Informing investment in youth work

Measuring value and strengthening the evidence base

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The current context

- The youth sector is facing unprecedented change, with services hit hard by reductions in central and local government spending
- Difficult decisions lead to an increasing pressure to define the impact and value
- Local authorities and commissioners need to know what works to support budget decisions now
- The fiscal climate makes it necessary to look to new approaches for funding and investment – tools that can unlock new sources of finance for social goals
- There are challenges in achieving the potential of new models of investment

The aims of the project

- The Young Foundation was commissioned to undertake this short project, as part of NYA's partnership with the Local Government Association
- The project aimed to
  - Inform investment in youth work, including testing feasibility of social financing , through the development of a typology of value
  - Review existing research and tools with a focus on what practitioners and commissioners need
  - Advise and shape future work through:
    - encouraging consensus on efficacy of tools
    - taking steps to greater commonality of language
    - clarifying variables
    - contributing to development of commissioning policy and investments through Big Society Bank

Our focus

- The focus for this project is youth work, as a distinctive pedagogical approach
- It is important to note that youth work can be defined by processes, settings and outcomes – some of which are contested – all of which have posed challenges in reviewing the evidence base and building the case for investment

"The key purpose of youth work is to:

Enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential."

Source: LLUK, Professional and National Occupational Standards for Youth Work

Emerging messages

- As part of desk research, telephone interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders, with a number of key themes emerging:
- There is agreement that qualitative evidence about the *intrinsic* value of youth work is plentiful, and can be powerful

  "Every one of us at this table could tell you transformational stories about young people, particularly marginalised young people, who have engaged with youth workers in a positive way" (Fiona Blacke, CEO, NYA in oral evidence to Education Select Committee)

- Equally, there is agreement that quantitative evidence around *extrinsic* value is less available, and dispersed – there has been no systematic collection or collation

  "I think it's been all too easy for the Government and for local authorities to cut spending on services to young people, because we haven't as a sector been able to demonstrate our impact well enough. Actually, we should never have been in that position, and we should never find ourselves in that position again" (respondent in telephone interview)

Emerging messages

- Respondents recognised the importance of building an investment case for quality youth work - other areas such as early years are already well placed to make such a case
- There was general consensus about the most valuable outcomes of youth work
  - Youth work is about personal and social development; the development of 'non-cognitive skills', building resilience and avoidance of risky behaviour
  - It is about enabling young people to play a fully active role in society (whether work, learning, volunteering, relationships) and make a successful transition to adulthood
  - This is the foundation of youth work upon which the 'central life pillars' can be built
- The challenges to building an investment case are historical, cultural and resource-related - all inter-connected. Cultural change is the key to moving forward

Informing investment in youth work implies two questions

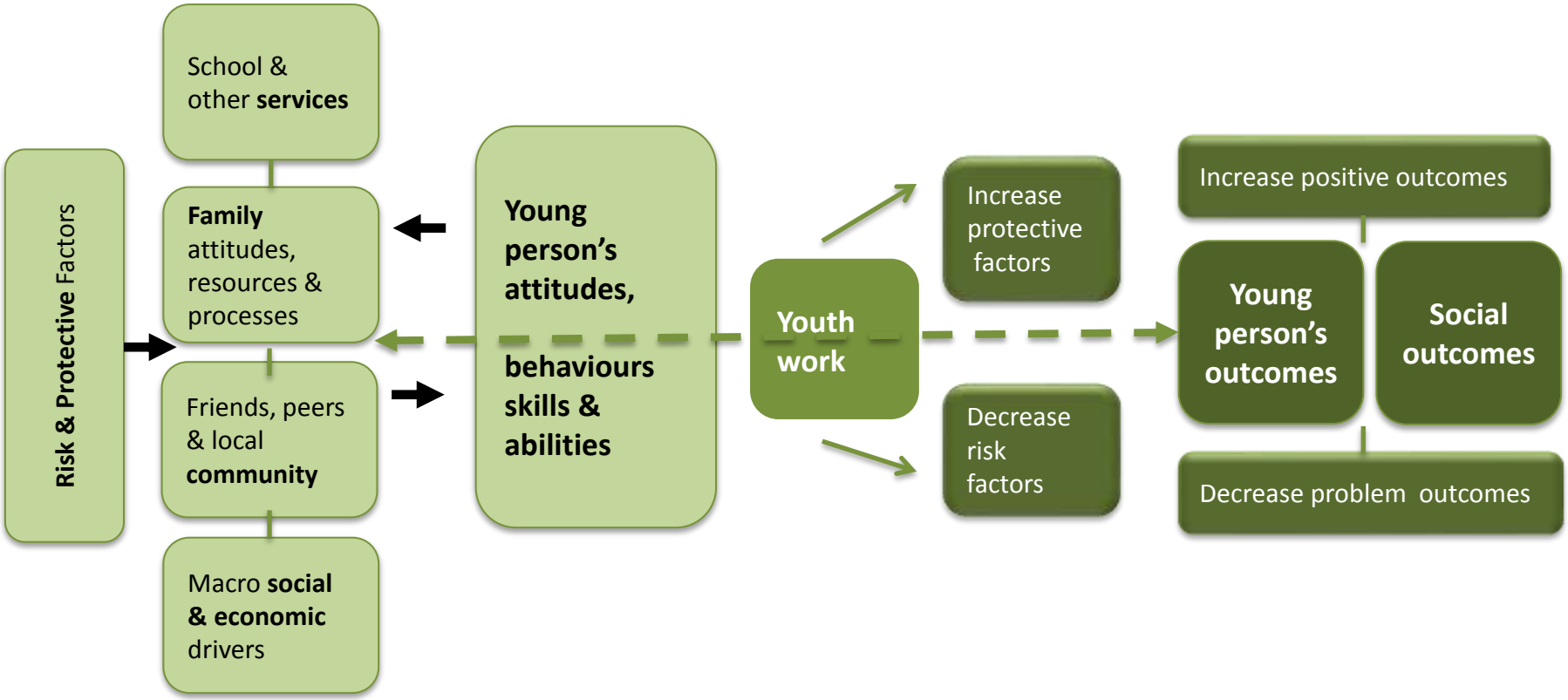
- How do we assess the **impact** of youth work on outcomes?
- How do we assess the **value** of youth work's outcomes?

Commissioners, grant-givers and increasingly social investors need to know what difference services make for young people, and what value that creates

Youth work will impact upon outcomes alongside other influences and services

- There are many other influences on young people's lives, including their families, other services, and opportunities in their communities
- Youth work can mediate these other influences by both increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors
- It can be challenging to isolate the impact of youth work – but taking the complexities of young people's lives into account can be precisely what makes youth work a valuable proposition

Understanding the impact of youth work



Commissioners or social investors will look for robust evidence of youth work's impact

Examples:

- Aos Reviews, Washington State
- YPDP Evaluation
- Harvard Family Project evaluations
- Feinstein et al – Leisure Contexts
- Chance UK – Mentoring Report
- Fairbridge – Back from the Brink
- Positive Futures
- JRF Street Based Youth Work

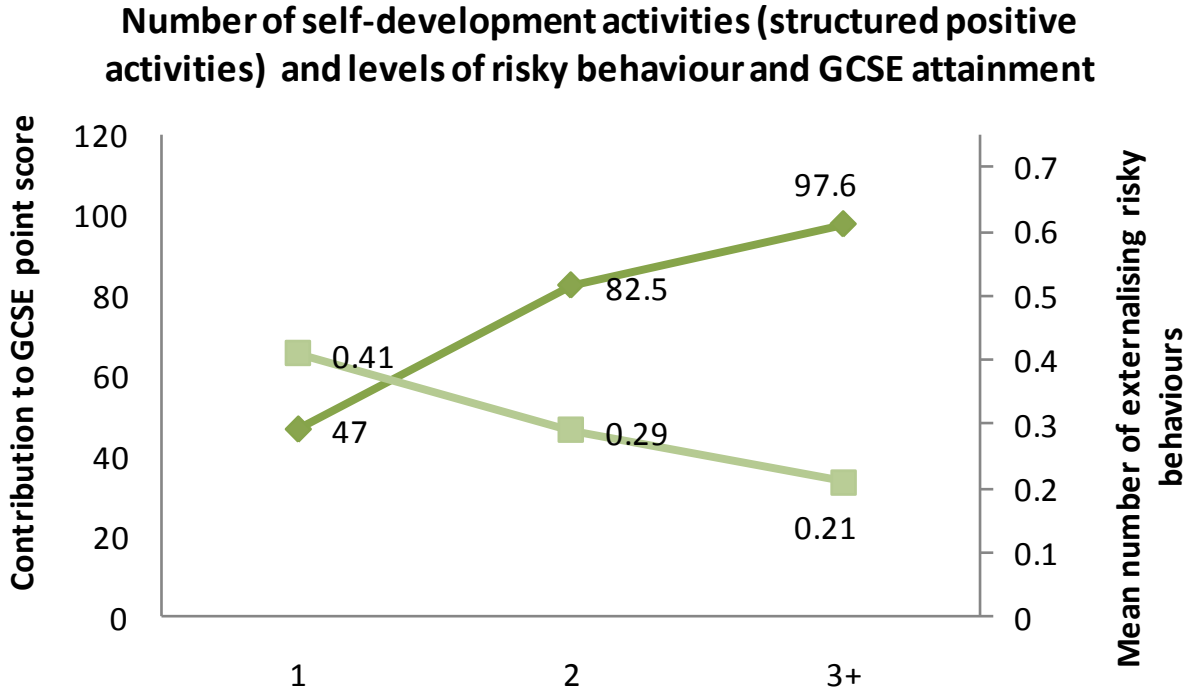
We reviewed the robustness of a wide range of evaluations across seven criteria. Key criteria for assessment included theory of change, sample size and baseline/control group.

Audit Commission 2009: only 27% of youth projects assessed collected evidence that allowed for any value for money assessment (only 52% of youth projects assessed have any evidence of outcomes)

What outcomes might we try to assign value to?

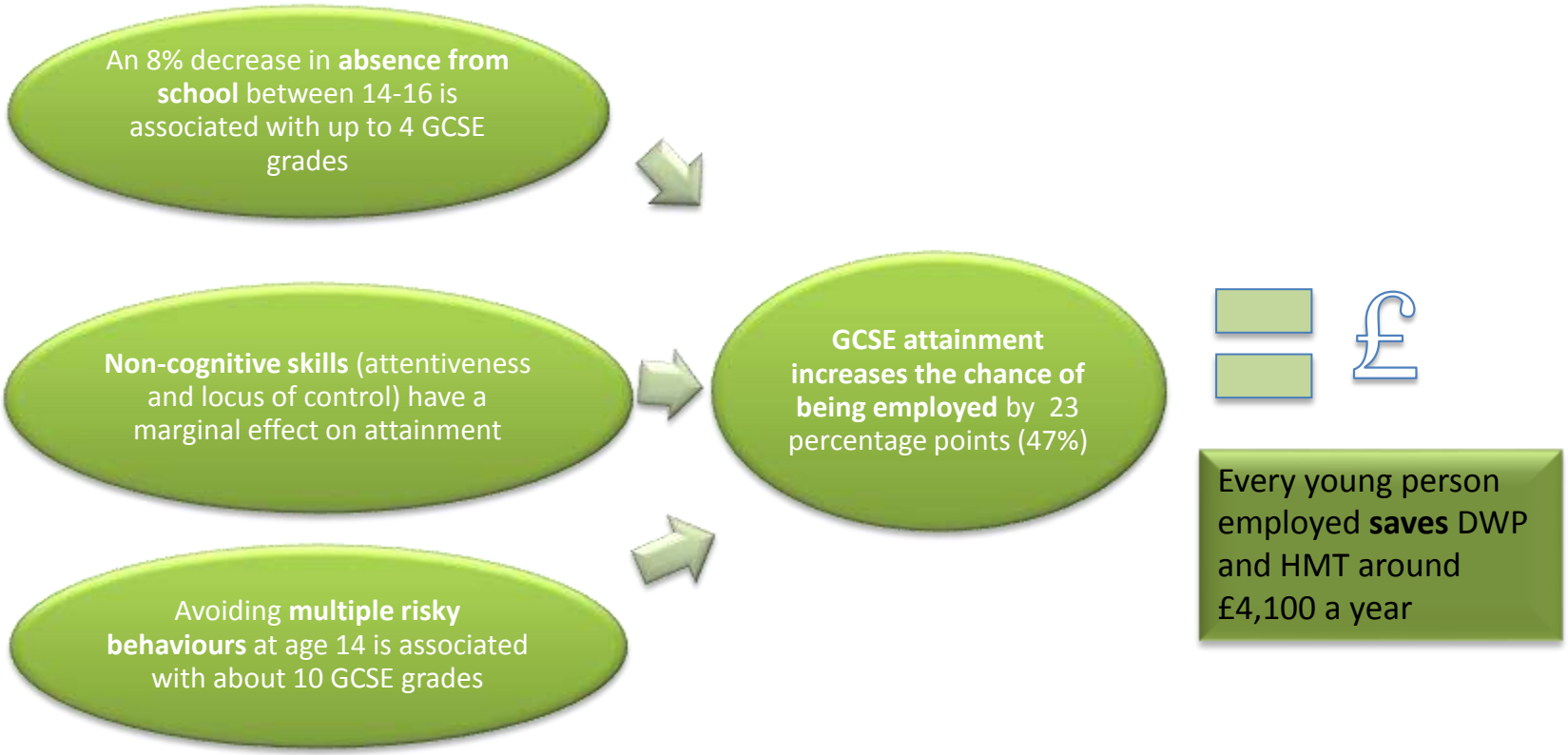
	Individual outcomes	Social outcomes
'Harder' Indicators	- Staying on at school - Avoiding exclusion - Gaining qualifications - Not becoming 'looked after' - Reduced risky behaviours - Reduced obesity	- Employment - Not offending - Not behaving anti-socially - Lowered health risk
'Softer' Indicators	- Self-esteem, self-belief - 'Locus of control' - Voice & empowerment - Positive peer group support - Reduced bullying	- Participation in public life -Quality family life and relationships - Wellbeing - Making a social contribution - Community cohesion

Building a case for the value of improvement in outcomes: more structured activities are associated with better individual outcomes



Source: Cebulla & Tomaszewski, 2009. Analysis of LSYPE

Individual outcomes impact on outcomes which can save public services money



These outcomes can have intrinsic and extrinsic value

• **Intrinsic value** – attainment of attributes that are of value in and of themselves, such as happiness, friendship, confidence or resilience. Intrinsic value is difficult to assess. Intrinsic value is particularly important for young people at risk of not reaching their potential.

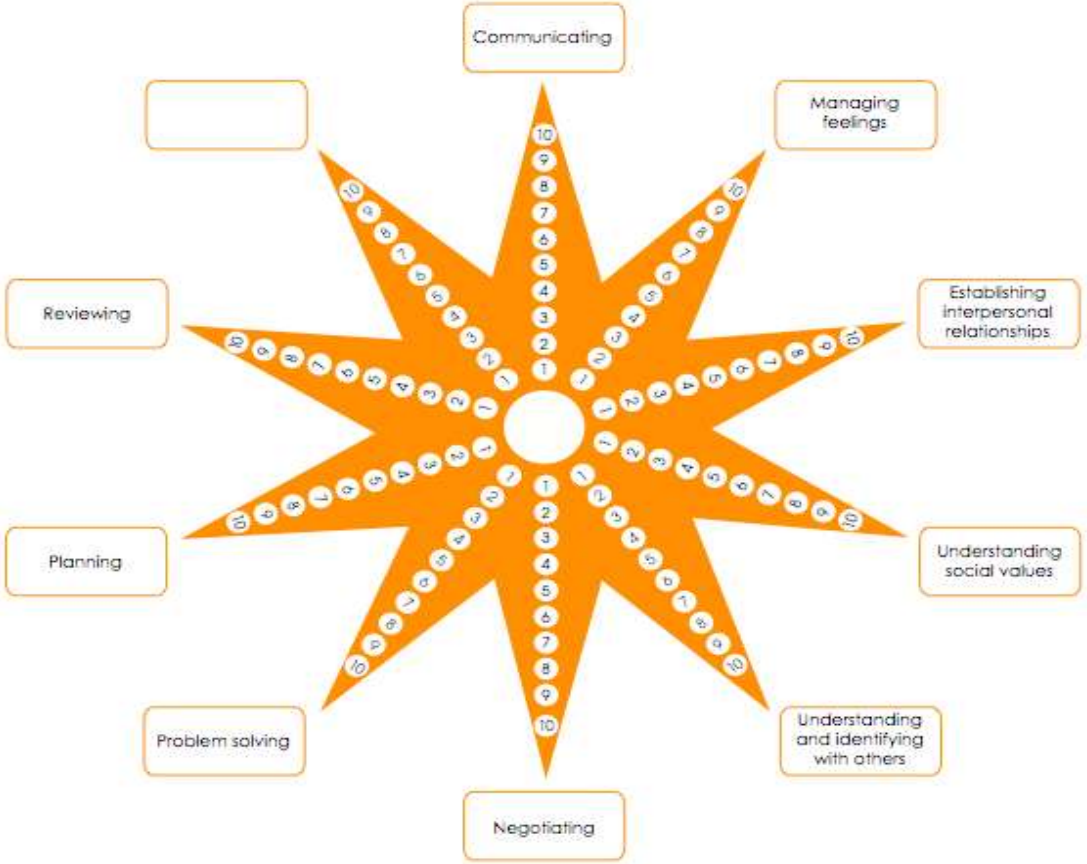
• **Extrinsic value** – activity that has wider social implications such as the ability to reduce levels of worklessness or crime. Extrinsic value is easier to assess.

•To inform investment in a time of deep budget cuts, our focus is on extrinsic value.

• The evidence base on impact on extrinsic value is weaker, but if this can be overcome it presents an opportunity to make an investment case.

There are different methods of evaluating the impact on intrinsic value to inform practice

For example, Fairbridge's Outcome Star (right) is designed to involve young people & their youth or key workers in assessing their progress on important social and emotional skills



There are different methods of evaluating extrinsic value to inform investment

Indirect Value – the macro socio-economic case

• Attempts to, for example, estimate the costs of poor mental health and wellbeing on reduced consumption, and therefore generalised impact on economic growth (e.g. Nef), or opportunity costs of low skills in terms of lost productivity

•Informs **national investment** priorities & approach (e.g. next CSR)

Direct Value – the micro fiscal case

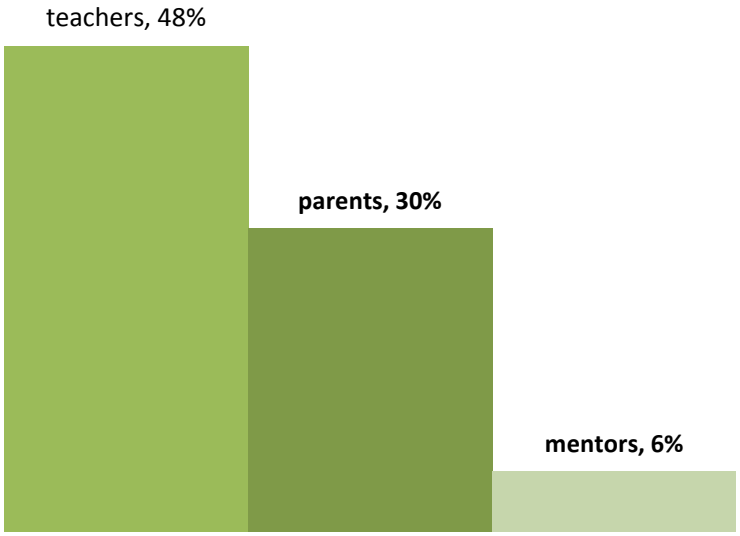
• Directly assessing impact on outcomes such as employment or offending compared to a comparative control group (e.g. Washington State analysis)

• Measuring impact on drivers (e.g. GCSE attainment, teenage pregnancy) where we know, in turn, the impact of drivers on poor outcomes

• Informs **local commissioners** or potential direct social investors (e.g. local authority budgets 2012/13)

There are numerous examples of positive impact on intrinsic value

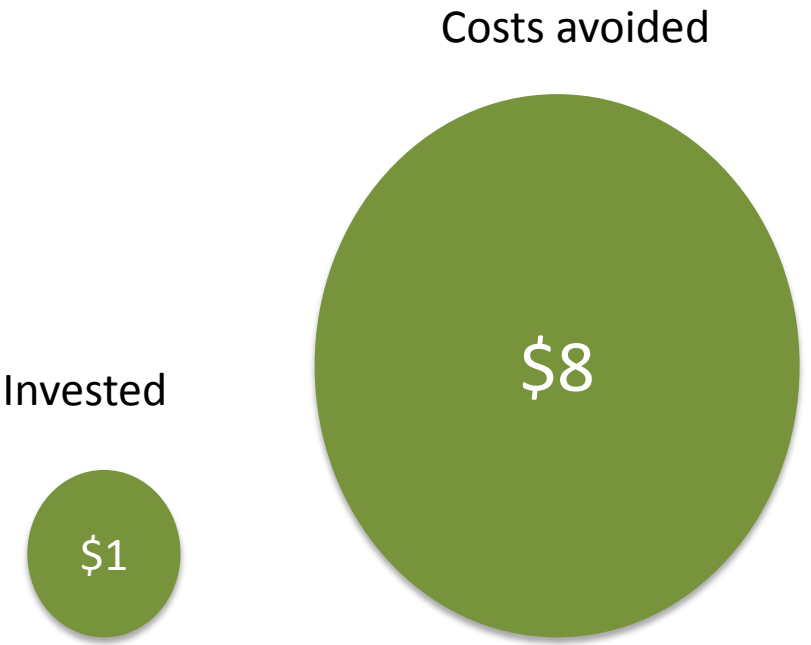
Reduction in young people assessed as having 'high' or 'particularly high' difficulties scores before and after mentoring, by assessor



Source: Smith & Howard, An Analysis of the Impact of Chance UK's mentoring programme, based on Strength & Difficulties Questionnaires . N=100

There is potential to demonstrate an impact on extrinsic value

- The **adolescence diversion project** (for lower risk offenders) reduces convicted crime by 17.6%.
- It is estimated this saves for the tax payer over **$8 for each $1** marginally invested.
- These estimates of savings are based upon the **long-run** marginal operating costs to the Criminal Justice System in Washington State
- Not all of these savings will be 'cashable' in the short term. Only 14% of the long term costs of being NEET in the UK are current costs, with 80% medium term



Source: Drake, Aos & Miller 2009, Evidence-Based Public Policy Options to Reduce Crime and Criminal Justice Costs: Implications in Washington State Offenders, Vol. 4, No. 1, November 2008: pp. 1–35

Certainly, the fiscal costs for poor outcomes in adolescence can be high

- It is estimated around £1bn a year is spent on Jobseekers Allowance for young people under 24 year olds (The Prince's Trust, 2007)
- A young person in custody costs on average over £40,000 a year – and 13% of prisoners are under 21 (Nef, 2011)
- A young person in local authority care costs on average over £27,000 a year (Demos, 2010)

- In some instances, costs can also be long-term and inter-generational
- The long term costs of being NEET to the taxpayer are estimated at £97,000 over a lifetime, totalling £3.65 bn annually (Coles et al 2010)
- Where young people become parents, there is a higher risk of poorer outcomes for their children, and so potentially greater costs (Nef, 2011)

UK evidence on the impact of youth work is limited but indicates potential

- **Individual case studies show potential** – but are often small scale and lack common approaches or comparators:
  - **SkillForce:** reduced the risk of becoming NEET by 19% (comparing pre- and post- intervention)
  - **Street-based youth work** – reduces numbers not in education, employment and training by 28% and those known to be offending by 31% (comparing pre- and post-intervention)
  - **Positive Futures:** a 64% reduction in first time entrants to the criminal justice system and a 32% reduction in anti-social behaviour calls to the local police (change in *areas* over the period where Positive Futures had been working)

Analysis can show the link between youth work outcomes and savings

Case Study 1: impact on employment and offending

Street-Based Youth Work (JRF 2004)

- **Impact:** Reduces numbers not in education, employment and training by 28%
  Reduces those known to be offending by 31%

- **Discount:** for small sample and short track record: - 40%

- **Costs** Only £32 cost per participant for period of contact (largely volunteer-staffed)

+ **Savings:** £4,100 per NEET avoided and £4,691 per young offender supervised (annual)

= Estimated **net** savings (assuming 80% savings are **cashable**): **£1,335**

→ Savings to DWP, HMT, HO & MOJ

Analysis can show the link between youth work outcomes and savings

Case Study 2: Impact on employment & training

SkillForce (the Value of SkillForce, 2009)

- **Impact:** Reduces numbers not in education, employment and training by 18.9%

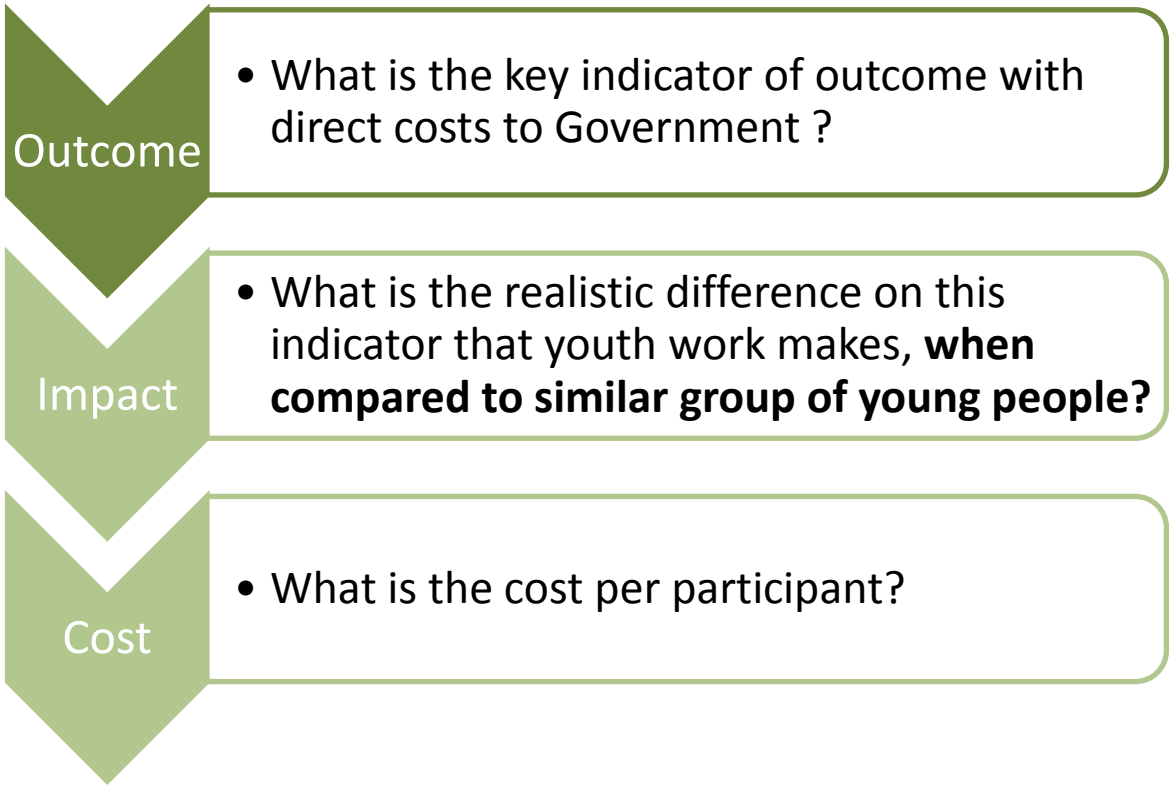
- **Discount:** for small sample and use of national comparison group: -20%

- **Costs** £700 per participant
+ **Savings:** £4,100 per NEET avoided

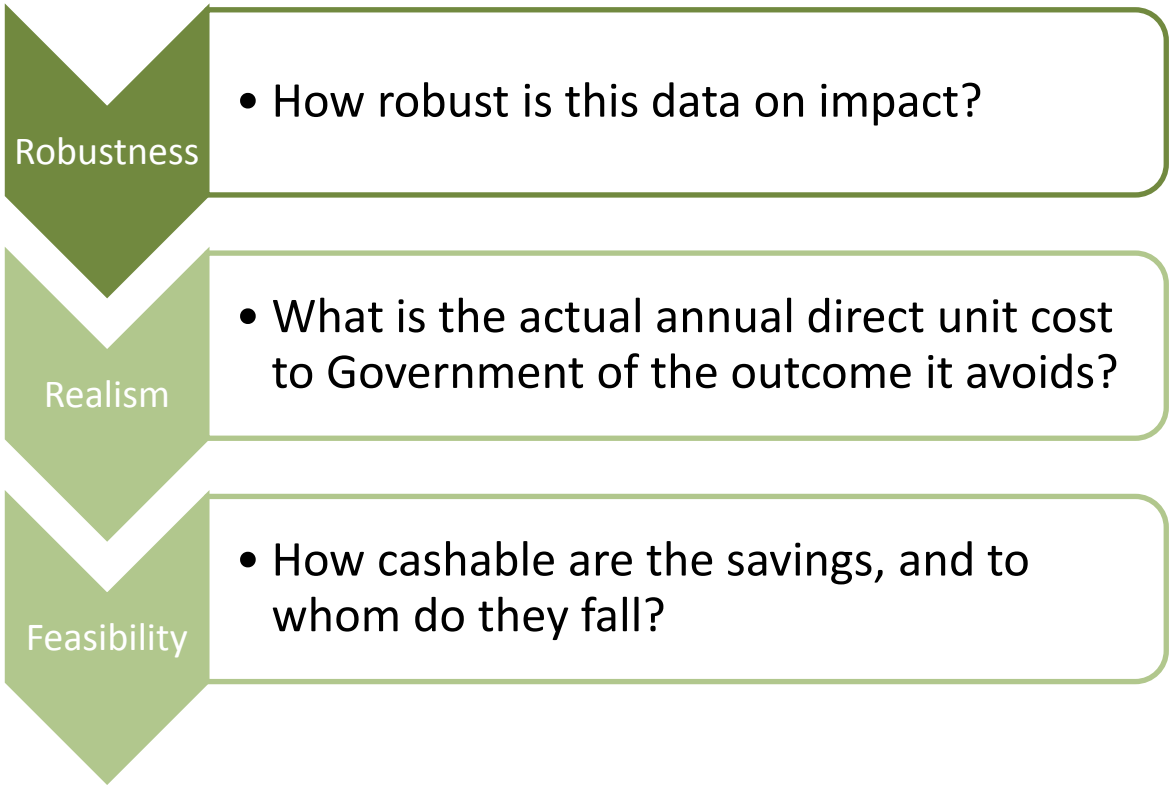
= Estimated **gross** savings (assuming 80% savings are **cashable**): **£623** per participant

→ Savings to DWP and HMT

To use this ‘calculator’ of value, three questions about the project need to be answered



We then use three checks to calculate value to inform investment



Conclusions

- The sector has great stories to tell on its qualitative impact – but much less compelling on its extrinsic value

- Studies of impact with a good level of rigour are sparse. This agenda should continue to have high priority, and there is some distance to go

- Such studies as do exist show that youth work has an important contribution to make – both on intrinsic and extrinsic value – when its projects go well and succeed