The Listening Fund (England) Final Learning Report

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The Centre for Youth Impact

The Centre for Youth Impact is a community of organisations that work together to progress thinking and practice about impact measurement in youth work and services for young people. Our vision is for all young people to have access to high quality provision and services that improve their life chances, by enabling embedded approaches to impact measurement that directly inform practice. Our work, therefore, is dedicated to three objectives, together with our expanded networks and other organisations from across the youth sector: curating the debate, building the movement, and shaping the future.

Find out more about the Centre for Youth Impact at www.youthimpact.uk and follow us on Twitter @YouthImpactUK.

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Executive Summary

Background and aims

The Listening Fund aims to advance the ability of the youth sector to listen and respond to their core constituents: young people. The Listening Fund in England is supported by the Blagrave Trust, Comic Relief, the National Lottery Community Fund, and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. 22 youth organisations (referred to as 'partners') have been funded over two years, from 2018 to 2020, to develop their listening practice.

The Centre for Youth Impact has conducted an evaluation of the Listening Fund, which aims to learn about specific aspects of listening in order to support the learning of the funded organisations and to advance practice in the sector as a whole. The central research question for the evaluation is: 'What is the impact of dedicated funder support on organisational listening practice?'

A parallel Listening Fund has been set up in Scotland, which began in March 2019 and is funding 12 Scottish youth organisations over two years. The Centre for Youth Impact is undertaking a comparative evaluation to draw out learning from both the English and Scottish cohorts.

Methodology

Research for this evaluation was conducted using a combination of light touch quantitative methods and more in-depth qualitative methods. All methods were designed, firstly, to provide direct insights for each partner organisations to improve their listening practice, and secondly, to enable the evaluation team to draw out learning at the level of the cohort. Various resources to support the development of listening for organisations working with young people, including a feedback survey for young people and an organisational self-assessment, are publicly available and are signposted throughout this report.

Impacts of the Listening Fund

At the simplest level, the findings in this report suggest that dedicated funder support for organisational listening can result in significant positive change to organisational delivery and strategy, with an improved focus on and response to young people's needs and preferences. A key piece of learning from the evaluation is that, to 'do listening well' - in a manner that is driven by young people and leads to tangible action based on what they say - is challenging and requires dedicated time and investment. This is something that is often underestimated in the youth sector: therefore, lack of proper resource can lead to the tokenistic involvement of young people in projects that claim to listen to or co-produce with them. By providing a dedicated resource, the Listening Fund has resulted in some significant progress in partners' abilities to listen. In particular, involvement in the Fund has enabled partners to make cultural shifts, to question 'what does listening mean' within the context of the organisation and to address power dynamics in how they engage with their beneficiaries.

A wide range of mechanisms for listening have been used across the cohort of partners, spanning qualitative, face-to-face methods, such as a youth forum, and quantitative, online methods such as a digital feedback survey. The diverse array of approaches is testament to the complexity of listening when undertaken in a meaningful and focussed way. Practically, the extent to which partners successfully implemented mechanisms for listening varies across the cohort, and this

was influenced by the enablers and barriers that are outlined below. Many partners have used the Fund as an opportunity to 'go back to basics', to develop 'low level' elements of listening and to re-centre young people in their organisation. Accordingly, many partners have emphasised that their projects are not confined within the two years of the Listening Fund, and that they are still in the relatively early stages of a long-term process to improve and sustain their ability to listen.

For young people, the Listening Fund has had direct positive impacts in allowing them to gain greater decision-making capacity within their organisations and has improved their experience of provision because it has been shaped more directly to meet their preferences and their needs. In the words of one young person, the partner organisation they engage with now "*always asks my opinion on what part I want to play and what ideas I have, which is helpful and supportive*". Additionally, the empowering nature of listening has been highlighted, where young people have gained skills, confidence, and have been empowered to act on issues that are important to them.

Key enablers for meaningful listening practice

The findings demonstrate that there is no one size fits all approach to listening, but there are various enabling factors that have consistently supported the development of listening practice:

- Providing dedicated spaces or structures for young people to voice their opinions and views;
- Identifying staff member(s) to drive motivation to listen and to deliver listening activity;
- Ensuring spaces and mechanisms for listening are safe and supportive for young people;
- Making listening activities worthwhile and enjoyable, to motivate young people to take part;
- Engaging with and listening to young people's families and wider networks, for a holistic view of their lives and experiences; and
- Conducting analysis and outreach to make sure listening is representative and accessible to all young people.

Key barriers to meaningful listening practice

The evaluation has highlighted the need for dedicated funding in the area of listening, as a lack of time and resources for listening is considered one of the biggest barriers to progress. Even with the support of the Listening Fund, many partners acknowledged that the grants provided were fairly modest and over a relatively short time period, which impacted the level of progress that could be achieved. Additional key barriers to meaningful listening practice that have been identified are:

- Challenges related to recruiting and retaining essential staff;
- Unstable funding environments, where listening comes second to core service delivery, and it will not be prioritised if the conditions are not in place for this to thrive;
- Managing competing agendas, when the action that would be taken on listening does not align with an organisation's existing funding streams; and
- Disconnected services within one organisation, which limits internal learning on listening.

1. Introduction

The Listening Fund

The Listening Fund supports youth-focussed organisations to develop their practice of listening to young people and responding to what they hear. The Fund's objective is to advance the ability of the youth sector to listen to the voices of young people, to enable them to have a greater say in shaping the provision they receive and to be agents of change on issues affecting them.

The Listening Fund in England is supported by the Blagrave Trust, Comic Relief, the National Lottery Community Fund, and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The fund is worth £900,000, which is shared across 22 youth organisations (referred to as 'partners') each receiving up to £20,000 per annum for two years, from 2018 to 2020.

The 22 Listening Fund partners vary in terms of the region in which they operate, the type of services or provision they offer, and the young people they reach. Some organisations work to support young people who have a particular set of experiences and needs (such as young care leavers, young refugees, transgender young people, or young people who have experienced homelessness). Others work to support a broad range of young people, either in a particular city or region of England, or on a national scale. The map in Figure 1 broadly shows the distribution of the Listening Fund partners across England (note that some partners operate UK-wide and are represented by their London headquarters). For a full list of the partners supported by the Listening Fund, see Appendix A.

Figure 1: Distribution of partners
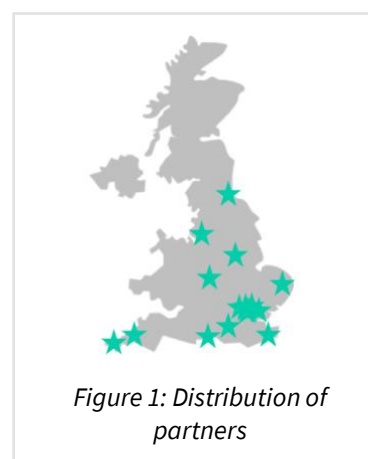
The Listening Fund Evaluation

The Centre for Youth Impact was commissioned to evaluate the Listening Fund in order to optimise learning from the investment. The evaluation aims to understand and assess the impact of the Listening Fund on the practice of the organisations who are in receipt of funding, whilst also making a broader contribution to the evidence base around organisational listening. The central research question for the evaluation is:

What is the impact of dedicated funder support on organisational listening practice?

The evaluation focusses on capturing learning through understanding process alongside impact. To answer the above research question, the evaluation addresses the following sub-questions.

1. What changed for partners as a result of the Listening Fund? (in listening practice and in organisational practice)
2. What changed for young people as a result of the Listening Fund? (in experience of provision and in outcomes)
3. What are the enablers to meaningful practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?
4. What are the barriers to meaningful practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?

Our intention is that the evaluation will not only offer insights for the youth organisations and funders that are directly involved in the Fund, but also that this learning will be shared and applied much more widely. Our ambition for the wider youth sector and its funders is to enhance their understanding of how to embed good listening practice into their work, with greater knowledge of the enablers and barriers to meaningful practice when responding to young people.

Two learning reports have already been published from the Listening Fund. The first report explores early findings from the first partner self-assessment (see Section 5 for details on what the self-assessment methodology involves) (Centre for Youth Impact, 2018). The second report shares interim findings from the mid-point of the fund (Centre for Youth Impact, 2019). This third learning report draws on the findings in the previous reports, as well as from the additional research that took place over the second year.

There is also an accompanying case study report that details the findings from in-depth research with six of the Listening Fund partners. This is valuable in supplementing the generalised findings in the report, by providing specific examples of areas of progress and challenge in listening. This report can be found on the Centre for Youth Impact website[1].

A parallel Listening Fund has been set up in Scotland, which began in March 2019 and is funding 12 Scottish youth organisations over a period of two years. The Centre for Youth Impact is undertaking a comparative evaluation to draw out learning from both the English and Scottish cohorts. Again, more information can be found on the Centre for Youth Impact website.

All data for this evaluation was collected prior to the UK lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore important to note that the findings do not account for the disruption that has been caused to youth provision since March 2020.

Evaluation methodology

The Listening Fund evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach, drawing on light touch quantitative methods across all 22 partners and more in-depth qualitative methods for a subsection of partners. The methods were designed to provide insights for the partners to develop their listening practice, and to enable the evaluation team to draw out learning at the cohort level.

The methods for this evaluation involved:
- A partner self-assessment tool: where staff responded to 27 questions that explored listening practice, culture, skills, resources, and acting on which is heard. The tool was completed at three time-points during the fund (baseline, mid-point, and end-point).
- Listening feedback surveys: light-touch surveys were completed by young people to gain insights about their experiences of being listened to and how this could be improved.
- Case studies: in-depth research was conducted with six partners to provide a detailed look at their listening projects, incorporating interviews and focus groups with staff, young people, and external stakeholders.

[1] www.youthimpact.uk/the-listening-fund-evaluation.html

- Telephone interviews: were conducted with partner staff at the mid-point of the fund.
- Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology: this involved the collection of 'stories of change' that highlight the impact of the fund on young people, staff, and organisations, which were discussed and analysed in a reflective practitioner workshop.

The methodology for this evaluation is explored in detail in Section 5.

Defining 'listening'

By 'listening' we are referring to an active process where young people are given tangible opportunities to have a say in, and shape, youth provision, or to influence wider policies and practices impacting their role in society. There are two related but distinct types of listening that are relevant to this evaluation:

- Internally-focussed listening: a process where an organisation takes account of young people's views, opinions and experiences with the aim of developing their offer, in terms of the activities and services they deliver and how they are delivered.
- Advocacy-focussed listening: a process where an organisation provides young people with opportunities to influence external organisations, such as local authorities or national organisations, on the basis of their views and experiences.

For the vast majority of partners in the Fund, their listening projects span both types, with internal and advocacy-focussed components.

2. Discussion of Key Findings

This section identifies and explores the findings from this evaluation, drawing on and triangulating data from the various research methods that were employed. All quotations in the following sections are taken from staff members involved in the Listening Fund and are representative of broader views and experiences.

A wide range of mechanisms have been used for listening, including face-to-face methods such as a youth board, as well as online methods such as a digital feedback survey. The specific mechanisms used for listening are explored in detail in Section 2.3.

2.1 The impact of the Listening Fund grants on practice

Many partners felt they had the motivation and ideas for how to develop their ability to capture and respond to young people's voices before the Listening Fund, but lacked the resource to implement these ideas. Accordingly, a key piece of learning from the evaluation is that, to 'do listening well' - in a manner that is driven by young people and leads to tangible action based on what they say - is challenging and requires dedicated time and investment. This is something that is often underestimated in the youth sector: therefore, lack of proper resource can lead to tokenistic and superficial involvement of young people in projects that claim to listen to or co-produce with them. In such cases, it is easy for listening to "*descend into a tick box exercise*", where young people are briefly consulted but adults maintain full control over decision-making.

Some partners described how receiving a grant from the Listening Fund enabled them to avoid and to progress beyond this situation. It provided the time and space to "*think carefully and collectively about what it really means to involve young people's voices in our context*". They could then be experimental in exploring and testing different mechanisms for listening, to learn from this, and to design and implement a process that enabled young people to meaningfully have a say. Furthermore, the grant provided the space to "*stop regularly to question what is working and what could be improved in our approach*" and to make adaptations accordingly.

In line with this, many partners reflected that they were overly ambitious in their initial application to the Listening Fund and had not appreciated how challenging it would be to get the work right. Even when listening already strongly aligned with their values as an organisation, it often took longer than anticipated to "*get the actual structures in place*" to do listening well. In the early stages of the fund, there was a process for many of realising that they needed to "*take a few steps back*" or to "*go back to basics*". Through interviews and discussions with the partners, it was found this was prompted by various factors, which are explored below.

Discussions with young people

Upon speaking with young people after receiving the grant, some partners realised they did not actually want to take part in the listening activities originally outlined. For instance, one partner intended to recruit young people onto their trustee board, but found in practice that they were not keen on the idea and would rather be involved in the organisation in a way that comes with less legal and financial responsibility. A common challenge with the nature of co-produced projects is that "*you are often asked by the funder to say what you're going to do before you've actually had a*

chance to speak to any young people". Because of this, it was seen as valuable that the Listening Fund was "*flexible and non-prescriptive*", appreciating the need for partners to continually adapt and refine listening activities based on young people's input. It was noted that any genuinely youth-led project is likely to look different from the initial application, which may be a positive sign it is working as intended.

Discussions in the staff team

Through discussions in the staff team, some partners realised that, even with the support of the Listening Fund grant, they needed to "*rein in the project*" to focus on developing high-quality rudimentary listening practices, rather than "*grand ideas*" that might not be practically feasible or sustainable. In other words, they collectively recognised that it would be beneficial to ensure they got the 'low level' elements of listening right before 'higher level' elements could be implemented. What this means looked different in each context. For example, for one partner it involved implementing robust data storage and analysis processes to ensure they could properly make sense of what they hear from young people.

Collective learning with other organisations

Various collective learning activities were held as part of the Listening Fund, such as webinars and convening days, in which partners could discuss and share information about their projects. This helped some partners to better understand concepts around listening that were new to them, and, in some cases, to realise that they "*were behind in areas we hadn't even considered before*". For several partners this involved recognising the significance of closing the feedback loop or fully comprehending the process of co-production, which caused them to shift their focus in the first year.

Many partners have already applied for separate funding to continue their listening projects after the duration of the Listening Fund, highlighting further the importance of dedicated resource. It was emphasised that the projects "*are not neatly packaged into two years*", and they are still in the relatively early stages of a long-term process to improve and sustain their ability to listen.

2.2 Cultural shifts in approaches to listening

Within the non-profit and charitable sector – which *"thrives on people who think they are doing good in the world"* - there is often an assumption that things are already being done in the 'right way'. However, partners recognised that all organisations have blind spots, and the Listening Fund was a focused opportunity to engage in critical reflection of their practice and strategy. There was the opportunity to question aspects of practice that often go unquestioned in this line of work.

For many, the first step was to question *"what does listening mean"* within the context of the organisation. This required a review of how they relate to their beneficiaries: specifically, for some, this involved a realisation that their position was not as the expert or 'rescuer', but as a facilitator and partner in relation to young people's needs. This involved appreciating that young people are experts in their own circumstances. Accordingly, some partners have had to challenge long-held assumptions about young people's ability to engage in listening, to counteract tokenism and

paternalism in their work. For most, the reality was that *"young people come up with really good ideas for how to improve the service [and] it is important that there is trust this will happen"*. A key outcome for some partners was the realisation that young people were often not at the centre of their services in the ways that they should be. However, partners found that by consulting young people, particularly on higher-level decisions such as staff recruitment, they gained confidence in young people's ability to provide a valuable contribution to these processes. Some took practical steps to facilitate a cultural shift, such as formally codifying informal practices relating to young people's involvement in decision-making, and holding staff training to enable a wider change in attitudes to listening.

This was not necessarily an easy transition and for most it is an ongoing feature of their work. However, ultimately through involvement in the Listening Fund many partners expressed a better appreciation of the inherent power dynamics that underline listening to and with young people. For some, this also led partners to challenge assumptions within other organisations in their networks that may take a deficit view of young people's ability to engage in listening, and to share their own learning and champion more youth-centred approaches in multi-agency settings.

2.3 Design and mechanics of listening

There was variety in the mechanisms used for listening across the cohort of partners. Figure 2 shows what these mechanisms are and how their use has changed during the Fund. As highlighted above, for many partners the grant from the Listening Fund provided the capacity to test, explore and refine what tools work best in their specific context, and hence there has been some change in the mechanisms used over time.

Approaches for listening fell broadly into two categories: qualitative methods (usually face-to-face), such as youth advisory boards, youth forums, young trustees, interviews, and case studies, and quantitative methods (which can be face-to-face, paper, or online), such as surveys or feedback tools.


Figure 2: Forms of organisational listening
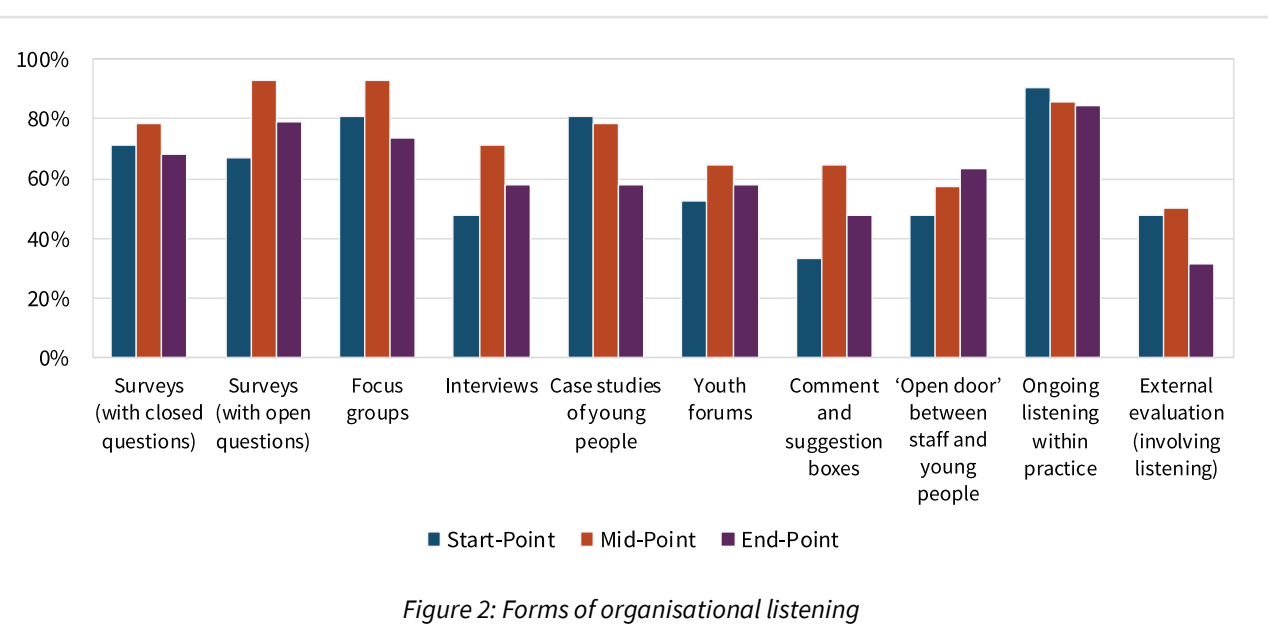
There was a sense across a number of partners that young people often feel "*bombarded*" with quantitative feedback methods such as surveys, questionnaires and evaluation forms, as they are often a condition of funding streams. Therefore, young people can "*see it as just another survey*" and are reluctant to meaningfully engage, leading to the data having limited value. Many partners therefore felt that such methods ought to be used sparingly; only where it will gather high quality data that will facilitate genuine change and improvement. This requires tailoring the tool appropriately to the audience, for instance: using targeted language and formatting (e.g. avoiding the use of smiley/sad faces for an age group where this may be seen as patronising), making a tool straightforward to use, and prioritising questions to focus on the most valuable information.

As partners perceived, there are, however, also significant benefits of quantitative listening approaches:

- All voices are heard evenly (whereas in a face-to-face group session, the conversation can become dominated by young people whose voices are louder and more confident);
- They are not restricted by geographical reach (when technology is used) and therefore have the potential to engage a greater number of young people; and
- Feedback can be submitted anonymously, which may reduce the chance of bias in some young people's responses.

Some emphasised anonymity as a particularly important benefit of quantitative listening methods, especially for gathering critical feedback on how their services were not working for young people and suggestions for how they could be improved. The self-assessment (Figure 3) showed that the number of partners that engaged young people anonymously in at least one form of listening increased considerably throughout the Fund, from 48% of partners at the start-point to 89% at the end-point. This is likely because partners have become more aware of the advantages of anonymous forms of listening throughout the Fund.

Figure 3: The use of some form of anonymous listening
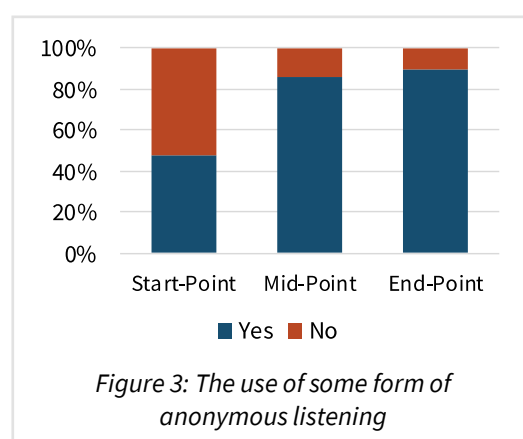
Qualitative methods for listening, on the other hand, were strongly valued for their conversational and discursive nature. This allowed for a rich understanding of young people's thoughts and ideas, as well as to provide opportunities for them to interact with peers and develop skills such as communication or problem-solving. The main drawbacks of qualitative listening approaches are:

- They can be limited in geographical reach (leading to bias in whose voices are heard);
- They often lack the option of anonymity; and
- They usually require a greater level of commitment from young people (meaning some are practically unable or will choose not to engage).

Ultimately, there were significant benefits to drawing on multiple mechanisms for listening within one organisation, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. This enabled partners to hear the voices of a wider range of young people, with different methods to suit their

differing circumstances and preferences, which allowed listening practices to be more representative.

2.4 Enablers for listening

Though the process of understanding how to listen and developing mechanisms to enable them to do this, the evaluation reveals how partners began to 'create the conditions for listening' within their organisations. These conditions manifested in various ways, outlined below.

Forming specific listening spaces and structures

As above, a number of partners adopted the approach of creating youth-led structures or 'spaces', including youth forums, a youth advisory group, or recruiting young ambassadors. These spaces often gave young people the confidence – through building relationships with peers and feeling that their concerns were valued – to both raise issues and to act upon them. For some partners, these dedicated listening spaces also had the benefit of affording young people the agency to take collective action, rather than dealing with issues individually.

For many partners, these spaces also directly improved social and emotional learning outcomes for young people. The very action of giving them space to discuss issues was a catalyst *"which has led to numerous projects led by lived experience".* This process allowed them to support young people to run workshops or attend key events, which was of great value in terms of their personal development.

The role of staff

A staff member was often key to the process of listening, to become the dedicated lead in "*making listening activities happen*" and to build motivation and buy-in to the concept across the whole team. For some, the appropriate member of staff was also one who could establish common ground: where young people had multiple and complex needs, and/or traumatic life experiences, building a trusting relationship was essential to enable them to feel comfortable to engage.

Some partners created and recruited for a specific role, such a Co-Production or Participation Lead, to manage listening across their organisation. In line with this, the proportion of partners who had a member of staff or a volunteer with 'listening' specifically included in their job description was high, at 72% at the start-point of the fund and 95% by the end-point. This further suggests there was an experience amongst partners where having a dedicated role was beneficial to the process of listening. However, partners also flagged that finding and recruiting qualified and experienced staff could be a challenge.

The key learning is that listening is not necessarily something that all organisations are equipped to do: it requires particular skills and expertise, and often a dedicated member of staff to guide activities. At the same time, it is also important that listening is embedded within the wider staff team, to create a sustainable approach and to negate the risk if the dedicated lead on listening were to leave an organisation.

Making listening activities safe and supportive

Creating a safe and supportive environment was a prerequisite for enabling listening activities to be effective in practice, and partners facilitated this in a number of ways:

- **Preparing with young people**: Asking young people to speak and share views externally can be an intimidating and daunting experience. Partners expressed that young people "*should not be put on the spot*", but given appropriate support so they could make effective use of the platform they are given. This involved staff helping them to think in advance about the key messages they want to get across, and how to structure their arguments.

- **Avoiding 'emotional labour'**: There can be a tendency to ask young people to "*tell their life stories over and over again, to the point it could become detrimental for them*". The 'emotional labour' that is sometimes placed on young people needs to be recognised, and young people should be given opportunities to share their views, "*without necessarily having to delve into the details of their lives each time*". Ultimately, young people should have choice and ownership over how they want to raise their voice.

- **Safeguarding**: If a young person made a disclosure during a listening activity, it was important there was a process to follow up with them and provide support. Where this was not possible (e.g. in an anonymous feedback mechanism) this must be made apparent to the young person and alternative channels for disclosure provided.

- **Acting as a gatekeeper:** Some partners felt they had a responsibility to act as a 'gatekeeper' to ensure journalists or researchers are only given access to young people when they are confident that they have positive and sincere intentions to share their voices in an accurate and respectful way. Negative and misconstrued representations of young people in the media can be disempowering and damaging to them. Steps must be taken to ensure that young people's views and experiences are represented appropriately.

- **Managing expectations**: Organisations needed be transparent about the extent of their capacity and remit. It was considered helpful to be upfront from the outset, so young people were aware of limitations in what could be achieved through listening activities.

Making listening worthwhile and enjoyable

Young people usually engage with organisations in the first instance as somewhere to receive support, to have fun, and to spend time with peers. Against this context, it was important to partners that they "*are not weighed down with always being asked to give some kind of feedback*". In other words, partners acknowledged that it was important that listening activities did not detract from young people's original motivations for engaging with provision, but rather supplemented and improved the experience. If young people felt 'burdened' or 'hassled' with giving feedback, it was less likely that the information they provide would be meaningful or insightful.

Part of overcoming this challenge was striking the right balance in the regularity of listening, such as deciding how often to hold a youth board meeting or to release a survey. It must be regular enough so that young people's voices can be heard on an ongoing basis, but not so regular that young people feel overwhelmed or fatigued. The appropriate regularity depends on the nature of the activity and the individual context: for instance, some partners found it is optimal to hold a youth forum meeting every two weeks, and others once every three months. Partners also thought

about techniques to make listening activities enjoyable, such as ensuring a survey was easy to use, or providing snacks and icebreaker games in a face-to-face session.

Organisations also pointed to the importance of how listening activities are promoted to young people. For instance, one partner avoided referring to the youth forum as a 'meeting' to recognise that some young people have negative connotations of the concept through their experiences at school or with social workers, and instead referred to it as a 'session'. As described by one youth worker, "*if we call it a 'meeting' some would view it as a formal, serious process that takes place when there is a problem or issue, we want them to go into it with a more positive mind frame than that*".

Engaging with young people's wider networks

For many, listening to young people also fundamentally involved listening to their families, carers and wider networks, in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of their situation and life experience. This is especially important for young people with high-level and complex needs, and for young people who face challenges expressing themselves. These links were established in various ways, including informal conversations, holding collaborative events, and interacting over email. This gave some partners more confidence in their ability to engage young people as it allowed them to get a new perspective on a young person's situation. Some partners expressed that this is an area where they would like to do more but are limited in capacity, further highlighting the need for dedicated investment in this type of work.

2.5 Barriers to listening

The level of progress made by the partners over the two years of the Listening Fund varied considerably. Despite the areas of improvement highlighted so far, there are some partners in the cohort that felt either that their projects did not meet their aims, or that they had made some developments but were considerably behind where they hoped to be at the end of the two-year funding period. Some factors that played a role in limiting progress are explored below.

Staff turnover

Partners often reported that they had one or two staff members who were key championing listening, and if those individuals left it was easy to lose motivation and to slip back into tokenistic forms of involvement. In particular, a key learning has been the importance of making listening "*a priority at the senior level*". This is to ensure proper resources are dedicated to enable listening to happen effectively (such as opportunities for staff training) and to secure buy-in for an organisation-wide approach to listening to ensure that it is sustainable.

Unstable funding environments

Some partners were unable to develop their listening as intended because of challenges maintaining steady funding during the two-year period, which, in some cases, resulted in reduced service provision, heavy workloads, and staff redundancies. This highlights that listening came second to core service delivery, and if the conditions were not in place for this to thrive then listening would be deprioritised.

Managing competing agendas

Where young people's needs or ideas for service development did not align with the projects the organisation was already commissioned to do, finding the funding to translate listening into action was inevitably challenging. In general, some partners seek to apply for pots of funding that align with the values of flexibility and responsiveness to overcome this challenge, but this is not always possible given the competitive funding environment that exists in the youth sector.

Disconnected services

When there are many distinct services within one organisation, approaches to listening were sometimes inconsistent and disconnected from one another. This made it difficult to get an organisation-wide picture of listening and limited internal learning. Once again, to overcome this, it was important to have someone prioritising listening at the senior level who makes an effort to coordinate and share approaches internally.

The self-assessment indicated that the Listening Fund grant has enabled partners to reduce the level of disconnect in listening across their provision, perhaps through putting more emphasis on the concept at the senior level. The proportion of partners that reported their listening practice varies across the organisation to a high extent (i.e. a score of four or five on a five-point scale, with five being 'to a great extent' and one being 'not at all') reduced from around half (47%) to just over a third (39%) at the end of the Fund.

Resourcing

Many partners acknowledged that, while the grant from the Listening Fund has been valuable, it "*is also quite a small amount of money for achieving tangible changes at different levels of an organisation, and over a relatively short period of time".* Most partners felt they had low resource to develop their listening prior to the Fund, so they were starting from limited circumstances, and that the grants that were provided were fairly modest, which impacted the level of progress that could be achieved. In line with this, there was a sense that the partners who made the highest level of progress were those who were able to find additional sources of funding for their listening projects.

2.6 Representative listening

It is important that listening is representative: that is to say, the types of young people that engage in listening activity are the same types of young people who engage more broadly in the organisation's work. Organisations must make a conscious effort to make listening activities inclusive, particularly to include the voices of those who are typically the least heard. As such, it is necessary to continually ask whose voices are being heard and which are missing.

The extent to which partners believed that their listening was representative varied, as shown in Figure 4. The pattern only changed slightly throughout the Fund: initially around a fifth (18%) of partners said their listening was not at all or not particularly representative, whereas by the end-point, all who took part in the self-assessment reported their listening was at least moderately representative.

Figure 4: The extent that listening is representative
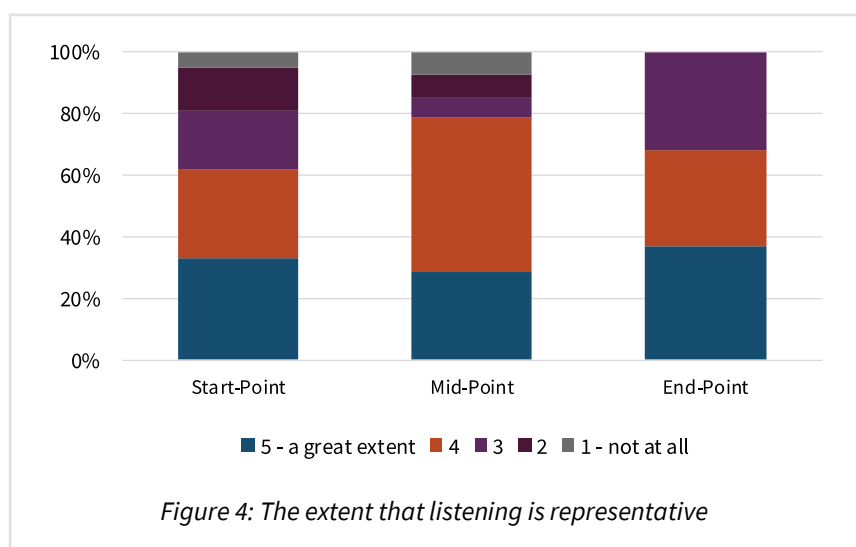
The self-assessment also suggested that the number of partners that checked for bias in who is engaging in listening increased, from 48% to 74%, indicating that more partners now have a more accurate idea of whether or not their listening is representative.

The number of partners that undertook specific outreach activities to engage groups who have been less engaged in listening was already high at the start of the Fund, at around 70%, and this stayed consistent. As shown in Figure 4, there was no significant change in the extent to which listening is representative. This suggests that the outreach activities may not have reached their aims, and this may be an area where organisations would benefit from additional support and advice.

Engaging new young people in listening was considered to be particularly challenging, especially with higher commitment activities, such as a youth board. Many partners found getting the first engagement to be the biggest challenge, as young people quickly started to see the value in taking part once they attended. Some found it beneficial to ask existing young people to act as 'ambassadors', either to encourage others to take part, or to collect and represent their views.

As noted earlier, overcoming geographical barriers was a challenge for partners who operate across multiple regions of England. Various partners expressed concern that the representation of young people in their listening was skewed towards London and the South East. Many partners took steps to overcome this, for instance: offering travel bursaries, arranging for groups of young people to travel together (to reduce anxiety around travel), and factoring in suitable timings so young people travelling can arrive and leave on time.

Some partners have also considered or attempted holding listening activities remotely, such as through online video calls, to overcome geographical barriers. However, "*it should not be assumed that what works in person automatically works remotely*". In other words, partners were aware that it takes additional capacity and skill to ensure that online sessions foster meaningful engagement. Furthermore, there are additional benefits to having young people 'in the room' in terms of peer learning and collaboration. Therefore, whilst online activities have benefits, they cannot entirely

replace the need to bring young people together face-to-face, and It is important for funders to recognise the additional costs associated with this.

2.7 Acting on listening

It is fundamental that organisations working with young people are not carrying out listening for listening's sake, but rather that it is driving meaningful change in policy and practice. In the interim evaluation report for the Listening Fund, we reported that some partners could not clearly identify areas where listening had been acted on over the first year, especially those who had started in a position of less experience and expertise, as they were more focussed on getting processes and mechanisms in place to capture young people's view.

By the end of the Fund, this was less often the case. The self-assessment suggests that, at the end of the Listening Fund, 83% of partners believed their organisation acts on what they've heard in listening to a high or a great extent (compared to 72% at the start-point). From the young people's feedback surveys, 43% of respondents reported that they had seen the organisation change something in response to their feedback, 41% said they were not sure, and 17% said that they had not seen a change. This is represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Responses to: 'have you ever seen [organisation] change something in response to your feedback?'
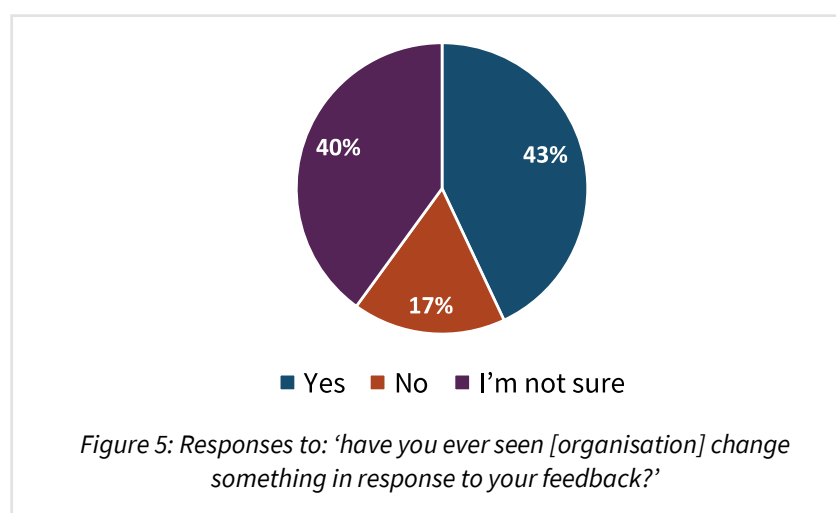
In the feedback surveys, young people were directly asked what changes they had seen organisations make in response to what they had told them. Their responses included:

- Implemented ideas for activities or changed the location where they are held;
- Provided support for a specific challenge being faced (e.g. conflict with a family member);
- Took account of their view in staff recruitment;
- Created a resource or changed the language in an existing resource;
- Created more social and gathering opportunities for young people;
- Addressed inappropriate behaviour of other young people; and
- Made services multilingual.

The partners directly highlighted a range of ways that they had acted upon what they heard through their listening. Some of these are presented below, with specific examples from across the cohort.

- **Incorporated listening into the organisational strategy**. For example, the Foyer Federation, which provides holistic support for young people experiencing homelessness, has introduced youth influence and voice as a core pillar of their new strategy. This is part of their goal to build sustainable listening practice, with young people's voices at the heart of the organisation.

- **Engaged young people in key decision-making processes**. For example, the Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN), which supports young refugees and asylum seekers, has implemented a process where candidates for all new staff positions are involved in an informal interview with young people, who then provide feedback to the main interview panel before a decision is made.

- **Reviewed service delivery to align more closely with beneficiary needs**. For example, Spark Inside runs coaching programmes in prisons across London and the South East. Through their in-prison advisory board, Spark Inside has engaged young black men to co-design their 'Hero's Life Coaching Programme', which addresses the specific experiences that they face in the prison system. This has helped to align the programme, which is being rolled out in prisons including HMP Wormwood Scrubs and HMPYOI Isis, to meet the specific needs and issues of this demographic of young people.

- **Re-designed physical spaces to meet young people's preferences and needs**. For example, Youth Access is a membership organisation of mental health and wellbeing services for young people. Through their digital feedback scheme, one member organisation has been encouraged to re-design their service environment, and has used creative methods to make the fairly small waiting area in the service venue feel less cramped and stressful.

- **Adapted language to ensure it is empowering, appropriate, and endorsed by young people**. For example, the Magdalene Group works to prevent the sexual exploitation and coercion of women and young people. Through consultation with young people, the Magdalene Group recognised that it would be beneficial to change the name of a 'care home interview' because the formal connotation of the word 'interview' was creating reluctance for some young people to be involved.

- **Used listening practice to bring about external changes in other organisations that have an impact on young people's lives**. For example, Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) works with and supports young care leavers. Following accounts of several care leavers having to leave their university accommodation over the summer with no home to go back to, the DFF's Policy Forum have started conversations with universities across the country. Their efforts have led to several universities, including King College London and St Mary's University London, to pledge a year-round accommodation offer for care leavers, and has also put the issue into the Labour Party's Manifesto.

More in-depth examples of acting on listening are detailed in the separate case study report, which can be found on the Centre for Youth Impact website[2].

[2] www.youthimpact.uk/the-listening-fund-evaluation.html

There were a proportion of partners who felt that they were not always able to demonstrate change based on their listening. For some, this was because they had not implemented processes for listening in the way they had intended, or because their project was still in the early stages of development due to delays. For others, this was because their primary focus is working to support young people to bring change to issues that are sufficiently complex that one would not expect to see change over a period of two years (such as when lobbying for change on a specific issue at a policy level). However, even where change was not evident, partners emphasised that this does not mean listening is not worthwhile. The partners are often working with young people who are deeply disadvantaged and disenfranchised, and the process of listening in itself was highly beneficial for empowering them to feel validated in their views, as explored further in Section 2.10.

2.8 Closing the feedback loop

'Closing the feedback loop' refers to the act of informing young people what changes have been made as a result of listening, and it is widely considered to be a key component of the listening process. It emphasises that listening is not a one-way interaction, and young people should be kept informed as to how their contributions are used (or not used) to affect change.

Despite most partners feeling that they *do* act on what they hear from young people, a large number described the subsequent process of closing the feedback loop as an area they "*have still not quite figured out yet*". Though most recognised the significance of the concept, they often lacked a formal process for implementing it in practice. Many focused on how it was happening informally, expecting young people to simply "*see the changes as they are happening*", such as when they had requested a particular activity, which was then introduced into the organisation. Here, closing the feedback loop was taking place on an ad hoc basis primarily through open door conversations between staff and young people.

Figure 6: Responses to: "what could the organisation do to make them better listeners?"
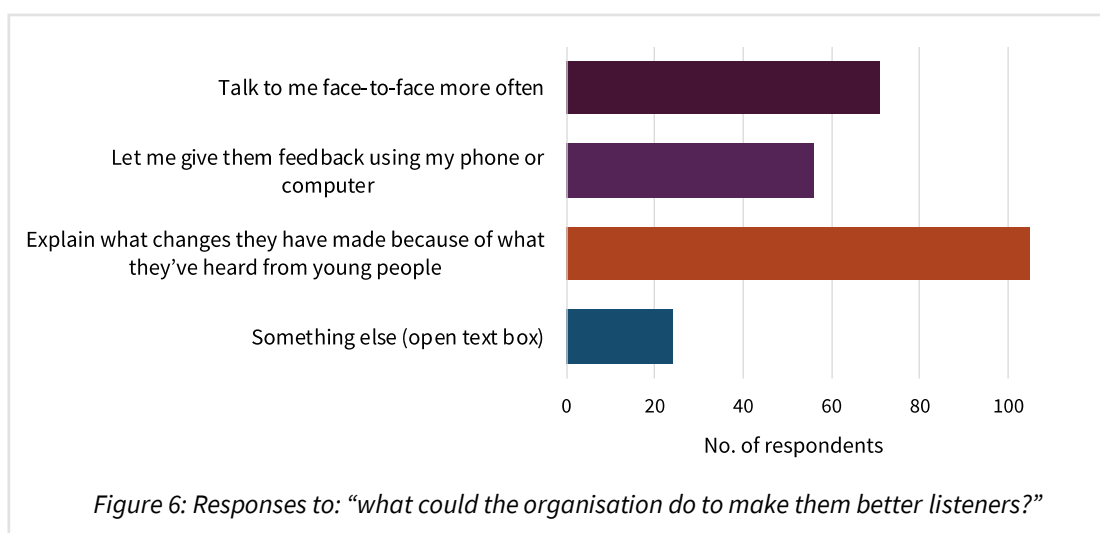
In the end-point self-assessment, 74% of partners believed they communicate their actions to young people who have engaged in listening processes to a high extent (i.e. a score of four or five on a five-point scale). In the listening feedback surveys, however, closing the feedback loop was rated strongly by young people as an area where they most wanted to see improvement in

listening: over half the young people who took part selected this option, as in Figure 6. This reinforces the idea that not all partners were doing this as effectively as they thought, and it suggests that relying on informal methods may not be sufficient.

For those partners who had more structured processes for closing the feedback loop in place, there were two main methods identified: creating dedicated time at the start of a structured face-to-face group session (such as a youth forum) to feedback actions from the last session; and creating a 'you said, we did' notice board or newsletter segment. For the latter in particular, some had concerns that young people do not engage with such mechanisms and that is they are "*more in the interests of the organisation patting itself on the back, rather than for the benefit of young people*". Within the cohort, there was a desire to think more creatively about how to close the loop, such as using social media, but they recognised that this requires extra time and resource that they did not necessarily have available.

An additional challenge involved informing young people when action cannot be taken based on what they have heard, for example due to practical or financial reasons. At the end of the Fund, less than half (42%) felt they were doing this to a high extent (i.e. a score of four or five on a five-point scale). Nevertheless, this was considered to be important because it can be "*highly demotivating for young people when you're hearing all the time 'no you can't do this' and 'no you can't do that'*". It could also lead to the impression the organisation is not taking their views seriously or thinks they "*already know what's best*". Some partners found it particularly challenging when they did not take the same view as the young people they were representing*:* in this instance, some came up with a formal process (which involved letting their Board decide the outcome) and ensured this was explicitly communicated.

2.9 Evaluation of the listening process

It is a fundamental principle that if we are asking young people for feedback, we should also give them an opportunity to report on whether they feel that their voice is being heard and acted upon. Evaluation of the listening process involves collecting 'feedback on feedback', to ensure processes are working well from young people's perspectives. This will give young people more ownership over listening, meaning they will be more likely to take it seriously and engage meaningfully. Although most of the partners recognised the significance of this, implementing processes to evaluate listening activity stands out as one of the greatest areas of challenge in the self-assessment. At the start of the Fund, only a third (29%) reported high levels of evaluation (i.e. they scored four or five on a five-point scale), which rose to over half (55%) at the end-point.

Partners were also asked the extent that they involved young people in evaluating their listening, and the scores were yet lower. As in Figure 7, the proportion of partners that scored themselves as 4 or 5 was just over a third (39%) in the end point self-assessment.

Figure 7: The extent that partners involve young people in evaluating listening
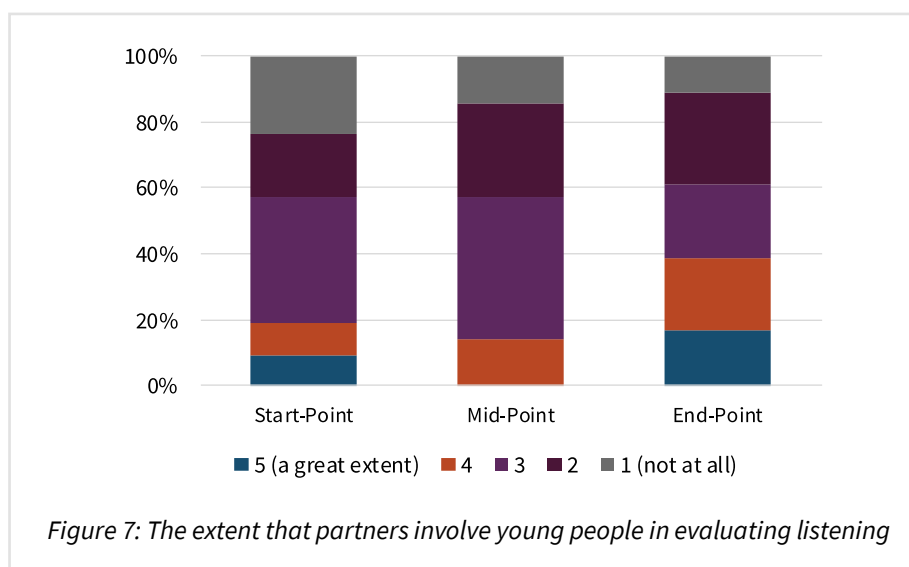
Many partners reported that they reflected on their listening informally and conversationally, by asking staff and young people about their experiences, but they did not have a structured process for doing this. Evaluating listening could be as simple as asking a few questions on whether young people feel heard as part of a broader evaluation, as opposed to a whole process on its own. Partners were supported to do this during the Listening Fund via the listening feedback survey (Appendix B), and, as in the methodology section, responses were collected by approximately half of the partners. However, most partners did not do this as a matter of course and, anecdotally, there have been few reports that many partners are likely to collect this data this on an ongoing basis beyond the duration of the Fund.

2.10 Listening as a process of empowerment

A key finding was the way in which listening can be highly empowering for young people. Most obviously, this took place where young people were given direct influence over key organisational decisions, such as giving input at a board meeting or in revising the format of a project. Adults can often take the space in decision-making processes, *"because you've got more sophisticated understanding and language – or you think you have"*. Some partners found that through giving space to young people to express their points of view, there was a process of shifting power and responsibility, something which *"isn't always comfortable at first when executed in practice"*.

No matter what mechanisms were used, it was not possible for partners to listen meaningfully when young people were not comfortable expressing their views, feelings or experiences. When running a listening activity such as a youth forum or a focus group, partners considered that it was easy to introduce bias by only engaging young people who already had the confidence and skills to articulate themselves. Accordingly, some partners saw it as important to empower young people to 'speak up' and to make the most of the spaces offered to them. For some, this simply involved allowing young people to practice talking about issues and raising their voices over time, in structured and unstructured settings. For others, it involved providing formal training on topics such as public speaking and leadership.

This process of empowerment had positive impacts that extend far beyond the projects in question. For some, the development of listening activities gave young people the confidence to engage in other youth-driven projects, such as connecting with external agencies over a particular issue that mattered to them. In other words, the listening projects had broader effects in "*moving young people to a place of more power and agency*" and helping them to "*find their pollical voice*".

2.11 Hart's Ladder of Participation

Finally, in the self-assessment, partners were asked to rate their organisation on Hart's Ladder (1997), which presents eight levels of participation of young people. As shown in Figure 8, there was considerable variety in the partners responses, and the overall pattern did not show significant change throughout the duration of the Fund. At no stage did any partners rate themselves on the bottom two rungs of Hart's Ladder. The most common ratings throughout all stages of the fund were level five (young people are consulted and informed) and level six (adult initiated, shared decisions with young people). At all stages, two or three partners who completed the self-assessment rated themselves on the top two rungs.

Figure 8: Where partners rated themselves on Hart's Ladder
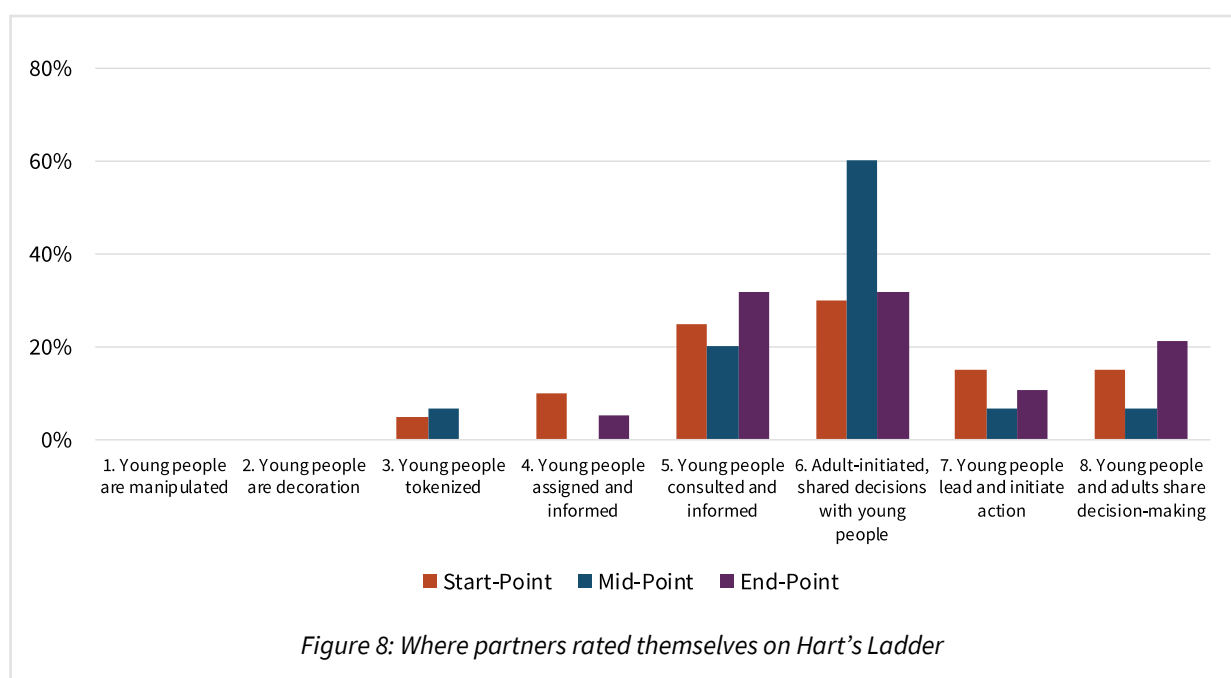
It is likely the lack of change is explained, at least in part, by the effect of uncovering and becoming more aware of limitations in listening practice as it became a bigger focus of partners' work. This means partners could have been more likely to give modest ratings in all areas of the self-assessment as they progressed through the Fund, despite having developed their practice overall. Additionally, as noted throughout, as they came to the end of the Listening Fund most partners felt they are at the beginning of a longer process to develop their listening practice.

3. Reflections on the Listening Fund

A final learning from the evaluation is a reflection on the Listening Fund itself. The opportunity to take part in the Listening Fund and its overall ethos was valued by the partners. Developing listening practices, in the myriad ways this report has identified, is complex and challenging, and as several partners noted, time and capacity will always be the biggest challenge to undertaking this type of work. The Listening Fund provided the resources *"to slow thinking down, to reflect on whose voices are heard and where power lies"*.

In particular, the flexibility of the Listening Fund was beneficial, as funders were relatively un-prescriptive in how partners should approach the Fund. As many partners commented, this allowed for highly individualised projects without *"fear of 'funder limited development'"*, and for steps both forwards, backwards and sideways. As one partner summed up, it has *"allowed us the capacity to revise our original plans, to change in response to feedback from young people and to adapt practice without feeling constrained by earlier budgets or rigid outcomes".* Relatedly, the light-touch reporting process meant that partners could focus on the aim of becoming a better listener without a concern for 'demonstrating impact'. Whilst improving impact for young people and organisations is the ultimate goal, the emphasis on process learning over evaluating or measuring impact has afforded partners space to be creative and to truly understand what does, or does not, 'work' in their listening.

The Listening Fund cohort was designed as a mechanism through which partners could share and learn from each other, including multiple convening days, webinars, and ongoing support and coordination from the Blagrave Trust. Whilst all of these were valued highly, the Most Significant Change evaluation process demonstrated that tangible evidence of cross-partner learning was not as strong as the funders had hoped, with only a few reports of partners connecting with one another directly. Some organisations acknowledged that they spent so much time 'internally focussing' on developing their practice that they could overlook importance of connecting and sharing learning with others, and that limited capacity was a contributing factor. Moving forward, cross partner learning could further be facilitated through:

- Directing partners to the Listening Fund website for updates on a more regular basis (where learning reports and case studies are accessible);
- Ring fencing more funding to hold shared learning events; and
- Designing learning events that are 'partner-led', to make sure they offer a genuine opportunity to share and learn from their work collectively, rather than following an agenda that has been set by the funders or evaluators.

4. Conclusion

At the simplest level, the findings in this report suggest that dedicated funder support for organisational listening can result in significant positive change to organisational delivery and strategy, with an improved focus on and response to young people's needs. Partners have been challenged to review how well their practices are youth-led, and young people have often been empowered through this process. However, this was not universally the case, as even with dedicated funder support, some partners' progress has been limited by various internal and external factors. Below, findings are summarised that relate to each of the research questions for this evaluation.

1) What has changed for partners as a result of the Listening Fund?

Most clearly, several partners identified a cultural shift in their understanding of listening, as the grant provided the time and resource to challenge assumptions about what it means to listen purposefully and effectively at different levels in the organisation. The extent of practical progress within organisations varied, and many partners could be observed to primarily have made progress in 'low level' elements of listening, as opposed to 'grand ideas'. However, these low-level aspects are vital to a longer-term process to improve listening and are fundamentally important to re-centring young people in service design, thus building provision that effectively meets young people's needs.

2) What changed for young people as a result of the Listening Fund?

The evaluation demonstrates that activities undertaken as part of the Listening Fund led to a range of beneficial changes for young people, including:

- Young people gained greater decision-making capacity within their organisations (due to cultural shifts and the implementation of practical processes);
- Service delivery was altered in response to young people's feedback, which improved their experience of provision;
- Young people felt empowered, through gaining the skills and confidence to act on issues that are important to them; and
- As a result of the above, some young people have been able to influence wider systems that have effect on them, thus bringing improvement to their lives more broadly.

The evaluation suggests that 'closing the feedback loop' warrants further attention, so that young people are fully informed as to how the process of listening has been used to affect change. Doing so can positively address power dynamics to ensure young people and adults are on 'level ground'. The complex nature of meaningful listening meant that often this was not an aspect that took centre stage in partners' projects. Although involvement in the Listening Fund clearly highlighted the importance of this process for partners, for the majority it requires more time to develop in an effective way.

3) What are the enablers to meaningful practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?

The findings demonstrate that there is no one size fits all approach to listening, and effective practices will, and should, be shaped by organisational circumstances and beneficiary need.

Nevertheless, various enablers have been identified that have consistently supported the development of meaningful listening across the cohort:

- Providing dedicated spaces or structures for young people to voice their opinions or ideas;
- Identifying staff member(s) to drive and support listening, to implement practical processes and to generate buy-in to the concept;
- Championing listening at a senior level in order to coordinate internal approaches;
- Ensuring spaces and mechanisms for listening were safe and supportive for young people;
- Making listening activities worthwhile and enjoyable, to motivate young people to take part;
- Engaging with and listening to young people's families and wider networks, to obtain a more holistic picture of their life experiences; and
- Conducting analysis and outreach to make sure listening is representative and accessible to a range of young people.

Notably, listening is a multifaceted process that requires a number of enabling factors. It should not be assumed that organisations necessarily know what these factors are: a process of understanding how to create the right 'conditions' for listening is essential, which is achieved through sharing learning externally and undergoing internal exploration and testing with young people's input.

4) What are the barriers to meaningful practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?

The evaluation has clearly highlighted the need for dedicated funding in the area of listening, as a lack of time and resources is considered one of the biggest barriers to progress. Even with the support of the Listening Fund, many partners acknowledged that the grants provided were fairly modest and over a relatively short time period, which impacted the level of progress that could be achieved. Additional key barriers that have been identified are:

- Challenges related to recruiting and retaining essential staff;
- Unstable funding environments, where listening comes second to core service delivery;
- Managing competing agendas, when the action that would be taken from listening does not align with an organisations existing funding streams; and
- Disconnected provision within an organisation, which limits internal learning.

These findings indicate that listening does not hold a privileged position on the agendas of funders and in the youth sector more widely. It is often seen as not tied to outcomes and so easily gets 'bumped down' the list of priorities. However, in observing that a key impact of dedicated funding is the re-centring of young people in service design, we suggest that listening needs to be given higher credence when investing in outcomes for young people. Specifically, this evaluation clearly demonstrates that a focus on listening can lead to more effective processes of co-production or co-design in services for young people. Where this is an explicit focus of grant opportunities, improving listening practices should be an explicit focus also.

Reflections on the evaluation methodology

In designing the evaluation for the Listening Fund, a key consideration was ensuring that the research methods were beneficial to the partners. This involved guaranteeing they were low-burden and that they facilitated actionable learning and improvement. To support this, the Most Significant Change process was introduced part-way through the Fund to facilitate further shared learning within the cohort. Additionally, the evaluation involved elements of co-design to ensure the process was relevant to partners, such as the design of the questions in the listening feedback survey.

Despite having elements of co-production, the overall structure of evaluation was designed by the Centre for Youth Impact and the Blagrave Trust before final selection of funded youth organisations had been made and without direct consultation with them. On reflection, it is felt that the evaluation would have benefitted from an explicit process of consultation with the partners during the design stage, to draw directly on their knowledge and experience, and to ensure the methods were well suited to the variable circumstances of different organisations. This would have also increased the transparency of how the evaluation activities were decided, to ensure that the partners felt invested in its purpose and value from the outset.

Some challenges were encountered in collecting data throughout the evaluation. For instance, in collecting responses for the listening feedback survey, some partners were unable to gather responses, such as when they are working with young people in prison who do not have access to an electronic device, or partners working with young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) who found the survey inaccessible. This inevitably introduced bias in the respondent sample. Additionally, for the focus group research for the case studies, it is likely that the young people who took part were those who were already typically more engaged with, and dedicated to, organisations' listening activities, therefore influencing the findings. From the outset, we sought to mitigate the challenge of under-representation by utilising a range of research methods sympathetic to different partners and young people's circumstances. However, as above, we recognise that in order to address issues such as bias in young people's representation, moving forward we must continue to carefully consult with organisations to further understand the contexts in which they operate and how the research process can accommodate for this.

5. Evaluation Methodology

The Listening Fund evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach, drawing on light touch quantitative methods across all 22 partners and more in-depth qualitative methods for a subsection of partners.

These methods were selected and designed with two aims: firstly, to provide insights for each partner organisation to develop and improve their own listening practice, and secondly, to enable the evaluation team to draw out learning at the level of the cohort in order to identify effective approaches, as well as areas of challenge. Table 1 shows the timeline of evaluation activities, and more information on each method is set out below.

Table 1: Timeline of evaluation activities

Evaluation Activity	Project Year and Date
Partner self-assessment (baseline)	Year 1 (April 2018)
Telephone interviews, with approximately half the partners	Year 1 (February 2019)
Partner self-assessment (mid-point)	Year 1 (April 2019)
Listening feedback survey data collection	Year 2 (January 2020)
In-depth organisational case studies with six partners	Year 2 (January – March 2020)
Most Significant Change workshop and thematic analysis	Year 2 (January 2020)
Partner self-assessment (end-point)	Year 2 (April 2020)

5.1 Partner self-assessment

A self-assessment tool was designed to explore different elements of how the partners listen to young people: as far as we are aware, this is the first of its kind. The self-assessment takes a broad conception of organisational listening, drawing on Jim Macnamara's 'Architecture of Listening' framework, which adopts the following definition:

> "*Organisational listening is comprised of the culture, policies, structure, processes, resources, skills, technologies and practices applied by an organisation to give recognition, acknowledgement, attention, interpretation, understanding, consideration, and response to its stakeholders and publics.*"
> (Macnamara, 2015)

The self-assessment contains 27 questions, related to the above definition, which are adapted for the context of working with young people. It includes questions on listening practice, culture, skills, resources, communication, and acting on what is heard. The assessment tool was tested and refined through engagement with four organisations not funded as part of the Listening Fund.

The purpose of the tool is both to aid the partners' reflection on their listening, as well as enabling the evaluation team to identify change in the cohort over time.

The partners were asked to complete the self-assessment at three time-points throughout the two-year funding (baseline, mid-point, and end-point). Data was gathered through an online form, and partners were encouraged to complete it with at least two staff members present, to prompt discussion and capture different perspectives. Participation in the self-assessment, as in all elements of the evaluation, is voluntary. However, response rates have been high for the baseline, mid-point and the end-point of data collection (with 91%, 76% and 82% of partners completing it, respectively). The data from the self-assessment was analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010 and open responses were subjected to thematic analysis.

The self-assessment tool is publicly available for any organisation across the youth sector to use to reflect on and analyse their own listening practice. We encourage the 22 partners to continue to use it beyond the Fund, as well as other organisations if they are interested in developing their listening practice. The tool is available here, as well as on the Listening Fund website[3], alongside other supporting resources.

5.2 Listening feedback surveys

A standardised survey was developed to enable the Listening Fund partners to gather systematic feedback from young people. The survey is focussed directly on young people's experiences of organisational listening. It is designed to be light-touch, anonymous, and to provide clear insights that are comparable across the partners.

The purpose of the feedback survey is to develop understanding of whether the young people feel heard, to identify changes that have taken place as a result of their input, and to gather their suggestions for how listening could be improved. It complements the partner self-assessment, to see whether young people's perceptions match up with those of the management team and staff. Survey data was collected in January 2020 by 11 partners, with response rates varying significantly (from five young people to 50). There were 182 survey responses in total.

The survey questions were developed with input from young people involved in the Fund, via two focus groups. The survey can be found in Appendix B, and it is also publicly available here. For other organisations looking to use the survey, we recommend data is collected anonymously to reduce the likelihood of bias in responses.

5.3 Case studies

Case study research was conducted with six of the Listening Fund partners for an in-depth investigation of their funded projects, with emphasis on exploring both the successes and challenges associated with listening and responding to young people's voices.

[3] www.thelisteningfund.org/resources-for-partners

Each of the six case studies involved a site visit that incorporated interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders, including leadership staff, frontline staff, young people, and external stakeholders (such as trustees, delivery partners and parents). For one partner, data collected by an independent evaluator was used to avoid the duplication of research activities.

Case study fieldwork was conducted from January to March 2020 - in the final stages of the Listening Fund – to allow for a comprehensive look at the partners' experiences throughout the entire funding period. The six partners investigated as case studies are listed in Appendix A. Given the large variety in the nature of listening activities across the partners, it was not possible to be entirely representative: nevertheless, the six cases were chosen on the basis of giving a varied picture in terms of organisational size, geography, experience in listening, and mechanisms used for listening.

The case study findings are incorporated into the main body of this report and detailed separately in an accompanying report, which can be found on the Centre for Youth Impact website[4].

5.4 Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with 12 partners in March 2019, which formed the basis of the Interim Learning Report (Centre for Youth Impact, 2019). The aim was to develop an in-depth perspective of the partners' learning as they approached the mid-point of the Fund. The interviews used a semi-structured format, with an emphasis on identifying key achievements and challenges in the first year, and setting out priorities, opportunities and concerns for Year 2.

5.5 Most Significant Change (MSC)

MSC Evaluation Process

Most Significant Change (MSC) is an evaluation methodology developed by Davies and Dart (2005) that originally emerged in the international development field and has since been used in a variety of settings. The MSC process involves collecting brief 'stories of change' from people directly involved in a project that highlight the impacts it has had on beneficiaries, practitioners, and organisations. Once the stories are collected, the steps in the process are as follows:

- The stories are analysed in a reflective Practitioner Workshop. In groups, the attendees read the stories aloud and organise them into a series of 'domains', based on the emerging themes;
- One story from each domain is selected as having the 'most significance', and commentary is written as to why the choice was made;
- Following this, the refined selection of stories is used in a 'Stakeholder Group' Meeting. This follows a similar process where participants read the stories aloud, identify those that are most significant for them, and provide commentary; and
- All commentaries are fed back through the chain of contributors.

The MSC approach was used to identify the most significant areas of learning from the Listening Fund, and it had the additional purpose of facilitating group reflection and sharing within the cohort. 40 significant change stories were collected in total, which were anonymised.

The Listening Fund Practitioner Workshop was held in January 2020 and attended by staff and young people from across the partners. Participants were divided into three groups and each group was given a selection of stories to read aloud and sort into domains. From this process, 12 stories were selected as representing the 'most significant change' and were then taken forward to a Stakeholder Group Meeting in March 2020 with the funders of the Listening Fund. The Stakeholder Group made a final selection of four stories that represent the most significant learning from the programme. The domains identified at the Practitioner Workshop and Stakeholder Group Meeting are detailed in Appendix C, and the final stories selected by stakeholders can be found in Appendix D, with the commentary provided by the group.

MSC Thematic Analysis

Alongside the MSC workshop, a process of secondary analysis of the stories took place to identify the key outcomes from the Listening Fund. All 40 stories were coded iteratively, and codes were drawn together into themes. A summary of all the stories and an overview of the thematic analysis process can be found in Appendix E. The outcomes of this analysis are explored in the discussion section of this report, and they are described individually in more detail in Appendix F.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Listening Fund partners

The 22 organisations supported by the Listening Fund were selected in 2017 and their projects began in Spring 2018, lasting for two years. The full list of organisations is below. More information about each partner can be found on the Listening Fund website5. The six partners that were investigated as case studies are marked with an asterisk.

- Become
- Carefree Cornwall
- Counselling and Support for Young People (CASY)
- Centre 63
- The Drive Forward Foundation
- Gendered Intelligence*
- Investing in Children*
- It's Your Choice
- Just for Kids Law
- Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN)*
- Leap Confronting Conflict
- London Black Women's Project
- Prison Reform Trust*
- Spark Inside
- Step by Step
- Beatfreeks
- The Change Foundation
- The Foyer Federation
- The Magdalene Group
- The Mix
- Treyla*
- Youth Access*

Appendix B: Listening feedback survey

The table shows the survey questions used to gather feedback from young people directly on their experiences of organisational listening.

Question	Response Options
1. A) Do you feel like [organisation] listens to what you think? (Just tick one)	- Definitely: I always feel my opinion is valued - A bit: I sometimes feel my opinion is valued - I'm not sure - Not really: I often don't feel my opinion is valued - Definitely not: I never feel my opinion is valued
1. B) If you have an idea about how to improve [organisation], do you know how to tell them? (Just tick one)	- Yes, and there are **lots of ways** for me to suggest ideas - Yes, and I know **one way** for me to suggest ideas - No, I do not know **how** to suggest an idea - I do not **want** to suggest any ideas
2. A) Have you ever seen [organisation] change something in response to your feedback?	- Yes - No - I'm not sure
2. B) If you have seen a change, what was it?	Open question
3. What do you think [organisation] could do to make them better listeners? (Tick as many as you like)	- Talk to me face-to-face more often - Let me give them feedback using a computer or my phone - Explain what changes they have made because of what they've heard from me and other young people - Something else (please tell us here):

Appendix C: MSC story domains

The table details the domains identified through the MSC evaluation process.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Stakeholder Group
Action/change: Making changes based on what young people have said	**Youth-led**: Young people driving services	**Youth-led change**: Young people driving services	**Youth empowerment**: Young people gain confidence and skills to make their voices heard
Culture: Adopting a new understanding of and/or approach to listening across the organisation	**Youth gains**: Benefits for young people as a result of listening activities	**Empowerment**: Young people gain confidence and skills to make their voices heard	**Organisational change**: Adopting a new understanding of and/or approach to listening across the organisation (at a strategic level)
Process: Listening is not an instant activity, but a complex and considered process of dialogue	**Power**: Shifting the balance of power between staff and young people	**Outcomes**: positive changes based on listening activities	**Voice for all**: Capturing and acting on voices of a range of young people engaged in services
	Culture: Adopting a new understanding of and/or approach to listening across the organisation	**Systems change**: Adaptations at a strategic level to understand the importance of listening	**Practice tools**: Develop new mechanisms for listening

Appendix D: MSC stakeholder stories

In the MSC process, The Stakeholder Group made a final selection of four stories that represent the most significant learning from the programme. These stories are presented below, with the commentary provided as to the rationale for the selection.

Story 1: Youth empowerment

"[Organisation] have listened to me about a project I wanted to do on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). I wanted more young people to be aware of this and be safe. I knew about these issues well and they helped me with my ideas. With funding from the Listening Project, they connected me up with workers from the County Council so I could link with young people to deliver my everyone session on CSE. They also helped me deliver my sessions to young people living in care and to students doing social work degrees, so they became more aware of it. It also gave me the confidence to apply to become a young director with [organisation] and they are also connecting me with a business enterprise manager to support me with my plans in the future regarding CSE awareness and projects. The Listening Fund Project I think has provided young people from [organisation] with opportunities to discuss and raise ideas for projects and better connect them with staff and young people from across the city."

Stakeholder commentary

- Highlights tangible impact of listening
- Organisation made listening to young people more long-term
- The organisation is listening to other young people, not just those 'on the programme'
- Upskilling young people gives them equity
- The organisation stepped back and let the young person take control

Story 2: Voice for all

"[Organisation] developed an In Prison Advisory Board (IPAB) as a method to ensure the voices of young people would contribute to all aspects of work and services delivered in prison. We ask prisoners what behaviours, skills and knowledge they thought our new CEO should have and what questions they would like the interview panel to ask, on their behalf during interviews. We ran focus groups and wing pop-ups and formal meetings, attended by Trustees and senior staff, in addition to recruiting Wing Ambassadors in each prison to carry out this work.

Stakeholder commentary

- This story shows the range of roles that young people can have
- Recognising that other stakeholders can be involved
- Changing one thing has a knock-on effect – this was embraced not 'boundaried'
- Involvement of trustees can have a systematic/organisation-wide impact

Story 3: Organisational change

"In the past, the intervention delivered by our Rose Project (Reaching Out on Sexual Exploitation) was modelled around targeted support in which a specific topic (e.g. grooming, consent, abuse, healthy relationships) was systematically covered each session. However, many young people

have expressed that they do not wish to engage with 'CSE' [child sexual exploitation] work as this makes them feel like they are being 'blamed' for the exploitation that has happened to them; instead, they would like professionals to 'stop bringing it up' and let them move on. As a result of this we are undergoing a significant review and reduction of the resources we use (especially the use of videos) to avoid inadvertently re-traumatising them. The feedback has also opened up discussions internally about how we refer to those we work with and whether or not this language unwittingly feeds into how young people understand and experience support around exploitation, e.g. does 'young person' give children a sense of agency that hinders their comprehension of their personal experiences of exploitation. Our CSE Practitioners are implementing a more therapeutic and relational approach that allows the young person to lead the sessions according to what they feel their needs, concerns or interests are at that time. Young people have also feedback that they appreciate being in control of deciding where they would like these sessions to take place as it reinforces that the support is for them and on their terms".

Stakeholder commentary

- This is one of two stories that really showed the power of how listening to young people can challenge assumptions and bias

Story 4: Practical tools

"As an organisation, through this funding, we have identified and acted on the importance of 'closing the loop'. During the initial session with the Listening Funding when the cohort was first convened, we learnt about this idea and immediately found the articulation of this facet of effective listening incredibly useful. Not only have we used this notion when it comes to 'closing the loop' with young people who fill out our survey, we have also used it when working with businesses, policy makers and influencers who have said they will act on the findings of our report."

Stakeholder commentary

- This story shows that tools used can be used in different contexts
- Closing the loop often comes up as a blockage
- This is a message that can be used externally – it is a simple, practical tool
- We can all start doing this better straightaway

Appendix E: MSC Thematic Analysis Process

Story	Story Summary	Emergent Ideas	Collated Thematic Ideas (sub-themes)	Overarching Themes
1	The partner is putting young people at the centre of their work, and are trying to do this at different levels across organisation (i.e. not just in the participation team) by reviewing all areas where young people can be involved.	Embed the value (of have young people at centre of work) across organisation. Leads to organisation-wide changes	• Centre young people as service-users in organisation's work • Focus on young people's participation across all levels of the organisation	• Practice development • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility
2	The LF training has been helpful to highlight closing the feedback loop as an area of importance. The partner has used this with young people, businesses, policy makers, influencers. The LF has highlighted the importance of this as a final stage of listening and altered way organisation thinks about listening (beyond just young people).	Acting on closing the feedback loop – organisation-wide change in approach to listening.	• Organisational-wide change in approach to/understanding of listening • LF cohort: learning opportunity	• Organisational shift in approach to listening • Benefits of LF approach
3	A direct impact of young people being listened too is a reduced cost of bus travel, and the organisation is valuing closing the feedback look to communicate this change. LF convening days have provided a space to learn and reflect. They have appreciated light-touch evaluation, which allows space and focus.	When young people have a chance to be heard they can affect change – increased impact through listening. LF Convening days as a reflection/learning opportunity.	• Increased impact/positive outcomes for young people • LF cohort: space for reflection, like light-touch approach	• Improved outcomes for young people • Benefits of LF approach
4	The partner has created a specific role to evaluate co-production, and an evaluation report is now included in organisation's five-year strategy. Overall the work prompted a focus on sharing power and responsibility and better understanding of co-production practices.	Young people's voices/opinions included in organisation actions and strategy. Better understanding of how this can happen and explicit focus on co-production at strategic level.	• Changes at strategic level (inclusion of young people's voices)	• Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility • Organisational shift in approach to listening
5	The partner has created a co-production process so that young people have higher levels of participation. This has involved the delivery of co-production training and incorporation into a plan for staff.	Specific process for young people to be involved in strategic decisions and shaping work. Changes to staff training and approach to involving young people.	• Changes at practice level (move towards co-production) • Space for young people to be listened too (dedicated co-production process) • Incorporated into staff training	• Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility • Practice development • Creating conditions for listening
6	Young ambassadors are involved in recruitment processes, which gives young people responsibility in maintaining culture within organisation.	Young people have decision making power – involved in important decisions.	• Changes at practice level (young people have decision making power)	• Practice development • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility
7	The partner started a youth forum to involve young people in problem solving. The outcome was that young people were invited to join a parliamentary panel hearing and question MP candidates. Young people are now involved in shaping work at the organisation	Young people involved in strategic decisions and shaping work within organisation. Positive tangible outcomes for Young people as a result. Young	• Space for young people to be listened to • Changes at practice level • Increased impact/positive outcomes for young people	• Creating conditions for listening • Practice development • Improved outcomes for young people

	through employment opportunities and involvement in making strategies and recruitment. The partner now more explicitly encourages young people's involvement.	people feel better listened to within organisation.		
8	The partner created a youth forum through LF, as a space where young people can raise issues and action will be taken collectively (as opposed to tackling individual problems). This has given the opportunity to create better, more powerful solutions to problems as opposed to treating individual symptoms.	Youth forum has provided space/voice/agency to young people within organisation – able to have more impact as a group than raising individual voice.	• Space for young people to be listened to • empowering young people to take action	• Creating conditions for listening • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility
9	Through the youth forum (story 8) young people have been able to tackle the problem of access to mental health services for refugees. Generally, through the youth forum young people have gained a voice and agency within the organisation	Youth forum has provided space/voice/agency to YOUNG PEOPLE within organisation – young people have been able to take positive youth-led action as a result.	• Increased/impact positive outcomes for young people	• Improved outcomes for young people
10	The creation of a youth advisory group to feed into the board and management level decisions. LF has required concerted thinking across the organisation around mindful listening.	Young people advisory board allows young people to have greater influence – resulted in systematic changes across organisation in their approach to listening.	• space for young people to be listened to • changes at strategic level (young people have influence) • Organisational-wide change in approach to/understanding of listening	• Creating conditions for listening • Practice development • Organisational shift in approach to listening
11	The partner listened to young people's feedback on experiences of services and acted this to develop a project. Sessions are now much more youth-led and young people have fed back that they appreciate being in control. This has prompted discussions around language used in relation to young people (power-dynamics) and how this might be changed (story 12).	Focus on voice of young people in practice and translating this into service delivery and organisational change to align services with what young people want.	• Organisational-wide change in approach to/understanding of listening • Increased impact/positive outcomes for young people	• Organisational shift in approach to listening • Improved outcomes for young people
12	The partner acts as a mouthpiece for views of young people in multi-agency meetings and have started challenging use of 'victim blaming' language by other professionals. Feedback from young people suggests this is working well. LF has given time to reflect on these complex issues.	Acknowledgement that this work takes/ needs dedicated time. Through listening and hearing young people are able to better advocate for their needs/position across wider systems/partnerships.	• Influence on wider systems • LF cohort: given time/money for complex work	• Influence of external systems • Benefits of LF approach
13	Creating a space for listening (via a questionnaire) has allowed a young person to disclose important information about their wellbeing. This allowed the partner to support the young person through counselling. The partner has made a change in the way they listen which allowed this support to happen. Flexibility of LF allowed them to identify gap in their service.	Creating space for (and acting on) listening has allowed work to have a greater impact. Changes to listening channels.	• Space for young people to be listened to (changed practice around this- questionnaire) • Increased impact/positive outcomes for young people • LF cohort – importance of flexibility in fund	• Creating conditions for listening • Improved outcomes for young people • Benefits of LF approach

14	The partner acted on feedback from young people to make changes to physical space and make it more homelike. They have created a channel for young people to continuously feedback. LF required structuring and devoting time to listening which has not previously been the case.	Closing feedback loop/acting on feedback and creating effective feedback channel. Benefit of LF is dedicated time for this overlooked work.	• Acting on feedback has Increased impact/ positive outcomes for young people • space for young people to be listened to (feedback process) • LF cohort: given time/money for complex work	• Improved outcomes for young people • Creating conditions for listening • Benefits of LF approach
15	Through the LF the partner has grown the participation team to work with legal and policy teams and with young people. They conducted a research project to inform courts on how they can communicate with young people better. They changed format of research (from focus groups to individual interviews) so that it is more accessible to young people, which has resulted in better research and follow up engagement of young people.	Having time/space to focus on young people's meaningful participation in their work. Adapting methods of listening to needs of young people – which therefore has a better outcome.	• Increased impact/positive outcomes for young people • Changes at practice level (how to engage with young people)	• Practice development • Improved outcomes for young people
16	The partner recruited two young people (externally) to the Board, and have grown the participation team to meet the strategic aim where participation of young people is central to activities. The board have now decided to recruit additional young people with lived experience.	Young people involved at strategic level of organisation through greater decision making and participation.	• Changes at strategic level (young people have greater decision-making capabilities) • focus on young people's participation across all levels of organisation	• Practice development
17	Young people have often been involved with recruitment process but there is no codified policy around this. The partner is now producing guidelines to ensure young people can engage as fully as possible and ensuring a youth practitioner is present to support process.	Young people now formally involved in decisions within organisation and efforts to make this process valuable for them.	• Changes at practice level (how organisation engages young people) • Changes at strategic level – changes to policy	• Practice development
18	There has been an organisational shift in approach to listening, from a rescuer/problem solver to a facilitator. This involves empowering young people to share views and ensure they are supported to develop their confidence in importance of being heard. The partner is also working with partner organisations to ensure young people's voices heard within these. There has been a shift to focus on young people's voice at centre of work at all times.	Organisational shift in approach to listening (challenging power dynamics) – empowering young people to voice their opinions and feel supported to take action. Creating right conditions for listening and for young people to feel safe to speak	• Organisational-wide change in approach to/understanding of listening • 'Space' for young people to be listened to • empowering young people to have voices heard and support resulting changes • Influence on wider systems (working with partner organisations) • Centre young people as service-users in organisation's work	• Organisational shift in approach to listening • Creating conditions for listening • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility • Influence on external systems
19	The partner has adopted a practice of listening deeply and carefully, and responding in a flexible and creative way to ensure young people feel they have been heard. They responded to young parents saying they struggle to demonstrate enthusiasm for school by creating book bag initiative, which has had a positive impact on their motivation.	Listening is time consuming – it takes time/effort and need space to respond flexibly to have success/impact.	• Organisational-wide change in approach to/understanding of listening • Increased impact/positive outcome for young people • LF cohort: flexibility and time essential for this work	• Organisational shift in approach to listening • Improved outcomes for young people • Benefits of LF approach

20	The partner delivery of service to have young people leading the sessions, which has provided a starting point to build up trust and confidence.	Work must be guided by young people – planned interventions are not always appropriate.	• Centre young people as service-users in organisation's work	• Practice development
21	The partner established an ambassadors group, which has resulted in projects led by lived experience. For example, young people prepared an agenda, key questions and hosting duties for a criminalisation in care event. Autonomy of LF was important to allow the organisation to have clear focus.	Empowering young people to take action/lead projects.	• 'Space' for young people to be listened to • empowering young people to have voices heard and support resulting changes • LF cohort: autonomy & flexibility key to allowing organisation to focus	• Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility • Creating conditions for listening • Benefits of LF approach
22	The LF has had wider impacts across organisation. As a result of creating an ambassadors group (story 21), the partner has created spaces for more peer-support work. For example, one young person was inspired to set up women mental health support group.	Empowering young people to take action/lead projects.	• Space for young people to be listened to • empowering young people to have voices heard and support resulting changes	• Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility • Creating conditions for listening
23	Young advisors have built strong relationships with each other. The flexibility of the LF was essential to limit 'fear of funder', and enabled the ability to respond to feedback and to scope, test, and iteratively develop approaches for listening.	Social benefit that comes from connecting young people. Flexibility of LF important to allow maximum learning – not restrained by rigid outcomes	• Space for young people to be listened to (has wider social benefit for young people) • LF cohort: autonomy & flexibility key to allowing org to focus (ability to respond individually)	• Creating conditions for listening • Benefits of LF approach
24	The partner included young people in recruitment process for the new CEO, which gave the organisation greater confidence in final appointment. They are now continuing the process of involving young people in recruitment, as part of a process of sharing power. The LF convening days have been a good opportunity for learning.	Sharing power and control over decisions. Learning from other organisations in the LF convening day – sharing good practice	• Changes at strategic level (young people have greater decision-making capabilities) • Increased confidence of organisation in their strategic direction • LF cohort: useful to share good practice	• Practice development • Benefits of LF approach • Assumption versus reality
25	The partner started running a young person advisory group and have equipped young people and staff with skills to listen and communicate effectively.	Improve listening skills, build young people's confidence in communication (improved ability to share ideas)	• Empowering young people to have voices heard (through upskilling) • space for young people to be listened to	• Creating conditions for listening • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility
26	Learning from the LF has enabled the partner to involve a wider group of youth voices, and ensure their ideas are heard and acted upon. This has allowed young people accessing services to become involved in the organisation in new ways, giving them confidence. The listening culture across the whole organisation has develop, and this has not just restricted to the LF project. The partner is now committed to providing opportunities for young people to shape their work.	Development of better listening culture across organisation. Empowering process for young people – have power/control at a high level within organisation. Create conditions for young people to be able to speak.	• Organisational-wide change in approach to/understanding of listening • empowering young people to have voices heard (through greater engagement) • Space for young people to be listened to (through better cultural conditions for listening)	• Organisational shift in approach to listening • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility • Creating conditions for listening
27	The partner created a space for listening (via a questionnaire) that allowed a young person to disclose important information about his	Creating right conditions for listening, and for young people to be prepared to speak (supportive environment).	• Space for young people to be listened to (changed practice around this- questionnaire) • Increased impact/positive outcomes for young people	• Creating conditions for listening • Improved outcomes for young people

	wellbeing. This allowed the organisation to support them through counselling. Flexibility of LF allowed org to identify gap in service.		• LF cohort: importance of flexibility in fund	• Benefits of LF approach
28	The partner created a youth advisory board to ensure young people in prison contribute to the partner's work. This has included the recruitment of a new CEO, such as developing questions for the interview. This protocol will now be embedded in all recruitment processes. The LF allowed an understanding of sustainability of the project through doing feasibility study.	Highlight skills/contribution of young people – often overlooked. Developed new way of working with and engaging young people – handing over responsibility/power. Flexibility of fund important e.g. opportunity to do feasibility study.	• Highlight competencies of young people (assumptions versus reality) • Changes at practice level (how young people are engaged) • changes at strategic level (young people have decision making power and influence) • LF cohort: flexibility important to do what they want with fund	• Assumption versus reality • Practice development • Benefits of LF approach
29	The creation of a new participation worker role has enabled young people to share their experiences of school exclusion, and therefore, to contribute to a youth-led conference on school exclusion and a documentary with external agency. The partner has struggled to engage young people in this work previously, but the LF has given an opportunity to do improve the approach, which they will apply to other projects.	Learning how to engage young people through improving listening practices – now dedicate resources for this as part of wider organisational practice change	• changes at practice level (how young people are engaged) • increased impact/positive outcomes for young people	• Improved outcomes for young people • Practice development
30	The partner has challenged their organisational attitude to listening, with a focus on being accountable to young people, translating listening into action, and closing the feedback loop. This has involved recruited young people as mentors for staff to challenge their thinking. The partner now has a new strategy for active listening and a young ambassadors scheme. The LF has provided a realisation as to how to adapt thinking around youth inclusion. The Blagrave Trust's approach to the cohort has been excellent, with an emphasis on face to face discussion rather than reports.	Change in how organisation understands listening (ensuring action is taken & closing feedback loop). Led to creating space for young people to be heard and putting young people at centre of service.	• Organisational-wide change in approach to/understanding of listening (taking action and closing feedback loop, challenging thinking) • Space for young people to be listened to (through mentoring & ambassadors scheme) • centre young people as service-users in organisation's work • LF cohort: unique approach better than other funds! Learning as opposed to reporting	• Organisational shift in approach to listening • Creating conditions for listening • Practice development • Benefits of LF approach
31	The partner has challenge staff assumptions around young people's capacity to engage, particularly around their involvement in policy work, and staff has increased their confidence in engaging young people in this. A focus on 'listening to' rather than 'delivering to' young people has changed the power dynamic.	Assumptions versus reality – young people are capable of contributing/engaging in a valuable way.	• Highlight competencies of young people (assumptions versus reality) • Increased confidence of org in their ability to engage with young people • LF cohort: focus on listening removes expectation to deliver	• Assumption versus reality • Benefits of LF approach
32	The partner has focussed on finding the right person and resource to engage young people. In this case it has been former prisoners with a shared experience with young people.	Assumptions versus reality – young people are capable of contributing/engaging in a valuable way.	• Highlight competencies of young people (a marginalised group) • Creating 'space' for young people to be listened to (by finding right 'hook')	• Assumption versus reality • Creating conditions for listening

33	Individuals with lived experience of prison as a young person have been recruited in staff team and on Board of Trustees.	Ensuring there is a continued focus on young people at a strategic and practical level within organisation.	• Changes at practice level (how young people are engaged) • Changes at strategic level (purposeful focus on young people)	• Practice development
34	A reverse mentoring programme (story 30) has encouraged a focus on what young people gain from listening , and the partner has embedded their needs into the framework. This includes: when/where to meet, feedback cycle, training needs. LF learning and sharing days helped keep momentum and enthusiasm in project.	Ensuring there is a continued focus on young people at a strategic and practical level within organisation.	• Changes at practice level (how young people are engaged) • changes at strategic level (purposeful focus on young people) • Benefits of LF: concerted focus on listening	• Practice development • Benefits of LF approach
35	Through the LF Real Insights Training, the partner gained the confidence to support staff to involve young people more purposefully. They set up a Service Innovator Committee to inform development of services, and implemented staff training. The process has given staff more confidence to work with young people and led to more young people engaged in more areas of organisations work.	Centring young people in service by embedding this across staff team/training/approach first to ensure this way of working trickles down.	• Changes at strategic level (young people involved in more areas of organisation's work) • Changes at practice level (the way staff are given ownership over projects extends to young people) • Benefits of LF: useful training days	• Practice development • Benefits of LF approach
36	The partner has learnt that young people have useful and diverse opinions and ideas, and it is important ideas are not only heard but acted upon to shape key decisions. The youth forum's enthusiasm about youth-led projects demonstrated that listening is most meaningful when it is acted on.	Appreciation that young people are experts on their own lives – their ideas matter. Listening is also about action, and this makes projects more meaningful.	• Highlights competencies of young people – they have diverse and useful ideas • Change in organisational understanding of what it means to listen/how listening should happen and why this is important for outcomes	• Assumption versus reality • Organisational shift in approach to listening • Improved outcomes for young people
37	As a result of being listened, a young person has been able to meet with the CEO of the County Council and campaign for a discount card for young care leavers. This was a youth-led initiative and the organisation have listened to young people widely about the issue to shape the project.	Improve young people's confidence to speak up/have their voice heard through creating space for this to happen, and a tangible positive outcome for this young person.	• Give young people confidence and structure to speak up and support them to take action • Improved outcome as a result of listening to needs of young people	• Improved outcomes for young people • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility • Creating conditions for listening
38	A young person led part of LF work, which has opened their eyes to how they can use their voice more effectively, and have given them greater confidence to speak up.	Improve young people's confidence to speak up/have their voice heard through creating space for this to happen – personal development of young person.	• Give young people confidence and structure through which to speak up	• Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility
39	Young people have been given opportunities to speak up and tangible action has been taken as result of their ideas. The partner has supported people to pursue project they are passionate about.	Importance of listening *and* action to create positive impact on/for young people. Young people can see their ideas come to life.	• Young people are empowered when they can see their ideas come to life	• Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility

| 40 | Young people have been given opportunities to speak up and the organisation has supported them to pursue project they are passionate about, which has improved the young person's confidence. | Improve young people's confidence to speak up through supporting them to do this | • Give young people confidence and structure through which to speak up | • Empowerment/sharing power & responsibility |

Appendix F: Key outcomes identified through MSC analysis

The table details the key outcomes from the Listening Fund that were identified through the MSC thematic analysis process.

Theme	Description and Examples
Practice Development	• Strategic-level change, by giving young people chances to contribute at 'higher' levels • Service-level change, through re-centring young people in service design
Empowerment / sharing power and responsibility	• Giving young people confidence, through providing space for them to speak, and valuing and acting on their contributions • Supporting young people to take action in youth-led projects • Handing over greater decision-making capacity (e.g. involvement in staff recruitment) • A focus on 'listening to' rather than 'delivering to' young people, which puts them in a position of power
Creating conditions for listening	• Improving feedback channels, to ensure they are effective in practice • Staff training, to improve knowledge of good listening practice • Forming dedicated spaces for youth voices to be heard (e.g. a youth forum)
Improved outcomes for young people	• Listening to and acting on feedback: to improve delivery of key services • Creating spaces for young people to have a voice: which has led to further change where young people are supported to take action
Organisational shift in approach to listening	• Understanding closing the feedback loop, and considering the effectiveness of current practice in this area • Reflecting on power dynamics: moving from position of 'rescuer/expert' to 'facilitator' • Intentional focus on listening and action: developing a deeper understanding of 'what it means to listen' and embedding this within organisational ethos
Assumption versus reality	• Recognising young people's competency: realising that young people can come up with useful ideas and are experts on their own lives • Increased confidence: in the contribution young people can make to high-level decisions
Influence on external systems	• Working with partner organisations: to develop their own listening practices and challenging assumptions • Sharing project learning: to demonstrate the impact of improved listening practices
Benefits of the Listening Fund approach	• Dedicated time/resources: deemed as necessary for this complex work • Flexibility and autonomy: which allowed for highly individualised projects • Sharing through cohort: opportunity to gain ideas and reflect