Dismantling the hierarchy

The iterative nature of service improvement
and the generation of evidence

About this series: This series of Programme Insights shares reflections, learning and practical implications from Realising Ambition: a £25m Big Lottery Fund programme supporting the replication of evidence-based and promising services designed to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Rather than writing a long evaluation report at the end of the five-year programme – which would likely be read by very few people – we are instead producing a series of Programme Insights so people can get information about the programme while it is happening in bite-sized pieces.

Some issues, like this one, are **Findings Pieces** that describe preliminary data and learning from the evaluation activities undertaken by the Dartington Social Research Unit, and our reflections upon the implications of these. Others will be **Focus Pieces,** like the first two issues, that present ideas and concepts emerging from the programme. The last type will be **Field Guides:** practical 'how to' guides for a variety of audiences. By sharing ideas, successes, challenges and even some mistakes, we hope to support and inspire others considering, undertaking or commissioning their own replication journey.

Throughout each issue, some words are highlighted in blue. For these you will find definitions in the Glossary of Terms box at the end of this piece. There you will also find some key reading we have drawn on in the development of this issue.

About us: The Realising Ambition programme is supporting and is powered by 22 organisations – large and small – replicating 25 different services all over the UK. The programme is managed by a consortium of four organisations committed to improving outcomes for children. It is led by Catch22, alongside the Dartington Social Research Unit, Substance and The Young Foundation. This issue was written by the Dartington Social Research Unit (DSRU), with contributions from all partners in the consortium.

Realising Ambition Programme Insights: Issue 3

About this Programme Insight

In this issue of the Programme Insight series we explore to what degree the 25 Realising Ambition projects have refined their services and strengthened their evidence-base over the course of the initiative. This is one of the primary evaluation questions posed by the Big Lottery Fund. We consider the state of play three-quarters of the way through Realising Ambition, and will update the findings as the programme concludes in 2017.

In Part 1 we describe the Standards of Evidence, which are a tool for assessing how tightly defined and ready for wider replication particular services are and the strength of the evidence supporting them. We explore the strengths and limitations of applying these Standards, particularly in the context of replication. We then introduce a simple alternative approach for considering evidence in the context of replication and service improvement.

In Part 2 we present preliminary findings about the degree to which the 25 Realising Ambition projects, overall, have improved against a number of indicators of service refinement and evidential strength. We consider what we can and cannot infer from these findings.

In Part 3 we delve beneath these findings to look at the investment required to make service refinements and generate evidence; the variation found in the quality of tools and evidence; the iterative and continuous nature of refinement in the context of replication; and how the journey of refinement is more important than the end destination.

Part 1: Advancing the Standards of Evidence

In the first issue of this Programme Insight series we broadly defined successful replication as a tightly defined service delivered by a strong organisation that uses evidence to learn and adapt, as required. In addition to a strong organisation delivering a strong service, a good understanding of the context into which a service is being replicated is also important (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Elements of successful replication
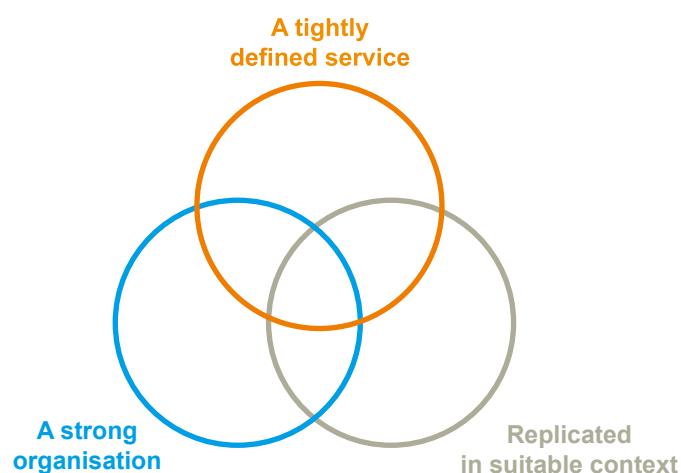
In the second issue we described how replication requires a flexible, iterative approach to the generation of evidence in order to adapt, test and refine.
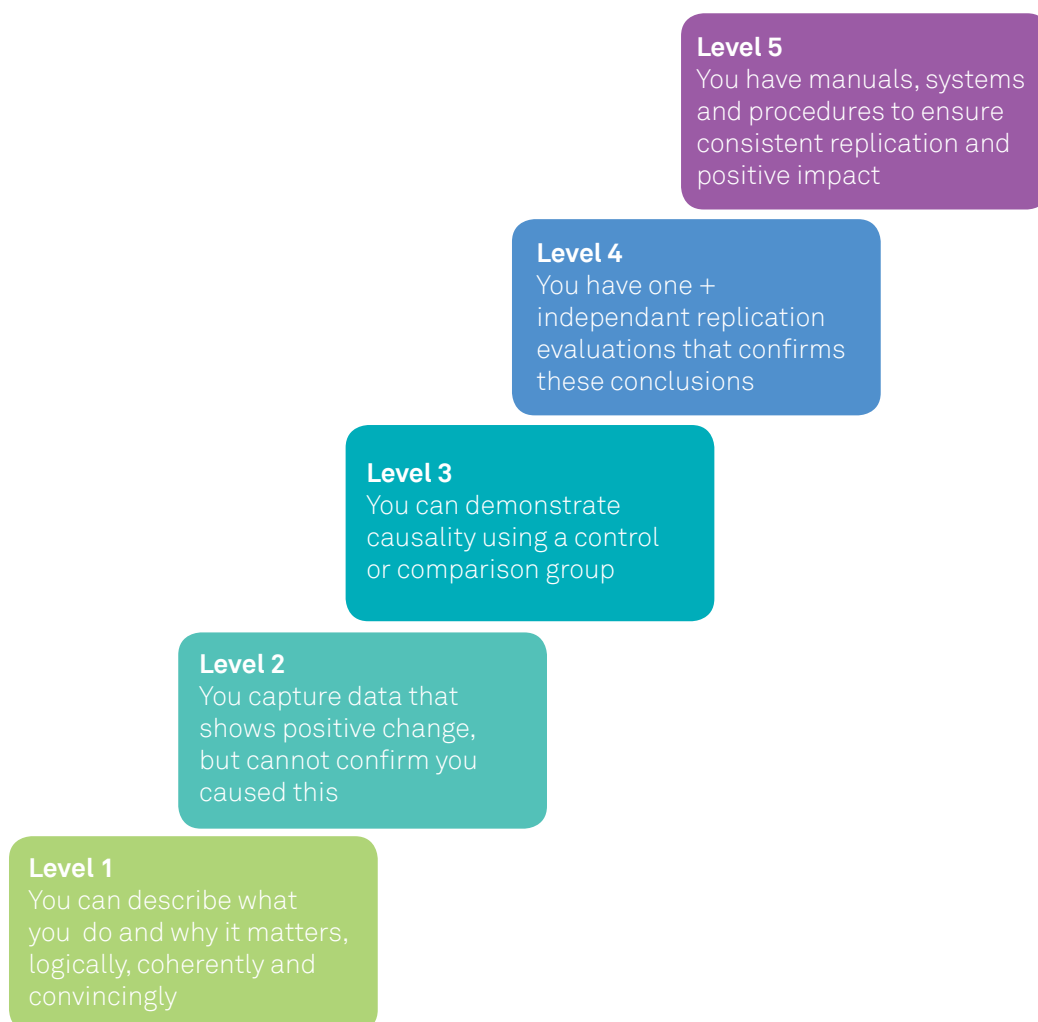
In this Findings Piece we are going to focus on the top circle of figure 1, a tightly defined service, and the evidence associated with this. We think this is an important prerequisite for successful replication because a tightly defined service is one that is more likely to be effective at improving outcomes of beneficiaries and it is also one that is more likely to be consistently replicated in new places.

At the outset of the Realising Ambition programme, we used the Dartington Social Research Unit (DSRU) Standards of Evidence to assess how tightly defined each of the 25 services was. These Standards include criteria to assess:

(a) the degree to which the service can be described as logical and coherent;
(b) the quality of the evidence and evaluation supporting the service;
(c) an assessment of impact on outcomes; and
(d) the degree to which the service is ready for wider replication.

Numerous organisations have since used these Standards, often adopting the structure initially developed by DSRU for the Greater London Authority and Project Oracle. As illustrated in Figure 2 (NESTA's adaptation of these Standards), this structure includes five hierarchical levels.

Figure 2: NESTA's adaptation of the Standards of the Evidence

Level 5
You have manuals, systems and procedures to ensure consistent replication and positive impact

Level 4
You have one + independant replication evaluations that confirms these conclusions

Level 3
You can demonstrate causality using a control or comparison group

Level 2
You capture data that shows positive change, but cannot confirm you caused this

Level 1
You can describe what you do and why it matters, logically, coherently and convincingly

Source: NESTA Standards of Evidence

Strengths and limitations

A strength of this application of the Standards of Evidence is that it creates a positive focus on outcomes and impact. It focuses not only on high quality evidence and evaluation methods but also on broader aspects of service refinement and scalability.

Table 1 illustrates how many of the 25 Realising Ambition projects sat at Levels 1, 2 or 3 or above respectively prior to the start of the programme compared to now (three quarters of the way through the five-year investment). See the box on the following page for an overview of the methods and sources of information used to make these judgements (as well as the methods informing data described in Part 2).

Table 1: Progression up the levels of the Standards of Evidence

	Start of the Programme	Now (3.5 years later)
Level 1	10	1
Level 2	4	10
Level 3+	11	14*

*Of these, three projects are currently undergoing experimental evaluation but results are not yet available.

Most of those projects that were initially at Level 1 are now at Level 2, and a few that were at Level 2 are now currently undergoing experimental evaluation in order to reach Level 3. This indicates a positive and marked refinement of services over the course of the Realising Ambition programme. We think that the support and guidance provided to each of the 25 projects by consortium partners over the first three years of the programme has contributed to this progression, as well as the Big Lottery Fund's investment in experimental evaluation of three of the projects.

However, the consortium partners have identified a number of limitations of this application of the Standards of Evidence, at least in an investment programme focused on replication. First, there are many projects, including some of those at Level 1, that have elements of Level 5 in place – manuals, systems and procedures to ensure consistent replication. But because they have not undergone an experimental evaluation they are 'stuck' at Level 1 or 2. Second, there is a great deal of variation within each of the five levels of the Standards that they do not adequately capture. For example, the coherence and evidence underpinning how tightly defined a service is at Level 1 – illustrated by the quality of a logic model or theory of change – can vary enormously. The same applies for the quality of evidence of change in outcomes at Levels 2, 3 and 4. These themes will be explored further in Part 3.

A different approach to evidence

These limitations have led us to explore the value in moving away from a simple hierarchical application of the Standards of Evidence (moving up levels) in favour of a more nuanced approach, at least in the context of supporting service improvement. This is encapsulated by our development of the Evidence-Confidence Framework – introduced in the second issue of this Programme Insight series. This framework provides an overview of numerous service and organisational aspects of replication including, for example, whether the organisation is serving those for whom the service was designed and whether the delivery organisation has a compelling business case to support sustainability. When used as a self-assessment tool it helps organisations to identify areas of strength and potential development. These areas of potential development will not necessarily follow a fixed order or linear pathway, but may include revisiting and strengthening earlier evidential foundations. An illustrative overview and application of the Evidence-Confidence Framework to a hypothetical project is provided in Figure 3. Further details about the Evidence-Confidence Framework are provided in the second issue of this programme insights series.

As such, in this Findings piece, rather than report further on the movement of interventions up levels of the Standards of Evidence, we instead look to report against a number of important specific indicators of a tightly defined service within the Evidence-Confidence Framework.

Figure 3: An illustrative application of the Realising Ambition Evidence-Confidence Framework

A tightly defined service	Supported by a strong logic model	The "core" of the service is well defined	There are clearly specified activities	Delivery supported by manuals and training
That is effectively delivered to those that need it	Eligible individuals in need are served	Realistic delivery targets can be met	The "core" is delivered with fidelity	Service delivered by motivated and qualified staff
Evidence is used to learn and adapt, as required	Outcomes are routinely monitored	Engagement and retention are routinely monitored	Flexible components are identified and adaptations tested	Learning is translated across the delivery organisation
There is confidence that outcomes will improve	Evidence from elsewhere that outcomes improved	Delivery organisation able to effectively gather, analyse and communicate evidence	Evidence from current replication area that outcomes improved	Evidence of wider positive impact
The service is cost-beneficial and sustainable	Analysis of costs and likely financial return on investment	Compelling business case supporting replication	Service fully integrated into core business	Financial and organisational structures sufficiently robust to support replication

Note lighter shaded cells indicate a high degree of confidence and darker shades of blue indicate areas of potential development.

Specifically, we describe how many of the 25 Realising Ambition projects had, at the outset of their replication journey:

(a) a coherent logic model supported by evidence;
(b) manuals or implementation handbooks to support consistent replication;
(c) tools or processes to monitor the fidelity or consistency of delivery;
(d) estimations of unit and start-up costs;
(e) routinely monitored outcomes of intended beneficiaries; and
(f) experimental evidence of impact on outcomes of intended beneficiaries.

We then compare this to where the 25 projects are now, three-quarters of the way through the five-year programme. Future Programme Insight issues will focus on other more organisational and contextual elements of the Evidence-Confidence Framework.

The analysis in Part 2 is simple and descriptive. In many ways the results are not surprising given the investment in service refinement and the generation of evidence within the Realising Ambition programme (spoiler alert: most services have become more tightly defined and replicable). In Part 3 we take a more reflective examination of what underlies these findings.

Methods for charting service refinement

We assess both progression up the levels of the Standards of Evidence, and the development of specific indicators of service refinement and the generation of evidence, by applying the full and comprehensive criteria of the Dartington Social Research Unit's (DSRU) Standards of Evidence. You can find the full Standards of Evidence at: investinginchildren.eu/evidence-standards.

At the outset and project selection phase of the Realising Ambition programme we applied the full Standards of Evidence to all those projects that were long-listed to take part in the initiative. We applied the Standards to each based on materials, evaluation reports and documentation provided. These assessments were undertaken by researchers trained in the application of the Standards at the Dartington Social Research Unit (and cross-checked).

During the course of the Realising Ambition programme we developed a prototype online self-assessment against the Standards of Evidence. Each project was required to complete and update this annually, uploading new materials, processes and documentation related to each indicator on the Standards (such as logic models, manuals or new evaluation reports). This, alongside further information provided by projects in their quarterly and annual reporting, formed the material basis for subsequent re-application of the Standards of Evidence by researchers at DSRU.

Part 2: Findings

Summary of service development

First we take an overall look at the degree to which the 25 Realising Ambition projects, as a whole, have developed against our six key indicators of service development. This is summarised in Figure 4, which charts how many of the 25 projects met each of these indicators at the outset of the programme, compared to now (about three-quarters through the five-year programme).

Figure 4: Overall summary of service refinement and the generation of evidence
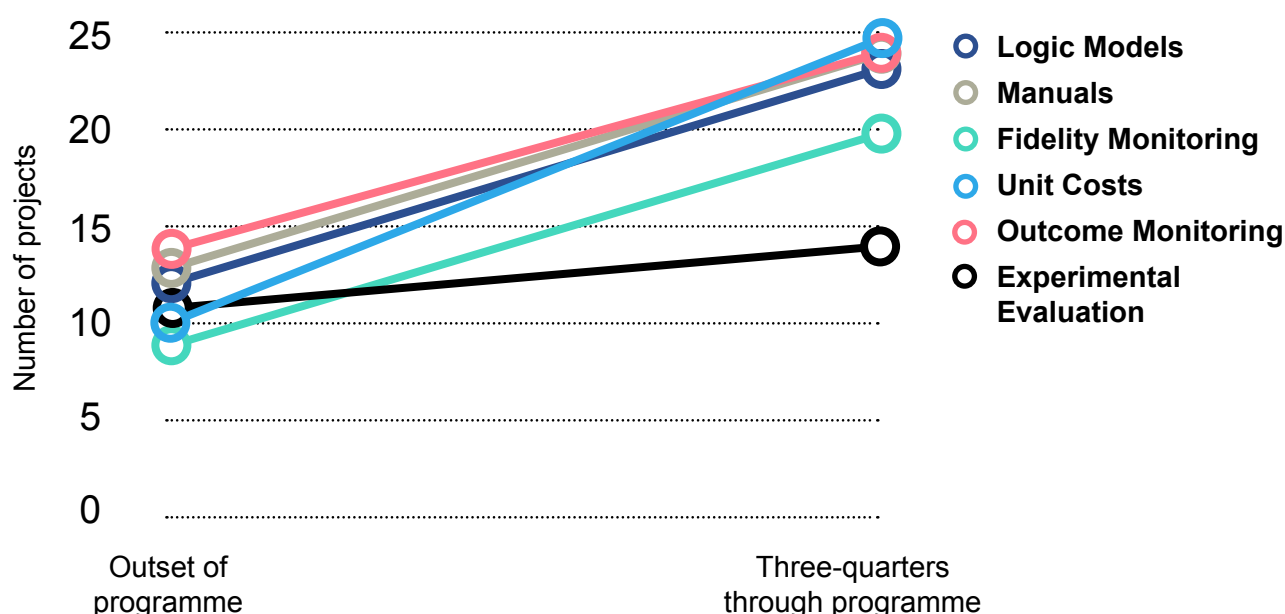
A closer look at specific indicators

Figure 5 presents the summary of each specific indicator (those same colour lines as in Figure 4), alongside a breakdown of those projects we defined at the outset of the programme as either an 'evidence-based programme' (11 of the 25 Realising Ambition projects – the grey lines) or a 'promising intervention' (the remaining 14 – the blue lines). The box on the following page provides an example of an evidence-based and promising intervention within the Realising Ambition programme.

We provide this breakdown because, generally speaking, the 11 evidence-based programmes started Realising Ambition with a strong evidence-base and high degree of refinement. This is reflected by flat grey lines in Figure 5: a ceiling was reached because they started the programme with many of these elements in place. However, this is not to say that they were not further refined over the course of replication and adaption (see Part 3).

By contrast, Figure 5 illustrates a greater development against these indicators for the promising interventions (the blue lines). Many projects started the Realising Ambition programme with the basis of these elements in place (for example, the outline of a logic model or the bones of an implementation handbook). However, most required a considerable investment of time and energy to refine these to the point that they (and we) were confident in them - for example, by strengthening and refining a logic model based on prior research and evidence, or getting more specific about core and adaptable practice in a manual or handbook. As with the evidence-based programmes, most elements tended to be refined continually as adaptations were made over the course of replication.
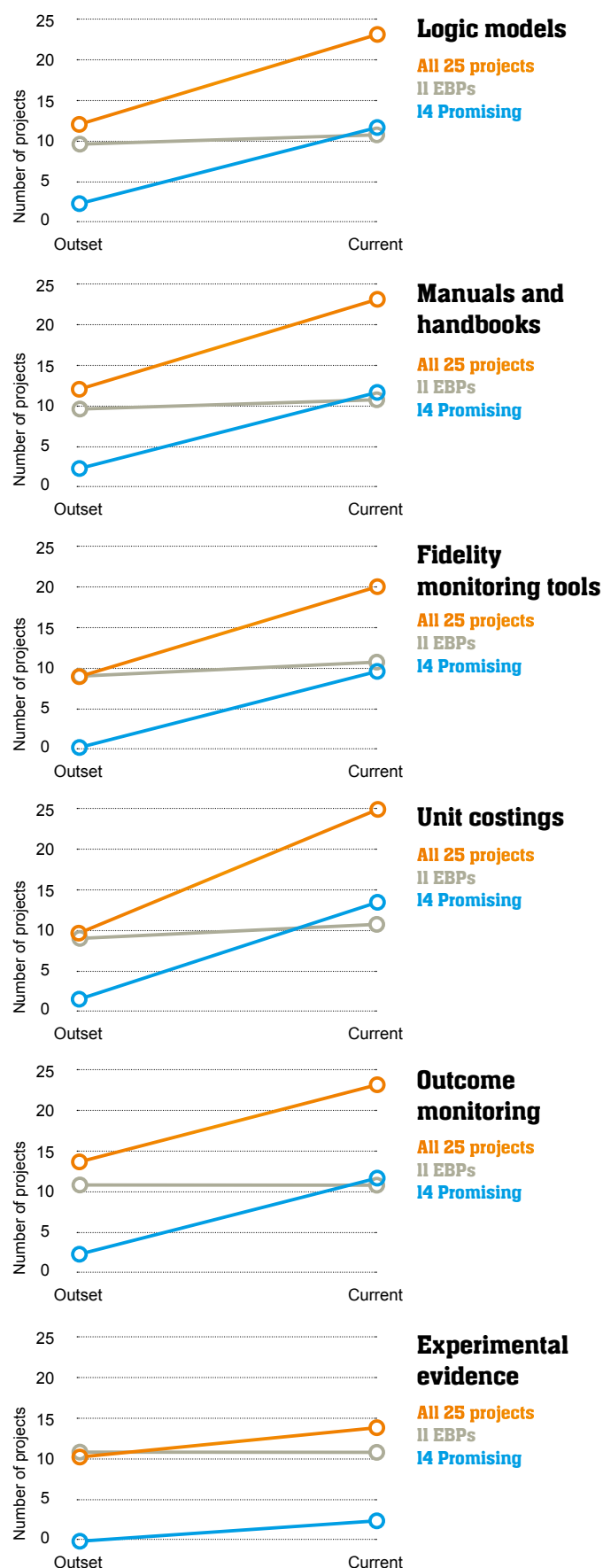
Evidence-based and promising interventions

We define an evidence-based programme as a discrete, organised package of practices or services – often accompanied by implementation manuals, training and technical support – that has been tested through rigorous experimental evaluation, comparing the outcomes of those receiving the service with those who do not, and found to be effective. This relates to the equivalent of Level 5 on the Standards of Evidence in Figure 2. One example of an evidence-based programme from the Realising Ambition projects is Multi Systemic Therapy (MST). MST is an intensive family and community based model that focuses on the whole ecology of the child. In Realising Ambition this service has been delivered by Extern in Northern Ireland. MST has undergone a number of experimental evaluations in the US and has been found to be effective in reducing out of home placements, retaining young people in school, decreasing drug and alcohol misuse, and improving family relationships.

We define a promising service as a tightly defined service, underpinned by a strong logic model, that has some indicative – though not experimental – evidence of impact. This relates to the equivalent of Level 2 on the Standards of Evidence in Figure 2. One example of a promising intervention from the Realising Ambition projects is The Children's Parliament Community Initiative. Delivered by Children's Parliament, this service aims to promote human rights and pro-social relationships among children on the periphery of anti-social behaviour or gang involvement. The service includes both workshops and group work where children are supported to explore their rights. Through Realising Ambition Children's Parliament has been supported to tighten and formalise its approach to outcome measurement.

Almost all Realising Ambition projects now have reasonably well-developed logic models, manuals or implementation handbooks, and estimations of start-up and unit costs and are routinely monitoring outcomes of children and young people. There are, however, as discussed in Part 3, variations in how refined these are. Many projects continue to further develop their logic models, manuals and activities in the light of new data on outcomes and costs, as well as opportunities and challenges in new replication areas.

Figure 5: Overall summary of service refinement and the generation of evidence

Logic models
All 25 projects
11 EBPs
14 Promising

Manuals and handbooks
All 25 projects
11 EBPs
14 Promising

Fidelity monitoring tools
All 25 projects
11 EBPs
14 Promising

Unit costings
All 25 projects
11 EBPs
14 Promising

Outcome monitoring
All 25 projects
11 EBPs
14 Promising

Experimental evidence
All 25 projects
11 EBPs
14 Promising

Approximately four-fifths of the projects have in place or have developed fidelity monitoring tools. However, what we know less about at this stage is if and how they are being used to support consistency of service delivery and adaptations (we will return to this later in this Programme Insights series).

The Realising Ambition programme is unique in that almost half of the projects in the portfolio have, in the past or elsewhere, been rigorously evaluated for their impact using experimental methods. This is not at all typical: based on an analysis of expenditure in local authorities by DSRU, we estimate that fewer than 1% of services for children in the UK have been evaluated in this way. The small rise in the number of Realising Ambition projects with experimental evidence is accounted for by those three projects currently involved in a full or pilot RCT as part of the Realising Ambition programme. These are still underway. In subsequent Programme Insights issues we will discuss the role of RCTs in replication and innovation, what we and the organisations involved have learnt from undertaking trials in a 'real world' non-clinical setting, as well as results of the trials as when they are available.

So what? Are projects and beneficiaries any better off?

An examination of these indicators of service refinement and evidence suggest that projects have become more refined over the course and investment of the Realising Ambition programme. Does this mean that the services have enhanced their ability to replicate and spread their practice to new areas? We cannot say for sure – a number of external factors also impact on an organisation's ability to replicate effectively and improve outcomes. However, what we can say is that by the end of 2015 and as part of the Realising Ambition programme, over 142,000 children and young people have received a service from one of the 25 Realising Ambition projects (more than the planned 134,000). We can also say that many projects attribute some of this success to the refinement of their services, evidence, structures and processes (see next page and the emerging body of individual project case studies as projects exit the programme).

Does the refinement of services and generation of evidence mean that the outcomes for children and young people have improved? The next issue of this Programme Insights series will be reporting preliminary outcome data from the programme. The case studies released so far also include some project-specific outcome data. In short, the findings generally show stable or improved outcomes (but as one would expect, not necessarily for all). However, given the absence of a comparison or control group for most projects, it is difficult to state whether the services themselves are responsible for improvements in outcomes - changes may have occurred regardless. It therefore becomes even more difficult to state whether the refinement of services and generation of evidence have contributed to improvements in outcomes.

That said, many of the projects report in their case studies that the development and refinement of services has supported them to better communicate to funders and commissioners what their service does and provide greater confidence about the potential impact that it has. See the box on the following page for some examples.

Added value: what some projects say

Malachi: "The development of a robust and well evidenced logic model has transformed all aspects of our service delivery at Malachi from our recruitment and training processes to our monitoring and reporting systems. The logic model provides a focus and a framework for which we now develop all our systems around and is displayed throughout our organisation and is constantly referred to for a benchmark of internal evaluation."
- Laura Evans, CEO of Malachi

The Ariel Trust: "It took 3 years to engage 100 schools using our anti-violence resource 'Face Up'. For a small organisation that was good going but the work that we did as part of Realising Ambition transformed our ability to work with schools.

Our latest anti-violence resource 'CyberSense' was launched in the spring of 2015 and enabled the engagement of 100 schools within 3 months. The effectiveness of this intervention was dramatically improved through work on refinement of the logic model, development user manuals and engagement with the existing evidence from elsewhere.

The next phase of development will see the emergence of a third generation of anti-violence educational resources for schools. These new resources have begun to attract the attention of commercial sponsors, though it is early days we have found that potential sponsors are interested in associating their brand with products that are used widely in schools across the UK."
- Paul Ainsworth, CEO of the Ariel Trust

Part 3: A more nuanced reflection on the findings

In this final part we take a more nuanced reflection on the findings.

It doesn't happen overnight
This degree of service refinement and generation of evidence has not occurred overnight. At the outset of the Realising Ambition programme we initially thought that we, the consortium, could provide intensive support to aid service refinement and organisational development in the first 12 to 18 months of the initiative, and then our work would be done. We envisaged that projects would then seek to take their refined approaches and replicate them further while planning for further sustainability. We were wrong. Instead we have provided variable intensities of support over a much longer period of time – in some cases it is still ongoing nearly four years in. This was, in part, due to an intensive set-up period for many projects in new geographical replication areas. This period included a variety of competing demands, such as the engagement of new staff, delivery partners, referral pathways and beneficiaries as well as new reporting requirements. This meant that little time could be devoted to service refinement. As the intensive set-up period settled down projects were able to focus on refinement, adaptation and testing whilst also balancing competing priorities of maintaining delivery and meeting contractual and reporting obligations.

Service improvement requires investment
The process of refinement and adaptation of 25 projects has required a significant investment. This investment has been provided by both the Big Lottery Fund in terms of resourcing the consortium to provide support, and critically by each of the 25 Realising Ambition projects. Each delivery organisation has invested considerable time, effort and resource to refine their work whilst meeting expectations regarding delivery. The Realising Ambition programme has demonstrated what can be achieved, but the investment is relatively unique: such resources and time are not typically available in a traditional grant or commissioning arrangement.

Variability and quality
There is a great deal of variation in the quality of the tools, processes and evidence that sit under each indicator we assessed. The charts in Figures 4 and 5 do not reveal this variation. For example, logic models are now relatively common-place in children's services and social innovation. But the quality varies enormously. Some are not really very logical, others are logical but without any substantiation or detail, and fewer are both logical, specific and underpinned by evidence. But this variation in quality can be hard to judge. The development of the Evidence-Confidence Framework is designed, in part, to help organisations make some judgments about the strength and quality of service refinement indicators and also what could be done to refine them further in the context of replication. You can read more about the Evidence-Confidence Framework and associated indicators on the Realising Ambition webpages, as well as consider project-specific strengths and areas for further refinement in our case studies series.

Continuous reflection
Service refinement and the generation of evidence should not stop when replicating. The graphs in Figures 4 and 5 suggest that many projects have now developed a logic model, manual or a process for routinely monitoring outcomes, and that the task is now complete. But the reality is that replication requires continuous reflection, refinement and adaptation. This reflection may be needed in response to developments in one area impacting on another (such as outcome data questioning the links in a logic model), and in response to challenges and opportunities in replication areas and new contexts (such as difficulties in engaging or retaining young people in a service).

For example, one of the Realising Ambition projects - the Ariel Trust - had initially based their work on school teachers using interactive digital resources within classrooms. These resources were designed to promote a change in attitudes and behaviours related to alcohol misuse, cyber bullying and controlling relationships. A logic model was based around this. However, preliminary outcome data,

feedback from young people and teachers, and an examination of the literature indicated that these messages needed to be reinforced via a whole-school approach if changes in attitudes were to translate to changes in behaviour. This led to some key aspects of the logic model being refined and new materials and resources being produced.

A non-sequential process

It follows that the process of service refinement and the generation of evidence is generally non-sequential. While there are some foundations that are important (such as a logic model which can focus the choice of outcome monitoring tools), the subsequent order of development and refinement is not fixed. Many of the indicators in the Evidence-Confidence Framework may be considered and reconsidered at numerous points in the replication process. The staging of refinements will be influenced by current organisational priorities and local replication challenges.

Putting it into practice

Just because something is in place does not mean it will be used. There is a risk that the production of manuals or the generation of outcome data becomes an end in and of itself, rather than a means to an end. Organisations can invest a lot of time and effort in developing these things but in practice not end up using them. For example, while many Realising Ambition projects have developed and are actively using fidelity monitoring tools to help ensure consistent delivery, many have also developed but not subsequently used them. Care should be taken only to develop evidence, tools and processes that are subsequently used in order to inform practice, beneficiary outcomes and support wider replication and scale.

A journey, not a destination

The learning from replication comes from the process of developing tools, procedures and evidence and not necessarily from the end products of these tools (such as a manual or outcome report). For example, another Realising Ambition project - Malachi - found that the process of developing a logic model that encapsulated their organisation's ethos and way of working was a powerful tool in staff recruitment and training (see Box 3). Chance UK found that writing sections on need and demand for their implementation handbook helped them revisit and refine their approach to referral and family engagement practices. This, in turn, helped boost their engagement and delivery numbers.

In summary, over the last three and half years the vast majority of the 25 projects within the Realising Ambition portfolio have demonstrably improved against a number of important indicators of service refinement and the generation of evidence. Yet it is not progression against these indicators per se that represents the benefit and achievement. Rather, it is the steps forward as well as backwards, and the learning from this iterative process of refinement that represents the real achievement in this programme.

Key Learning Points

- **The majority of projects have become more tightly defined and replicable**
Almost all now have strong logic models, implementation manuals and a realistic calculation of start-up and unit costs.

- **The majority of projects have strengthened the evidence underpinning their services**
Almost all are now routinely monitoring beneficiary outcomes and three are currently undergoing an experimental evaluation of impact (in addition to the eleven already underpinned by this).

- **Service refinement, adaptation and testing requires time**
The demands of embedding a service in a new area and meeting contractual demands of service delivery competes with time and resource to make planned adaptations and refinements. It took most projects at least two years until they could really focus on planned adaption and testing.

- **Service refinement, adaptation and testing requires investment**
It took a significant investment in time and resource from the service delivery organisations themselves and the consortium providing support to enable service refinement and planned adaptation.

- **The quality of tools, processes and evidence to support replication can vary enormously**
Just because logic models, fidelity monitoring tools or an evaluation of impact is in place does not necessarily mean that they are strong or they are used.

- **The Standards of Evidence are a blunt tool for supporting service refinement, adaptation and testing**
While they are valuable for building our scientific knowledge of 'what works' to improve outcomes they are not designed to support iterative adaptation and testing.

- **Replication requires continuous reflection and revisiting of earlier evidential foundations**
Delivery in new contexts and the availability of newly generated evidence may challenge some aspects of a service delivery model, in turn prompting further adaptation and testing.

- **The Evidence-Confidence Framework provides service delivery organisations with a nuanced reflection on areas of strength and potential refinement**
While in need of further development itself, the Evidence-Confidence Framework may be a useful tool for other organisations replicating services in new areas.

- **Replication is a journey, not a destination**
The learning from the process of replication stems from the process of developing tools, procedures and evidence, not necessarily from the end products of these tools.

Glossary of Terms

- **Adaptable practice**

Those aspects of a service that can be adapted without compromising its core components. Adaptable components can enable practitioners to tailor a service to fit the unique requirements of the local context and beneficiaries of replication.

- **Control group / comparison group**

A group of participants within an experimental evaluation who do not receive the programme or service under evaluation, in order to measure the outcomes that would have occurred without the presence of the programme.

- **Core components / activities**

The key activities that make a service work. Put another way, the specific aspects or mechanisms of a service that lead to the desired change in outcomes. For a service to be replicated successfully, providers need to be clear about what can and cannot be changed.

- **Evidence-based programme**

A discrete, organised package of practices or services – often accompanied by implementation manuals, training and technical support – that has been tested through rigorous experimental evaluation, comparing the outcomes of those receiving the service with those who do not, and found to be effective, i.e. it has a clear positive effect on child outcomes. In the Standards of Evidence developed by the Dartington Social Research Unit, used by Project Oracle, NESTA and others, this relates to 'at least Level 3' on the Standards.

- **Evidence-Confidence Framework**

The Realising Ambition 'Evidence-Confidence Framework' is a tool that can be used to help judge the strength and overall balance of different types of evidence for a particular service being replicated, and to identify areas of development and opportunity. It is structured around a five-part definition of successful replication: (i) a tightly defined service; (ii) that is effectively and faithfully delivered to those that need it; (iii) evidence is used to learn and adapt, as required; (iv) there is confidence that outcomes have improved; and (v) the service is cost-beneficial and sustainable. A simple five-point colour grading system is used to grade the strength and quality of each type of evidence: the lightest blue representing the strongest evidence and the darkest blue the weakest.

- **Experimental evaluation / Robust evidence of impact**

An evaluation that compares the outcomes of children and young people who receive a service to those of a control group of similar children and young people who do not. The control group may be identified by randomly allocating children and young people who meet the target group criteria – a randomised controlled trial or RCT -, or by identifying a comparable group of children and young people in receipt of similar service – a quasi-experimental design or QED.

Glossary of Terms

- **Fidelity / Faithful delivery**

The faithfulness to the original design and core components of a service. This can be assessed by fidelity monitoring tools, checklists or observations.

- **Fidelity monitoring tools**

Typically, these are checklists or observations which enable practitioners, programme managers, or researchers to monitor whether or not a programme is being delivered faithfully, according to its original design.

- **Impact**

The impact (positive or negative) of a programme or service on relevant outcomes (ideally according to one or more robust impact evaluations).

- **Implementation handbook**

A document that describes the processes and agreements for replicating an intervention in a new context. Typically it would include information on the structure and content of the programme, its intended outcomes and the resources needed to deliver it.

- **Innovation**

The process of translating a new idea into a service that creates value for the intended beneficiaries and which can be funded or commissioned.

- **Logic model**

A typically graphical depiction of the logical connections between resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes of a service. Ideally these connections will have some research underpinning them. Some logic models also include assumptions about the way the service will work.

- **Manual**

A document that covers all the things about a programme or service that are relevant wherever and whenever it is being implemented. This includes the research base for the programme, the desired outcomes, the logical connection between activities and these outcomes, the target group and all of the relevant training or delivery materials (see also 'Implementation handbook').

- **Outcomes**

Outcomes refer to the 'impact' or change that is brought about, such as a change in behaviour or physical or mental health. In Realising Ambition all services seek to improve outcomes associated with a reduced likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system.

- **Outcome monitoring tools**

Within the context of services for children and their families, these are typically questionnaires, structured interviews, or observations completed by young people or their parents, practitioners or researchers on a range of indicators of emotional and physical well-being and development.

Glossary of Terms

- **Promising service/intervention**

A tightly defined service, underpinned by a strong logic model, that has some indicative – though not experimental – evidence of impact. In the Standards of Evidence developed by the Dartington Social Research Unit, used by Project Oracle, NESTA and others, this relates to 'Level 2' on the Standards.

- **Replication**

Delivering a service into new geographical areas or to new or different audiences. Replication is distinct from scaling-up in that replication is just one way of scaling 'wide' – i.e. reaching a greater number of beneficiaries in new places. (See definition of 'scale').

- **Standards of Evidence**

The Standards of Evidence are set of criteria by which to judge how tightly defined and ready for wider replication or implementation a particular service is. They also assess the strength and quality of any experimental evidence underpinning a service. The standards form the basis of the Investing in Children 'what works' portal for commissioners that provides a database of proven services for commissioners of children's services. The Standards have also underpinned numerous others, including the Project Oracle and NESTA Standards of Evidence.

- **Start-up costs**

The total cost of setting up a project, programme or service in a new area. Start-up costs typically include capital costs such as IT equipment, planning and training costs, consultancy, recruitment, licensing and legal costs.

- **Tightly defined service**

Successful interventions are clear about what they are, what they aim to achieve and with whom, and how they aim to do it. A tightly defined service is one which is focused, practical and logical.

- **Unit costs**

The cost of everything required to deliver a programme to a participant or a family. A unit cost is normally expressed as an average cost per child or family, but can also be expressed as a range (for example, unit costs ranging for "high need" to "low need" cases).

A more expansive glossary of key terms related to Realising Ambition may be found at the Realising Ambition website: catch-22.org.uk/realising-ambition. This will grow as the series of Programme Insights develop."

Further Reading

We have drawn on many sources in the production of this Programme Insight. Our top picks for further reading on the themes discussed are listed below.

- Dartington Social Research Unit. (2013). Investing in Children 'What Works' Standard of Evidence. Dartington: DSRU. See: http://investinginchildren.eu/standards-evidence

- Dartington Social Research Unit. (2013). Design and Refine: Developing effective interventions for children and young people. Dartington, England.

- Fixsen, D., et al. (2005). Implementation Research: A synthesis of the Literature. Tampa, USA: The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231)

- Gloster, R., Aston, J., & Foley, B. (2014). Evaluation of Project Oracle. London: Institute for Employment Studies and NESTA

- Gottfredson, D., Cook, T., Gardner, F, Gorman-Smith, D., Howe, G., Sandler, I. and Zafft, K. (2015). Standards of evidence for efficacy, effectiveness, and scale-up research in prevention science: Next generation. Prevention Science, pp.1-34.

- Nutley, S., Powell, A., & Davies, H. (2013). What counts as good evidence? Provocation paper for the Alliance for Useful Evidence. London, England.

- Petticrew, M. and Roberts, H. (2003) Evidence, hierarchies, and typologies: horses for courses. Journal of Epidemiology and Community health. 57: 527–529.

- Puttick, R., & Ludlow, J. (2012). Standards of Evidence for Impact Investing. London: NESTA

You can find a full list of additional resources we have drawn on at the Realising Ambition website: catch-22.org.uk/realising-ambition. This will grow as the series of Programme Insights develop.

Find out more

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