that they might have or progress or whatever else. So it’s really... we’ve had set points where we have contacted parents, because we’ve either had to because their child has been naughty. We had a coffee morning where we invited parents and teachers to come along to sort of see how their child is getting along and we will be having another end of course celebration where parents and teachers will be invited. But again, the attendance at those sort of things has been varied.

Some parents are really keen and enthusiastic and want to know what their child has been doing, and others, to be quite frank, aren't really that bothered and haven't put as much time and effort into what their child is doing. So it has been quite a mixed experience in terms of parental involvement.' (Team Leader)

Sometimes students may have been reluctant for their parents to attend the coffee mornings:

'Parents have not been particularly involved in activities due to students' disapproval. However, they have been invited and communication with most is good.' (Instructor)

'I don't know how keen the parents would be to come, which is a bit of a shame. It is funny though because some of the parents we have got really good relationships with. So they might... but at the same time, because of the nature of the beast there would be a lot of them go 'well I'm not bringing my Mum coz I know she might be the only Mum there and then I will be sort of the target' peer pressure type thing – which is always a problem.' (Team Leader)

Parents recognised that relationships were better with the SkillForce team than with teachers in school:

'He is a lot better here because he can talk to these better than his teachers. He has had 100% attendance. He's so proud. It's generally school he doesn't get on with. I don't know whether it's because his friends are there and he doesn't have his friends here. He has done really well and I think it might be a friend thing. I can't really fault the scheme – I think it has been really, really good. And I thank them for putting up with him. – I know what it is like at home, I am not one of these parents, who go 'oh not my son, he is not like that' I know what he is like, and I think they've been really good and they approach the kids in the right way.' (Parent)

SkillForce staff stressed the importance of trying to maintain communication with parents:

'We try and make relationships with the parents, and certainly with the Key Stage 3 group that was set up, that was absolutely crucial for making it work. And it is nice for the parents because they hear good things. You know, they don't get that phone call now 'he has insulted a teacher – he has been smoking, he has been doing this, he has been doing that' they also get the phone calls 'actually he has had a really good day today – been fantastic – he has done this, that and the other'. And on the Key Stage 3 programme the parents actually come in for a cup of tea on the Wednesdays. I think one of the big things for next year what we are looking at doing is – probably half way through the next term is start meeting the next bunch of parents and getting them on side before we start in September.' (Team Leader)

'I communicate with parents through phone calls, emails, whichever they prefer. I do ask them to come down sometimes, we have had parent mornings and things, but we don't really get parents coming to them when we have had them. When we started the course, talking about the course, I'd seen all the parents. When I invited them for the last six weekly open day I had one set of parents turn up. So it is difficult, but the majority do answer the phone if I phone them.' (Instructor)

SkillForce staff reported that the extent of parental involvement varied from school to school as well as parent to parent. Some school staff indicated that the communication with parents had had an impact:

‘All parents were invited into school for the ‘launch’ event at the start of the year. This brought some of our most ‘hard to reach’ students and parents into the school for perhaps the first time for a **positive** reason.’ (Member of school SMT)

Some teams felt that schools were not particularly supportive of parents attending events.

‘To be honest it has not been as good as we would have liked. We wanted parents to come along, but it hasn’t worked out, the schools aren’t very keen and they know the parents better than we do. So we keep in contact with the parents through letters home and reward cards and that sort of thing.’ (Team Leader)

However, some schools felt that the communication with parents helped to reinforce what the school had been saying:

‘The feedback offered by SkillForce helps to reinforce to parents which areas their children need to work on, which doesn’t leave the school as isolated.’ (Head of Year 7 and 8)

Some parents were not supportive and negative in their reactions:

‘Parents have rarely engaged. They have not attended meetings when asked even at the beginning of the course outlining the curriculum. Many parents’ comments are negative due to lack of understanding of our policies, procedures and function as a body.’ (Instructor)

One team ran a workshop on behaviour for parents which seemed to encourage engagement.

Attitudes towards SkillForce Instructors

Key to the success of SkillForce is the instructors. There was very strong agreement from the students that the instructors took time to explain things and were easy to get on with. There were also high levels of agreement that the instructors took more time to get to know the students than their teachers and that they were treated as adults by SkillForce personnel (see Table 20).

Table 20: Attitudes towards SkillForce instructors

	N	Mean	SD
The SkillForce instructors are easy to get on with	96	4.13	1.08
SkillForce instructors take time to explain things carefully	95	4.22	.95
SkillForce instructors take more time to get to know you than school teachers	96	3.91	1.33
SkillForce instructors treat you like an adult	96	3.82	1.38

The interviews with the young people supported their responses to the questionnaires. Being able to ‘have a laugh’ was important as well as the ease of relationships:

‘Better to get along with and can have a laugh with them.’ (Student)

‘You can have a joke with them and have a better conversation.’ (Student)

The young people perceived that they were treated as adults by SkillForce staff:

‘They treat you like a young adult not a kid.’ (Student)

‘Being treated as an adult rather than being moaned at all the time.’ (Student)

Students felt that they were treated with respect:

'You have treated us with respect.' (Student)

'They don't treat you like dirt.' (Student)

This included not being shouted at and listening:

'You haven't shouted at us.' (Student)

'You can talk to SkillForce better.' (Student)

'They give us eye contact when speaking to us.' (Student)

This was contrasted with the behaviour of teachers in school:

'SkillForce staff are more polite than other teachers in school.' (Student)

'Teachers at school just treat us like three year olds, not 13-year olds.' (Student)

'What I like best about SkillForce is how the instructors understand and listen to what you have to say unlike the normal teachers.' (Student)

Teachers don't listen to us.' (Student)

Pupils were frequently critical of their schools, in particular in relation to their perceptions of the way that teachers treated them. One boy talked about being sent out of the classroom in his school for no apparent reason. He said that his school was very strict and that he found this difficult to deal with. The young people also spoke about inequity of treatment from school staff. The students appreciated the instructors being honest with them and making them face up to their difficulties:

'They tell the truth and don't bullshit.' (Student)

'They help you realise how you are acting and they treat you like adults. You realise how you are behaving and what is right and wrong.' (Student)

These positive relationships were facilitated by student perceptions that the SkillForce staff were more similar to them than teachers:

'SkillForce instructors are more down at our level.' (Student)

'They're better at understanding and are cannier to you.' (Student)

The SkillForce team leaders supported this as did the school staff:

'SkillForce staff bring many life experiences to the classroom. Many have dealt with danger and adversity, suffered pain and loss with many originally coming from similar backgrounds to their students. This gives them an understanding and empathy with the young people. The students and instructor develop real relationships through activities and success. The students grow to trust their instructors with positive outcomes, instil self-confidence and personal reliance through achievement.' (Team Leader)

'SkillForce, being ex military are very organised but they are also laid back, because they are not from a teaching background. Their approach to the children is different, it is much more relaxed and that is beneficial for these kids because it is the authority that they battle against.

The sizes of the classes are much more condensed so that you have the ability to chip away and to get under their skin and to get that response.' (Link teacher).

'I think they bring for a lot of the kids an authenticity because of their life experiences. Having men and women from the forces who have been overseas, seen active service, gives them an authenticity that comes with them - and perhaps a greater sense of connection' (Head Teacher).

The SkillForce teams developed trust:

'SkillForce are trustworthy and easy to talk to.' (student)

'Pupils have formed a special bond with their peers and the instructors. Some have really opened up with issues at home. The bond with the instructors along with the firm discipline has demonstrated to most that SkillForce care about them.' (Team Leader)

This was necessary because the students had often been let down in the past:

'The main difficulty was to convince the pupils that they could feel safe enough to trust 'a teacher' again and convince them that people are genuinely interested in their education and development and they would not be abandoned or moved on when things got tough for the teacher. A promise was given by me and I ensured throughout that I kept that promise not to judge and always be there until the end of the programme. With time the pupils accepted this which enabled learning to take place.' (Instructor)

'There has been significantly less impact on the children from the PRU. These children have been passed from school to school on managed moves and were struggling to attend the PRU regularly. These pupils were at the endgame in their education and had perhaps gone down the road too often of adults who had let them down and abandoned them when they did not fit into the expected classroom behaviour.' (Instructor)

This level of trust was supported by one-to-one sessions:

'Mentoring sessions enable students to talk through concerns and to work on particular issues in school and at home that have caused them problems.' (Team Leader)

SkillForce staff as role models

School staff commented on the role of the SkillForce staff as role models:

'For many of the boys it was clear that the male staff of SkillForce were real role models – they had no other models like this in their lives. At the end of the morning teaching session all the pupils had 15 minutes just to relax and play a few games before lunch. A group of five boys took part in playing card games with a male SkillForce instructor. Clearly, they were having fun, but there was no messing around, no misbehaviour. Just looking at the boys communicating with this instructor it was really clear how much they looked up to him and admired him.' (Link teacher)

This did not only apply to the male instructors:

'She'll (*the Skill Force instructor*) solve anything. She's like a second God.' (student)

The adoption of a 'can do' approach

One of the major strengths of the SkillForce programme is the 'can do' approach of the SkillForce staff. This is particularly important in undertaking pilot work as inevitably there are things which do not work well immediately. SkillForce staff responded to challenges positively attempting to address the issues and improve the programme immediately, without waiting to be told what to do.

'Because it has been a pilot, there have been mistakes. It has been a massive learning curve. I do think we've learned a lot from it.' (Team Leader)

'It has been a steep learning curve. Over the last year we have learnt different techniques to deal with behaviour and we are a lot better prepared for next year.' (Team leader)

'To be fair, J is absolutely amazing. It is unbelievable what she has done with these kids on this programme because the first term was hard. You know, we went in there with our eyes wide shut. We had ideas, we had plans, but I don't think we ever quite knew what we were getting into. J has persevered and persevered and I think the training that we have had along the way, and the lessons that we have learned along the way, the different support groups that we have now got involved, it has all made a big difference and J before Christmas was just about ready to hang herself. She is now a happy person. I still speak to her every day – 'how has the day gone' and nine out of 10 days we have had a really good day. Sometimes we have had fantastic days. So from that point of view it has been just phenomenal the turn around – really, really good.' (Team Leader)

'So in the course of this project there has been a bit of a change of mindset from us just turning up to a group of kids and delivering something to identifying what it is we do. What is it we can do? And identifying or laying out exactly how we are going to do. And I think that is something significant that has evolved. We have learned so much now.' (Team Leader)

Adjusting to different age groups from those with which the instructors had previously worked also provided challenges:

'At first, we tried to run it like a place of work – so we had a uniform, but it was a work uniform – blue trousers, but we only wore it for outside projects. Because of the age group of the students, they couldn't grasp the concept of this being a work place. They couldn't make the jump, so it didn't work. So, certainly running it more like a school, like a school day, with a school uniform, has made a big impact.' (Instructor)

Differences in young people's responses between the programmes

There were very few differences in the questionnaire responses of the participants to the SkillForce programmes. Those that were statistically significantly different are set out in Table 21. These findings must be treated with caution as the sample sizes are very small.

In one of the Key Stage 3 programmes the students did not appear to enjoy the SkillForce activities as much as those in other programmes. The interviews cast some light on this. Some participants commented on the amount of writing:

'It can be boring – writing for ages.' (Student)

'Well we always do too much writing. We just do too much writing really.' (Student)

This was supported by school staff. Members of the Senior Management Team indicated:

'There were a number of difficulties at the start of the programme with mixed ages, years 7 and 8. Some students were already exhibiting poor behaviour. The focus on class room based activities was removed following meetings.' (Deputy Head)

'Initially, the activities were too classroom based. The school staff expressed these views and the programme was modified.' (Head teacher)

Some of the students in the Key Stage 3 programmes seemed to be teased by their peers for being involved in SkillForce. The allocation of pupils to SkillForce appeared to have become stigmatising:

'My friends go 'ugh SkillForce' 'So do mine – so bugging.' (Students)

'I would rather do lessons. The activities are enjoyable – building things, learning how to paint and decorate but other kids, they always take the mick and go "Skillforce dumbsters".' (Student)

When asked if all pupils should have the opportunity to join SkillForce it became clear that the students believed they were attending SkillForce because of their poor behaviour and school work:

'Not really, if they are well behaved they should just get on with lessons.' (Student)

However, some students valued not having to be in school lessons and appreciated the trips:

'I would rather be in SkillForce because you get out of lessons. One thing I would like to change about SkillForce is that we should go on trips every week.' (Student)

'I want to carry on because it gets you out of lessons.' (Student)

Despite the initial difficulties with the implementation of this Key Stage 3 programme where the students did not appear to enjoy the SkillForce activities as much as those in other programmes, the Head teacher in the school where the programme was running said

'There has been some success. It has been mixed. Where it has worked well it has had a massive impact. Staff in the school have appreciated the involvement of SkillForce and are prepared to work with them to achieve a positive outcome. There has been a good working relationship and productive joint planning has taken place. It has potential and while it has not quite had the impact we hoped for in the early stages the re-aligned programme appears to be having an impact. I would like to see a SkillForce pathway established from Key Stage 3.' (Head teacher)

Table 21: Differences in questionnaire responses between SkillForce sites

Statement	Sites	N	Mean	SD
SkillForce is my favourite subject	Newcastle KS4	6	3.5	.84
	Newcastle KS3	2	4.5	.71
	Oxfordshire KS3	8	2.4	1.3
	Leicester KS3	7	3.6	1.8
	B'ham KS4	5	4.2	.84
	Leeds, KS3	5	2.2	1.1
	Kent KS3	41	3.9	1.2
	Manchester KS3	11	2.7	1.4
	Exeter KS3	9	3.6	1.5
	Total	94	3.5	1.4
Since being in SkillForce I have had fewer detentions	Newcastle KS4	5	4.8	.45
	Newcastle KS3	2	5.0	.00
	Oxfordshire KS3	8	3.6	1.2
	Leicester KS3	8	3.0	1.7
	B'ham KS4	5	4.0	1.7
	Leeds, KS3	6	1.7	1.2
	Kent KS3	39	3.9	1.2
	Manchester KS3	11	3.4	1.9
	Exeter KS3	9	3.8	1.3
	Total	93	3.7	1.5
The teachers at school are interested in what I do in SkillForce	Newcastle KS4	0		
	Newcastle KS3	0		
	Oxfordshire KS3	0		
	Leicester KS3	8	4.5	.53
	B'ham KS4	4	4.5	.57
	Leeds, KS3	6	3.7	.52
	Kent KS3	40	2.8	1.4
	Manchester KS3	0		
	Exeter KS3	9	3.8	1.6
	Total	67	3.3	1.4
I was excited about joining SkillForce	Newcastle KS4	6	3.0	1.1
	Newcastle KS3	2	5.0	.00
	Oxfordshire KS3	8	3.4	1.06
	Leicester KS3	8	4.3	1.03
	B'ham KS4	5	4.2	.84
	Leeds, KS3	5	2.0	1.2
	Kent KS3	41	3.7	1.0
	Manchester KS3	11	2.7	1.2
	Exeter KS3	9	4.1	1.4
	Total	95	3.7	1.1
I enjoyed the SkillForce activities	Newcastle KS4	6	4.7	.52
	Newcastle KS3	2	4.5	.71
	Oxfordshire KS3	8	3.1	1.2
	Leicester KS3	8	4.8	.46
	B'ham KS4	5	4.6	.55
	Leeds, KS3	6	3.3	1.2
	Kent KS3	41	4.0	.76
	Manchester KS3	11	4.4	.92
	Exeter KS3	9	4.0	1.0
	Total	96	4.1	.92
SkillForce has given me the chance to gain extra qualifications	Newcastle KS4	6	4.5	.54
	Newcastle KS3	2	3.0	.000
	Oxfordshire KS3	8	2.8	1.0
	Leicester KS3	8	4.4	1.1
	B'ham KS4	5	3.8	1.6
	Leeds, KS3	6	3.2	1.3
	Kent KS3	40	3.8	1.1
	Manchester KS3	10	4.4	.69
	Exeter KS3	9	4.1	.93
	Total	94	3.8	1.1

Communication and relationships with schools

SkillForce staff were totally committed to working with schools. Communication was conducted by email, telephone and visits and many school staff were willing to give personal contact details and were approachable out of school hours. School staff reported that any arising issues were dealt with quickly. The SkillForce staff on the whole indicated that communication and relations with schools were good:

'All schools reacted very positively towards SkillForce, support was excellent and relationships very good.' (Instructor)

'We had daily phone calls to report any absence or incidents. We provided progress reports for each pupil on a weekly basis. Some emails bounced back but generally communication has been very good'. (Instructor)

'We have a link teacher with regular meetings. The relationship between the schools and SkillForce are positive and helpful.' (Instructor)

However, there were exceptions to this:

'The PRU was used as the main contact for attendance (daily) and weekly behavioural meetings. Very few other participating schools have attended these weekly meetings which was frustrating for staff and pupils, for instance, information about examination dates was not communicated.' (Instructor)

'It was pretty – shall we say - stressful at the beginning – I had six different schools, pupils from six different schools, and the only school that came to see them was the Head of the Pupil Referral Unit. The rest of the schools didn't visit – the kids started complaining - just ditched us here – they don't give a damn about us - and the kids feel it.' (Team Leader)

'Well the saddest thing from my point of view is that there has probably been five or six schools involved in the programme throughout the year. And I have had one or two schools attend meetings. And that has been for two or three times tops. And you just think – you know they are still your kids... you have still got that care of duty and that is a really sad thing.' (Team Leader)

It was clear that some schools had no desire to maintain responsibility for the students:

'If I am honest the schools don't help the situation. Some of the schools make them feel like they (the students) are not worth bothering with. The guys that are making the decisions – these are the guys that are meant to be drilling education into these kids, giving them knowledge and power to go out into the big bad world and they don't. They just go 'no good'. I would love to meet someone who could justify it – I really would!' (Instructor)

'Some of the schools offer a lot more support than others which makes the student still feel wanted and in touch.' (Instructor)

A member of a participating school's Senior Management Team stressed the importance of the involvement of the schools:

'SkillForce care, because they are there everyday. In a sense, I wouldn't say they think I care, but they know that I have maintained regular contact with them but the other schools have not maintained that – that is hard for these kids, their perception is that they are not

wanted... and that is a clear message coming from young people. I know schools are busy and I know it is very, very hard to get somebody to go and visit the construction site or the office, or the hairdressers... but it is absolutely essential that that is part of it, that it is built into the time... coz if not these young people could be experiencing difficulties and nobody would be picking it up. How do the schools know that it is going right unless they actually make that face to face contact? It is not a fault of SkillForce – SkillForce have tried.’ (Member of school SMT)

In some cases one school acted as the main focus for communication and passed on information to other schools. This was not always successful:

‘I have found out that they don’t always pass on the information that we are passing on to them. That is what I found out today when I’ve been to Peter’s school, so I might just have to start firing out the information to each of the schools as well – not just the one.’ (Instructor)

Recognising the need for better communication in one implementation of the programme a forum had been set up:

‘We have set up a whole series of different sorts of forums. So every four weeks we have all the head teachers of all the secondary schools. We now have agreement from them all that we work much more closely and that we are being honest – whereas sometimes there wasn’t honesty. So there is an understanding. There are two of the schools particularly that are much more closely involved with us now.’ (Member of school SMT)

SkillForce staff were also taking a stronger line with schools:

‘I think I learned the lesson from the first round so I really pushed it in the meetings with the schools and said ‘you need to become involved in this – it is not a dumping ground for you to leave your naughty kids with us’. In the first pilot, I would get, ‘well he is with you now – he is your problem’ I am not interested in answers like that.’ (Team leader)

The schools that engaged benefitted more from the programme:

‘Some schools took more interest in the programme and were more on board with what we were trying to achieve. This meant that their schools on the whole gained more from the course.’ (Team Leader)

SkillForce staff noted the differences in the success of the students from different schools:

‘Some schools are more successful and their cohorts seem to achieve more. My opinion is that in some schools high standards and expectations are set while others expect little from these students who then live up to these low expectations.’ (Team Leader)

In some cases the support from schools was very strong:

‘The support of all the staff has been outstanding especially with the weekly progress meeting to discuss both the individual and the group, an essential and invaluable support and information resource. Without this support many of the students may not have been as successful in gaining Maths and English qualifications.’ (Instructor)

The support from schools was crucial to success:

‘The support from schools ultimately responsible for the young people is an essential necessity in the development of both the young person and the overall success of the programme in the future.’ (Instructor)

One instructor indicated that it would be necessary to make changes for the future:

'If the programme were to run again I would adopt a different approach. When dealing with the link's from the participating schools, although they are the customer they must remain ultimately responsible for the education and development of THEIR pupils. To that end they must remain interested in the pupils and the programme.' (Instructor)

'Some schools fail to support their students, don't come to weekly meetings. This will change next year.' (Team leader)

In some schools there was a negative reaction as:

'Some people were unhappy to see a troublesome pupil receiving treats.' (Deputy Head)

Overall, where there was close contact with SkillForce staff, school staff were extremely complementary about their organisation and management:

'We have an open and honest dialog – my door is always open. We talk every day that they are in school. I've got confidence in them and I think they've got confidence in me.' (Deputy Head teacher)

'The pilot has been well managed by SkillForce staff. They have worked closely with relevant colleagues and been open and transparent when discussing issues with the Deputy Head or Directors of Learning. The SkillForce team integrated extremely well with the rest of the staff. They attend in house CPD provision which has proved mutually beneficial. They are open, honest, professional and hardworking. They have put a lot of effort into making the pilot a success and it is a pleasure to work with them.' (Deputy Head)

'The programme was managed well. The regular updates are valuable. The programme is impressive – good range of activities.' (Deputy Head)

'Great, yeh, yeh they're great. The two guys have been great, they come in and we have good chats with them about what is going on and what is going on at school, so I know everything that has been happening here.' (Link Teacher)

'The programme has been well delivered and organised. The instructor is regarded as a staff member with the team by the school community.' (Deputy Head Teacher)

School staff were also impressed with the impact of the programme:

'Once the programme was sorted out it has worked really well. Kids' lives are being turned around.' (Head teacher)

'The instructors were really trying to turn the young people around, to give them opportunities to succeed and to enable the young people to fully understand about actions and consequences so that they might be able to 'survive' in a school classroom.' (Member of school SMT)

'When I started here six years ago, we had the lowest attendance in our Local Authority, 85%. We have now got outstanding attendance from OFSTED, 94.5%, probably the highest attendance in the county. Now SkillForce has a cohort of about 20 to 30 kids each year having poor attendance, exclusions, etc. The suite of skills that they have been working on – COPE, ASDAN, can be presented in a different way – there is more flexibility. And they have all day – so you may get some pay offs for that.' (Head teacher)

There needed to be a match between the ethos of the school and the ethos of SkillForce in terms of the consequences for the students of poor behaviour or attendance. This was not always the case and then there was the potential for students to receive mixed messages about their behaviour.

There was variability in the extent to which schools were familiar with SkillForce and the way it worked. In some schools SkillForce was already well known and this made for stronger working relationships. In some cases instructors felt that more could be done to make the work of SkillForce more widely known:

‘The schools do not always know a great deal about SkillForce and what we do. Marketing who we are and what we do is an area SkillForce could develop going forward.’ (Instructor)

Academic work in SkillForce programmes

There were mixed views about the role of academic work in the SkillForce programme. Staff from one school viewed the programme as having a negative impact on other students and as giving the participants too much choice:

‘There was some negative impact on other students in some classes when the SkillForce student talked to them about trips and what they were doing. The SkillForce students seem to be able to pick and chose what they do depending on how they feel. There’s a need for more school work, less options for students so they don’t have quite so much control and must do certain things.’ (Head of Year)

Staff from the same school were concerned that participants had not completed school work while engaged with SkillForce:

‘There needs to be better co-ordinated completion of school work time. If students are too far behind when they return it will cause more problems.’ (Deputy Head)

The SkillForce staff felt that it was more important initially to focus on behavioural issues:

‘Focus on behavioural issues first, then introduce academic attainment.’ (Instructor)

‘Have less emphasis on qualifications and more on social skills, group discussions focusing on personal behaviours and more practical physical activities.’ (Team Leader)

‘The SkillForce programme was designed to re-engage students and fire their imagination giving them practical life skills and improve their employability. I think much of this has been diluted or lost. It should try to get back to the original principles where the onus was on improving challenging students’ attitudes and employability prospects.’(Instructor)

In contrast to these views, another instructor was concerned about the lack of academic learning on the five day programme, particularly in relation to maths, English and science in the SkillForce Key Stage 3 programme. He would have liked some intervention from teachers because the students were away from school for a whole term.

The extent to which programmes offer academic work or focus on behavioural issues needs to be considered by SkillForce.

Provision for different groups of students

Most of those participating in the SkillForce programmes were white British boys. This presented challenges for the instructors. For instance, where girls were in the minority they were sometimes reluctant to engage in the activities despite the fact that the instructors took gender into account when planning the activities.

'The boys tend to prefer practical activities and are less concerned about doing physical activities. I think girls are more self conscious and are more aware of their self image.' (Instructor)

'Most of the girls on the course do not like playing sports or being involved in outdoor team building tasks. This is because they do not want to get dirty or sweaty.' (Instructor)

Some girls leave the programme:

'The pilot programme started with 10 students, eight boys, two girls (who have now left the programme). The girls left as they no longer wanted to participate. I think they felt outnumbered by the boys. I think if there had been a better ratio of girls to boys they may have stayed. When one girl decided that it was not for her the other did not wish to be on her own.' (Team Leader)

If the girls were resilient and persisted the outcomes could be very positive:

'Initially, the female pupils would not engage in any out of classroom activities, they would attend but not participate. This was probably because of the threat of ridicule from the male pupils. Midway through the programme they started participating in all of the activities both physical and mental/tactical ones. Their confidence in themselves grew and the activities were made less male centric as the programme developed.' (Instructor)

Certainly instructors recognised the issues:

'The gender split is roughly one third girls and two thirds boys. The course is seen as physically challenging. We need to be more sympathetic in our provision towards sporting activities normally associated with girls such as netball and hockey. The residential camps and outdoor education activities suit both sexes equally. The course is kinaesthetic in nature and attracts more boys than girls. Some boys are reluctant to work outside their comfort zone in case of loss of face.' (Team Leader)

One instructor explained how:

'Parents of Muslim girls are reluctant to allow them on mixed residential camps. Last year we ran a camp just for Muslim girls which was very successful.' (Team Leader)

There were also issues relating to the age of the participants. Previously, SkillForce tended to operate mainly with students nearing the end of their school. The pilots included programmes which were focused on pupils in Key Stage 3 (11-14) including those for pupils in Year 7.

Schools seemed to welcome the inclusion of younger students:

'We have been really pleased since the move to a year 7 only cohort. The curriculum now gives the students an opportunity to explore practical skills and experience life outside the classroom. We are getting value for money in the Key Stage 4 cohort and in negotiation with Key Stage 3. We would be prepared to engage in the future without subsidy. We want

SkillForce to give our students what we find it difficult to offer, trips, visits, experiences and skills that exist outside the classroom and promote key skills of independence, co-operation and team work.’ (Deputy Head)

Schools felt that for students in KS3 SkillForce had something different to offer:

‘I think one of the roles is to have much more learning outside the classroom. And I think one of the bonuses that comes with SkillForce is their access to facilities – we don’t have that. And usually they are qualified to do that. They are qualified to do activities on the water, or at an army camp – and have experience of doing these things themselves. For students who come to us at risk of exclusion/disengagement, they can be thinking at least once a week or once a fortnight there is something really exciting that I do with guys who are different from anybody else. And that is something to look forward to, and that might tie me into the rest of the curriculum. What they do on that day is really memorable. (Head teacher)

There were some reservations about trying to include the whole Key Stage 3 age range (11-14) in one group. SkillForce staff also felt that it would have been helpful to have more information about the students prior to the programme being implemented:

‘I would have liked more information about the students in order to adapt the programme to the diversity of the group.’ (Instructor)

Individual diversity was felt to be more relevant than the school which the students attended. Because of the huge diversity of students it was suggested that the actual delivery of the programme might need adjustment from time to time:

‘I believe the course needs adaption depending on the students.’ (Instructor)

‘Every student has a unique set of circumstances which are more wide ranging than which school they come from. Once on the programme they soon become part of the team and are accepted (to whatever degree) by their peers based on who they are and not where they are from (school).’ (Instructor)

Length and intensity of programmes

There were a range of responses to questions about the length of the programmes and their suitability for students of different ages. Having had experience of the short programmes in the pilot a number of staff (school and SkillForce) indicated that twelve weeks was not long enough:

‘I don’t think 12 weeks is long enough. No, nowhere near... defeats the object – so I think 12 weeks, he is probably just getting into it... I think... coming back after one term it will be problematic. I think because they are thrust straight back into the environment. I think if you are going to do it, it needs to be a year long course or definitely two terms or something like that. A term is not long enough.’ (Link Teacher)

‘The programme is too short so the students will slip back into their old ways.’ (Instructor)

However, some SkillForce staff felt that six or twelve weeks might be sufficient for some of the younger students:

‘The six-week programme is about trying to give the young people the skills to remain in the classroom. In particular it is the back chat and answering back that are the problems – the kids don’t understand the game of being in school.’ (Team leader)

For the older students (KS4) there was a view that the programme definitely needed to be longer:

'I think that I have seen such an improvement in the lads that I just think we could do more now. They clearly like being with us and I don't want them to go back into schools and cause problems. I know that the original idea is let us turn them around, send them back to school and hopefully what we have done will stop them causing trouble when they get back to school but I think we need to do something more long term for that to happen. I think really Key Stage 4 is probably too late. I think if you are going to turn somebody round you need to do it at an earlier age – so maybe a twelve week programme if it was for the Key Stage 3, turn them around and then put them back into school. But if they are in Key Stage 4, keep them with us – and do it that way.' (Instructor)

'The traditional two-year programme for three days a week means that the first year is about building trust and learning skills: it culminates in the residential and this is where the young people can be turned around. They then come back to us in Year 11 and the focus is on gaining qualifications and eventually next steps. The one-year programme isn't long enough for this to happen. The pupils are in different year groups. In some cases it seemed that pupils had in effect been baby sat for one year.' (Team Leader)

One suggestion was for intensive engagement initially reducing the extent of participation over time:

'I think from a starting point, three days is about right and then I think... in the ideal world, if money were never an issue. For these kids, I think what they really need is may be something like, one term intensive three days a week, keeping up to date with another two days, then may be down to two days for a couple of terms and then for the second year - maybe even a second year... up to one day a week, so that they have got that continued support and break from the mainstream education but it's not just a sudden sort of throw them in a the deep end and then take it away again.' (Instructor)

A similar approach was suggested with an even more intensive start to the programme:

'SkillForce has the potential to improve many aspects of the lives of our client group. Only seeing the pupils one day a week means we have six days of poor habits, attitudes, etc to compete with every week. It's like starting from scratch every week reminding them how we work and what's expected. I am sure that a solid two week period would have far greater impact on the pupils. It would mean that we have only 2 days of poor habit, attitudes to compete with. A solid two weeks of positive delivery using every skill at our disposal would deliver a far greater level of success; would feel like the pupils were achieving more and ensure a more concentrated process. Subsequent to this two week intensive 'boot camp' we could continue with weekly or fortnightly follow ups to monitor progress. This could be agreed as part of any contract and enable SkillForce to really get these pupils out of their comfort zones and show them what they are really capable of.' (Instructor)

One member of staff expressed reservations about the full-time model:

'I think we would really struggle if we were running this five days a week. I think if we were taking them out of school and just working with them in a bubble, I think it would be quite hard. It definitely would be a lot harder for the instructors. I think they would burn out pretty rapidly and also for the students I think they have somethingthey really look forward to coming to us, and it kind of keeps them – it is a carrot for the rest of the week in school. And something that they enjoy doing, so the school can kind of use that to kind of make them behave a little bit.' (Team Leader)

Reintegration into school

Many of the interviewed pupils did not have a sense of what they wished to do in the future, were not sure how successful they would be when returning to their schools and were not looking forward to going back. SkillForce staff had particular concerns about whether the participants would be able to reintegrate back into school following completion of the programme.

There were concerns about re-integration with students on the short programmes:

'It's really whether or not they can continue the improvement in school full time because part of me, I wonder how much of an impact an eleven week programme can have. Will it really change their complete outlook and... I am hoping it will help them to build... I am hoping that the fact that they have actually achieved some awards and a qualification from this, they have had a positive experience with other adults, I'm hoping that that will then help them to go back and have the confidence that they can achieve things and that it will help them to understand that – and maybe the teachers will see them in a slightly different light, as opposed to the ones that are always in trouble and that sort of thing. And, it is very difficult, it is very difficult to know what will happen at the end of this. I mean sometimes I think they need some kind of alternative on a longer term basis.' (Team Leader)

'When we first started to put the programme together before we know now what we know about the pupils, we thought twelve weeks would be ideal... but I am really not looking forward to this lot going back to their schools.' (Team Leader)

The management of re-integration of young people on the Key Stage 3 programmes was of concern to SkillForce staff and school staff. Some form of transition process was believed to be needed:

'It is very important that we are always looking to transition them back into school. There has got to be a point where we say 'we are going to go into a procedure for getting these kids back in – a transitional procedure. And I say we are getting to that point now with Charlie and Oscar and Ollie. They have got the ability to achieve 5 A* to Cs. We can probably agree with the school whereby one of the instructors drops by for part of a morning for a week or two – and we kind of build it up bit by bit.' (Team leader)

'I think that the part time timetable is the best way forward so they still have that person that they can go back to and relate things to but when you have got somebody with you in a classroom setting that sets you apart immediately and for me that is going to cause more upset for the child because then they are going to feel defensive. They might be embarrassed by the SkillForce tutor and become estranged from them. I think it could damage the relationship I really do.' (Link teacher)

Overall, a phased return with some support was felt to be needed:

'We have got two of them that are ready to be going back into school, and they are going to be going back in September. I actually don't know what the plan is because it is up to the school, but what I think will happen is that they will be coming here in the morning and going to school in the afternoon until it is full days, but it is going to be part time here, part time school.' (Instructor)

Providing a mentor to offer support after return to school was seen as one way to support reintegration:

'Well obviously, they will get all their awards and certificates hopefully we will get a good attendance from the schools and parents who will help us by coming and saying well done to them. You know, look how much you have achieved and look what you can continue on with if you want to and you work hard. Well then they will go back to school after Easter but the mentor will continue to visit them in the schools to help them to kind of reinforce and put into practice the things that they have been doing with us – as a reminder of what they did with us until such time as those students, – I mean obviously it's not going to be indefinite support, we can't offer that. Certainly I am hoping by the half term they won't feel they need support anymore.' (Team Leader)

For the older children there was considerable doubt as to whether they would return to school successfully:

'I think even in Year 11 when they get put in this programme they are at the start of year 11 in September, they are probably not going to go back to school.' (Team Leader)

'None of them could reintegrate in my opinion. I don't think any of them would walk through the gate. Those in year 10 can't go back. Zoe is hoping to be here. I had a chat with her Monday. She said 'if I am not here, I am not going to school'. So obviously I have had a chat with them and said 'it is better at school, this is not the be all and end all, this is not the place that you really want to be – you want to be at school to get your GCSEs'. 'But I don't want to go to school, I don't like the teachers.' (Instructor)

There was also an issue about integration in relation to catching up with school work:

'They have had six months out of main stream education, they have done a little bit of maths and English, but not very much. Charlie will find it hard. He is ready to go back in. And hopefully the things that he has learned here, when he gets back into the classroom – if he doesn't understand something, he has got the confidence to put his hand up and say – instead of going back to the way that he was.' (Instructor)

For the SkillForce teams there was also the issue of students leaving and joining the programme at different times. This was believed to be manageable as long as there was a critical mass of students who had already learned to work within the rules and had become more mature in their behaviour:

'Initially, there was a lot of pecking order issues really. Not bullying but jostling to find out where they all fit in to the structure of the classroom. Coz we started off with just one school and then they brought in Zoe. Just when the group were about to settle, about three weeks later the others were introduced and that really upset the apple cart again. It might be better just having all ten from the start, rather than a trickle feed in so that we have two or three weeks of hell and then it is over. But we have a new one who came in this week and it hasn't upset the dynamics. And I think that is because the other students know where they fit. They seem to have matured a little bit and they know there are other kids coming in.' (Instructor)

'For the year 9s, that transition has to happen in the course of the next 6 weeks. And that creates space on the programme and people can come on. And we want to be in a position where we are letting one or two go, letting one or two come on, so we are never getting rid of a whole bulk of students and then ... we've got to achieve the right set of rules and standards and behaviours and attitudes in the group so that the critical mass is running in the direction that we want it to run. And then when students come in from the outside, they are in that critical mass and that sucks them along. Rather than them coming in and because there are lots of them they change the critical mass and then we are all at sea again. Because I would say they are significantly better behaved now than they were.' (Team Leader)

Location

There were issues about the location of the SkillForce provision and the logistics of getting participants to one location:

'The school itself has been brilliant – as have the school staff. The only problem really is logistics in that if you look at the geographical location of all the different schools and where all the different pupils have come from, this is the furthest afield and the taxi company is based elsewhere. That has caused us problems. So it has been the logistics of getting everybody here... piling everybody into one taxi started to work a bit better eventually – once they knew the layout of where all the individual pupils lived but some of the taxi journeys took a long time. If the school had been more central that would have been easier. But other than that, the school has been brilliant. We couldn't ask for anything better.' (Team leader)

'There was an initial problem with the taxi but that improved. The main problem was with transport. This was expensive and at times unreliable.' (Deputy Head)

'We had a bit of an incident with the transport unfortunately, in week two, and so from that point onwards, we decided that one of our instructors would be on the transport with them.' (Team Leader)

When the programme was offered in a school with children attending from other schools this sometimes created problems:

'The pupils from the 'host' school were more challenging at first. They knew where to hide and were rude to the school staff on various occasions.' (Instructor)

Location also seemed to impact on the attendance of the students:

'Our year 9s, one of them was engaged in the early stages and disengaged in the latter stages. He is not here. And, I think one of the things to think about is location. It is always a problem location, where you put something like this, in a disparate area like this. The further away it is from your school, the harder it is to get people there. The costs also escalate.' (Member of school SMT)

Where children were attending from different schools there were issues about finding a school that was willing to host the programme:

'The only initial issue was with venue as none of the schools were willing to host the provision. This was overcome by using our links with one ACF.' (Team Leader)

Having children from other schools also created problems about identity and different school rules:

'I think they should have worn a uniform... I think they should have been given a polo shirt or something with SkillForce on and given them a bit of corporate identity so it is not quite such a step away from the establishment in terms of the school uniform.' (Member of school SMT)

Where children from different schools were participating on one school site some of the pupils challenged the differences in behaviour policies from their own school and on some occasions had difficulty accepting changes. A member of staff from one school suggested that the programme might work well outside of a school environment:

'It could be in some sort of youth centre or a village sports centre.' (Member of school SMT)

Overall, it was difficult to find appropriate premises and some were far from ideal.

'We would like to improve on the venue certainly. We need to have your main classroom and a break out space. Supervision for students – down time is important to them, we haven't got that right yet.' (Team Leader)

Selection of students to participate

The selection of the appropriate young people to participate was essential. Students that came from mainstream schools and not PRUs generally were more successful on the programme. It was important to have a balanced group and also that the young people were not coerced into participation. Some schools were concerned to identify and change the behaviour of students as early as possible:

'My biggest issue with education is identifying these young people early enough so that we know that we have got the right provision at an early enough stage so that it can be channelled in an appropriate direction. And SkillForce is one of the directions that we can use – and very successfully as has been demonstrated here recently.' (Member of school SMT)

In some cases SkillForce had no choice in the selection of pupils. The schools had a fixed number of places and could send that number of pupils. This was frequently problematic. It was clear that for some students there would be safeguarding issues if they were forced to participate.

'The schools selected them. So they were students that were not engaging at all at school so were going to be managed moved or ending up in a PRU. They identified them and put them forward for the programme. But the programme is not for all of them. We have had one taken off, one never really got going to be honest. One or two have not bothered turning up. One we have taken off. He wanted to be alpha dog... but his problem was that he couldn't engage in a programme where people were laying down rules and regulations.' (Team Leader)

The selection of the pupils by the schools contributed to some difficulties with the earlier groups. At least one school was using it as a dumping ground and one school sent children with severe mental health problems. SkillForce staff indicated that interviewing students before they began the programme was the best approach:

'I have asked schools to identify pupils and I think we then do an interview process where we can actually be selective and think who would complement each other, rather than antagonise each other. In order to make it work, you have got to think of the dynamics of the group to give them the best possible advantage. It only takes one person to blow it all apart – as we know from the beginning of this year. It is now a stable cohort so you have got the opportunity of building whereas if you had one or two that don't want to participate then it spoils it for everybody. And I think we have got to be honest and say 'what do we want for these kids? If we are wanting a babysitting service then fine, pay your money and walk away from it – but that is not what we want. We want something – we want them to walk away with their heads held high and say 'we've achieved!' And I think that is absolutely essential.' (Instructor)

Some of the participants were recommended through a behaviour partnership which involved eight schools. Following the recommendation SkillForce staff:

'met with the parents, and the young person, and the school, and see, they were nominated and put forward by the school to do the programme, but then they had a meeting with us, then parents sort of signed up to it, they signed up to it, so it is really down to how much the school press gangs them into it whether or not – and again, it is like our long courses... it varies from school to school, other schools will put it in the options book and the students choose to come and do the programme, and other schools say 'right here are your 15 students for the two years'. (Team Leader)

There was considerable variability in the young people that the schools selected

'Whereas other schools in maybe tougher areas, we will have quite a few students where they are a nightmare. They are on a two year, one day a week programme and these kids will probably leave school with no other qualifications but the ones that they achieve through ourselves. Whereas, some cohorts have got a few behavioural issues, attendance hasn't always been the best, but they are working at level 2 and they are going to get some really good sort of GCSE equivalents from the programme. So I think even on long courses it can vary considerably depending on the school that you are in and what the school wants to achieve. Some schools just want you in there and they will give you reasonably bright, reasonably well behaved kids because they want you to get them through level 2 qualifications, other schools will give you really, really, really tough kids because they just want them occupied meaningfully and to give them something that is an alternative that they will enjoy, that they can also get some qualifications from as well.' (Team Leader)

Sometimes when students were participating from different schools and the schools selected the participants there were problems:

'There were two extremes with these kids – one or two of the schools took very vulnerable young people on, who maybe have found it tough because of the more street wise kids on the programme. And then the other half of the schools put the really street wise naughty kids on there. It wasn't that the schools got it wrong – they weren't all singing off the same song sheet. If the kids had all been of the similar nature to start with then we would have tailored the course more to that individual, but because there was such a mix, and kind of two extremes I think it made it quite hard for us to get the balance right in terms of what we were doing with them. But the seven that are remaining on the course, I think it has been a positive experience for them.' (Team Leader)

There were also issues about the year make up of the group. Groups with mixed year groups were not always successful:

'We started with a mixed group of year 7s and year 8s and that wasn't terribly successful because the 8s wanted to influence the 7s and the 7s wanted to mimic the 8s. And also the school was trying desperately hard to separate this group of year 7s and 8s and we were then sweeping them all up together in the same classroom. So we have stopped that and we have now got a cohort of just year 7s.' (Instructor)

Staff Training

In piloting new programmes it was important for staff to have appropriate training. They valued training opportunities.

'I did the Youth at Risk as part of my resettlement with SkillForce, left the army and the week after I left the army I started here. And then everything that had been covered at Youth at Risk started to fall into place, rule setting, and being consistent. Since then we have been on two continuation training days and they've been invaluable really. The first one we did up in Newcastle and that gave us the opportunity to chat with other people who were going

through the same things that we were. There was a time when everything that we seemed to be doing wasn't working and to speak to other people who were dealing with the same things and dealing with the same sorts of students and to hear that they have been through the same things, that was invaluable.' (Instructor)

It was suggested that staff should rotate through different roles to keep them fresh within the boundaries of their capabilities offering them opportunities for development.

Timetabling and staffing of programmes

Timetabling was a challenge when a full day was not planned off site:

'If a full day is not planned off site activities become more difficult to arrange. This continues to be a challenge. Schools looking for better value for money often split the SkillForce instructors to cover two classes. This lessens the effect, impact and success of the programme and has a detrimental effect all round. This is an ongoing issue.' (Team Leader)

Consistency in staffing was seen to be important with the same team working with the students and able to respond to their needs. It was suggested that ideally there should be three in the team, one of whom was a mentor who would be working away at the underlying problems. This would obviously have cost implications.

Timing of programmes

There were some specific issues related to the development of the new programmes, which meant that the SkillForce teams had little time for developing positive relationships with schools and for planning the programme:

'For programme one the planning stage was at the end of the winter term. This made it difficult to contact schools. In some cases schools were unaware of the programme until week one.' (Team Leader)

The tight time scale put particular pressure on some instructors:

'There should have been a proper pilot which had taken place before the programme was sold to schools. More information needs to be given to instructors before starting a new programme like this. I have had to make this programme up myself which has led to a number of issues during delivery of the programme.' (Instructor)

'I think we entered into the programme too quickly. With things such as behavioural contracts having been introduced we have learnt how to cope with groups. We are also looking to introduce more partners. We are looking to continue the programme but changing/adding partners such as the local college to get extra qualifications, include more work experience. It has made us look at the structure of the team.' (Team leader)

'Lack of time to prepare in the first instance put the team under pressure. There was no clear guidance as to what the programme would be or how the students would be expected to behave.' (Instructor)

Time for planning

There was little time for planning before the new programmes were implemented:

'Due to having little time to put the programme together there were some difficulties. These were overcome by making changes along the way and planning during breaks/lunchtimes.' (Instructor)

The five day programme meant that planning time had been curtailed.

'We don't have serious planning time. They usually go at 2 o'clock so our planning time starts at 2 o'clock and a lot of times we are up until midnight planning. There is a scheme of work, but it changes, everyday it changes. So we are planning in our own time basically. It would have been better had it been a four day programme – it would have given us more time at work to sort out what they had done, if they had missed anything, what they still needed to do.' (Instructor)

This has been resolved in some implementations by the school having an input on one day:

'From this week, we have got it that the school does Monday, maths and English, and we do Tuesday to Friday and I think that is the right balance. Doing five days it is really hard to do some planning, to do some site visits. A lot of the places we have been are places that we already know. Having a day to plan and get things like that in would have been really good. And that is in place now – so that is the right balance.' (Instructor)

Staff stress

The implementation of the new programme at speed and the extent to which staff had to solve problems on the job created stress for some SkillForce staff.

'SkillForce tends to use the ex military ethos of we will just muddle through with good will. And that is prevalent here and that is why the guys battle through so much of the time. It is their mentality to battle through, but we have got to do this new quality approach – we have got to get things so that it is not a trial of strength all the time. Which means having the programme supported and resourced, but that is all part of the learning experience.' (Team Leader)

'The first 12 weeks, I don't think I could cope with it again. I couldn't cope with the constant stress. I lost two stone, because I was inexperienced. I didn't know 'am I doing the right thing? – should I be doing something else?' So I was taking it all on myself. I could have really made myself ill through lack of experience. What probably made me ill was not being able to say 'I can't save everybody. I can't do it for everybody'. It was like a warzone coming in – in to a battle field, every single day. This was at the start. You are constantly on red alert. Right at the start, I gave them my word. 'I will never ever abandon you' and it is the only thing that kept me coming back. I could have cut my tongue out! But that would have been so destructive if I had walked away. But now, at the moment, they have gelled so well – brilliant. It's nice, they make you want to come back.' (Instructor)

To reduce staff stress, time needs to be devoted to training instructors to be able to deal with the complex needs of the children in the Zero Exclusion programme.

Conclusions and issues for consideration

The current market environment in education, particularly in relation to Alternative Provision (AP) means that increasingly schools are the 'customers' rather than local authorities or government. More and more funding is being devolved to schools to spend as they wish. Schools themselves are under pressure to deliver high academic standards. Pupils with behaviour problems disrupt the work of other pupils, frustrate teachers and have an impact

on the school's academic standards. There is therefore enormous potential for those providing AP which addresses behaviour problems.

As has been demonstrated throughout this report SkillForce is a highly successful programme which has the potential to turn around the lives of disaffected young people. Students enjoyed the activities, and demonstrated major improvements in attendance, behaviour, punctuality, and the use of bad language with fewer exclusions and confrontations with others. Students reported increased concentration and confidence relating to their school work and a range of benefits enhancing their well-being including confidence, respect for others, team working skills and improved communication and listening skills which improved pupil-staff relationships. For students reaching the end of their school careers, the SkillForce staff played a crucial role in supporting them in planning and enacting a future career or further education pathway giving them prospects for the future. This is remarkable given that the students had little self-belief in the likelihood of future academic success and few aspirations or ambitions when starting the programme.

The strengths of SkillForce staff were demonstrated throughout the pilot programmes. Their 'can do' and problem solving approaches meant that difficulties in implementation were tackled and new ways of working devised to address issues. The strengths of typical SkillForce programmes in relation to setting boundaries and behaviours having consequences, positive and negative, remained, albeit that more rigorous 'rules' had to be devised to manage the behaviour of some extremely challenging young people. SkillForce staff continued to act as role models, treated the young people as adults, with respect, not shouting at them but raising issues of poor behaviour calmly and privately. Staff attempted to understand the underlying causes of the poor behaviour and work with the students to address them. A key factor was the trust developed between staff and the students, many of whom had been let down in the past. SkillForce staff demonstrated an ongoing commitment to support them in turning their lives around.

The Zero Exclusions pilot had two overarching strands, programmes for students in KS3 and KS4. These presented different challenges to the SkillForce staff. From the perspective of schools, for most pupils in Years 10 and 11 the potential for high academic attainment had already been determined. Where this was limited and students' behaviour was disrupting the work of others school staff were likely to be content with any AP which removed them from the school environment providing this was not too costly. This was less likely to be the case with younger pupils where re-integration into school was to be expected. School's expectations were therefore likely to determine the extent to which they engaged with the work of the programme and supported their students. Where schools had 'abandoned' students, the task facing SkillForce was very great as the students themselves felt let down and unwanted and had effectively been 'forced' to participate.

Programmes where students were drawn from different schools faced a wide range of challenges. There were issues relating to location and transport and the difficulties that arose when one school acted as the home of the programme. Developing a team from students coming from a wide range of schools, who may join and leave the programme at different times presented particular challenges. In the pilot programmes SkillForce staff resolved issues as they arose adopting their characteristic 'can do' approach. In terms of developing and maintaining a team ethos and behaviour code it was important that there was a critical mass of existing good practice when new students were introduced. Issues relating to the quality of the accommodation and its location depend to some extent on what is available locally but need to be taken into account during the planning process to assess which option will present the least difficulties in the longer term.

One of the most serious issues facing programmes where more than one school is involved is the tendency for school staff to not be sufficiently committed to their students once they

have joined SkillForce. This is critical if there is an expectation that the young people will be re-integrated back into the school. Although schools are the 'customers' there needs to be a recognition on their part that if they wish students to return to school after participating in the SkillForce programme they must demonstrate their commitment and interest in that student. The SkillForce teams have recognised this issue and systems have already been put in place to address it.

Communicating with several different schools during an implementation of the programme may be more time consuming than asking one school to act as the co-ordinating school but is likely to be more reliable in ensuring that information reaches the intended recipient. Within each school, SkillForce need to have an individual contact who takes responsibility for communication.

It is important that schools understand the ethos of SkillForce and the principles on which it is based. Where SkillForce is based in a school and SkillForce staff work alongside school staff this understanding is soon established. Where this is not the case it is more difficult and schools can undermine the work of SkillForce by adopting practices which are diametrically opposed to those adopted by SkillForce which are based on the importance of consequences and personal responsibility. It may be helpful if these principles were set out clearly and schools informed of them when they were considering engaging with SkillForce.

There was considerable variability in the extent to which parents supported their children. SkillForce staff suggested that parents be involved from the outset, as students are selected for the programme. Indeed if there is doubt relating to the commitment of schools, the involvement of parents could to some extent compensate. However, there are circumstances where families are so dysfunctional that engaging parents in the process would be extremely difficult and in some cases could be detrimental. SkillForce staff need to assess this in relation to each individual case. Where parents take an interest in their child's progress SkillForce staff are exemplary in ensuring that they receive regular communications, sharing success as well as arising problems. Running a workshop for parents on managing challenging behaviour was successful in engaging parents in one pilot programme and might be worth introducing more widely. There may also be issues in the wider community from which the students are drawn which impinge on students' progress, for instance, drug abuse. SkillForce staff need to be aware of these and adapt the programme accordingly.

The implementation of the pilot programmes raised issues relating to the selection of students to participate. Many of the pilot programmes, particularly those operating with KS4 children drawn from a range of different schools, had participants with more extreme problems than had been the case in the past. Some exhibited extremely violent behaviour while others had mental health issues. For the programmes to enhance social skills and improve behaviour staff have to be able to develop team work. This can be disrupted by an individual who refuses to operate within the boundaries set. Selection of participants is therefore crucial for successful outcomes. The particular activities that SkillForce engages in and the approach adopted are not appropriate for every individual. This needs to be acknowledged.

A range of issues were raised about re-integration. In continuing to develop and pilot new programmes it might be useful to specify for each programme the extent to which participants are expected to re-integrate back into school or whether this is unlikely and the role of SkillForce is to support progress into Further Education or Employment. SkillForce has demonstrated that it can be successful in all of these endeavours but it is important that schools, before committing to participation in a programme, are made aware of the expectation. Clearly for younger students in Key Stage 3 re-integration is crucial, while for those in Year 11 it is less likely. What of those pupils in Year 10? Schools may well be expecting that Year 10 pupils will re-integrate back into school but this may not be realistic.

The issue of re-integration is closely related to the length and intensity of programmes and the Key Stage which they are catering for. For some students, particularly where they had been let down frequently in the past, gaining trust took time. SkillForce staff were able to develop this trust, however, the extent to which this would impact on participants' self-perceptions in the long term depended on individual circumstances. This has a bearing on the length of programmes. Some students need longer on programmes than others depending on their prior experiences and levels of support at home and in school. A way forward might be to develop flexibility where it was deemed necessary for individuals to continue with a programme over a longer period of time. Where students are to re-integrate from a full-time programme a phased re-integration is more likely to be successful than immediate immersion back into the school environment. For some students a college placement may be a better alternative than a return to school. The SkillForce teams provide 'after care' for participants on an informal basis for those going on into work. This is more formal for participants in Key Stage 3 with ongoing mentoring being provided where the programme is not based in the pupil's school. There are a number of questionnaire scales which assess student's readiness for re-integration which might be used to help SkillForce and school staff to establish readiness and the level of support needed.

A number of issues were raised about the relationship between the SkillForce programme and academic work. A range of views were expressed from school representatives and SkillForce staff. For some KS3 pupils, school staff felt that too much emphasis had been placed on academic work and insufficient on behaviour improvement. They felt that the school was providing academic input and that SkillForce should focus on developing social skills and improving behaviour for which the programmes were initially developed. In other cases, schools felt that SkillForce was not providing sufficient academic work and that opportunities for keeping up with school work were not being made available. SkillForce staff were aware that those on the full-time programmes, particularly those in Year 10, may not have been getting sufficient academic input to enable them to re-integrate into school and take GCSEs. Given the diversity of views on this issue it may be that there is not a single solution and that any given implementation of the programme needs to be tailored in relation to school work with the needs of participating schools. Where programmes are not full-time and based on one or two days each week, it is likely that schools will want SkillForce to focus on improving behaviour, attitudes, and self-esteem. Where programmes are full-time (5 days a week) schools and SkillForce teams need to be clear about where responsibility lies in relation to school work. This does not always seem to have been established sufficiently clearly at the outset. Agreements have to be reached with participating schools about how this is to be dealt with. The key role of SkillForce is to develop students' personal and social skills so that they can function effectively in an educational or workplace environment. Without such skills students will not only be unable to work effectively themselves but will also disrupt the work of others. How to achieve a balance between this and completing academic work needs to be negotiated with schools.

In some of the KS3 programmes there appears to be an issue with the stigmatisation of pupils if they engage with SkillForce. This may relate to the way that the school presents the programme. If younger students are to derive full benefit and be re-integrated back into schools ways of addressing this need to be found.

There continue to be issues relating to gender. Boys predominate as might be expected given that they constitute the greatest proportion of students who are excluded from school. Because boys are in the majority girls frequently seem inhibited and may drop out. If girls are to be recruited into programmes SkillForce staff need to be aware of this problem and adapt the programme accordingly. Perhaps SkillForce could operate some programmes which are specifically for girls. These might be organised on a different basis to existing programmes, for instance, a residential trip for Muslim girls, or programmes run during the school holidays.

The evaluation of the pilot revealed that some SkillForce staff experienced considerable stress in meeting the needs of some very difficult young people. Burnout is not uncommon in professionals who work with highly disaffected young people over long periods of time. SkillForce as an organisation needs to ensure that it has appropriate support in place for staff. Training was crucial as were opportunities to share experiences and solutions with other SkillForce staff. The need for time for planning, both in relation to the development of new programmes and the implementation of them was raised by several staff.

What is clear from this evaluation is that SkillForce staff are able to develop positive relationships with disaffected young people which can change their lives and lead to positive long term outcomes in terms of education and employment. The issues arising from the pilot programmes have largely been dealt with by staff as part of their problem solving approach and their willingness to learn. SkillForce has an excellent reputation and is well placed to meet the needs of schools as they take increasing responsibility for Alternative Provision for disaffected students.



Zero Exclusion Behaviour and Attendance Outcomes

July 2012

Data

Data is collected from 13 Zero Exclusion provisions in 7 SkillForce teams: Birmingham, Bradford, Devon, Leicester (2x cohorts), Manchester, Kent (6x cohorts) and Oxford. Provisions also exist in Newcastle (2x cohorts), a 2nd in Manchester and a 7th in Kent, though insufficient data exists thus far to execute a robust analysis of these provisions.

Programmes vary in length from 6 to 39 weeks, and have run at different times of the academic year. Of the 13 provisions we have valid data for, 7 have completed and 6 are ongoing. The analysis includes data for those provisions that are ongoing up until the week ending 29th June 2012.

Anomalies

The data from Astor College in Kent has been identified as anomalous and has skewed the results of the data from all other provisions. In order to give an accurate representation of the success of the programme, two analyses have been run: one including the data from the Astor College cohorts and one without.

Methodology

Behaviour

Instructors complete weekly behaviour monitoring forms for every student on the course. Ten aspects of good behaviour are rated according to whether the student 'always' exhibits each measure, 'mostly' does, 'sometimes' does, 'rarely' does or 'never' does. This raw data is then collated into an aggregate spreadsheet and team-by-team spreadsheets for analysis. Each rating is assigned a score out of 100. If the student 'always' achieves a specified measure they are awarded a score of 100; 'mostly' scores 75; 'sometimes' scores 50; 'rarely' scores 25 and if a student 'never' achieves the measures of good behaviour they are awarded a 0. An average of these scores is then taken to give one behaviour score out of 100 per week of the course.

Attendance

Instructors record attendance on a session-by-session basis. The number of sessions per week ranges from two (one day of teaching split into an AM session and a PM session) up to a maximum of ten sessions (five days of teaching with two sessions per day).

Students are either Present and on time to the session, Late (arriving after the register has closed), have an Authorised Absence (accepted and verified by their school) or have an Unauthorised Absence (when their reason for non-attendance is either not given or not accepted by their school). Scores are assigned to the attendance behaviour in a similar way to the behaviour data. Present is scored as 100; Late scores 50; Authorised Absence is awarded a mark of 10 and an Unauthorised Absence scores 0. In future the 'Late' score may be revised and increased if the student is less than 30 minutes late. When the attendance scores have been assigned, an average for the week is again calculated based on the number of sessions to give each week an attendance score out of 100.

Results

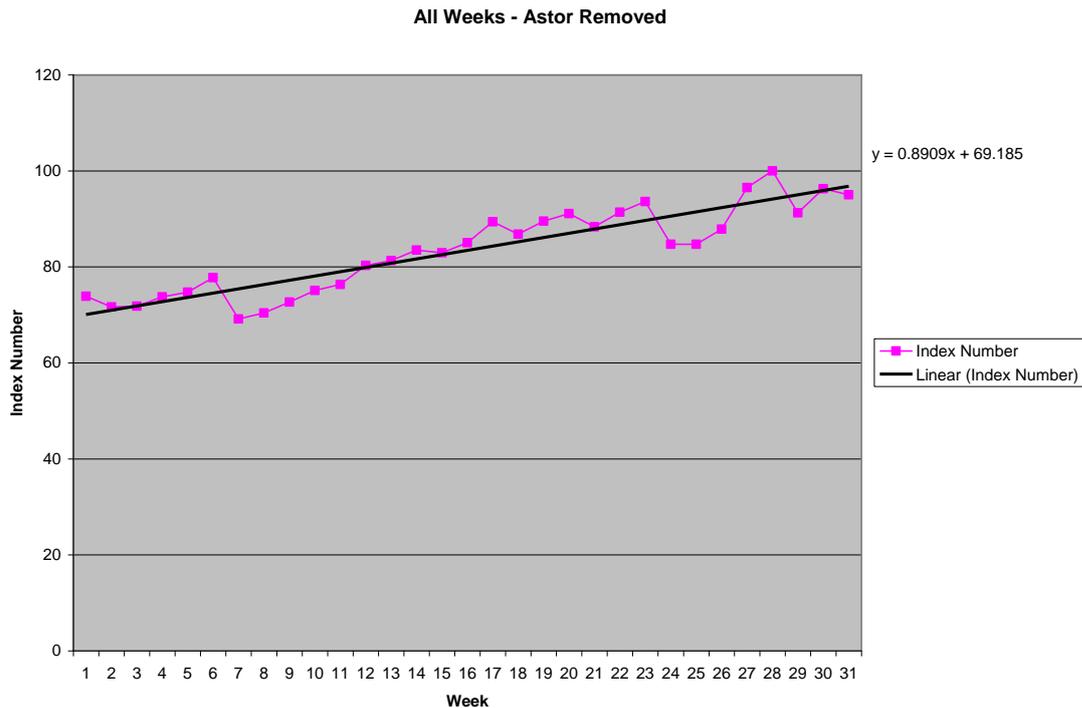
Supported by a number of other studies into the development of NEETs (or those at risk of becoming NEET), the Zero Exclusion students do not develop in a simple linear trajectory. There are localised successes and setbacks experienced at all stages of the programme. These patterns are to be expected because of the demographic we work with, and short-term dips in attendance and behaviour do not cause concern at this stage.

Nevertheless, the programme has the most success in the long-term. In line with the above statement, week 7 sees behaviour fall below its baseline value. It is around week 10 of the course that the students come back to baseline, and in the following weeks make strong improvements. The pattern in the attendance data is more severe and this will be explored more thoroughly in the relevant section. However, again, this pattern is supported by a number of studies into young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Behaviour

Long-term Impact: Astor College Removed

The long-term effect of the programme on behaviour is very encouraging. The following graph explains how behaviour improves as weeks on the programme increase:



As noted, there is not a simple linear relationship between time and behaviour and our students experience ups and downs at all stages in the programme. Most notably these dips occur in weeks 7 and 24 to 25; however both dips are followed by steady increases thereafter. The net effect is steady increase in behaviour over time. By running a linear regression on the data, which is a statistical method that calculates the precise relationship between two variables (in this case number of weeks on the course and behaviour); we can see that behaviour is determined by the following formula:

$$y = 0.8909x + 69.185$$

where y = behaviour and x = weeks on course.

This formula tells us that

- a) on average, students enter the course with a behaviour score of 69.185 out of 100;
- b) for every week on the course, behaviour improves by 0.8909 percentage points.

This formula is an incredibly powerful tool and can be used to predict the week in which students will be ready to re-enter mainstream education.

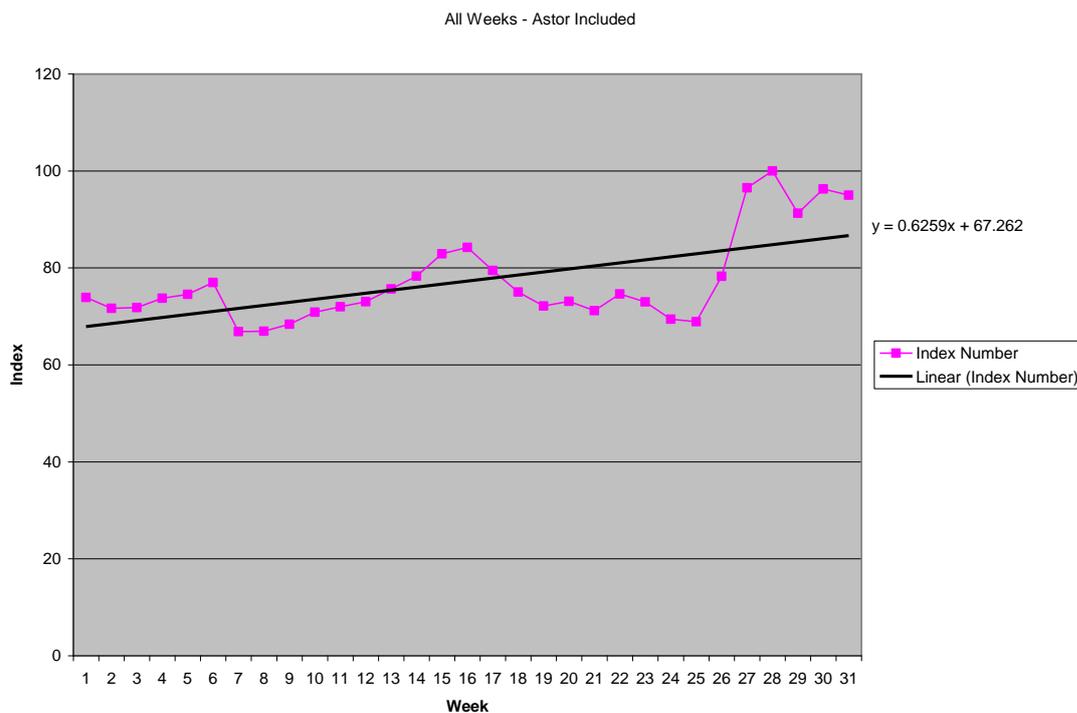
By assuming that students will be ready to exist in mainstream education with a behaviour score of 90 or above (this assumes that students can effectively work in a formal classroom environment with 6 behaviour indicators scoring 'always' and 4 indicators scoring 'mostly') and that they enter the course with the average behaviour score in the pilot programme of 69.185, it will take **23** weeks for a Zero Exclusion student to be ready to go back into school. If a behaviour score of 100 is

the desired level for re-integration (that is, all 10 behaviour indicators achieving an ‘always’), students will require **35** weeks on the programme. Whichever behaviour level is considered the most appropriate for re-integration, the implication is that Zero Exclusion is **long-term** programme.

It is possible to calculate a value that provides a measure of how well future outcomes are likely to be predicted by the model. The ‘adjusted coefficient of determination’, or R^2 , takes a value between 0 and 1 with values closer to 1 suggesting more accurate relationships. The R^2 of this model is 0.83, which suggests that future outcomes are likely to be predicted accurately by the model. In other words, we can be confident in the conclusions drawn above.

Long-term Impact: Astor College Included

As noted, the data is significantly skewed by the inclusion of the data from Astor College. The following graph shows the trend exhibited when the data from this provision is included:



The behavioural impact of the programme is severely skewed by the inclusion of this data. Most notably, there is a significant drop in behaviour from weeks 17-26, and in general the data is much more volatile with significant fluctuations around the trendline. Nevertheless, the general trend still suggests that behaviour is still improving week-on-week, albeit at a much slower pace, as indicated by the trendline. Behaviour can be explained using the following formula:

$$y = 0.6259x + 67.262$$

where y = behaviour and x = weeks on programme

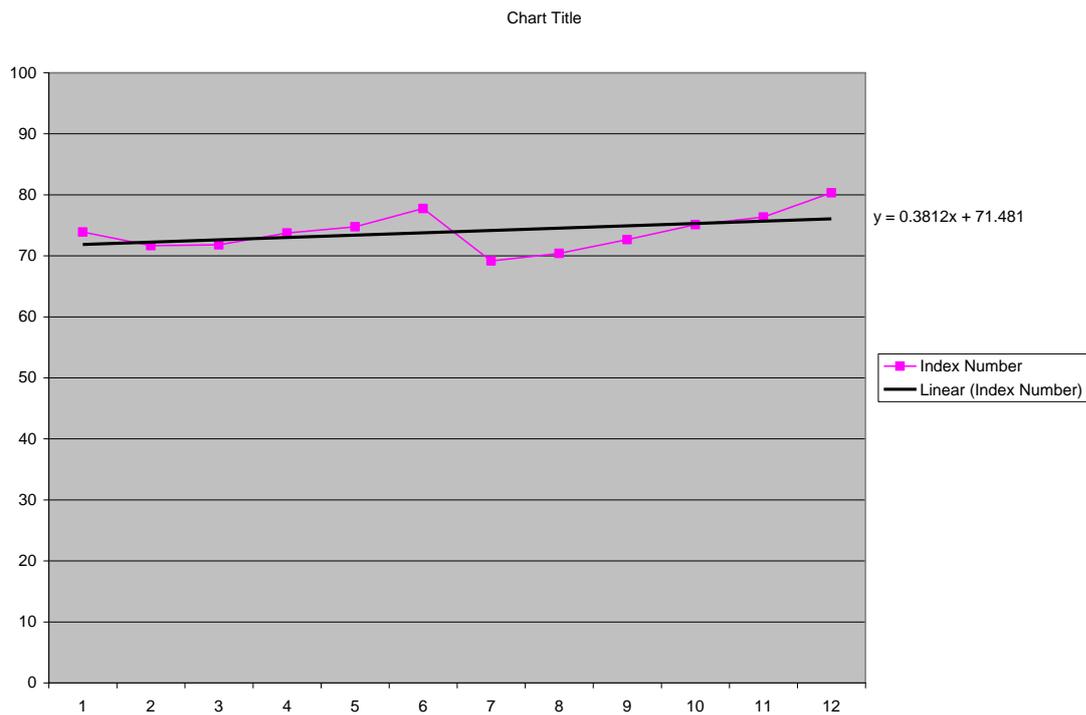
The implication is that:

- a) students enter the programme with a behaviour score of 67.262
- b) behaviour improves by 0.626 percentage points for every week on the course.

Under these conditions, re-integration would occur at week 36 for a behaviour score of 90 and 52 weeks for a behaviour score of 100 to be achieved. However, we can conclude that any predictions made by this model are likely to be inaccurate as $R^2 = 0.35$, suggesting very weak explanatory power.

Short-term Impact: Astor College Removed

The short-term outcomes of the programme are also encouraging; however the success is not as pronounced as with the long-term analysis. To following graph illustrates:



There are three key features of this analysis:

1. Students suffer a very slight dip in behaviour in week 2. It is possible that this occurs because they are on their “best behaviour” in their first week of the course and “test the water” in week 2 to see how far they can push the boundaries.
2. There is a more significant drop in behaviour in Week 7 to below the baseline value. This fall in line with arguments presented earlier about student development. There is a steady increase after this “dip” and baseline is achieved and surpassed in weeks 10-12.

3. The rate at which students develop in the first 12 weeks is much slower than in the long-term analysis. Behaviour is determined by the following formula:

$$y = 0.3812x + 71.481$$

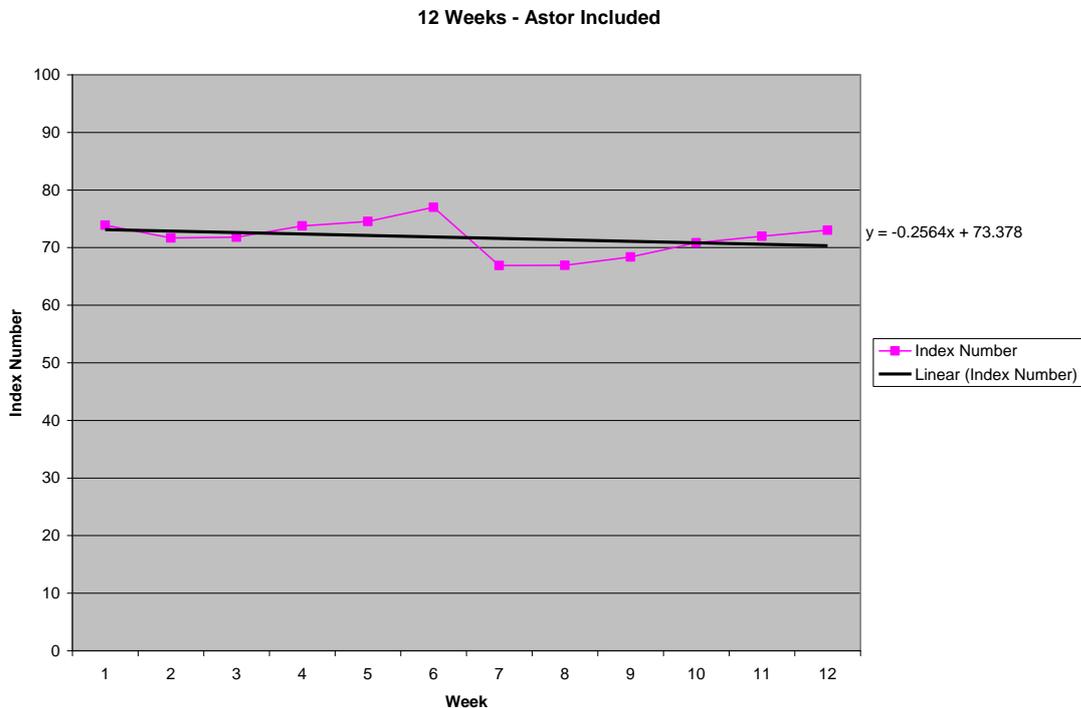
where y = behaviour and x = weeks on course.

The implication is that

- students enter the course with a behaviour score of 71.481 (the discrepancy with the long-term constant term occurs because of the methodology used to determine the linear regression formula)
- students develop at a much slower pace in the first 12 weeks of the course - by 0.3812 percentage points per week. To put this in to context, if they were to develop at this rate for the duration of the course in the long-term it would take **49** weeks for the students to be ready to re-integrate into mainstream education. This suggests that the course has most impact in weeks 12-30, and strengthens the argument that Zero Exclusion is a long-term programme.

Short-term Impact: Astor College Included

The 12 week analysis with Astor College included causes some concerns, with behaviour deteriorating over the 12 weeks. The graph shows:



As illustrated, the general trend over the 12 weeks is downward sloping. The precise relationship between time on the programme and behaviour is explained by the following formula:

$$y = -0.256x + 73.378$$

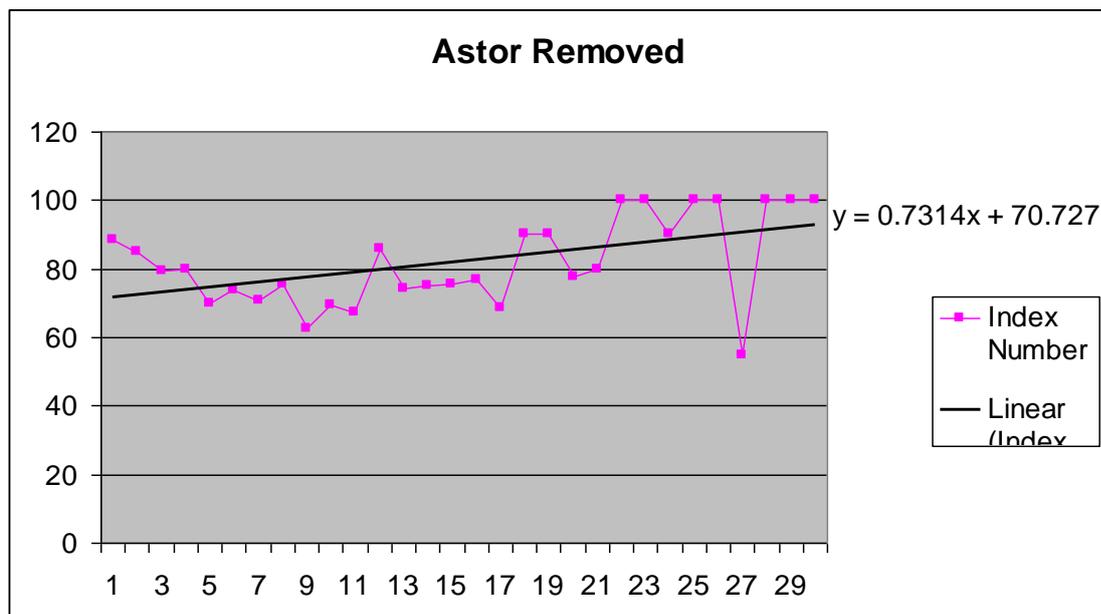
where y = behaviour and x = weeks on course

This model suggests that for every week on the course behaviour *decreases* by 0.256 percentage points. However, $R^2 = 0.089$ suggesting that the model has very little explanatory power and should not be used for the prediction of future values.

Attendance

Long-term Impact: Astor Removed

The data suggests that the long-term impact of the programme on attendance is very encouraging. To following graph explains:



Although, as illustrated, the data is variable with significant fluctuations around the mean, the general trend is upward sloping and positive. The anomalous result in week 27 is explained by a sudden increase in Authorised Absences. Running a linear regression on the data produces the following formula:

$$y = 0.731x + 70.727$$

where y = attendance and x = weeks on programme.

This formula tells us that:

- a) Students enter the programme with a behaviour score of 70.727
- b) Attendance improves by 0.731 percentage points per week.

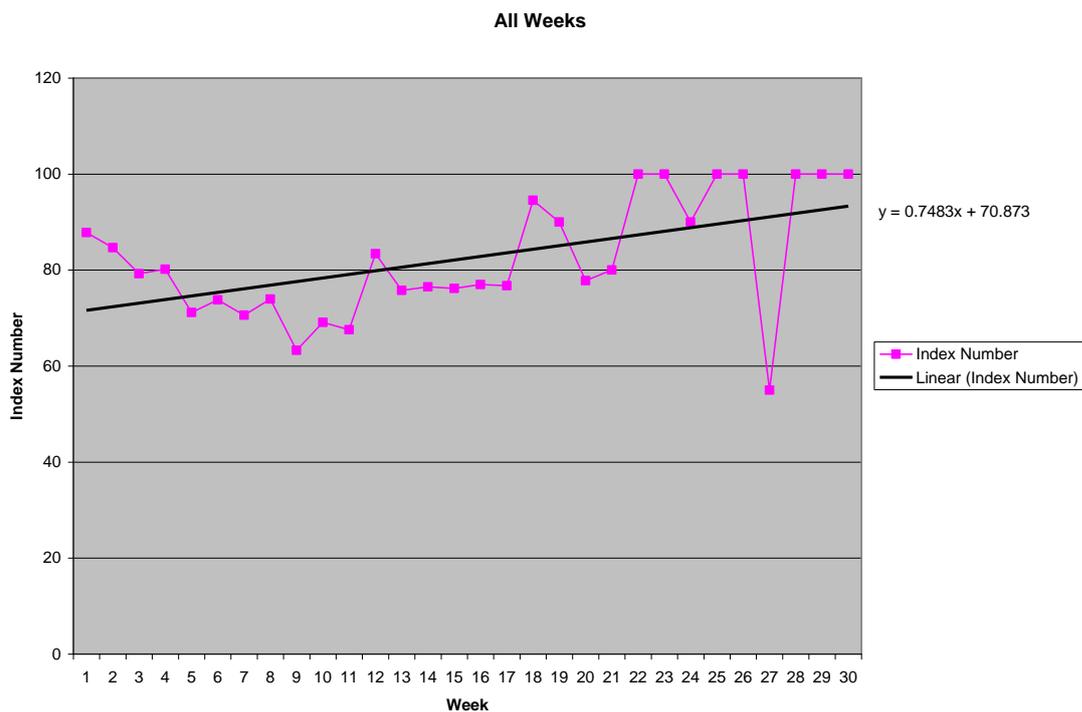
To achieve 100% attendance (that is, every student being present and on time to every session every week) students should spend **40** weeks on the course. After 39 weeks on the course (one academic year) students should achieve an attendance score of 99.24.

The explanatory power of this model is not as encouraging as others, with $R^2 = 0.22$. Conclusions drawn from and predictions made with the model must be done so with caution.

Long-term Impact: Astor Included

The inclusion of Astor College in the Attendance analysis does not have a significant effect upon the overall trend in attendance; however it does make the data much more variable around the mean.

The following graph explains:



As illustrated, the linear regression model does not alter significantly with the inclusion of this provision's data. Attendance is explained with the following formula:

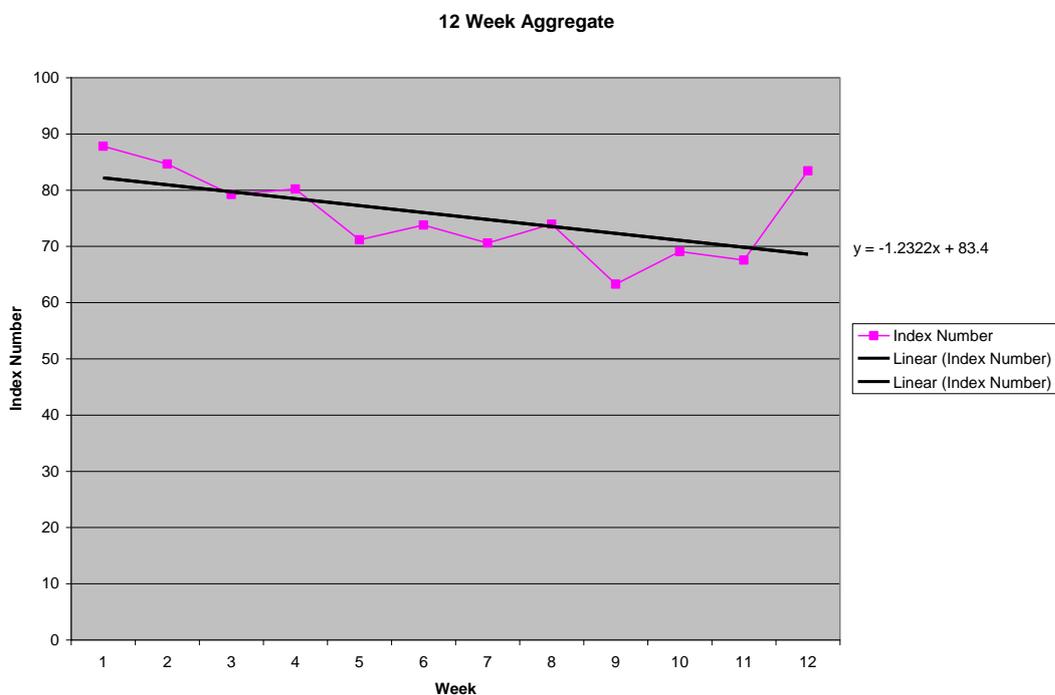
$$y = 0.7483x + 70.873$$

where y = attendance and x = weeks on programme

This suggests that for every week on the course attendance improves by 0.7483 percentage points. Comparing this to the model calculated without Astor data ($y = 0.731x + 70.727$), the Astor provision in fact positively influences the aggregate data. The $R^2 = 0.24$, also suggesting the explanatory power of this model is low, but no less than the aggregate.

Short-term Impact: Astor Removed

The short-term effect of the programme on attendance is less encouraging, and we see a notable decrease in the first 12 weeks. The graph explains:



The graph shows a general, steady decreasing trend in attendance over the first 12 weeks (though a sharp increase in week 12 itself). Indeed, the model, calculated as $y = -1.2322x + 83.4$, suggests that attendance *decreases* by 1.23 percentage points per week. This is the most significant rate of change in all the analyses conducted so far. Yet again, this result suggests that Zero Exclusion is a long-term programme, and little positive impact will occur in the first 12 weeks.

Short-term Impact: Astor Included

In line with the long-term attendance behaviour, the inclusion of the Astor data in the short-term attendance analysis does not have a significant impact on the results. The graph explains:



The trends exhibited in this graph mirror those in the Astor-removed analysis, suggesting that Astor’s attendance data follows a very similar pattern to other provisions running the programme. Indeed, the model is calculated as $y = -1.1666x + 83.252$, suggesting that the inclusion of Astor in the short-term attendance analysis actually *improves* attendance, and it now only decreases by 1.166 percentage points per week in the short-term.

Conclusions

The data suggests that the impact of the Zero Exclusion programme on attendance and behaviour is extremely positive in the long-term. Analysis suggests that students will achieve a standard of behaviour that will allow them to re-integrate into mainstream education after 23 weeks. Attendance will take slightly to improve: 39 to 40 weeks.

The short-term gains on behaviour are positive, though not as pronounced. Attendance appears to decrease in the short-term. To have full effect, Zero Exclusion provisions must be adopted as long-term programmes.

There are anomalies in the data that have skewed the results, however these have been identified, addressed and controlled for in the aggregate analysis.