



Seirbhís Tacaíochta
Oideachais Tusla

Tusla Education Support Service

Implementation of Evidence-Based Programmes and Practices (EBPs) in School Completion Programme

Report commissioned by
Tusla Education Support
Service (TESS)



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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Adaptation	A process of making changes to the Evidence-Based Programme/Practice (EBP) to make it more suitable to the local context
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
Community of Practice (CoP)	A group of professionals who meet together to learn from each other. In SCP practice, CoPs have been focused on specific programmes (e.g., LifeSkills Programme CoP, Working Things Out Programme CoP, Roots of Empathy Programme CoP).
De-implementation	Refers to the process of removing less effective practices (and typically replacing them with more effective ones).
Evidence-Based Programme/Practice (EBP)	Refers to programmes and practices that have been proven to be effective through validated scientific studies. These programmes and practices need to be delivered as intended (i.e., with fidelity).
Evidence-Informed Programme/Practice (EIP)	Refers to programmes and practices that are based on available research evidence, but which may also use other evidence (e.g., practitioner’s expertise). These programmes and practices do not typically have robust research as they include a wider scope of practice.
Fidelity	Refers to the degree of exactness with which an Evidence-Based Programme/Practice is delivered. Implementing EBP with fidelity means implementing EBP ‘as intended’.
Professional Learning Network (PLN)	A group of professionals who meet together to discuss their practice. In this report, this term is used to relate to collaborative structures that are not focused on specific programmes (EBPs).
PW	Project Worker
SCP	School Completion Programme
Sustainability	Refers to the ability to maintain continuous EBP implementation.
TESS	Tusla Education Support Service

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Introduction

This report details the evaluation of the implementation of evidence-based (EBP) programmes and practices in the School Completion Programme (SCP), currently consisting of 121 projects. Evidence-based practice (EBP) is practice that is based on decision-making that has been evidenced in rigorously conducted research to be the most effective in achieving the intended outcomes for the populations we work with. In this report, the term EBP will be used to refer to more specific programmes and approaches (or ‘practices’ as they are referred to in the SCP CPD Programme), which are structured, often manualised, and likely to require training to implement. The ultimate aim of integrating these EBPs in practice is to remove ‘subjective opinion, unfounded beliefs, or bias from decisions and actions in organisations in order to achieve the goals of the organisation’ (Oxford Review, Definition of Evidence-based Practice, para. 3), thus overall creating an evidence-informed approach in the work of an organisation. The evaluation of the suite of EBPs, including EBPs which currently form the Elective Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme for School Completion Programme (SCP), was initiated by Tusla Education Support Service (TESS). The purpose of this evaluation was to measure the impact of significant investment in training and implementation of EBPs in SCP since 2016 and to inform future direction of CPD for SCP staff.

The scope of the report does not extend to a wider discussion on Early School Leaving (ESL) and the critical factors influencing ESL and its prevention. As noted by many researchers (e.g., Eivers, 2021; Heeran-Flynn, 2017; Smyth et al., 2015), the current research consensus is that ESL is usually a gradual process of disengagement that can be exacerbated or mitigated by school-and

system-level factors. The position of the current SCP focus on targeted work with the individual child or young person identified to be at risk of ESL needs to be considered within this wider context.

Methodology

Consultation with SCP Coordinators and Project Workers through a national survey followed by group interviews, as well as a review of Retention Plans of SCP projects, informed the findings presented in this report. The research adopted a mixed-methods exploratory sequential design consisting of three phases. In the first phase, a review of the relevant sections of SCP Retention Plans was undertaken. A detailed online survey was circulated to all SCP Coordinators and SCP Project Workers in phase two of the research. Three focus groups with SCP Coordinators and 3 focus groups with Project Workers were conducted in phase three. In total 203 participants completed the survey and 23 participants took part in focus groups.

Professionalisation of SCP workforce

Overall, the findings clearly show that the introduction of the CPD Programme provided to SCP staff is viewed as extremely valuable. Staff cited that it provided a structured and consistent way of working, made SCP practice more outcome-focused, assisted in monitoring and evaluation, and developed staff confidence and competence in work. The introduction of EBP training ‘replaced’ previous practice of developing ‘programmes’ in many projects, thus it can be stated that it made the SCP practice not just more effective and evidence-based, but also more efficient. Furthermore, the participants stated that the provision of CPD Programme for SCP staff has strengthened SCP relationships with school staff and increased a buy-in from schools.

‘Toolkit’ approach underpinned by relationships

The findings show a wide range of EBPs included in the Elective CPD Programme as well as other EBPs and EIPs are currently utilised by SCP staff in their practice. Such rich and diverse practice ‘toolkit’ with many EBPs to select from and a range of EIPs is welcome by staff, and perhaps necessary given the differences of local contexts in individual SCP clusters. There was a clear recognition that EBPs are not just part of an overall SCP toolkit but that their overall effectiveness is ‘enabled’ by the philosophy and the culture of SCP¹. In this context, staff emphasised that EBPs need to be in the ‘hands of the right people’ and that a ‘meaningful connection’ with a young person creates background conditions for any EBP ‘to work’. Furthermore, the importance of responding to individual needs of the target students was a common theme in the research, and there was a strong consensus that SCP practice needs to be tailored to the students’ needs.

While the findings show that most SCP staff have a clear understanding of the role of EBPs in their practice, a small number of responses showed that some SCP staff view the relational nature of SCP work and the implementation of EBPs as opposing each other. This may indicate a misunderstanding of the broader concept of Evidence-based Practice (within which the Evidence-based Programmes are integrated). Furthermore, some responses indicated that some staff equated EBP with simply any group ‘programme’ work. The current CPD Programme consists of a range of separate training in individual EBPs (many of which can be delivered in 1:1 context), and it is recommended that a general module on the concept of EBP is offered to staff before they engage with the CPD Programme’s individual components.

Local context and capacity influencing EBP implementation

Local school context was named as a critical factor influencing effective implementation of EBPs and was a prominent theme in the research overall. This includes an overall school culture, relationships between SCP staff and the school personnel, as well as logistical arrangements such as the availability of physical space to work in schools. Many staff commented on the need for support in improving the ‘awareness’ of what SCP does in schools.

Most SCP projects listed capacity, referred to in relation to time, resources and staffing, as having a strong influence on the EBP implementation. Time was especially listed as a key challenge by more than half of participants. Some participant responses also suggested that EBPs may not be delivered with fidelity partly due to time pressure many SCP staff find themselves under. Furthermore, some participants noted that they have limited time to attend training, engage in communities of practice, and overall to plan, evaluate and reflect on their own work. In this context, programmes that were adaptable, did not require significant time commitment, and had associated resources supporting the delivery (for example, ready made powerpoints) were judged to be a better ‘fit’ with SCP and were more likely to be sustained. The flexibility, adaptability, and ‘ease of use’ or ‘usability’ of the EBP is a key consideration in the EBP adoption for SCP service nationally. This includes the availability of programme resources that support delivery.

Most EBPs listed in the CPD programme have associated training cost and many require ongoing investment in programme resources. This model was identified as a significant challenge for many SCP projects. The cost of EBPs training (and continued implementation) was identified as an important consideration in adopting EBPs and one of key challenges

¹ It is important to note, however, that currently the SCP Programme does not have an accessible national guidance that would provide overarching practice principles and theoretical framework guiding local implementation.

to implementation. In the context of limited capacity, the proposed solutions included an exploration of more hybrid training models, potentially utilising pre-recorded versions and/or self-directed learning modules

Inconsistent implementation support

Most SCP staff would like to receive more implementation support. However, about a third of both Coordinators and Project Workers responded that they would not, meaning that the existing implementation support was sufficient for their needs. This most likely reflects both the fragmentation of current implementation support and the diversity of SCP workforce. The current support for the implementation of EBPs is inconsistent nationally, with some programmes receiving support such as mentor support or community of practice (LifeSkills, Working Things Out, Roots of Empathy), and other programmes receiving no implementation support (for example, Incredible Years Programme, Decider Skills, Motivational Interviewing). The SCP workforce is also very diverse with some long serving staff who are experienced in the delivery of EBPs stating that they have sufficient confidence in delivery. The expertise of these experienced implementers could be utilised internally in developing mentoring and coaching for staff newly trained in EBPs.

Current research consensus is that professional development needs to be extended beyond training, and when directly asked for recommendations on what is needed in future SCP CPD model, many Coordinators and Project Workers indeed referred to developing further collaborative structures, such as Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) or Communities of Practice (CoPs), which would offer continued and ‘as needed’ support to staff in different implementation stages. Respondents also stated that they would welcome support in adapting EBPs. Currently, key implementation support in SCP is provided by programme

developers and/or organisations who hold programme licensing rights. It is possible that programme fidelity, and not programme adaptation, is of main importance in such implementation support structure.

The need for ongoing review and adaptation of the wider CPD programme and its components was identified. Consistent with a culture of tailoring support to the needs of students in SCP, many EBPs are adapted as they are seen as not meeting these needs. This practice of local programme adaptation may need increased national support. It would be critical for SCP practice going forward to receive support in finding the balance between programme fidelity and adaptation, and to indeed consider the concept of fidelity in SCP context.

Given considerable investment in the implementation of the LifeSkills programme in SCP, the research contained a separate evaluation of the implementation of this programme. Approximately half of all SCP staff have trained in this programme to date. A majority of respondents stated that implementation support for this programme (provided in the form of CoPs) was important especially in getting the programme ‘off the ground’, maintaining its fidelity and sustaining its delivery. This potential of CoPs could be utilised more effectively across SCP wider practice.

Need for more guidance to work with chronic needs

While recognising that the national outcomes of attendance, participation and retention are influenced by a broad range of factors, most respondents stated a belief that the EBPs support these outcomes, though some respondents commented on the EBPs supporting the national outcomes of participation and retention, but not directly attendance. Several staff, however, referenced EBPs as unable to work with complexity, and not offering the kind of intense support some young people may

need. In this context, two areas where current professional skills in SCP may be insufficient were identified, namely supporting students ‘out of school’ and supporting students requiring more specialist emotional support (which is outside of SCP remit). The participants identified that more evidence-based guidance is needed to inform SCP practice in relation to supporting attendance and students ‘out of school’ and with this in mind more training and support in practices that could be utilised in 1:1 work (for example, respondents cited ‘coaching skills’).

Diverse workforce

The research evidences that SCP staff are a diverse workforce in terms of length of service and professional qualifications. A majority of Coordinators and many Project Workers are very experienced in their SCP service, with many in post for longer than 10 years. This diversity among the workforce has important implications for professional development as different staff may need different levels of support and at different stages of EBPs implementation. For example, it was noted that the current CPD Programme does not respond to the needs of experienced staff, many of whom are already trained in most of the EBPs included in the CPD Elective Booklet. It was also noted that many Project Workers nationally may not work on a full-time contract and may thus find it more difficult to access training. The challenges associated with quality professional development of such diverse workforce need to be considered. Overall, however, the findings strongly suggest that current expertise of experienced SCP staff could be better utilised in the provision of CPD Programme.

‘Isolation’

Collaborative work is an important consideration in SCP and one that may need development. For example, many Coordinators and Project Workers expressed a feeling of ‘isolation’. Research data also suggest that many SCP staff appear

to be ‘designing’ their own programmes and interventions. While these are likely developed to address uniquely individualised needs of young people, there does appear to be a need for increased collaboration among SCP staff at both regional and national levels. In this context, staff commented on the need to develop collaborative networks that are focused on sharing and developing SCP practice in general, and not on the delivery of specific EBPs.

Conclusion and Key Recommendations

This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of EBPs in SCP practice. The research findings clearly show that the introduction of the CPD Programme in 2016 was extremely valuable as it enhanced the structure, consistency, effectiveness and arguably also efficiency of SCP practice. The CPD Programme has developed professional skills and competencies of both Coordinators and Project Workers, and the report emphasises the importance of continued investment in its delivery. It is recommended to develop further collaborative structures in SCP (for example, online CoPs/PLNs) that would support continued adaptation of EBPs, sharing of practice and development of resources, as well as to continue the review of CPD Programme overall. It is also important to provide training in the concept of EBP to SCP staff as some participants’ responses showed a potential misunderstanding of this concept and their role in delivering EBPs.

1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

In June 2023, following a select tendering process, we were commissioned by Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) to examine the extent and the impact of evidence-based (EBP) programmes and practices in School Completion Programme (SCP) projects. Since 2016, TESS has invested in significant development of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in the School Completion Programme, and the purpose of this commissioned research was to review this investment to inform future directions in SCP professional development (PD).

1.1 The School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme is a key component of the DEIS Action Plan (DEIS, 2005) and constitutes one strand of the Tusla Educational Support Service (TESS). It complements the other two strands of this service: the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) (also a DEIS action) and the Statutory Educational Welfare Service (EWS). Collectively, the three TESS strands work together with schools, families, and other relevant services to achieve the best educational outcomes for children and young people.

The current desired impact of SCP – developed under TESS in 2016 (with input from a Guiding Group comprised of SCP Coordinators and Project Workers) as part of the three national strands of TESS with a shared national outcome to improve attendance, participation and retention – is retention of a young person to completion of the leaving certificate, equivalent qualification or suitable level of educational attainment which enables them to transition into further education, training or employment.

The Programme operates in local clusters each representing one SCP project. There are currently 121 local SCP clusters, locally managed by voluntary Local Management

Committees (LMCs) who hold responsibility for the service. Each LMC engages a Local Coordinator to lead the development and implementation of the SCP project and operationalise the local service plan. At a local level, the Programme implementation is supported by the SCP Management Team who govern the national SCP budget, operationalised under Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with each of the 121 SCP projects.

To secure funding, via Local SLAs, individual SCP projects are required to complete an annual 'Retention Plan' which since 2017 outlines each cluster's analysis of need among their student cohort, community demographics, profile of the schools in the cluster and specific planned interventions, programmes and supports that respond to the identified need. The Retention Plans are put together following a collective review and planning process typically conducted at a LMC level. Thus, the LMCs operate and manage projects supported by the SCP Management Team and a suite of TESS nationally provided service supports, such as block insurance, HR helpdesk and CPD Programme. The funding parameters for the Programme are centrally provided by TESS.

The Programme has undergone several governance and operational changes in the last two decades, most notably since 2016. The original intention of the Programme was to provide a range of local interventions and initiatives in schools and their communities which support the retention of young people in education. Local decision making was a key feature of this approach (Brattman, 2014) and this flexibility and local decision-making, highlighted over the years as one of Programme's key strengths (Smyth et al., 2015), continues to be a defining feature of the Programme. A wide range of supports and interventions tailored to the specific needs of targeted children and young people are delivered, but since TESS has assumed oversight for the Programme in 2016, this local flexibility is enhanced by

a CPD Programme and *elective* training in a range of EBPs.

The SCP interventions are primarily for children and young people who are identified to be at risk of Early School Leaving (ESL) and who display poor attendance patterns and are referred to the Programme through the SCP Intake Framework process which sets out the rationale, requirements and responsibilities in this process at a national level.

An evidence-informed approach, which promotes decision-making based on best available research evidence, combined

with practitioner judgement and contextual factors, is an important guiding principle of the programme, and this has been significantly strengthened in recent years by TESS who developed and operationalised this approach nationally. For example, the Intake Framework process was designed following a literature review of risk and protective factors for early school leaving (Heeran-Flynn, 2017) and the CPD Programme for SCP staff is informed by a range of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices.

1.2 Continuous Professional Development in SCP

In 2015, TESS commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to carry out a review of the School Completion Programme. A key finding of the review was:

Perhaps the strongest tool in fostering student outcomes through SCP lies in continuous professional development both in group settings and through an online forum. It is crucial that CPD be used in the communication of best practice not only to coordinators but also to principals who are key decision makers in shaping the nature of provision at school (Smyth et al., 2015, p.200)

In 2016, TESS commissioned the provision of the CPD under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Foróige, the National Youth Development Organisation². Since then, TESS has invested in a bespoke programme of CPD for SCP Coordinators and Project Workers, which comprises five days of mandatory CPD and elective CPD. The mandatory CPD includes training on quality implementation, including conducting needs analysis, logic modelling, and monitoring and evaluation, and is provided to all SCP staff. The elective CPD comprises a range of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes, practices and approaches which are aimed to support children's attendance, participation and retention in school, and which may be accessed based on the local identified needs of children and young people and staff training needs.

The CPD Programme has been developed with input from Guiding Groups consisting of SCP Coordinators and Project Workers. To date, five Guiding Groups have been formed. Thus to date, over 50 SCP Coordinators and Project Workers informed the development of the CPD Programme. The Guiding Group aims to bring together the experience, good practice approaches and programmes already in place, build on that expertise and place it within a continuous and systematic training framework bespoke to SCP.

The CPD programme is informed by identified staff training needs and the requirements of the programme. The CPD programme:

- *Is aligned to the desired impact and objectives of the SCP as well the core outcomes of TESS i.e. improved attendance, participation and retention.*
- *Results in an effective, cohesive and outcomes focused programme for those children and young people supported by SCP.*
- *Contributes to the development of an outcomes focused, evidence-informed SCP practice within TESS.*

All SCP staff are mandated to attend five days of training in Needs Assessment, Logic Modelling, and Monitoring and Evaluation within the first two years of service. All SCP staff receive an annual CPD Booklet with mandatory and elective training. In 2023/2024, the CPD Booklet contained 11 EBPs, all of which were delivered by external providers. As part of annual planning, each SCP project is required to review the needs and capacity of their project and identify local training needs before applying for the elective training listed in the CPD Booklet. It is expected that SCP staff implement any programmes or approaches in their projects following attendance at training. Both the provision of elective training in EBPs as well as implementation support for some of these EBPs are provided by external providers who are either programme developers or organisations holding licensing rights for specific programmes.

Since 2020, TESS has invested in the LifeSkills Training programme for SCP through funding received through the What Works initiative. To date, over 125 SCP staff have been trained in LifeSkills Training with technical assistance provided by two SCP LifeSkills Coordinators to those delivering the programme to monitor and encourage fidelity and pupil engagement. Finally, In October 2023, a temporary TESS role of SCP Practice Manager with a particular responsibility for the development of practice toolkit in relation to school avoidance was created

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The objectives of the research as specified by TESS were:

1. To detail the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices in SCP, to include the number of projects using evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices, and names of the programmes and practices.
2. To collect data from SCP projects on the impact and outcomes of these evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices.
3. To identify barriers and enablers that supported the implementation of the evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices in SCP.
4. To identify any gaps in evidence-based or evidence-informed programmes or practices that would support SCP to meet its impact statement and the national outcomes.
5. To review the investment in the LifeSkills Training programme in terms of the impact of this programme using both qualitative and quantitative data.
6. To collect data from SCP projects on the impact and outcomes of these evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices.



² A Senior Youth Officer from Foróige was seconded to support this work and in 2019 a dedicated role of a CPD Manager was established within this commissioned contract.

This research is intended to inform the future direction of CPD in the School Completion Programme. A Research Working Group was established to oversee various stages of this research. The CPD Guiding Group has been asked to provide feedback on the draft of the final report. The membership of both Groups can be seen in appendices 1-2.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the methodological approach adopted in this research and states the levels of participation. Section 3 presents the findings. Section 4 includes a discussion of the findings, and Section 5 offers a conclusion and sets out key recommendations. Section 1.4 below outlines the concept and principles of EBP and EBP implementation.

1.4 Definition of Evidence-based Practice (EBP)

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is practice that is based on decision-making that has been *evidenced* in research to be the most effective in achieving the intended outcomes for the populations we work with. It is now well recognised that EBP is about integrating this current best research evidence with the practitioner's knowledge, and adapting it to the needs and preferences of those we work with and the context of our work. The EBP movement, initially adapted from medicine, has now formed a helpful practice framework in many disciplines (Ward et al., 2022).

An evidence-based programme is a programme that has been proven to be effective in robust research. In healthcare, some researchers make a distinction between evidence-based *practice* - which is about broader integration of research with expert judgement - and a more specific 'empirically supported treatments (ESTs)' (APA, 2005). Evidence-based *programmes* or specific evidence-based approaches can be viewed as such ESTs. In this report, the term EBP will be used to refer to these more *specific* programmes and approaches (or 'practices' as they are referred to in the SCP

CPD Programme), which are structured, often manualised, and likely to require training to implement. The implementation of such EBPs needs to be supported (Albers et al., 2021) and there is a wide body of literature focused on the model and strategies of this support.

The ultimate aim of integrating EBPs in practice is to remove 'subjective opinion, unfounded beliefs, or bias from decisions and actions in organisations in order to achieve the goals of the organisation' (Oxford Review, Definition of Evidence-based Practice, para. 3), thus overall creating an evidence-*informed* approach in the work of an organisation. Such an evidence-informed approach in SCP practice has been designed, developed and operationalised by TESS nationally with the introduction of the CPD Programme that is informed by a range of evidence-based programmes and practices (EBPs). This report reports on their implementation.

2

Methodology

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Overview

The following mixed-methods exploratory sequential design consisting of three phases was agreed with the Research Working Group. The research received an approval from Tusla Research Ethics Committee in July 2023.

A review of the relevant sections of SCP Retention Plans was undertaken as phase one of the research. 2023/2024 Retention Plans were made available to the principal researcher. The Retention Plans had been anonymised prior to this by a TESS Administrator.

A detailed online survey (see appendices 4-5) was circulated to all SCP Coordinators and SCP Project Workers in phase two of the research. This survey was circulated via email from TESS in September 2023. SCP staff had two weeks to complete the survey. Two versions of the survey, one for Coordinators and one for Project Workers were designed. The two versions contained broadly the same questions, however, slightly rephrased in places (for example 'What CPD Evidence-based Programmes/Practices does your SCP currently deliver' was rephrased for Project Workers as 'Which CPD Evidence-based Programmes/Practice do you currently deliver in your SCP role, see appendices 4-5; Coordinators were asked two additional questions about implementation barriers and enablers in their own local context). The survey contained 27 questions for Project Workers and 29 questions for Coordinators and was fully anonymous. The survey was completed by 70 SCP Coordinators and 133 Project Workers. Considering a broad estimation of 450 SCP staff (as per TESS estimation in October 2022), the total sample of 203 is representative at 90% confidence level and with 5% margin of error.

All SCP staff, both Coordinators and Project Workers were invited to put their names forward for participation in focus groups which formed phase three of the research.

In the initial correspondence about the research from TESS (containing information about the research and offering staff an opportunity to contact the principal researcher with any questions – see appendix 3) staff were asked to volunteer to take part in focus groups. This approach was considered to be the most equitable given the diversity of SCP staff.

Eighteen Coordinators and 12 Project Workers volunteered to take part in focus groups. SCP CPD Manager forwarded the names of all who volunteered to the principal researcher who conducted further selection (further selection needed to be applied to the group of Coordinators only). Purposive sampling of maximum diversity (by geographical location) was applied to the list of volunteers and 12 Coordinators and 12 Project Workers were invited to take part in focus groups. Where individuals were unable to attend, the place was offered to another participant (this was relevant to Coordinators only). Six focus groups took place in October 2023, three with SCP Coordinators and 3 with Project Workers. Twenty-three SCP staff attended focus groups, 12 Coordinators and 11 Project Workers. All focus groups were held remotely over zoom. With the consent of the participants, they were audio recorded with zoom enabled transcription.

Focus group transcripts and responses to open-ended questions from the survey were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis (TA), this facilitated a systematic strategy for coding and identifying themes. The principal researcher conducted an initial inductive coding process. Following this process, the transcripts were re-read using NVivo (DCU licensed version) in which previously identified codes were reviewed.



The survey questions and group interview schedules are included in appendices 4-7. SCP CPD Manager acted as a gatekeeper for the consultation process, disseminating the information sheet and consent forms to SCP staff. SCP staff were asked to contact the principal researcher with any research related queries.

The final phase of consultation involved a summary presentation of the findings and recommendations. Members of the Research Advisory Group and the Guiding Group were invited to provide feedback on the draft of the report in September 2024. The feedback from this phase informed the final report.

2.2 Participants

In total 203 participants completed the survey and 23 participants took part in focus groups.

2.3 Participant Responses

The following categories are used throughout the document to describe the level of responses:

- 'Almost all' - more than 90%
- 'Most' - 75%-90%
- 'Majority' - 51%-74%
- 'Fewer than half' - 25%-49%
- 'A small number' - 16%-24%
- 'A few' - up to 15%

Research Findings

3.0 Research Findings

Drawing on the review of Retention Plans, the survey responses and data from the focus groups, this chapter provides an overview of the impact of the introduction of CPD Programme in SCP practice, documents the current EBPs implementation across SCP projects nationally, discusses local implementation barriers and enablers to the implementation of these EBPs, and considers recurring themes in relation to current and future CPD Programme in SCP.

The themed analysis of the collected data is presented under six overarching themes. These six themes are discussed in turn in sections 3.1 – 3.6 below:

- 3.1 Professionalisation of SCP Workforce
- 3.2 EBPs Supporting the National Outcomes
- 3.3 The Use of EBPs in SCP Practice
- 3.4 Implementation Enablers and Barriers
- 3.5 Identified Gaps in Professional Development and Implementation Support
- 3.6 Lessons from the Evaluation of the Implementation of LifeSkills Programme

Within each theme, there are a number of sub-themes and sub-headings which relate to different aspects of participant data relating to this theme. For example, section 3.3 (*The use of Evidence-based Programmes and Practices*) is divided into the following eight sub-headings: *Adoption of EBPs from CPD Elective Programme, Coordinator and Project Worker Delivery of EBPs, Satisfaction with EBPs included in CPD Programme, Training in other EBPs not listed in CPD Programme, Sustainability of EBPs, Fidelity of EBP Delivery, Adaptation of EBPs, and Development of Programmes*. Taken together, these eight sub-headings provide a broad understanding of participants' opinions and ideas regarding the overall theme of the use of EBPs. Within each theme (and sub-theme) quotes from participants are detailed so that the reader

is able to see first-hand what participants had to say regarding the theme. Given that this study also involved collecting statistical data from participants in the form of survey responses, within several sub-headings qualitative data are augmented with survey response data to give a more contextualised understanding of participants' views. Following this chapter, chapter 4 offers a more detailed discussion of several of the key findings emerging from participant responses, relating the findings to previous academic research in the area, as well as the broader Irish educational context.

Section 3.1 considers the impact of the introduction of CPD Programme in SCP more generally, while section 3.2 considers how the CPD Programme and the current EBPs implemented in SCP projects address the national outcomes of attendance, participation and retention. Section 3.3 will outline what EBPs and EIPs are currently implemented across SCPs nationally. Information related to fidelity with which the EBPs are implemented will also be noted here. Section 3.4 considers local enablers and barriers to implementation, including local factors such as project capacity and access to staff supports, as well as contextual factors such as a buy-in from schools. The current provision of professional development and implementation support in SCP practice is evaluated in Section 3.5. Finally, the evaluation of the current implementation support provided for the LifeSkills programme is included in section 3.6.

3.1 Professionalisation of SCP Workforce

This section presents the findings of the first identified theme, *Professionalisation of SCP Workforce*. Within this theme, the findings are divided into three sub-headings, as follows:

- 3.1.1 Focused, structured and consistent way of working
- 3.1.2 Perception of change
- 3.1.3 Flexible ‘toolkit’ approach

Relevant findings from this section are discussed further in section 4.1 in the following chapter.

3.1.1 Focused, structured and consistent way of working

The findings clearly evidence that the introduction of the CPD Programme provided to SCP staff was very welcome. Staff felt that it was valuable, provided a structured and consistent way of working, and led to better outcomes for students. This can be seen in table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant responses on the impact of the introduction of the CPD Programme in SCP.
<p>‘Great to see we have a CPD Programme’ (Coordinator, focus group)</p> <p>‘When I first saw it it was quite exciting to see all these trainings [...] it was great to be able to add to our toolkit [...]’ (Coordinator, focus group)</p> <p>‘When I started as a Project Worker years ago it felt like you were in limbo’ (Project Worker, focus group)</p> <p>[...] there wasn’t anything before’ (Coordinator, focus group)</p> <p>‘They [the programmes] are very valuable to the project I am fortunate to be trained in them’ (Project Worker, focus group)</p> <p>‘I’ve had good outcomes with these EBPs’ (Project Worker, focus group)</p> <p>‘They are laid out well there is a clear structure to what you are doing’ (Project Worker, focus group)</p> <p>‘They are reliable, they are proven to work [...] I think they are great’ (Project Worker, focus groups)</p>

The introduction of EBP training discontinued previous practice of developing own programmes in many projects. In the survey, in response to an open-ended question about

previous practices, 36% of Coordinators expressed that EBPs replaced previous practices such as ‘DIY made programmes’ in their projects.

‘Much of the ‘DIY’ programmes have been shelved in favour of the evidence-based programmes’ (Coordinator, survey)

In qualitative responses, both Coordinators and Project Workers responded that they discontinued some previous activities with the introduction of EBPs:

[‘We discontinued] Social and Emotional programmes that were developed by staff with the aim of building resources to meet the needs of the target group working anger management, self esteem, self regulation and coping skills’ (Project Workers, survey)

‘Programmes I would have put together myself on feelings, social skills and friendship’ (Project Worker, survey)

It seems that the ‘DIY made’ programmes addressed a wide range of needs, including health needs such as ‘hygiene’ and broad areas of ‘resilience’ or ‘diversity tolerance’. At the very least the development of such interventions must have taken time, thus it can be assumed that training in EBPs would have made the SCP practice not just more effective and evidence-based, but also more efficient. Indeed, staff commented on this:

‘Using manualised programmes means there is less time spent on preparing for each session so we can get more done’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘I feel the structure of evidence-based programmes are designed very well to provide space for delivery of facts/information, time for reflection and outcomes/solutions. The structure of programmes reduces the amount of time staff have to spend researching and developing and allows more time delivering, engaging with the young people’ (Project Worker, survey)

Training in EBPs enhanced the ‘structure’ of both 1:1 and group work and [‘made them] more focused which leads to better outcomes’ (Coordinator, survey).

Importantly, though some participants commented that the introduction of EBPs in SCP has ‘replaced’ some less structured

activity-based work in SCP (‘Evidence-based interventions mostly replacing art or cooking based activities’, Project Worker, survey), the introduction of EBPs in SCP was viewed by most survey respondents as ‘enhancement’ not ‘replacement’:

‘We have used evidence-based to support and enhance existing programmes’ (Coordinator, survey, emphasis added)

‘We haven’t replaced our targeted intervention supports, but have used evidence-based programmes to further support our work’ (Project Worker, survey)

Access to EBP training also reduced ‘buying in support’ and ‘paid services’ including therapeutic interventions and counselling supports in some projects³. From the research data it cannot be stated whether the reason for this was increased skills of staff to respond to the needs of the students that might have required more specialist support previously, or whether the decision was a financial one (note the section on cost of EBP training in section 3.4).

Overall, it seems that training in EBPs have ‘focused’ SCP practice nationally. As one Project Worker put it:

‘We used to deliver more Art and craft sessions, reading and writing support, own social and life skills programmes [...] it’s more structured now’ (Project Worker, survey)

It must be noted however that most SCP projects remain engaged in practice that draws on a range of approaches, including both specific EBPs and some tailor-made approaches. For example, when asked what previous practices were ‘replaced’ by EBPs in SCP, one Project Worker stated:

‘None, we try to offer EBP programmes like MAP and incredible years programmes along with our more targeted approaches, so we cover the need of the young people we work with along with balancing the needs schools may have’ (Project Worker, survey)

³ SCP projects have a budget of 5K for therapeutic interventions per year.

3.1.2 Perception of change

Staff were asked to comment on the impact of the introduction of EBP training and ‘replacement’ (‘de-implementation’) of other practices they previously utilised. Majority of Coordinators surveyed (53%) believed that ‘de-implementation’ of previous practices and the introduction of EBPs has had an overall positive impact. They commented that training in EBPs made SCP practice more outcome-focused, assisted in monitoring and evaluation, and developed staff confidence and competence in work:

‘SCP staff feel more equipped to respond to challenges and issues young people bring to sessions as they are trained in specific skills to make use of in these sessions and feel more confident in responding to the needs presented’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Evidence-based programmes are structured and often accompanied by assessment tools giving clear baseline data which help to record the progress of the student’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘I think using EBP has a positive impact on our work. It gives us structure. It gives us routine. It makes it easier to implement programmes (getting schools and parents and such on board) as there is evidence to back it up, it is a reliable programme that is known to work. It makes me feel more secure and reassured in the work that I do’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘It has been positive, carrying out evidence-based programmes gives more focus on the sessions and builds the relationship’ (Coordinator, survey)

The provision of CPD Programme for SCP staff has strengthened SCP relationships with school staff and increased a buy-in from schools:

‘This has had a positive impact – bringing these programmes into schools has strengthened relationships with schools’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘It’s good to be able to say to schools these are the programmes that we offer [...] it increases the buy-in’ (Coordinator, focus group)

Staff also commented on increased ‘efficiency’ in SCP:

‘This has had a positive effect as you can take a bigger group and you cover way more topics than before’ (Project Worker, survey).

In light of the findings clearly highlighting the important role of EBPs in enhancing, focusing and professionalising SCP practice nationally, it is important to note that a small number of staff especially Project Workers appeared to view EPBs as something ‘additional’:

‘It takes time away from working with your groups’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Reluctance to dismantle work-practice which had good outcomes in favour of EBP’ (Project Worker, survey)

Though as many as 35% of respondents were neutral (‘neither positive or negative’) in response to a question on the introduction of EBP training and ‘de-implementation’, a small number (12%) of Coordinators believed that the ‘de-implementation’ of previous practice and the introduction of EBPs have had a negative impact. In this context, Coordinators referred mainly to the introduction of the Intake Framework:

‘We now work with about 3 to 5 students per year group. These are the most needy and many of them are not responding to any interventions. Very few have positive outcomes as they mostly reject support, often by voting with their feet. (Not showing up to school) There is very little success’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Less relationship building and the students ‘participation’ piece of work as SCP are no longer able to participate in relationship and participation building exercises such as School Shows, football etc. The Universal work has lessened therefore some students who may have been on the periphery of a target group may now be in the target group as the early intervention pieces couldn’t happen’ (Coordinator, survey)

These responses may show a misunderstanding of the concept and

principles of EBP (which does not ‘exclude’ the relational aspect of work; see Discussion in section 4) as well as potentially a resistance to change of practice. A small number of respondents felt their professional judgment was negatively influenced by the commissioning process and the ‘expectation’ to include EBPs in their planning. This is illustrated by quotes below:

‘They can be crude in that sense let’s get to the programme even if a child is upset I feel pressure to do EBPs even though they may be less effective than something I have in mind for them [the students]’ (Project Worker, focus group)

‘There is pressure that if we don’t play ball with these EBPs that are funded and presented [we ourselves] won’t get funded’ (Project Worker, focus group)

‘The Retention Planning is so prescriptive [...] if you do not put programmes you won’t pass’ (Coordinator, focus group)

‘Are we doing them [EBPs] for the sake of doing [...] if you are going to be judged by how many EBPs [you deliver] [...] keep the funders happy’ (Coordinator, focus group)

It is concerning that the CPD Programme is viewed by a small number of staff as something that projects need to engage in in order to ‘pass’ Retention Plans, as opposed to a means of improving delivery of service and improving confidence in delivery. It is also surprising that a small number of participants felt some ‘pressure’ to deliver EBPs as the SCP Elective CPD Booklet clearly states that ‘Each SCP project, in consultation with the Local Management Committee, may select to attend the CPD which best meets the needs of the children and young people supported by the project as identified in the Retention Plan (...)’ (SCP CPD Booklet, p. 3).

3.1.3 Flexible ‘toolkit’ approach

It was clear that EBPs are viewed by staff as part of a wider toolkit of practice, and this is consistent with current TESS CPD direction:

‘I think it is important that evidence-based programmes are part of the toolkit used by SCPs to support children and young people. Equally important is that they do not replace SCP’s unique ability to meet children and young people’s needs in a very direct way through approaches and techniques developed by SCP staff specifically responding to those needs through individual sessions and small group work’.

‘The EBPs are scaffolds we use them within a larger picture’ (Coordinator, focus group)

‘Having a wide and varied portfolio of programmes to offer the many needs of the young people I work with is very necessary to encourage attendance, participation and retention’ (Project Worker, survey)

With this in mind, staff emphasised the importance of maintaining the provision of a wide range of EBPs as well as developing ‘more’ and ‘new’ approaches:

‘Ensuring that the range of evidence-based programmes offers a range of outcomes so that each cluster can choose what programmes best meet the current needs of the area/cluster’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘SCP [should] focus on offering a wider range of interventions for clusters to choose from than there are currently’ (Project Worker, survey, emphasis underlined)

Overall, SCP projects seem to welcome a rich practice toolkit with many EBPs to select from and also a range of EIPs:

‘We use a lot of evidence-informed interventions to fill in the gaps in the provision’ (Coordinator, focus group).

‘You don’t want to lose the evidence-informed [programmes] [but] have them on the side’ (Project Worker, focus group)

Staff emphasised the need to retain a flexible and individualised approach in SCP and cautioned against evaluating EBPs in vacuum. When asked whether the introduction of EBPs had been positive or negative for SCP, one Project Worker commented:

⁴ Only five EBP have been funded by TESS – MI, NVR, LifeSkills, Coping Power and MAP. All others are not funded by TESS.

‘Some have been positive in that the work is more targeted, more accountable and also progression is more easily seen. It can be negative in that when a programme becomes all about achieving specific outcomes it can take from a child’s natural progression through a difficulty and the “unseen” outcomes that are just as important (such as the child smiling for the first time in school, the child asking for help for the first time without aggression, a child trusting enough to disclose any trauma they are currently experiencing that is impacting their home and school life)’ (Project Worker, survey)

The importance of retaining the flexible and needs-led approach in SCP was prominent throughout the research:

‘I do think there is a place definitely a place for EBPs but it has to be needs-led and there needs to be adaptation’ (Coordinator, focus group)

‘EBPs are really really useful [...] but the philosophy and the culture of [SCP] is much more important’ (Coordinator, focus group)

Overall, staff emphasised the importance of skilled (not just trained!) staff alongside the needs-based response as key ‘ingredients’ of SCP effectiveness:

‘I think overall the practice of delivering evidence-based or evidence-informed

programmes/practice (as long as it is accompanied with individual support for our high need target students) has been positive in terms of outcomes for the target group. I think the quality of the staff combined with support and training is the most impactful resource in improving outcomes for our target students’

3.2. EBPs Supporting the National Outcomes

This section presents findings related to the second identified theme, *EBPs Supporting the National Outcomes* and specifically on the participants’ perceptions about the efficacy of EBPs in meeting the national outcomes and how the participants believed the EBPs contribute to the achievement of these outcomes, under sub-headings as follows:

- 3.2.1 EBPs supporting improved participation
- 3.2.2 Relationship as a key enabler of the effectiveness of EBPs
- 3.2.3 Understanding a wider context in achieving national outcomes

The findings presented in this section are unpacked and discussed further in section 4.2 in the following chapter.



3.2.1 EBPs supporting improved participation

Overall, 60% of SCP coordinators and as many as 79% of Project Workers who

responded to the survey believe that the EBPs support the national outcomes of attendance, participation and retention. Their responses can be seen in table 2 below.

Table 2. Participant responses to the question ‘Do the EBPs in the CPD Programme support the achievement of national outcomes?’
“Yes, absolutely” (Coordinator, survey)
‘Yes particularly in the areas of participation and retention’ (Coordinator, survey)
Yes, Improved attendance and participation is evident’ (Project Worker, survey)
‘Yes. In my opinion these programmes are a key element to supporting the national outcomes. They provide the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills to the young person, that are key to them reaching their potential in school and life.’
‘Yes. They enable children to develop their social skills in a positive, safe environment, to develop their emotional literacy and regulation skills, their behavioural regulation skills, to improve their self-esteem, their trust in adults and their peers, reduce their anxiety/over thinking, all of which allow them to participate positively in the classroom and on the yard and to develop strong, healthy, positive relationships with their peers and school staff. Positive participation leads to better attendance and a sense of belonging to the school environment which in turn improves retention rates’ (Project Worker, focus group)
‘Yes. Young people are given the skills and the space to communicate their needs and concerns. Some programmes have transferrable skills that can be applied within both the schooling and employment settings’ (Project Worker, focus group)
‘Yes. Evidence-based practices work to develop the wellbeing of children and young people in often time-restricting setting’ (Project Worker, focus group)
‘Yes, the skills learned in the programmes are skills the young people will have for life, keep their attendance up in school, build on their self-esteem and participation’ (Project Worker, focus group)

However, 40% of SCP coordinators and 21% of Project Workers, while mostly agreeing to some extent with the statement that these EBPs meet the national outcomes, gave more qualified responses, as below:

‘Some of them may contribute yes, but overall, particularly the whole class programmes/ universal approach, they don’t specifically zone in on the APR [Attendance, Participation, Retention] outcomes.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Most of the programmes offered are not relevant to the daily work of SCP which is about building individual trust and strengthening relationships with children and their parents’ (Coordinator, survey)

Many respondents commented on the EBPs supporting the national outcomes of participation and retention to some extent, but not directly attendance:

I feel that the outcome that is most likely supported through the evidence-based programmes I deliver is improved participation and then retention. I feel such programmes have less impact on attendance’ (Project Worker, survey)

These qualified responses will now be thematically discussed.

3.2.2 Relationship as a key enabler for the effectiveness of EBPs

Relationship was a strong theme across the research overall. For example, when asked if the currently implemented EBPs support the national outcomes of attendance, participation and retention, one Coordinator commented:

‘Their effectiveness is entirely dependent upon the person delivering them and the relationship that they have with the cohort to whom they are delivering’ (Coordinator, survey)

Similarly, when asked what else is needed going forward, staff responded:

‘I think it is important to recognise and know that the person delivering the programme is important in achieving outcomes. It is ultimately the relational nature of the

interactions between the person and the child/young person that brings about change’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Yes [the EBPs support the national outcomes] in part, however in my opinion a relationship needs to be in place for these programmes to have maximum impact for the child/young person. Every interaction is an intervention’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Some programmes like MAP can be valuable, however it is the caring relationship of SCP staff that is the vital element of every engagement and intervention that is successful’ (Coordinator, survey)

Notably, many staff emphasised that the EBPs were supporting them to improve relationships and interactions with young people:

‘One of the core goals of our work with SCP pivots around our ability to build trusting relationships with targeted students. The evidence-based programmes we have chosen to implement are relationship based. We work to ensure that these programmes are relevant to the young people we work with, as this promotes engagement. A lot of the material and sessions in the programmes we offer are relational, to provide repeated experiences of respectful and rewarding interactions between students and SCP staff’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘[the programmes] bolster connection to SCP staff which improves relationships and lays the groundwork for future advocacy if the need arises’ (Coordinator, survey)

EBPs are *‘great for having structured access to the students during school time and for relationship building’* (Coordinator, survey)

‘Young people are influenced by people in whom they trust and believe, and if those people are aided by good information, and they are able to deliver it in an authentic way, then the ideal mix is achieved’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Yes CPD Evidence-Based Practices are of value and can support attendance, participation and retention. Additionally a person-centred holistic approach to practice is

central in promoting attendance, participation and retention. Developing positive supportive relationships with the young people and their parents in my opinion is the most effective way of achieving the above’ (Project Worker, survey)

In referencing ‘relationships’ and ‘interactions’, many SCP staff commented on discussing ‘what’s going on for the student’ and ‘meeting them [the students] where they are at’ as guiding principles of this interaction. For example, Project Workers commented:

‘Time required to deliver the programme can impact time available to discuss other needs issues (wellbeing, attendance, school relationships, family life)’ (Project Worker, survey)

One Coordinator who took part in a focus group spoke of the concept of ‘evidence-based’ relationship:

‘Evidence-based intervention is not enough we need to look at evidence-based relationship as well’ (Coordinator, focus group).

It may be worthwhile to establish the critical, evidence-based components of an ‘evidence-based’ relationship in SCP to guide and support staff in these interactions with the students. One example of a practice that can be flexibly used for 1:1 mentoring and coaching of students is Motivational Interviewing (MI) and this practice was referred to as such by many participants.

3.2.3 Understanding a wider context in achieving national outcomes

In evaluating whether the SCP interventions impact the achievement of TESS national outcomes, it is important to look at a wider context that supports young people and the achievement of outcomes of attendance, participation and retention. These outcomes are broad and are influenced by a multitude of factors, as well as a range of approaches. This was recognised by most SCP staff.

‘There are many other factors though that contribute to improving our outcomes like parental initiatives, holiday time provisions,

lunchtime/afterschool clubs and incentives for example. It’s a combination of a few interventions that often helps to improve all these factors. Sometimes some things are out of your control in terms of external environment.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘It’s hard to say if one programme alone can improve the national targets as most need multiple support’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘[...] Why do young people not want to be in school? Have we really asked the right questions to answer this one.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘[...] If students are angry do they need anger management or do we need to look at something else’ (Project Worker, focus group)

These responses acknowledge that the position of the current SCP focus on targeted work with the individual young person identified to be at risk of Early School Leaving (ESL) needs to be considered within a wider context on the current research on ESL which emphasises the importance of school- and system-level factors influencing ESL (Eivers, 2021; Heeran-Flynn, 2017; Smyth et al., 2015).

3.3 The Use of EBPs in SCP Practice

This section presents findings related to the overarching theme of *The Use of EBPs in SCP Practice*. The review sought to examine the number of SCP projects using EBPs and the specific EBPs that are used. SCP staff were asked about the implementation of EBPs that are included in the annual CPD Elective Programme, as well as other EBPs that they might have accessed locally. The section is divided into the following sub-sections:

- 3.3.1 Adoption of EBPs from CPD Elective Programme
- 3.3.2 Coordinator and Project Worker Delivery of EBPs
- 3.3.3 Satisfaction with EBPs included in CPD Programme
- 3.3.4 Training in other EBPs not listed in CPD Programme
- 3.3.5 Sustainability of EBPs

- 3.3.6 Fidelity of EBP delivery
- 3.3.7 Adaptation of EBPs
- 3.3.8 Development of ‘programmes’

As discussed in the general introduction to this section above, and following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method of undertaking thematic analysis, the presentation of the findings (in this section) is distinct from the discussion and interpretation of these findings which follows in section 4.

3.3.1 Adoption of EBPs from CPD Elective Programme

From the review of Retention Plans and the survey responses, it is clear that all SCP Projects adopted some EBPs from the CPD Programme in their practice. From the review of Retention Plans, it is evident also that EBPs constitute only a part of SCP service provision. In line with SCP core provision, and consistent with a ‘toolkit’ approach (as discussed in section 3.1.3), most SCP projects utilise a range of approaches to meet the needs of the targeted students, including practical supports such as for example summer and after school provision, transfer programmes, and breakfast clubs.

Out of 203 survey responses, only 1 Project Worker stated at the start of the survey that they do not deliver any EBPs in their work; the survey was constructed in such a way that it discontinued after this statement and this respondent did not proceed to other survey questions about the implementation of EBPs. It is possible that this was a new SCP staff member. As can be seen in Figure 11 below, close to 15% of Project Workers are in the post less than 1 year.

At the time of this research, 11 EBPs were included in the CPD programme. Information on these EBPs can be seen in appendix 8. Figure 1 shows the current implementation of these EBPs nationally. Currently was defined as ‘delivered this year and planned to deliver next year’.

The research did not ask the participants to comment specifically on individual programmes, however, SCP staff made several references to individual EBPs in their survey responses and during focus groups. These individual perspectives on various EBPs are referenced throughout the report.

3.3.2 Coordinator and Project Worker Delivery of EBPs

Both Coordinators and Project Workers are engaged in delivering EBPs. Only a small number of Coordinators (<10%) do not deliver any of the 11 EBPs. More than 40% of Coordinators and a majority of Project Workers (55%) deliver the LifeSkills Programme. The majority of both Coordinators and Project Workers use Motivational Interviewing (MI) approach in their practice. Only a few SCP staff use Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) and Coping Power in their practice; very few Coordinators deliver Coping Power. A small number of Project Workers and Coordinators implement Roots of Empathy, DESTY and Incredible Years Programme, and it appears that Coordinators are less likely to deliver DESTY than Project Workers. Other EBPs including Decider Skills, MindOut, WTO and MAP are delivered by about a third of staff (between 30% and 40%). This is illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 below.

Figure 1: EBPs ‘currently’ delivered in SCP projects: Coordinators’ responses.

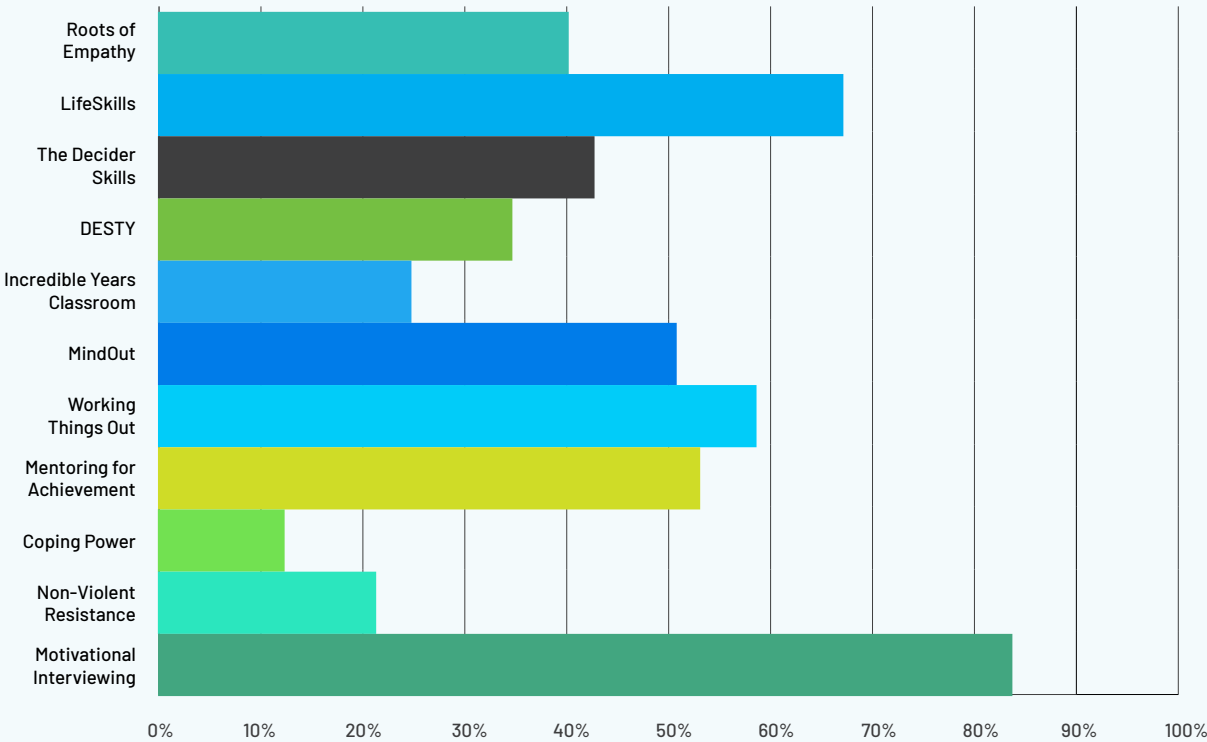
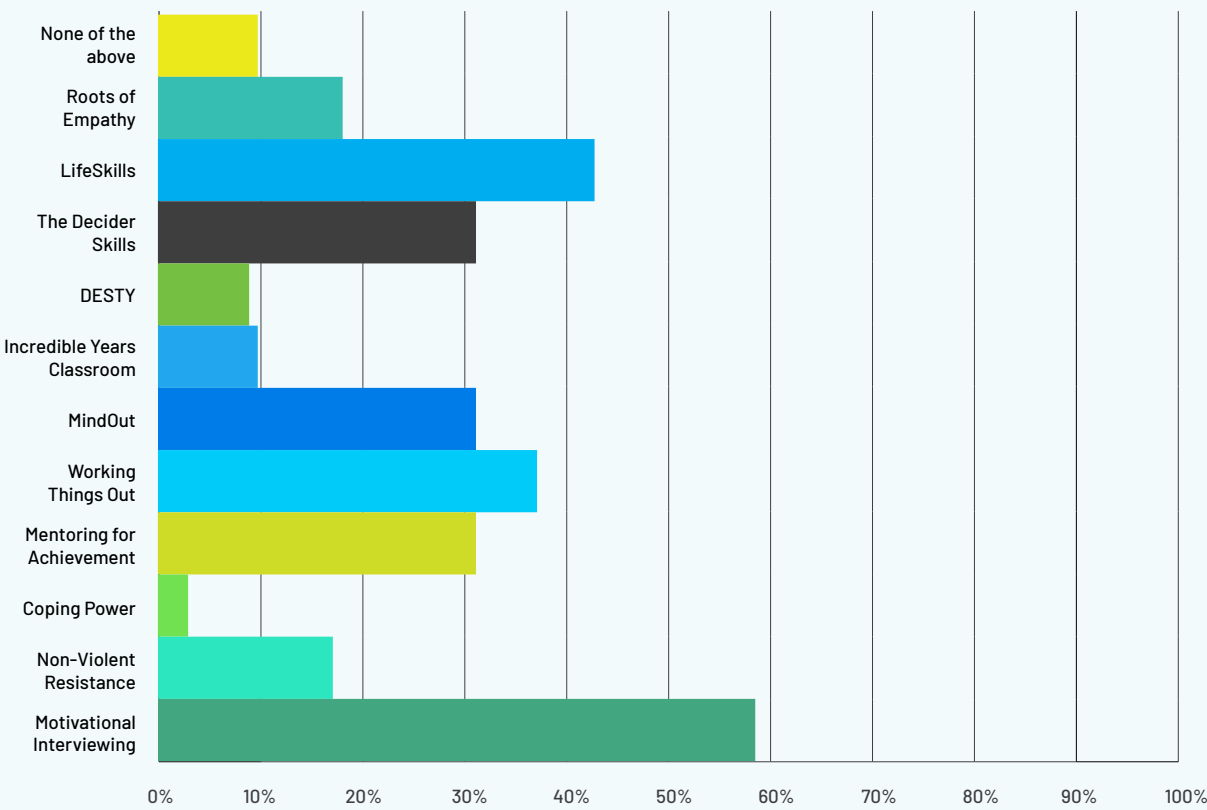
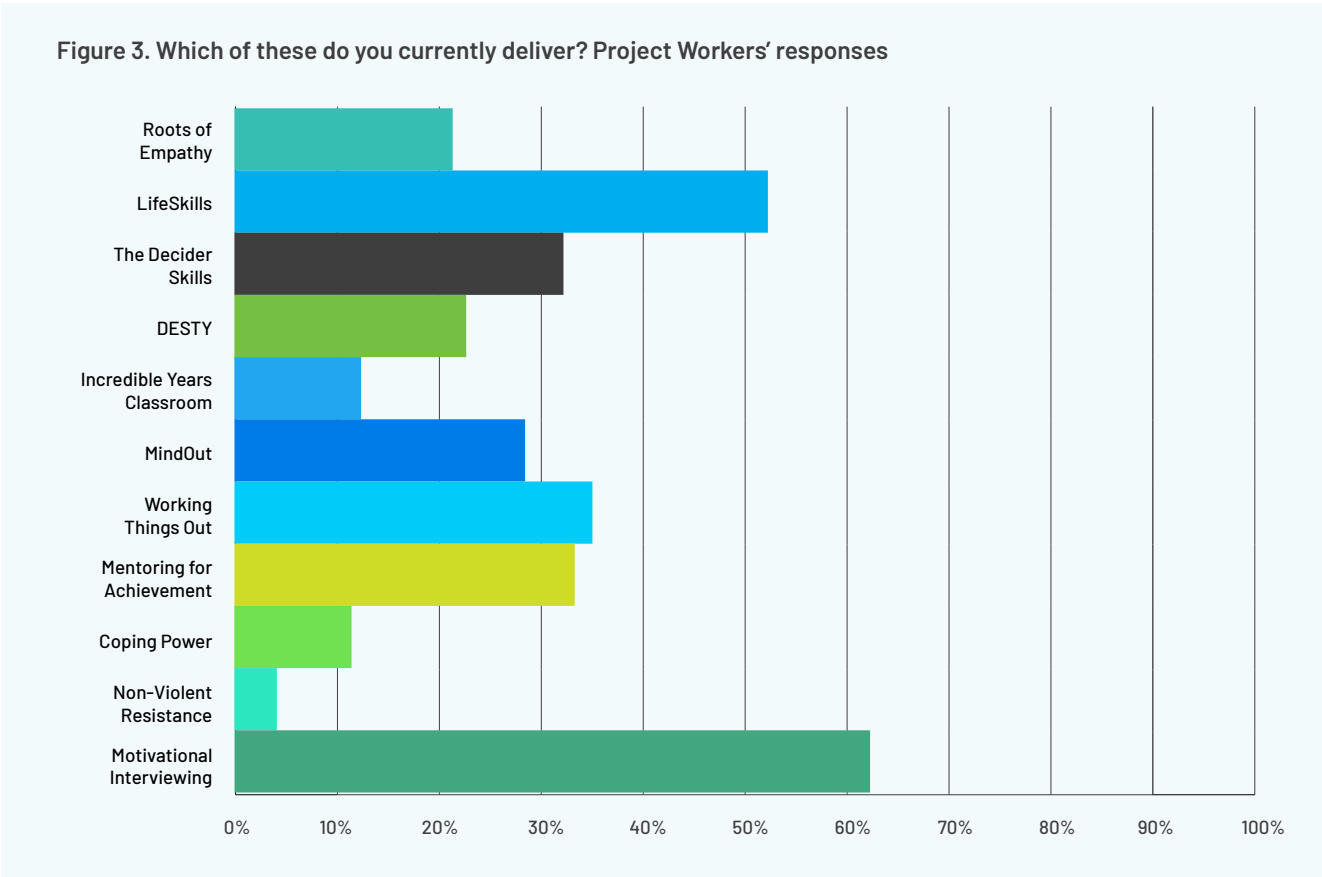


Figure 2. Which of these do you currently deliver? Coordinators’ responses

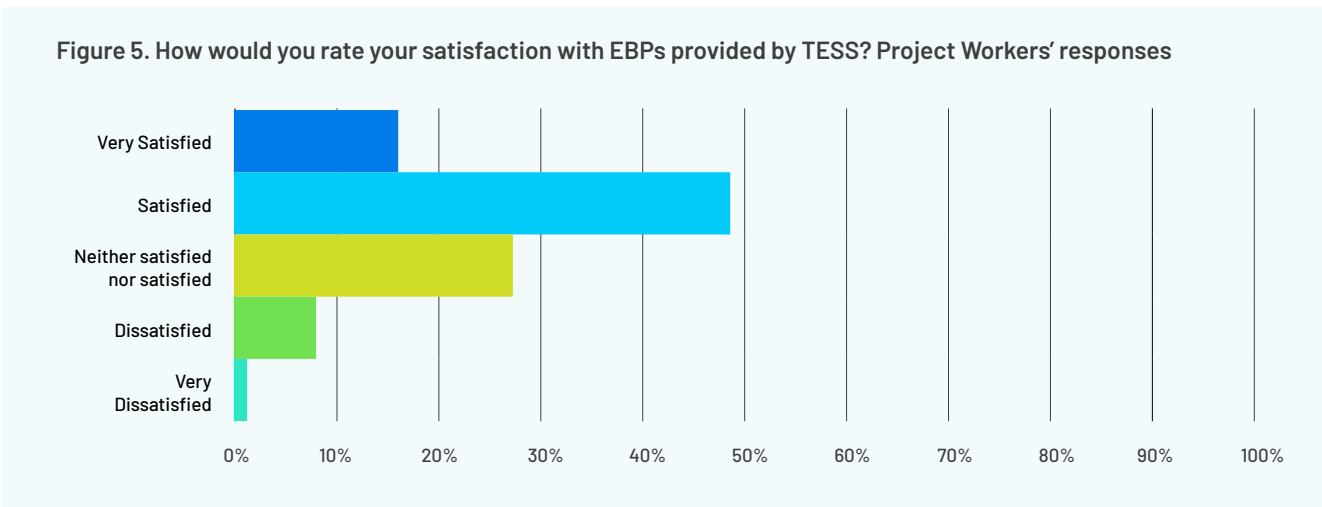
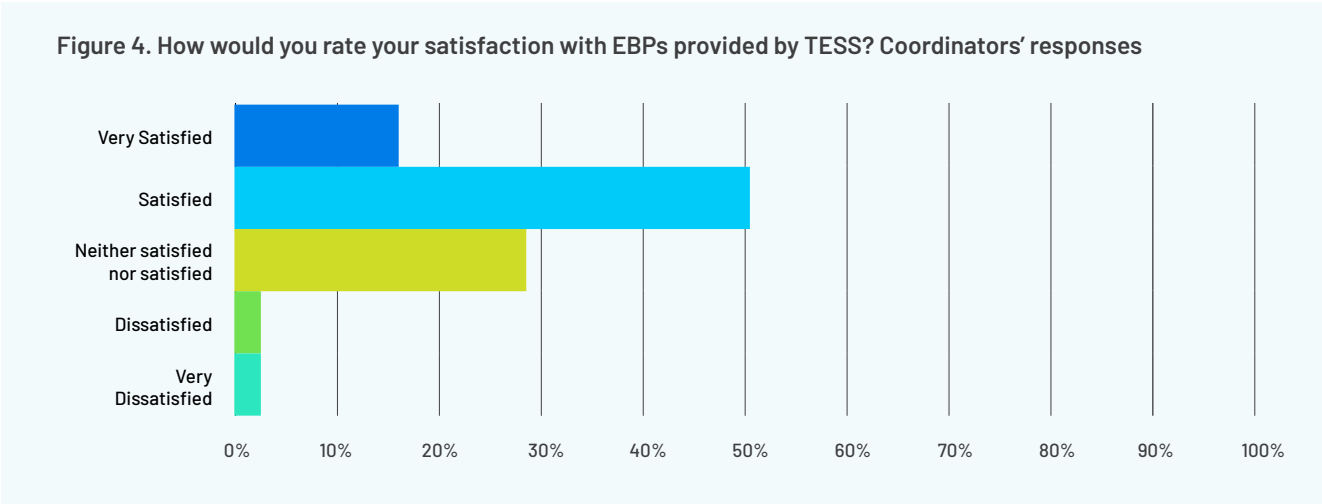




3.3.3 Satisfaction with EBPs included in CPD Programme

Overall, a majority of SCP coordinators (>65%) and Project Workers (65%) were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the 11 EBPs included in TESS SCP CPD Programme.

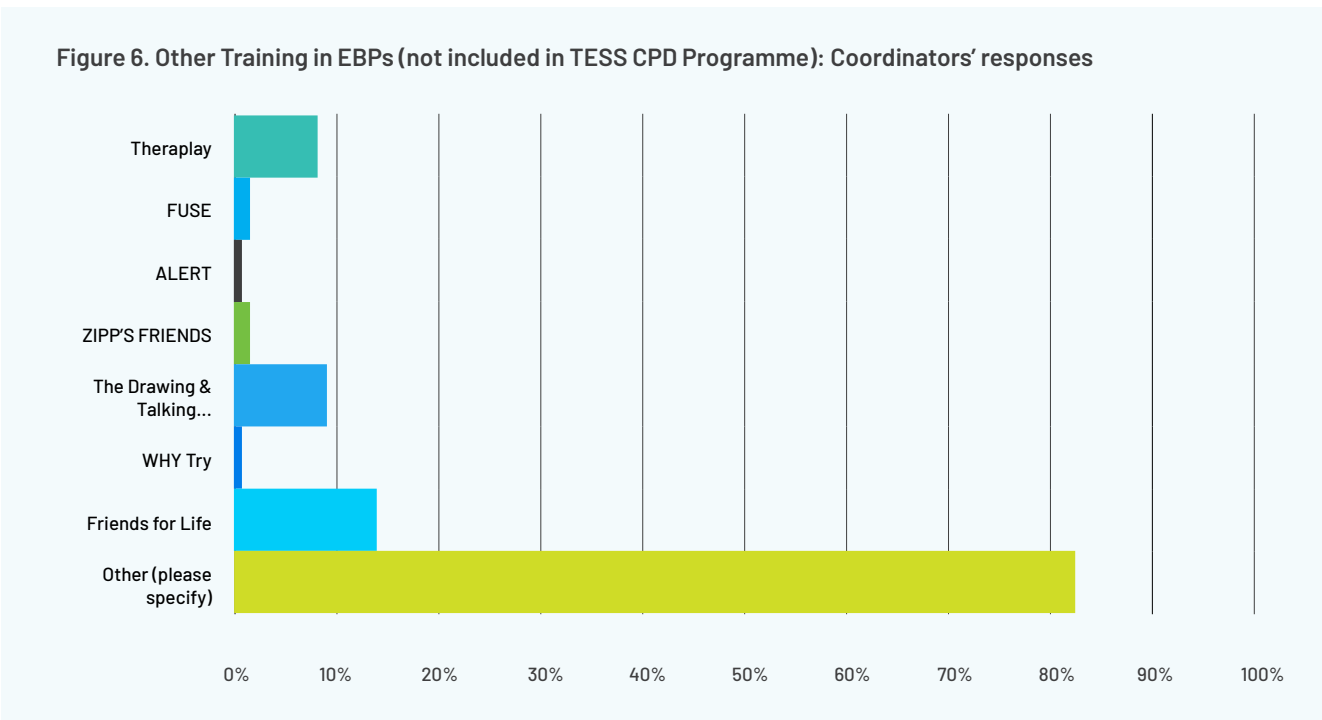
However, over 30% of coordinators who responded to the survey did not state this satisfaction. Similarly, every tenth of Project Workers (9%) stated that they were either 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with the EBPs included in the CPD Programme. This is illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.

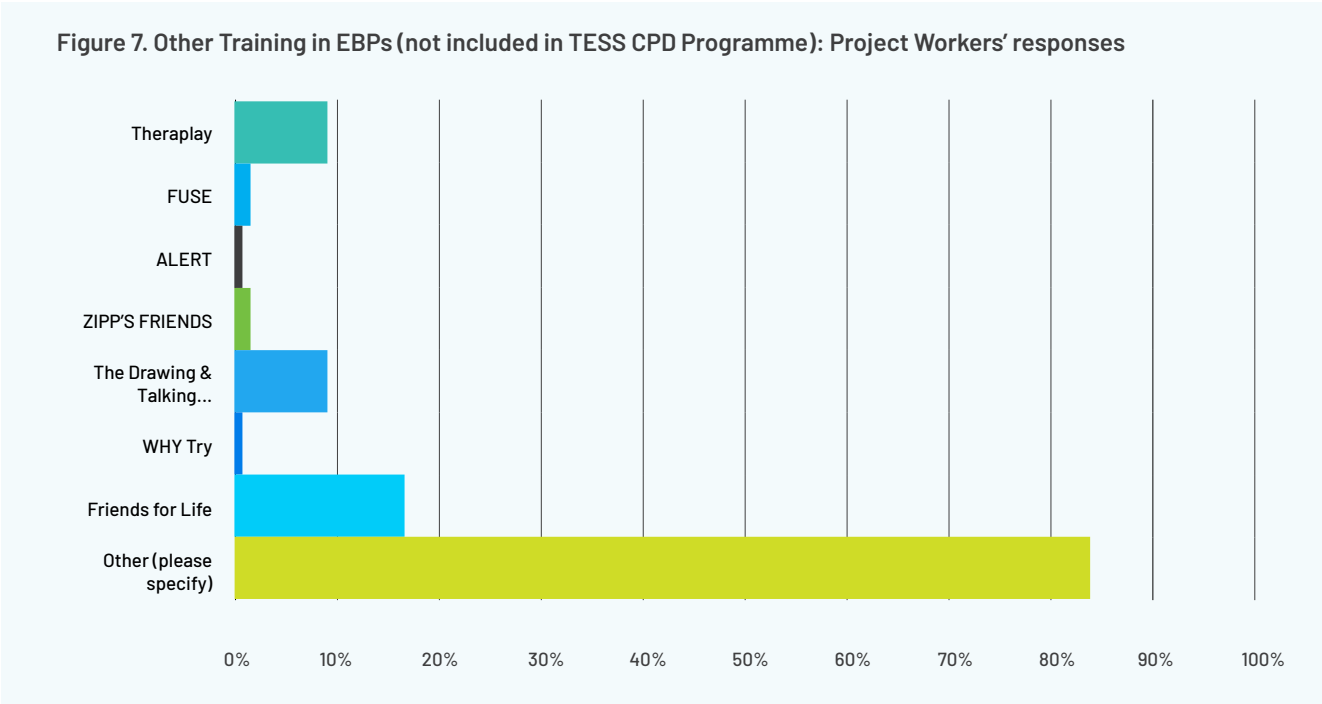


It is possible that this response reflects the complexity of the needs of some targeted students and the fact that EBPs, especially broader group based EBPs, while supporting student outcomes at a prevention and early intervention level, may not meet the needs of students with chronic needs, for example students who are out of school. This is discussed further in section 3.5 as well as in Chapter 4.

Like other professionals in the wider child and family sector, and not unlike teachers, SCP staff access a range of other local training, outside that provided by TESS. To support the analysis of responses from over 200 staff to the question related to 'other training', a list of EBPs known to the ancillary researcher who worked as an SCP Coordinator was provided, and SCP staff were asked to select those they attended. Survey respondents were given an option to add additional EBPs that were not listed. Figures 6 and 7 below and on page 34 show the responses to this question.

3.3.4 Training in other EBPs not listed in CPD Programme





It appears that close to half of SCP Coordinators are trained in the Friends for Life programme⁵. In the category 'other'

training in EBPs, survey respondents included a wide range of programmes and practices, as detailed in table 3 below and continued on page 35.

Table 3. Range of EBPs and EIPs cited by the participants as utilised in SCP practice.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Seasons for Growth/Rainbows - Seasons for Growth programme has been added to the Elective CPD list in 2023/2024.Real UCheck and Connect - training is provided by the NCSE to school staff. While SCP staff can attend this training at a local (school) level, the NCSE will not provide it directly to SCP nationally.Strengthening Families ProgrammeDoodle DenSquashy Couch Sexual Health ProgrammeCopping OnIgnitePutting the Pieces Together (training offered by Drugs and Alcohol Task Force)Trauma Informed Practice - TESS provide introductory webinars to Trauma Informed Practice.Nurture ProgrammeSafe Talk - this training has been added to the Elective CPD list in 2023/2024.Understanding Self-HarmConflict ManagementCreative MindfulnessASSIST - training has been added to the Elective CPD list in 2023/2024.Theraplay - currently reviewed by TESS for inclusion in the Elective CPD List.	

⁵ Training in Friends for Life programme is provided by NEPS in Ireland. As advised by SCP CPD Manager, NEPS currently have no capacity to deliver this training to SCP staff.

Table 3. Range of EBPs and EIPs cited by the participants as utilised in SCP practice.

- Alert - training provided by NCSE, not available to SCP staff
- Zippy's Friends - training provided by HSE, not available to SCP staff
- Why Try - training provided by NCSE, not available to SCP staff
- Drawing and Talking
- Fuse
- Thrive Approach

In addition to EBPs and EIPs listed in table 3, some respondents also cited activity based programmes such as Healthy Food Made Easy (training offered by HSE) or 6 Bricks Lego Programme. Overall, the cited list includes varied programmes and practices, with varied published effectiveness, and varied support for implementation. It thus appears that while SCP staff have good access to evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices, some SCP staff may misunderstand the concept of EBP and 'equate' it with simply a broad 'programme' work.

Similarly, in another survey question, when asked what other EBPs were delivered *without training*, respondents included a wide range of both EBPs and other 'programmes' (despite the questions asking about EBPs) including Check and Connect, Zones of Regulations, Heads Up, Talkabout, Cool Kids, and Transition Programmes, but also a range of other practices in broad areas of 'controlling anger' 'bullying', 'wellbeing', and 'social skills'. These included, for example, techniques such as Stop Think Do or Time to Talk and 'programmes' referred to as Feelings and Friendship, Bullying Workshops, Cookery Clubs, Pyramid of Success, as well as Yoga and Mindfulness. The responses to this question show varied understanding of what EBP is and what it is not among SCP staff. They also evidence a wealth of resources and 'manuals' utilised in SCP practice.

A few survey respondents mentioned bereavement programmes, and especially Seasons for Growth, as a programme that they delivered without training. This is especially concerning. Most SCP projects included Trauma Informed Practices as 'other' training that they attended. Elsewhere, this training was recommended by a few staff as one that should be made available to all SCP staff (TESS does provide a webinar on Trauma Informed Practice).

'I know we are not therapists but we need to be informed so we are not re traumatising kids' (Project Worker, focus group)

3.3.5 Sustainability of EBPs

About a quarter of SCP projects discontinued the delivery of the EBPs they previously implemented. ‘Discontinued’ was defined as not delivering in the past 2 years but having previously delivered. As it can be seen in Tables 4 and 5 below, the programmes most often discontinued included: Roots of Empathy, Working Things Out (WTO), and Mentoring for Achievement (MAP) Programme. It appears that about a quarter of staff – both Coordinators and Project Workers – who trained in Roots of Empathy, WTO and MAP discontinued the implementation of these interventions. This is an interesting finding considering that implementation support in all three EBPs is provided by programme developers.

Table 4. Which of the following did your SCP project discontinue? (Coordinators’ responses)	
Roots of Empathy	26.47%
LifeSkills	5.88%
The Decider Skills	0.00%
DESTY	5.88%
Incredible Years Classroom Dina	17.65%
MindOut	11.76%
Working Things Out	26.47%
Mentoring for Achievement	26.47%
Coping Power	17.65%
Non-Violent Resistance Training (NVR)	14.71%
Motivational Interviewing	5.88%

Table 5. Which of the following did you discontinue in your practice? Project Workers’ responses	
Roots of Empathy	36.05%
LifeSkills	19.77%
The Decider Skills	11.63%
DESTY	20.93%
Incredible Years Classroom Dina	17.44%
MindOut	17.44%
Working Things Out	29.07%
Mentoring for Achievement	27.91%
Coping Power	15.12%
Non-Violent Resistance Training (NVR)	17.44%
Motivational Interviewing	26.74%

The cited reasons for discontinuation most frequently included ‘time constraints’ and related ‘very time consuming’, ‘schools didn’t want to commit to the time required’ or ‘heavy paperwork’ themes (these will be discussed below under implementation barriers). In this context, it is worth examining the characteristics of the four EBPs that appear to be most sustained by most projects, namely the Decider Skills, DESTY, LifeSkills and Motivational Interviewing (MI), though it is important to be cautious in this interpretation. Both MI and Decider Skills are very flexible in delivery, and both are delivered mainly in 1:1 context (though, WTO programme is also flexible in delivery). Similarly, DESTY

is delivered in 1:1 context. On the other hand, LifeSkills receives significant implementation support, however, unlike the Roots of Empathy, WTO and MAP programmes, the programme implementation support is provided by internal SCP staff (who are seconded to the role of technical assistance). Participant responses emphasised the resources that come with this programme being a significant implementation support: ‘I’ve found that LifeSkills, for example, has been a great programme to implement, as the training provides you with brilliant, ready to use resources (powerpoints, manual with detailed lesson plans, etc.). When the programme is easy to run and implement, it is very useful to me, because of time constraints’ (Project Worker, survey). ‘The materials are very well put together, require very little supplementation and it is simple for the facilitator to deliver’ (Project Worker, survey). The data shows, however, that LifeSkills and MI have the same level of discontinuation for Coordinators, and broadly similar level of discontinuation for PWs despite very different levels of implementation support – unfortunately, from the data of this research it is not possible to provide conclusions about this. It is possible that to some extent this reflects ‘staffing’ challenges in projects. Indeed, Coordinators cited ‘staffing’ as a reason for discontinuation of previously delivered EBPs. They commented that, for example, trained staff left the project, or that there was a lack of second staff trained required for facilitation of the programme. Staffing challenges and other barriers to implementation are discussed in more depth in section 3.4 below. Three SCP coordinators mentioned that there was another staff member in the school delivering the programme (e.g., Behaviour for Learning teacher delivering Working Things Out and Mind Out, HSCL delivering NVR).

3.3.6 Fidelity of EBP Delivery

Qualitative data from participants indicates that many EBPs are not consistently delivered with their intended fidelity. This includes the EBPs that were included in the CPD Elective Programme: ‘We are delivering a modified version of the programme. It was not successful for us’ (Coordinator, survey) ‘Still use elements of the programme’ (Project Worker, survey) ‘Use a variation of the programme’ (Project Worker, survey) In terms of the factors that lead to EBPs being delivered without the intended fidelity, participants frequently mentioned time as being a constraining force: ‘Time is the main barrier. With so many referrals, trying to run a number of programmes can be hard, and time doesn’t always allow for it. Especially in terms of fidelity, it can be nice to pick and choose bits from certain programmes that don’t require such a set structure and way in which they are carried out’ (Project Worker, survey). ‘I often don’t have the time to have the session finished [...] it’s back to the resources and the time I just don’t have the time I wish I had more time to be more meaningful in my work’ (Coordinator, focus group) Several interviewees also noted the desire to take an “eclectic approach” or to adopt an “integrated practice”, wherein information from different programmes is used when delivering EBPs, therefore affecting fidelity. ‘I like the idea of an integrated practice we draw from different programmes’ (Coordinator, focus group, emphasis added) ‘On occasion we have tailored or designed programmes to suit our priority group based on existing evidence-based programmes. This bespoke modelling is underpinned by other training in the area of Trauma Informed Practice and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training’.

Staff adapt EBPs to respond to students' needs, as illustrated in the quote below:

'I am trying to meet the needs [...] I take a bit from this programme and a bit from that programme and make it work [...]' (Coordinator, focus group)

'Staff using parts of programmes when working in one-to-one situations/using the training as an approach rather than facilitating a programme.' (Coordinator, survey).

When asked about training in and implementation of other EBPs not included in CPD Elective Programme, some respondents noted delivering programmes without training:

'Not trained in Why Try however use their resources and worksheets'

Overall, while adaptation is often necessary in any EBP implementation, it does appear that some SCP staff may be compromising the fidelity of some EBPs by delivering them without the intended structure and/or without necessary training, thus potentially impacting the achievement of its intended outcomes. The extent of programme adaptation in SCP practice is discussed below.

3.3.7 Adaptation of EBPs

Consistent with a culture of tailoring support to the needs of students in SCP, many EBPs are adapted as they are seen as not meeting these needs. For example, one survey respondent commented *'often elements of some of the programmes are not relevant to our target children/young people'* (emphasis underlined). This practice of local programme adaptation may need support. For example, one Project Worker emphasised the need for adaptation of the LifeSkills programme:

'I feel that LifeSkills' materials are outdated, there is a strong focus on smoking, particularly at level 3, which holds little relevance for the students. I also found that some of the activities at level 2/3 did not match the age and maturity of the students, the children often said that they found it too "babyish"' (Project Worker, survey)

Other participants discussed how they take EBPs that are intended for group delivery and adapt them to one-on-one settings. This shows that staff may lack training in EBPs that can be used in 1:1 settings, but also that they may benefit from training and supported reflection on the concepts of fidelity and adaptation. It would be critical for SCP practice going forward to receive support in finding the balance between programme fidelity and adaptation, and to indeed consider the concept of fidelity in SCP context. When directly asked what could be done differently going forward, one SCP coordinator said:

'I would evaluate the basis for the adaptation of each programme. I would ask if adhering strictly to evidence-based programmes are the best way forward. I would ask if we understand the real barriers facing the young people, when we look to implement a programme' (Coordinator, survey)

It is important to remember that one of the key stated principles of SCP is support tailored to the needs of the students (Smyth et al., 2015; Murphy, 2021), thus SCP staff routinely make professional judgment on the 'suitability' of EBPs to the students' needs.

'Sometimes you have to stop the programme [...] they don't meet everyone's needs you have to have plan B and sometimes plan C' (Project Worker, focus group)

The importance of responding to individual needs of target students was a common theme in the research. In general, there appears to be a consensus that SCP practice needs to be tailored to the needs of the target students. Participants spoke about this in positive terms, saying that they can tailor EBPs to individual student needs in a way that is beneficial for student outcomes:

'Most programmes are adapted to suit the needs of the young people and the facilities available in the school' (Project Worker, survey)

Even those who found the EBPs to be "restrictive" still commented that they are able to adapt them to meet student needs: *'Needs of our young people can be so varied that EB programmes need to be adapted to suit individuals as they can be quite restrictive'* (Coordinator, survey)

Overall, as one Coordinator put it: *'[Programmes can't have] too many requirements. Adaptable Programmes fit the SCP model better'.*

However, several participants noted the difficulty of adapting EBPs for one-on-one student support:

'Not enough choice [in the current EBPs included in CPD Programme] for individual one to one work with young people that fit the needs and requirements of the young people and the school' (Project Worker, focus group)

The process of responding to the students' needs may also include discontinuing certain EBPs if they are deemed irrelevant to the students' needs. Participants were positive that effective implementation, particularly where the programmes are adapted to meet students' needs, can help to support the national outcomes of attendance, participation and retention. In light of this finding, the current implementation support model which appears to be mainly focused on supporting programme fidelity may need reconsideration.

3.3.8 Development of 'programmes'

Many participants discussed a process by which they identify the needs of their student population, and develop programmes in order to effectively meet those needs:

'We have designed lots of programmes to address the various needs of children and young people presenting to us. These programmes were put together based on staff skills set and their own background education & training. Programmes: Be Kind to Your Mind Mindful Mondays Wellness Wednesday Self Esteem Team Cheerios Storytellers'

LOLs & Marvels Munch Bunch Wind down weekdays Study Buddies Making the Move/ Mind the Gap - transfer programme Feel Good Vibes Organisational Skills/Mind Maps' (Coordinator, survey)

'Children and young people's needs are complex which means they are not always met by evidence-based programmes. In this case, our cluster finds custom made approaches to supporting children/young people works best.' (Coordinator, survey)

'Needs of individual students may be greater as staff resources are prioritised with out of school students and others struggling with attendance. These needs are specific and are not met in broader programmes.' (Coordinator, survey)

Furthermore, some respondents emphasised that EBPs require a certain level of 'readiness' from a young person, and that their practices are bespoke in this context.

'We deliver a substantial amount of individual (one to one work) as many of the target students need this level of support before being ready to participate in an evidence-based group programme' (Coordinator, survey, emphasis underlined)

'Students often are dealing with issues that need to be addressed before any programme can be dealt with and this can sometimes delay the delivery of a programme or run it off schedule' (Project Worker, survey, emphasis underlined)

3.4 Implementation Enablers and Barriers

This section presents findings related to the fourth overarching theme, *Implementation Enablers and Barriers*. This section is divided into different subheadings, each representing a construct that was identified to either enable or challenge EBP implementation in SCP practice, as follows:

- 3.4.1 Capacity: time, cost and staffing
- 3.4.2 The degree of EBP adaptability & available resources

- 3.4.3 ‘Fit’ of EBP with students’ needs
- 3.4.4 Supportive school culture: buy-in from schools
- 3.4.5 Relationship with the young person
- 3.2.6 Collaboration with colleagues

As is the case throughout this chapter, findings from participants are presented without significant interpretation or discussion. This more detailed analysis takes place in the following chapter (section 4.4). Table 6 below presents an overview of

the enablers and barriers identified by the participants to influence the implementation of EBPs in everyday SCP practice in schools. The identified enablers and barriers are mapped onto corresponding domains of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR)(Damschroder et al., 2022) which is a commonly used determinant framework for assessing contextual factors affecting implementation. They are then discussed in the following sections.

***all cited dimensions can act as either

Table 6. Barriers and enablers identified by the participants to influence the implementation of EBPs within the broader domains of Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR).	
CFIR Domains	Barriers and enablers cited by respondents***
Innovation (‘the thing being implemented’)	Flexibility Adaptability Available resources Structure and format of EBP Cost of training and resources Innovation ‘relative advantage’: ‘Fit’ of EBP with students’ needs
Inner Context (‘the setting in which the innovation is being implemented’)	Capacity in the project: Time and staffing Available budget in the project Collaboration with and support from colleagues (at project level)
Outer Context (‘the setting in which the inner setting exists’)	Supportive school culture Buy-in from schools Physical space in schools Collaboration with and support from colleagues (at national level and with school staff)
Individuals (‘the roles and characteristics of individuals’)	Relationship with the young person ‘Fit’ of EBP with students’ needs
Implementation Processes (‘the activities and strategies used to implement the innovation’)	‘Teaming’ (collaboration with and support from colleagues)

barriers or enablers (for example, availability of resources or staffing is an implementation enabler, while unavailability of resources or staffing is an implementation barrier).

3.4.1 Capacity: time, cost and staffing

Most SCP projects listed capacity, referred to in relation to time, resources and staffing, as having a strong influence on the EBP and EIP implementation:

[Key] consideration is capacity within the project for funding/staffing/timetabling’ (Coordinator, survey)

Capacity differs significantly among SCP projects as some projects are ‘large, with

many schools’ and others ‘only have a full time Coordinator and no project workers.’ ‘Staff, resourcing and time’ including ‘planning time’ were mentioned directly by 54% Coordinators and 30% Project Workers in their responses to what supports implementation.

‘That the programme is manageable to run and there is sufficient capacity (funding/ staffing/time) within the project to run it’ (Coordinator, survey).

A sample of quotes evidencing capacity challenges in terms of available time, financial resources and staffing are detailed below in table 7.

Table 7. Participant responses on the capacity challenges influencing implementation.	
Time	<p>‘Time- to deliver the programme, plan for delivery, reflect on delivery, support for others re: difficulties in delivery’ (Coordinator, survey)</p> <p>‘Taking time off to attend training’ (Coordinator, survey)</p> <p>Time Management, taking into consideration preparation time, delivery time along with meeting the needs of the target group and the requests of the school from SCP’ (Project Worker, survey)</p> <p>‘Certain Evidenced Based Programmes are too time consuming to deliver’ (Project Worker, survey)</p> <p>‘Programme is too long given current workload’ (Coordinator, survey)</p> <p>‘I’d like to see more shorter programmes and shorter training [...] and [programmes] easier in terms of training and easier in terms of delivery and time preparation’ (Coordinator, focus group)</p>

Cost	<p><i>‘Cost of the programmes lead to their effective unavailability to our Project’</i> (Project Worker, survey)</p> <p><i>‘Would love to have delivered it but training very expensive’</i> (Coordinator, survey)</p> <p><i>‘The cost is a huge thing you can end up partially doing programmes’</i> (Coordinator, focus group)</p> <p><i>‘The cost of the resources accompanying the programme, do I need a workbook for each student, do I need to buy a puppet etc.’</i> (Coordinator, survey)</p> <p><i>[If TESS] ‘fund training so the budget of programme implementation is not impacted’</i> (Coordinator, focus group)</p>
Staffing	<p><i>‘No longer delivering this [programme] as the project worker trained has left’</i></p> <p><i>‘Availability of staff for training [is a challenge]’</i></p>

3.4.1.1 Time

When asked about specific barriers to implementation of EBPs, more than half of Coordinators (52%) and Project Workers (51%) listed time as a key challenge. Related challenges of ‘excess paperwork’ or the length of specific programmes were cited as barriers in implementation. Some participants also noted that some EBP training requires significant time commitment. It also appears that some staff may not value the importance of planning and evaluation in service delivery. As one SCP coordinator commented ‘Often these programmes take a lot of additional time to prepare prior to delivering and there is often a significant work after sessions to follow up on after sessions’. The participants’ responses evidencing these findings can be seen in table 5.

3.4.1.2 Cost

Despite the fact that some training included in the CPD Booklet is delivered at no cost or at low cost, cost of both training and

programme resources was mentioned as a key implementation barrier. This was especially relevant for two programmes that require repeated annual investment. This refers to staff having to purchase resources or renew membership for continued programme implementation. Cost associated with individual programmes is an important consideration for staff. The importance of financial support from TESS to fully fund training was proposed by the respondents. The participants’ responses evidencing these findings can be seen in table 5.

3.4.1.3 Staffing

Staffing was listed as a key challenge by 58% of SCP coordinators who responded to the survey. The availability of staff, especially Project Workers, as well as staff turnover were mentioned among key challenges. For example, skilled and trained staff leaving SCP projects was cited as a key barrier to sustain EBPs. This was mentioned by survey

respondents especially in relation to Working Things Out, Incredible Years Programme and LifeSkills Programmes. Overall, staffing shortages were listed among implementation barriers by many survey respondents. Considering challenges with staffing, one SCP coordinator added that there is a ‘requirement for more than one staff member to be trained all the time’ to potentially minimise the challenges of staff rotation in SCP projects. Some responses appeared to suggest that some SCP staff have ‘no time’ to attend training as they are ‘too busy’ delivering the SCP service.

3.4.2 The degree of EBP adaptability & available resources

The EBP general ‘usability’ and its adaptability was cited as one of key factors influencing implementation, especially the initial adoption of EBPs. When asked what supports implementation in their own local context, many staff commented on the characteristics of individual EBPs, and these responses are shown in table 8 below.

Table 8. Participant responses on the characteristics of EBP influencing implementation.
<p><i>‘Flexibility with format and length of programme’</i> (Coordinator, survey)</p> <p><i>‘Flexibility of the programme this allows the programme to be tailored to the needs of the students’</i> (Project Worker, survey)</p> <p><i>‘Motivational Interviewing this is great cause it’s <u>flexible</u> gives more skills to the one good adult’</i> (Coordinator, focus group, emphasis underlined)</p> <p><i>‘What kind of resources are with the programme; can you download printable worksheets [...] Is there a website with relevant updated information’</i></p> <p><i>‘Enough resources to make it engaging and interesting for the children’</i> (Project Worker, survey)</p> <p><i>‘Length of time for delivery has been a huge barrier for longer programmes’</i> (Coordinator, survey)</p>

As SCP is a ‘busy service’ it seems that a good ‘fit’ means ‘if the programme is relevant and user friendly. Does not require much preparation or recording’ (Coordinator, survey). Other respondents named it ‘ease

of use’ (Coordinator, survey) or ‘simplicity’ (Project Worker, survey). The degree of programme flexibility and its overall complexity are important factors in EBP implementation in SCP practice.

3.4.3 ‘Fit’ of EBP with students’ needs

The ‘disconnection’ between some EBPs and the target students was mentioned by a few survey respondents. A sample of these responses is shown in table 9 below.

Table 9. Participant responses on the ‘fit’ of EBP with students’ needs influencing implementation.

- ‘Some programmes the context is not familiar among our groups, they are not relatable’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘They may not be relevant to the target group or workable with them’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘Too long Too many sessions in the programme. Boring not designed with a good understanding of at -risk teenagers as the main participants’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘It can be difficult delivering some evidence-based programmes, that seem to be developed for a broad cohort, to a target group. These programmes can require adaptation for delivery which can raise the question of whether the focus is to be on fidelity to the programme or the impact upon target groups’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘The relevance of the programme to the needs of the target group so the students can relate’ (Project Workers, survey).
- ‘The relevance of the programmes to children and young people’s needs and their capacity to be able to participate in the programme’ (Coordinator, survey)

Although many SCP projects are currently engaged in delivering universal whole class programmes (LifeSkills and Roots of Empathy), the balance between targeted or universal provision appears to be an important consideration in the decision on whether to adopt a programme. One SCP coordinator referred to as ‘the biggest question often is whether the programme is deliverable to the target group only vs universal whole class approach.’

3.4.4 Supportive school culture: Buy-in from schools

When asked about what supports implementation in a local context, many Coordinators and Project Workers commented on supportive school culture and relationships with schools and school staff. When directly asked about what supports implementation in their local context, school culture and relationships with the school and school personnel were mentioned by 56%

Coordinators and 44% of Project Workers. This is a very significant proportion of SCP staff who recognise the importance of the school context in their SCP practice. A sample of these responses is shown in table 10 below

It is thus clear that buy-in from schools and school culture in general could act as either a barrier or enabler for implementation. In the words of one Coordinator ‘school structures need to be able to support the practices. In some schools this is easily done. In other schools, timetable demands & physical space prevent some EBP happening.’ For example, in relation to the MAP programme, some SCP staff commented that weekly meetings with teachers were difficult to implement (‘was proving difficult to get school staff to commit to weekly meetings’ – Coordinator, survey).

Table 10. Participant responses on supportive school culture influencing EBP implementation.

- ‘Good relationships with school personnel’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘Local context with key relationships’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘Good communication with the school, positive view/relationship of SCP, good relationship with the HSCL to build connections with the parents to then get their kids involved in SCP’ (Project Worker, survey)
- ‘We have very good relations with our schools and their staff so taking groups or individuals for targeted evidence-based work is not a problem’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘Open and like-minded school culture where values align with that of SCP’
- ‘Some schools are reluctant to allow new programmes to be delivered, it takes time to convince schools and coordinators/management of the benefit of the programmes and to secure funding for the necessary resources to carry out the programmes’ (Project Worker, survey)
- ‘Support from the school management; the evidence we can provide to schools to demonstrate its effectiveness’
- ‘A commitment and buy-in from the school [and their] genuine interest in what programme is being delivered’ (Coordinator, survey)
- ‘School culture and dynamics play huge part in ability to deliver universal programmes in schools’.

The availability of suitable space in schools for programme delivery, for example *‘due to an increase in population sizes in schools’* was also cited as one of the barriers. School timetables in general were listed as a barrier (*‘logistics of timetables for SCP and schools’*). Schools are busy environments and some staff commented that *‘school activities [may be] running at the designated [programme] time’* which hinders implementation.

‘Practical housekeeping things can have a real impact on how you deliver the programme’ (Project Worker, focus group)

In terms of physical space in schools to implement the programmes, as many as 16% of Project Workers listed this as a barrier in implementation, this is a very significant number of staff who are dealing with logistical challenges of implementing EBP in schools. Project Workers mentioned both *‘schools not having space’* and *‘not having a room in the school’* in this context.

In the context of school buy-in, staff mentioned the importance of raising *‘awareness’* of what SCP does in schools:

‘We should raise awareness of the programmes [...] getting the schools to buy-in [...] marketing the value of the programmes [...] look at the LifeSkills and the report how sleek it is’ (Project Worker, focus group)

‘There needs to be a better understanding of SCP in schools’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘None of the teachers know what SCP is [...] there should be more information to the teachers and schools what we do - they don’t know how these children were selected what the referral process is and you have been coming to their door to take the kids out’ (Project Worker, focus group)

‘Main gaps for me are the education about SCP not everybody is aware of what it is [...] it’s a difficult thing to explain for students for parents and for teachers’ (Project Worker, focus group)

The role of schools in decision making about the EBPs delivered by SCP staff was highlighted by some participants. For example, a few survey respondents commented on schools making decisions to deliver certain programmes or to deliver them in a certain format, some of these decisions were not welcome by SCP staff:

‘Schools seem to be set on having the programme [...] say things like ‘oh, that’s good, lets do that’ It means SCP staff begin delivering a programme that may not meet the needs of the student(s) and drop off is inevitable. Many of the evidence-based programmes we deliver are delivered up to now to the whole class so impact is less effective, e.g. WTO to a class of 33!’ (Project Worker, survey).

The WTO Programme is not designed for a whole class delivery. This is an example of poor fidelity when the programme is not delivered as intended.

The findings also suggest that other elements of a local school context, namely the availability of other professionals within the school (for example, Behaviour Support Teachers) and other EBPs already delivered in the schools, influence the adoption of EBPs in SCP projects:

‘There are a lot of different SPHE books and programmes and sometimes schools feel that there may be duplication’ (Coordinator, survey)

3.4.5 Relationship with the young person

Relationship was the most prominent theme throughout the research. For example, when asked for recommendations on what could be done differently in CPD going forward, one Project Worker commented: *‘To acknowledge that SCP is at its most effective [...] as a relationship-based intervention’*. Elsewhere, staff commented:

‘The relationship between SCP staff and the child/young person is hugely important in terms of supporting children/young people’s participation in evidence-based programmes.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘You have to have good relationships with children and young people you cannot go straight into a programme with them’ (Coordinator, focus group)

Good relationship is a critical prerequisite to a *‘Buy-in and engagement from the young people doing the programme’* which is key in implementation.

The need for a balance between structured and unstructured engagements with children and young people was mentioned by many survey respondents, and the need to preserve this balance may be an important consideration in ensuring that EBP implementation is effective:

‘The evidence-based programmes are beneficial but I think there is still room for fun activities to enhance relationship building’.

‘At times, I do feel that young people have no interest in programmes and would rather have a person to sit and talk to about how they are feeling in that moment and need guidance and support at helping them find their way’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘With not doing sports or other small groups it’s a different dynamic with the children’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Some of the older students do not want a programme’ (Coordinator, focus group)

Overall, 1:1 individualised support was named by many participants as key in SCP practice, and many Coordinators and Project Workers emphasised that a *‘meaningful connection’* with a young person is a key enabler of the effectiveness of EBPs:

‘1-1 tailored support [...] is the most valuable and in demand and useful intervention I have seen provided in my 7 years at SCP. Group work and evidence -based programmes can be a good way to transition out of intense 1-1 support when the young person becomes regulated enough to fully participate in group work. Before emotional needs are met, before a connection and relationship is built, evidence-based programmes are limited and facilitators are likely going through the content and ticking boxes but the young people may not be engaged in the content at all’ (Project Worker, survey)

3.4.6 Collaboration with colleagues

One Coordinator named *‘Collaboration of SCP staff members’* as a *‘significant’* support for implementation. Many respondents also valued Communities of Practice (CoPs) (for example, LifeSkills Programme CoPs; see section 3.6 below).

The findings of this research also suggest that many SCP staff appear to be *‘designing’* their own programmes and interventions. While these are likely developed to address uniquely individualised needs of young people, there does appear to be limited national support for collaboration among SCP staff members in both *‘working together to develop resources’* and in *‘delivering programmes together’* (i.e., encouraging staff to co-deliver programmes, akin to team teaching in schools). A sample of responses evidencing the need for greater collaboration in SCP is shown in table 11 on page 48.

Table 11. Participant responses on the need for greater collaboration in SCP.

- ‘There needs to be more support for more structured collaboration’ (Coordinator, focus group)*
- ‘Every project is trying to solve their own programmes’ (Project Worker, focus group)*
- ‘Would love to see a Transfer Programme developed at a national level that supports students movement from primary to secondary developed from evidence opposed to each project developing transfer programme’ (Project Worker, survey)*
- ‘Support circles with other staff delivering the same programme programmes [are needed]’ (Coordinator, focus group)*
- ‘The collegiality is missing’ (Project Worker, focus group)*

A few Project Workers mentioned the isolated nature of SCP work and two commented on a lack of support from SCP Coordinator:

‘Lack of support from the Coordinator. You are on your own, apart from the school support. Isolation. would be a good description in my case’ (Project Worker, survey)

However, a majority of Project Workers listed *‘My coordinator and other project workers in my project’* or *‘Coordinator and team are really supportive’* among implementation enablers.

Some Coordinators also stated a feeling of ‘isolation’. For example:

‘We need more support as coordinators it can be very isolating’ (Coordinator, focus group)

Elsewhere, staff commented on the importance of sharing experiences of local implementation barriers and enablers especially in relation to implementation in schools⁶:

‘It is important to hear from SCP delivering programme about the actual logistics on the ground’ (Coordinator, survey)

When asked about supports for implementation of EBPs (outside of own SCP), a few Project Workers still cited *‘coordinator support’* *‘school support’* and *‘supervision’* (despite the question specifying ‘outside of your local SCP’) – this further evidences the importance of such local support from local

SCP team and from local schools in which SCP staff work. A few Project Workers also cited *‘support from other project workers’*.

The current CPD Programme is focused on the provision of training for individuals and does not include team and collaborative structures (i.e., professional learning networks, project team based training). Collaborative work is an important consideration in SCP and one that may need greater consideration going forward.

3.5 Identified Gaps in Professional Support and Implementation Support

This section presents findings related to the fifth identified theme, *Implementation Support*. The section will outline the perspectives of SCP staff on the current format and content of professional development and support, and outline gaps and areas for its development identified by the participants. This section is divided into subheadings as follows:

- 3.5.1 Fragmentation in current implementation support
- 3.5.2 The need for “more” implementation support
 - 3.5.2.1 Professional Learning Networks
- 3.5.3 Need for a differentiated model of CPD that responds to diversity of SCP staff

- 3.5.4 Need to Increase Access to Training (and Proposed Solutions)e
- 3.5.5 Need to develop supports for continued review of CPD programme
- 3.5.6 EBPs not meeting the needs of
 - students with complex needs
 - 3.5.6.1 Students ‘out of school’
 - 3.5.6.2 Students with mental health needs
- 3.5.7 More training for ‘skills’ for working 1:1 is needed
- 3.5.8 More focus on interventions in postprimary school are needed
- 3.5.9 More inclusive and creative Interventions

As is the case throughout this chapter, findings from participants are presented

without significant interpretation or discussion. This more detailed analysis takes place in the following chapter (section 4.3).

3.5.1 Fragmentation in current implementation support

Support for the implementation of EBPs appears inconsistent in SCP projects. Some programmes receive support such as mentor support or community of practice (LifeSkills, Working Things Out, Roots of Empathy), other programmes receive no implementation support (for example, Incredible Years Programme, Decider Skills, Motivational Interviewing). There were inconsistent responses in relation to access to support for some other programmes, for example, Mentoring for Achievement programme. This is illustrated in table 12 below.

Table 12. Participant responses on implementation support for EBPs in the CPD Elective Programme.

Roots of Empathy	Mentor support, Community of Practice/‘online cafes’, booster training
LifeSkills Programme	Mentor support and Community of Practice
DESTY	Mentor support, mid-implementation online meetings, ‘yearly webinar’
Working Things Out	Mentor support, ‘supervision sessions’, ‘regular group support calls’
Incredible Years Programme	No support for implementation
The Decider Skills	No support for implementation
Coping Power	No support for implementation
Mind Out	Only one SCP coordinator listed mentor support for this programme.

⁶ This has been recognised also by TESS. In 2022/3, six webinars were held for SCP to introduce them to programmes and to support them to decide if a programme was a ‘good’ fit. Some of these included input from SCP projects delivering on the programme. These are available on the SCP Portal

Mentoring for Achievement Programme	There were mixed responses about the perceived support received for the implementation of this programme. Some survey respondents listed mentor support, CoPs, while others commented ‘no support beyond initial training’ and ‘very little support’.
Non-Violent Resistance Training (NVR)	Similarly, there were mixed responses about the perceived support received for the implementation of this programme. One coordinator identified ‘no support beyond [training]’ while another listed ‘network support’ (it is possible that this support is provided through a local agency network).

It was also clear that some SCP staff receive support from other organisations and/or professional bodies they may be affiliated with; such support may also be focused on particular interventions. Examples of these are listed in the table 13 below.

Table 13. Participant responses on implementation support for other EBPs (not included in the CPD Programme).	
Theraplay	Mentor support, ‘special interest group that meets once a month’
The Drawing & Talking Programme	Booster training (and ‘more advanced training available’), online support, Communities of Practice
Doodle Den	‘After training there were communities of practice. There was also a person who came to support delivery on site, and to inspect on fidelity. There was also a person who was appointed into the role of ‘mentor’.
Restorative Practice	Communities of Practice
Trauma Informed Practice	‘ongoing training offered’
Thrive Approach	‘on-going CPD required’
Healthy Food Made Easy	‘Community Dietician visit once during each programme’
Friends for Life/ Fun Friends	updated online resources

The current implementation model appears fragmented, especially given the large number of interventions and EBPs currently delivered by SCP staff nationally. Overall, it is clear that the implementation support is not consistent for all programmes and practices, and this may be because this support is not provided internally. The overall CPD model with outsourced implementation support may need reconsideration.

3.5.2 The need for ‘more’ implementation support

Most SCP staff would like to receive more EBP implementation support. This is illustrated in Figures 8 and 9 below.

For the majority of SCP staff who responded that they would like more implementation support, when asked to specify the type of support they would welcome, the following were listed: communities of practice, regular check ins and support sessions ‘once a month or once a term’ where practitioners can ‘hear other people’s ideas [...] and compare ideas’.

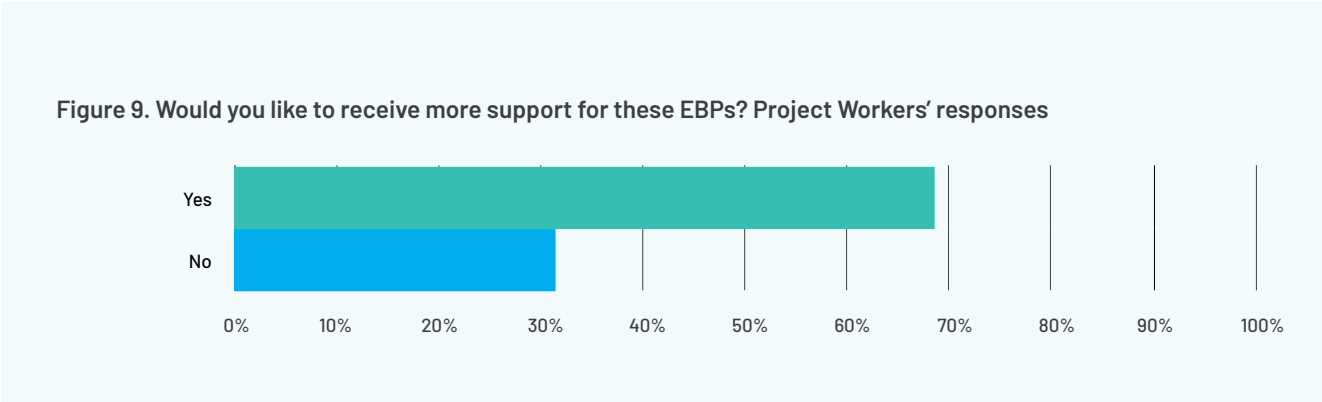
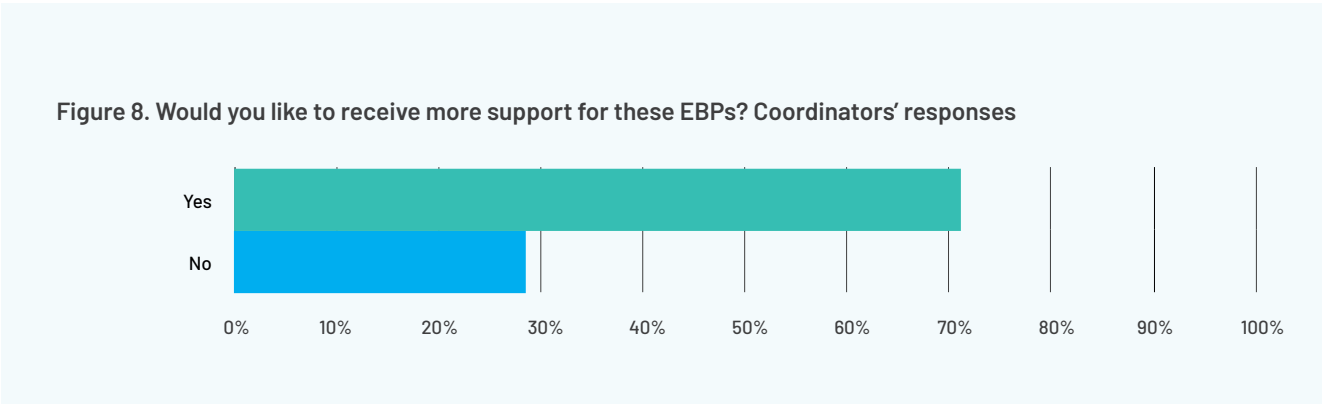
Staff would welcome ‘emails, best practice suggestions, and tips’ and ‘online forums for sharing ideas’... sharing of best practice, what works’ (Coordinators, survey)

‘The CoPs and peer supports are very worthwhile, particularly in the first years of delivery’ (Coordinator, survey)

It seems that the model of support currently offered for LifeSkills, Roots of Empathy or Working Things Out programmes is welcomed by staff. This model based on mentoring, coaching and professional learning networks is consistent with our current knowledge of ‘what works’ in professional development.

‘The model from Roots of Empathy feels very supportive. Mentor calls every term, continuous professional development conferences etc.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘It would be nice to have the option of getting support on practices with programmes like they give with Working Things Out. Especially with MI, MAP, Coping Power, Friends.’ (Coordinator, survey)



SCP staff recognised that training alone is insufficient for quality implementation, and that regular check-ins are needed. This was mentioned in relation to some programmes especially:

‘Refresher sessions especially in MindOut and Motivational Interviewing’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘I would like a booster day of training for motivational interviewing, I felt the training was very relevant and it would be helpful to refresh my knowledge’. (Project Worker, survey)

‘I have found the mentoring and COP offered in LifeSkills very useful in giving support and enforcing deadlines for starting the programme, delivery and evaluation. Refresher training and more advanced training are also helpful to support continued implementation of programmes.’ (Coordinator, survey)

While staff identified the need for continued implementation support, including mentoring/coaching support, as well as support for monitoring and evaluation of students’ outcomes, there was a sense from some responses that CoPs should be available, but that staff should make individual judgment on whether or not to attend:

‘I did not find [...] CoP’s for LifeSkills a good use of time as they were quite frequent. I think it would be better to have the option to attend based on my own need to ask a question or discuss an aspect of the programme’ (Project Worker, survey).

‘When you are running multiple programmes and have to attend CoP’s for each of them it can take up a lot of time. Voluntary CoP’s which you can attend if you have an issue or question would be far better’. (Project Worker, survey)

Staff also wished to also see support for ongoing programme implementation and resource adaptation:

‘Updated resources, emails with updated literature and resources’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Additional resources – other methodologies to deliver the same message’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘More resources, powerpoints, workbooks that complement the programmes’ (Project Worker, survey)

Overall, it seems that staff value professional development beyond training (i.e., CoPs, booster training, mentoring, etc.) and that a majority (about two thirds) would welcome an extension of such support (available on an ‘as needed’ basis). However, as seen in tables 8 and 9, about a third of both coordinators (29%) and Project Workers (31%) responded that they would not like to receive ‘more’ implementation support meaning that existing implementation support is sufficient for them.

‘For the programmes I deliver there is plenty support’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘The programmes I use provide enough support’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘There is enough support’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘We are carrying out these programmes for a number of years now so comfortable in doing it’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘I feel staff are skilled enough to seek support if needed’ (Coordinator, survey)

This may show the diverse professional needs of different SCP staff who have diverse backgrounds and differing experience of delivering EBPs.

3.5.2.1 Professional Learning Networks

Professional learning networks (PLNs) are networks of professionals to collaborate, share ideas and practices and engage in professional discussions. They are typically informal and have a less defined focus than

communities of practice which typically focus on the implementation of specific programmes and may be facilitated. The need to develop professional learning networks in SCP, and to overall strengthen collaboration and collegiality among SCP staff was emphasised in many responses and a sample of these can be seen in table 14.

Table 14. Participant responses on the need to strengthen collaboration in SCP.
<i>‘Peer support and opportunities to meet’</i> (Project Worker, survey)
<i>‘It is crazy that we have to sign up to training just to have the space to meet other colleagues [...] we go to training to meet people even though we may not feel the value of the programme’</i> (Project Worker, focus group)
<i>‘We should learn from each other create resources together share resources’</i> (Coordinator, focus group)
<i>“Opportunities to bring people together [...] localised versions of like conferences [...] [this would] encourage you to keep going”</i> (Coordinator, focus group)
<i>‘It’s not coming from the top it has to be initiated informally by us which is wrong’</i> (Project Worker, focus group)
<i>‘We need to go back ten twelve years ago when we used to meet up in person we need to be seeing each other bounce ideas [...] we don’t know anyone [...] TESS and Tusla are not getting us to meet [...]’</i> (Project Worker, focus group)

As seen in the responses in table 14, some staff felt this ‘collegiality’ was not supported at a national level ⁷ and that this could be supported by encouraging (or indeed mandating), for example, the development of cluster meetings for staff locally and/or by the provision of seminars/conferences at a national level.

⁷ It must be noted that TESS as the funder of SCP projects (and CPD Programme) have a limited role in supporting SCP staff to collaborate with each other.

3.5.3 Need for a differentiated model of CPD that responds to diversity of SCP staff

A majority of Coordinators and many Project Workers are long serving in their SCP service. However, not unlike other organisations in the community and voluntary sector, there are many ‘new’ staff members, and this is especially the case for Project Workers. This diversity among the workforce has important implications for professional development. SCP staff are a diverse workforce in terms of length of service and professional qualifications. Figures 10 and 11 below illustrate this diversity of longevity of service. Figures 12 and 13 illustrate the transdisciplinary background of SCP staff.

The diversity of professional background and professional qualifications should be considered in professional development of staff. Considering that approximately 30% of staff stated no willingness for more implementation support, and given the diversity and experience of SCP workforce, it is recommended that a more differentiated model of professional development is developed for SCP. For example, staff commented that implementation support may be needed more when getting the programmes ‘off the ground’ and less in full implementation:

‘More practical support when first setting up deliverance of programme’ (Project Worker, survey)

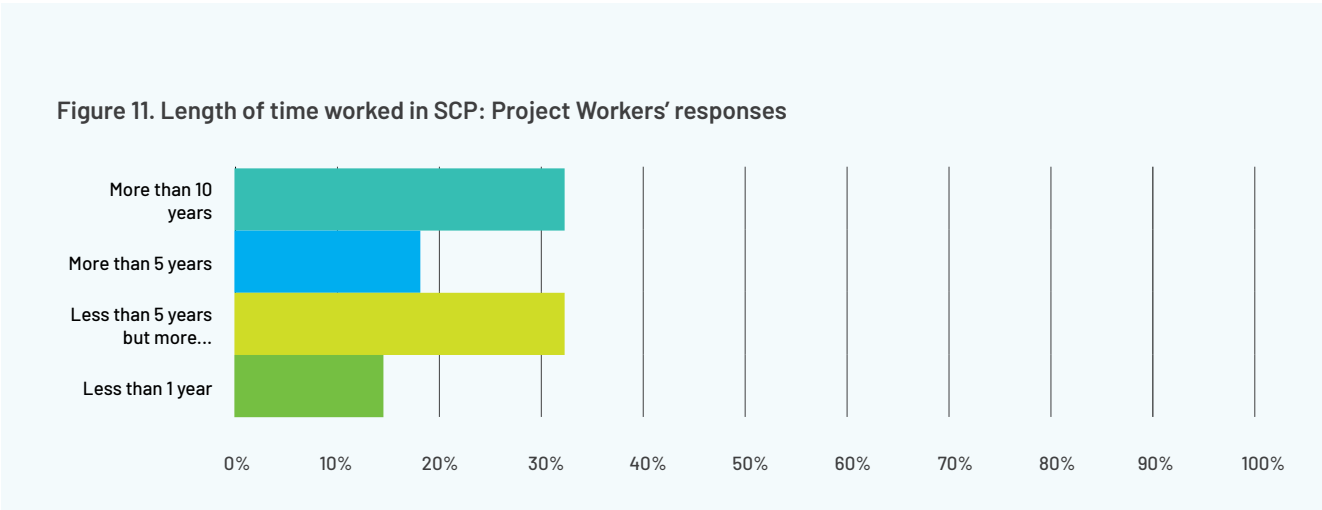
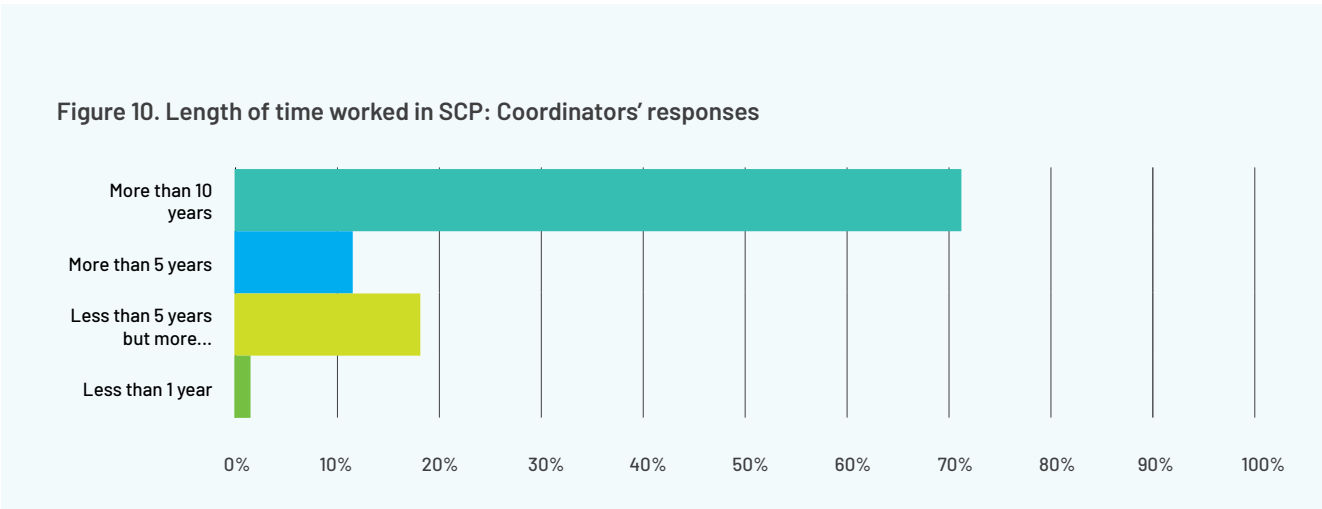


Figure 12. Background discipline: Coordinators’ responses

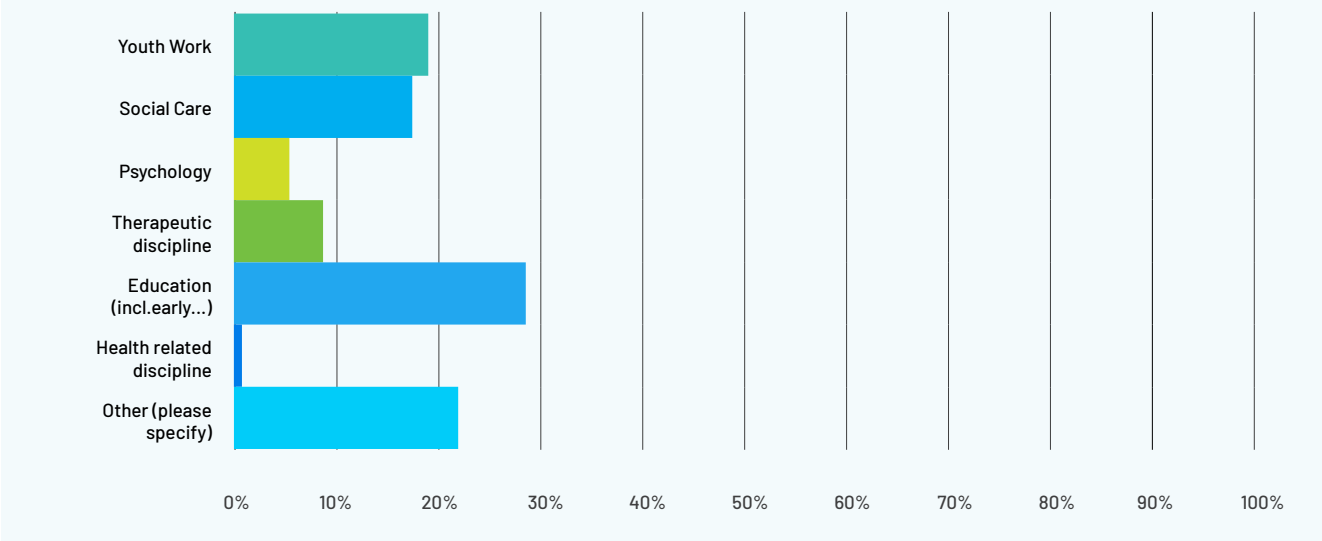
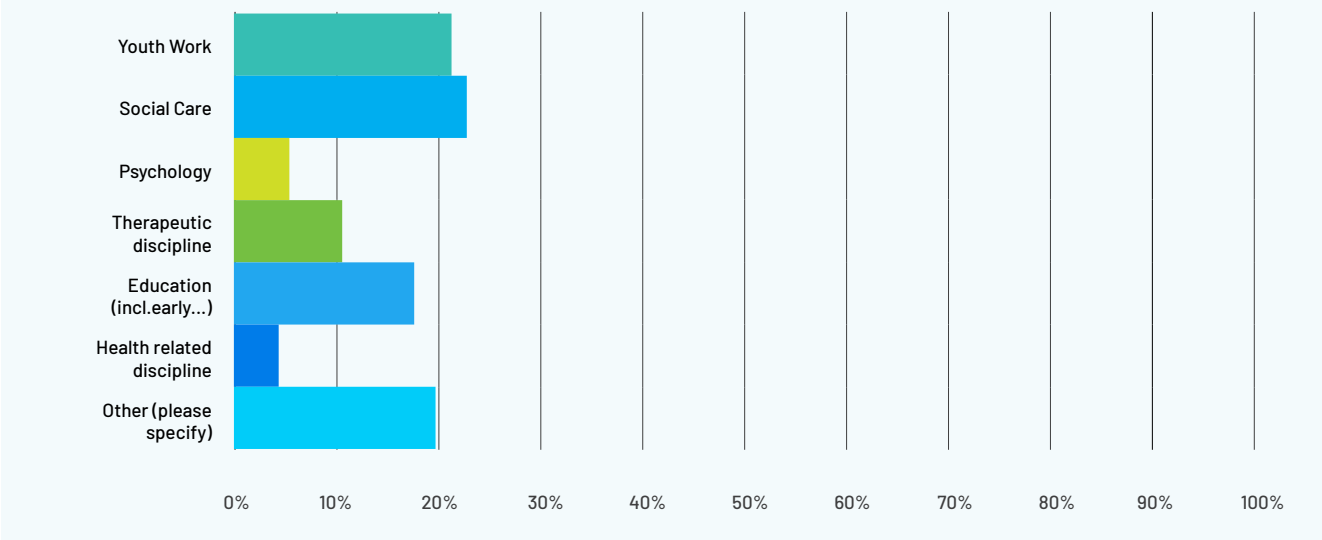


Figure 13. Background Discipline: Project Workers’ responses



‘[The CoPs] at the start are very important as you go along they are not needed as much’ (Project Worker, focus group)

The findings suggest that current expertise of long serving, experienced SCP staff who have delivered the EBPs for many years could be better utilised in the provision of CPD Programme. As it can be seen from Figures 10 and 11 above, many SCP Coordinators and Project Workers are in post for longer than 10 years. The current CPD Programme does not appear to respond to the needs of experienced staff.

‘They [the EBPs] have been kind of the same for the last four five years [...] I have done a lot of them’ (focus group, PW)

‘There is repetition every year when you are all trained in it’ (focus group, Coordinator)

‘In our SCP we did a lot of the training pre Tusla involvement so maybe refresher courses might be useful.’

Some Coordinators and Project Workers expressed that the current professional development model in SCP does not recognise the expertise of staff. For example, a few Project Workers commented:

‘It is important to note that the extensive training and learning gained from college as well as years of experience gained from working with young people and their families has provided projects workers with invaluable skills [...]’ (PW)

Overall, it is thus important that a CPD Programme responds to the diversity of experience and qualifications of the SCP workforce. In addition to very experienced staff, there are also many new Project Workers (see Figure 11) and it appears worthwhile to utilise internal expertise within SCP to train and support new staff, given existing numbers of very experienced staff and staff willingness for such a model. For example, greater involvement⁸ of the SCP

⁸Currently, SCP Coordinators are responsible for local training and supporting new to post Project Workers, however, they are not formally delivering mandatory CPD to new staff which is delivered by externally commissioned organisation (Foroige).

⁹LifeSkills Training and programme resources are currently funded for SCP staff in the first year of delivery, however, ongoing programme resources (i.e., programme workbooks) need to be purchased by SCP projects to continue programme implementation beyond year one. .

Coordinators in the training of SCP Project Workers as well as the development of ‘peer mentoring’ were proposed.

‘Train the trainers even regionally would be an excellent addition to the SCP programme nationwide’ (Coordinator, survey)

One Project Worker commented on the need to ‘rethink’ continuity in CPD Programme:

‘There also needs to be more progression with training, not just once off courses that are never again revisited’ (Project Worker, survey)

Furthermore, a few Project Workers added they would welcome ‘shadowing of mentor/ trained person’ and a few others mentioned ‘feedback’. These professional development components are not currently utilised in SCP.

3.5.4 Need to increase access to training (and proposed solutions)

While training in some EBPs is provided at no cost/low cost to SCP staff, most EBPs listed in the CPD programme have associated training cost and some (including those with initial training at no cost/low cost) require ongoing investment in programme resources. This model is a significant challenge for many SCP projects.

The cost of EBPs training (and continued implementation) was identified as an important consideration in adopting EBPs and one of key challenges to implementation. Conversely, financial support was identified as one of the implementation enablers.

‘For the programmes that cost money, financial support would be much appreciated.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Budget for training in evidence-based programmes.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘To ensure that if funding is required to deliver the programme (e.g. LifeSkills workbooks need to be purchased after the first year⁹), it is made available to projects.’ (Coordinator, survey)

SCP staff would also welcome ‘time away from schools’ to attend training and increased access to training overall. Scheduling training during ‘school shut down periods’ was identified by some as one solution (*‘we find it hard to release staff when we are so stretched as a service’*).

Limited availability of training places was mentioned by some respondents.

‘More places available. When it is offered it is very hard to actually get a place’. (Coordinator, survey)

‘This could be improved by offering more training, without such limited places. Online is an effective way to continue to deliver training.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Have a extensive catalogue for EBP’s readily available and accessible for SCP Staff and for training to be more accessible - online and self-paced with regular live support’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Ability to access these at a time that suits’ (Coordinator, survey)

A few Project Workers also commented that training for many EBPs is Dublin based and that *‘Taking time off work during busy times can be problematic’* (Project Worker, survey).

The suggested solution of online training appears promising. This could include an exploration of potentially utilising pre-

recorded versions and/or self-directed learning, and the associated components of professional development provided in person or in a hybrid mode.

‘I think that accessibility for training is important. Online training is highly preferred for me due to cost, location, time, etc. If a training is online, I am much more likely to sign up for it. Similarly, if a training is self-paced [...]’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘In-Person regional trainings - not all in Dublin, Athlone - travel is a significant resource out of programme budget and time.

Overall, in the words of one Project Worker: *‘More training outside Dublin, more online training, [and] more training with progression’* are recommended.

Participants commented on the importance of retaining a degree of local decision-making in relation to professional development. This is in line with the current TESS model in which local projects evaluate staff CPD needs as part of annual Retention Planning.

3.5.5 Need to develop supports for a continued review of CPD Programme

The need for ongoing review and adaptation of the CPD Programme and its components was identified by many respondents, and this can be seen in table 15 below.

Table 15. Participant responses on the need for a continued review of the CPD Programme.
<i>‘More up to date and newer programmes’</i> (Coordinator, survey)
<i>‘New programmes you can get a bit stale’</i> (Project Worker, focus group)
<i>‘Review and update of some of the programmes’</i> (Coordinator, survey)
<i>‘More types of different interventions’</i> (Project Worker, focus group)
<i>‘Young people’s needs are constantly changing’</i> (Project Worker, survey).

At a wider level, relevance was also mentioned in relation to the overall CPD Programme.

‘Some programmes are outdated and need to be replaced with those relevant to the needs of the target group for eg there is an increased incidence of anxiety in younger children’ (Coordinator, survey)

This is also relevant to programmes that were not developed in an Irish context:

‘The American programmes do require change as they are not Irish systems appropriate’ (Coordinator, survey)

A few Project Workers proposed adapting group programmes to 1:1 setting, for example, one Project Worker commented: *‘Mind Out, which I have trained in, is geared towards group work, which is difficult to implement in a secondary school environment. It would be good to have support in adapting this for a one-to-one setting’* (Project Worker, survey)

‘I don’t have the capacity to deliver programmes in a group environment. I work only in post-primary schools, and it is not possible to form a group that will all be available at the same time in order to deliver a programme. There also is not space in their timetable for another class or time to be scheduled for this capacity. I work primarily one-to-one and do my best to adapt programmes for this context. In some cases, I do find myself skipping certain exercises that will only work in a group context’ (Project Worker, survey)

Fast and efficient ‘knowledge translation’ in SCP may be challenging due to SCP culture of immediate response to the need; it may not be feasible to conduct rapid evidence reviews on all aspects of young people’s needs that SCP staff aim to address. For example, one SCP coordinator mentioned: *‘A good selection of shorter-term interventions – smoking cessation programme would be beneficial – vaping in particular is a huge issue and is resulting in a huge level of suspensions’* (Coordinator, survey).

Furthermore, two responses from Project Workers mentioned access to EBP training and resources in Irish: *‘Training to be available in IRISH but in particular programme RESOURCES to be available in IRISH. It is very very time consuming for the project to be translating resources and then to be working with programme plans and templates that are in English whilst trying to deliver the programme in IRISH’*.

3.5.6 EBPs not meeting the needs of students with complex needs

Some staff referenced that most EBPs are unable to work with complexity, and that they do not offer the kind of intense support many young people need. Two areas were identified as needing further professional (and possibly more specialist) support in SCP, namely supporting students ‘out of school’ and supporting students with mental health needs.

‘A lot of the time some students are gone well beyond engaging in evidence-based programmes and need a huge amount of additional support, counselling, rewards etc to get them on track. This takes a considerable amount of time [...]’ (Coordinator, survey)

It is important to remember that most of the 11 EBPs included in the CPD Programme are ‘prevention and early intervention’ programmes and are for example listed as such in various programme repositories, for example the What Works Ireland Evidence Hub. The target students in SCP include students with complex needs requiring specialist interventions (level 3 and/or level 4 in the Hardiker model¹⁰). For example, one SCP Project Worker commented:

‘Students are experiencing domestic violence abuse people are attacking their homes [...] you are creating safe space for them [...] these programmes don’t fit into that’ (Project Worker, focus group)

However, another Project Worker participating in the same focus group

commented: *‘The need in our SCP would be a lot less a lot of the programmes would suit’* (Project Worker, focus group). It is thus important to understand the diversity of needs in different schools and communities and to consider the current available expertise and practice tools in SCP in this context.

3.5.6.1 Students ‘out of school’

Staff mentioned that most EBPs are challenging to deliver to ‘out of school’ students:

‘When it comes to children who are ‘out of school’ (attendance) these programmes (apart from MI) are not possible to run when children are not in school. Sporadic and chronic attendance affects the quality of the information received and the benefits to the children.’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Some do some don’t. An example being MAPs the really poor attenders are obviously hard to reach so MAP is not ideal as they aren’t in’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘It is difficult to complete programmes with those who are not attending or engaging regularly’ (Project Worker, survey)

The participants stated that more evidence-based guidance is needed to inform SCP practice in relation to supporting attendance:

‘[We need] Research into what works in terms of improving school attendance. Often, those to whom the programmes are targeted are absent for the days of delivery’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Students with severe challenges in their lives and who struggle to attend school will not benefit from some of these programmes in school. I think there is room for both supports depending on the needs of the children, school and local area’ (Coordinator, survey)

The challenges of identifying and building relationships with the students avoiding school was also mentioned:

‘There is a whole newer target group [who are] middle class who are starting to school refuse since covid [...] you may not have the

relationship with these new young people they wouldn’t even meet the intake framework criteria’ (Coordinator, focus group)

3.5.6.2 Students with mental health needs

Despite at least three EBPs in the CPD Programme explicitly focused on supporting mental health and wellbeing of young people (namely, Working Things Out, Decider Skills and Mind Out), some SCP staff emphasised how existing EBPs do not meet the increasing level of mental health needs amongst young people:

‘Given the increase in mental health issues and then school refusal in all schools it would be beneficial if there are another other evidence-based programmes available in this area for post primary school students’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘We need training and support around anxiety-based programmes’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘Mental health anxiety if we can have more training in that’ (Project Worker, focus group)

‘Anxiety that’s a big area of need’ (Project Worker, focus group)

It is worth noting here that a large proportion of staff appear to be trained in the Friends for Life programme already (see Figures 6 and 7). This programme has been recognised by WHO as effective in preventing anxiety for children who are aged 8–11 years old.

‘I find particularly since the post Covid return to school there is a lot more need for flexibility around the interactions with target pupils as mental health/anxiety issues are sky high and school refusal/poor attendance has soared also so trying to implement these programmes to some of these target children would be pointless when they are working through these issues’ (Project Worker, survey)

3.5.7 More training for skills for working 1:1 is needed

Many EBPs included in the CPD Booklet can be utilised in 1:1 work. Despite this, SCP staff identified a need for more training

¹⁰Hardiker model of need (Hardiker et al., 1991) recognises four levels, from universal (level one) to chronic need (level four). Multi Agency responses are necessary at levels three and four.

and support in practices that could be utilised in 1:1 work. This may indicate a misunderstanding of what EBP is and the content of the CPD Programme, but it also evidences that 1:1 work is challenging in SCP practice and needs significant support. The

development of skills and approaches for working in 1:1 context with a young person was explicitly stated by respondents as an area that needs development in the SCP CPD programme. These responses can be seen in table 16.

Table 16. Participant responses on the need for more training for working in 1:1 context.
<p><i>‘There is huge demand for Individual Support in schools. I find schools are not requesting group work as much. We are suggesting evidence-based programmes to them and trying to make them fit in some situations. Would benefit from any training around supporting students on a one to one’. (Coordinator, survey)</i></p> <p><i>‘More individual based programmes/practices that can be used in one-on-one sessions’ (Project Worker, survey)</i></p> <p><i>‘Awareness that for many SCP Project Workers, our work is predominantly one-to-one and developing programmes / practices with this in mind’ (Project Worker, survey)</i></p> <p><i>‘As mentioned above, while I feel the contents in the programmes are helpful and beneficial, from my understanding the majority are geared toward a group situation. It is very difficult to work in a group in a secondary school environment, due to timetables and availability. I think more programmes aimed for one-to-one, or adaptations provided for some elements of programmes for one-to-one, would improve the effectiveness’ (Project Worker, survey)</i></p> <p><i>‘They [EBPs] can be very helpful to supplement key work but they are not always suitable as a response to an individual need’ (Project Worker, survey)</i></p>

Suggestions from Project Workers for training to support 1:1 work included training in coaching skills and more ‘skills’ (as opposed to programmes) in general:

‘I would like to see a little more coaching [training in coaching]’ (Project Worker, focus group)

‘More emphasis on skills and practices rather than programmes’ (Coordinator, survey)

‘The one good adult model we are using [...] Motivational Interviewing this is great cause it’s flexible gives more skills to the one good adult’ (Coordinator, focus group – emphasis underlined)

A few survey respondents referred to a wider ‘suitability’ of group work with some targeted young people. For example, when asked about local implementation barriers, one Project Worker commented: *‘Young people with multiple traumas, high need, vulnerability requiring containing and regulating experiences can make finding the right group dynamics challenging and also determine the size or the group (smaller is better)’*. This again calls for reconsideration of the suitability of group-based EBPs for young people with chronic needs, as well the appropriateness of having young people with chronic needs grouped all together for a programme – this

was mentioned by some survey respondents when reflecting on the changes in SCP since the introduction of EBPs:

‘Narrow targeting has made some activities stigmatising’ (Project Worker, survey)

It is important to note here that Project Workers may not always be included in the decision-making about the adoption of the EBPs in projects and in who is ‘put forward’ for participation in these EBPs, and that this should be an important decision at a local level.

3.5.8 More focus on interventions in post-primary school are needed

The CPD Elective Booklet contains many EBPs that can be used in post-primary context. Despite this, the need for more interventions suitable for supporting students at post-primary school and students who are ‘out of school’ was identified by many Coordinators and Project Workers. This can be seen in table 17 below.

Table 17. Participant responses on the need for more interventions for working at post-primary level.
<p><i>‘More programmes to deliver for second level if they are available’ (Coordinator, survey)</i></p> <p><i>‘More programmes for teenagers’ (Project Worker, survey)</i></p> <p><i>‘I do feel a lot of the programmes are more targeted towards primary school children’ (Project Worker, survey)</i></p> <p><i>‘There needs to be more programmes for second level [...] I have programmes for primary coming out of my ears’ (Coordinator, focus group)</i></p> <p><i>‘I would love to see the inclusion of a emotional literacy programme for second level’ (Project Worker, survey – emphasis underlined)</i></p> <p><i>‘More one to one interventions that are feasible would benefit SCP particularly those in Post Primary settings. A lot is changing for this age group and we as SCP need to be educated and move with the trends happening for young people. Can feel very inept at times’ (Coordinator, survey)</i></p>

On the other hand, the participants were clear that the balance between prevention and intervention (and between work at primary and post-primary school) should be carefully considered at a local level. For example, in the words of two Project Workers:

‘I think more of these [EBPs] need to be implemented at primary school level. As a project worker in second level many of these young people have developed bad habits by the time they get to me’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Delivering this programme as a universal intervention supports the class group, but also builds rapport between the facilitator and the students, and in the past when students have needed targeted interventions from previous roots of empathy groups, their awareness of SCP and the work we do has really supported keyworking interventions’ (Project Worker, survey)

3.5.9 More inclusive and creative interventions

Some survey respondents mentioned language and literacy needs of the target students and how some programme resources are not sufficiently differentiated for these students:

‘Programmes that are specifically targeted for very young children or children with learning difficulties would also be beneficial as it can be difficult for them to understand at times’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Learning and retaining information for these students [is a barrier]’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Literacy difficulties’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Infants there is a massive need now we need more tools to work with them’ (Coordinator, focus group)

Some solutions to working with younger age group proposed by the participants included ‘therapeutic play skills’ and ‘creative interventions’:

‘Years ago I trained in therapeutic play skills I find this hugely valuable’ (Coordinator, focus groups)

A few Coordinators commented that many EBPs have associated worksheets for the students and they suggested a need for more ‘creative’ and ‘playful’ interventions:

‘There are not enough creative interventions’ (Coordinator, focus group)

‘Do not just complete worksheets [...] we are different we are not teachers and we are not youth workers’ (Coordinator, focus group)

Overall, it is clear that SCP staff work with very diverse cohorts, with the students at all levels of need, and from early primary school to late secondary school, as well as with students with diverse needs, including

students who are ‘out of school’ and students with SEN. Continuous professional development of staff in a range of practices and approaches is thus critical.

3.6 Lessons from the Evaluation of the Implementation of LifeSkills Programme

This section presents findings related specifically to the LifeSkills Programme. In 2020, two SCP Coordinators were seconded to TESS to provide technical assistance for the implementation of the LifeSkills Programme. Given this considerable implementation support, the surveys contained an additional evaluation of this programme. The survey included a separate section on LifeSkills programme which was completed by Coordinators and Project Workers who trained in this programme. From the total survey participants (203 respondents), 50% of Coordinators (35 Coordinators) and 43% of Project Workers (49 Project Workers) stated that they deliver this programme. This is broadly consistent with Figures 4 and 5 (see section 3.1.1) and with data reported by the LifeSkills Coordinators (at the time of writing this report, 42 Coordinators and 115 Project Workers have been trained in the programme). The section begins with a general overview of the survey responses broadly relating to the LifeSkills Programme. Following this, the section is divided into the following subsections:

- 3.6.1 Implementation Barriers and Enablers
- 3.6.2 Further Training

As is the case throughout this report, the findings from this section are addressed further in chapter 4.

Figure 14. Coordinators who stated that they deliver the LifeSkills programme

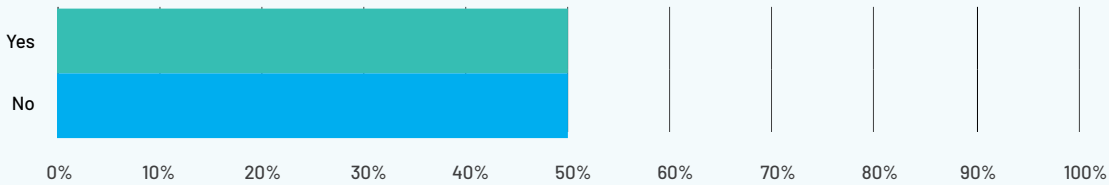
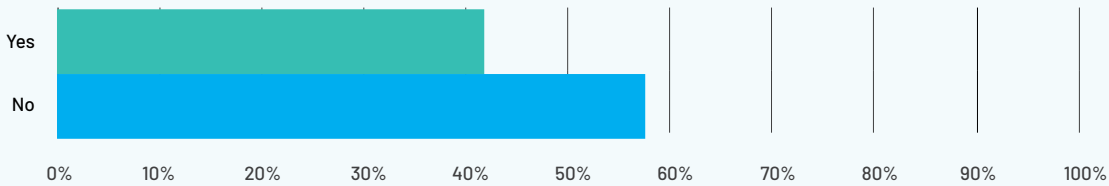


Figure 15. Project Workers who stated that they deliver the LifeSkills programme



The survey respondents were asked to state whether they engage in implementation support provided by TESS LifeSkills Coordinators. A majority of trained Coordinators (73%) and most of trained Project Workers (85%) stated that they were

engaging with the implementation support provided for LifeSkills delivery. However, 15% of Project Workers and 27% of Coordinators did not engage in the support provided for the implementation of this programme. This is illustrated in Figures 16 and 17 below.

Figure 16. Coordinators’ engagement in the support provided for LifeSkills implementation

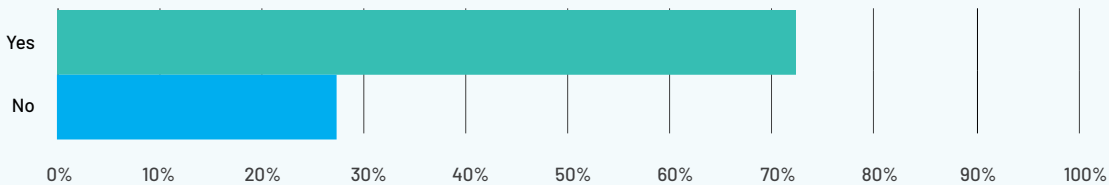
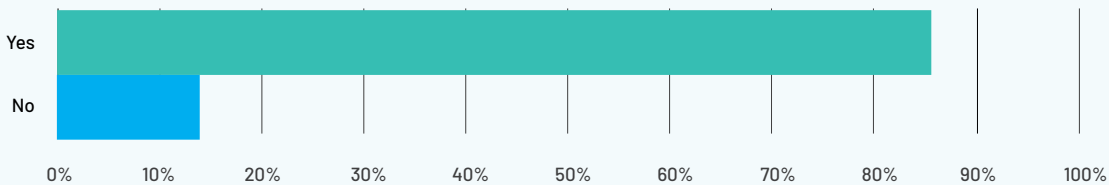


Figure 17. Project Workers’ engagement in the support provided for LifeSkills implementation



One SCP Coordinator mentioned that they receive external support from a different organisation. Three Coordinators stated that they do not themselves engage in LifeSkills implementation support because Project staff deliver the programme. This would imply that some Coordinators train in the programme but then transfer delivery to their Project staff.

Of the few Project Workers who are not engaging in the supports provided, time was a key factor:

'I wasn't able to free up the time' (Project Worker, survey)

'I do engage but do not find them a good use of staff time. The CoPs are really only break out rooms and are not useful unless you have an

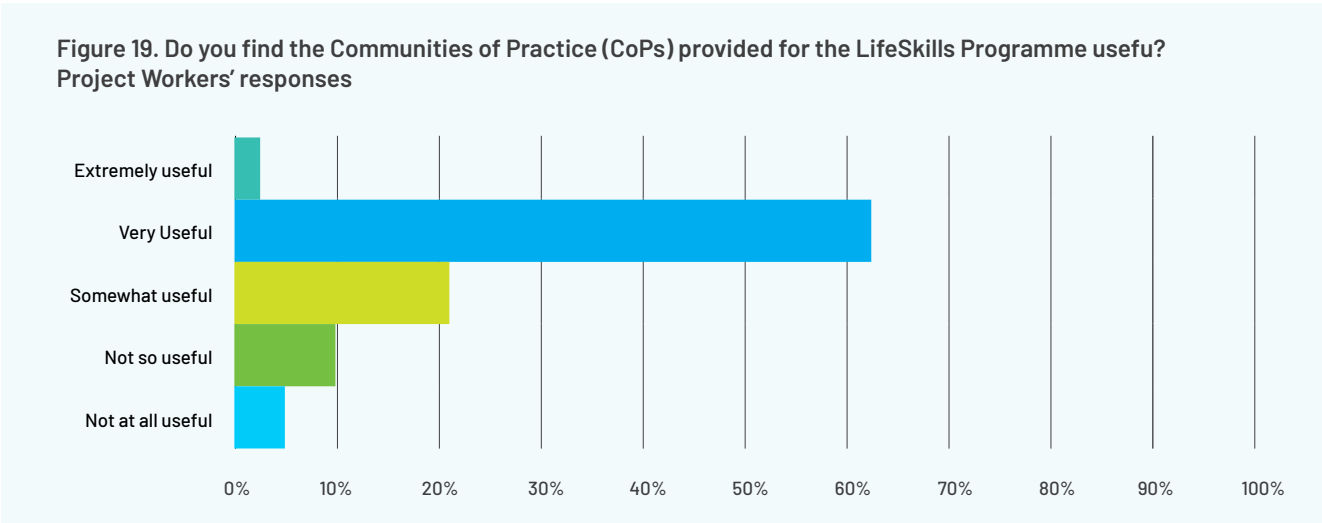
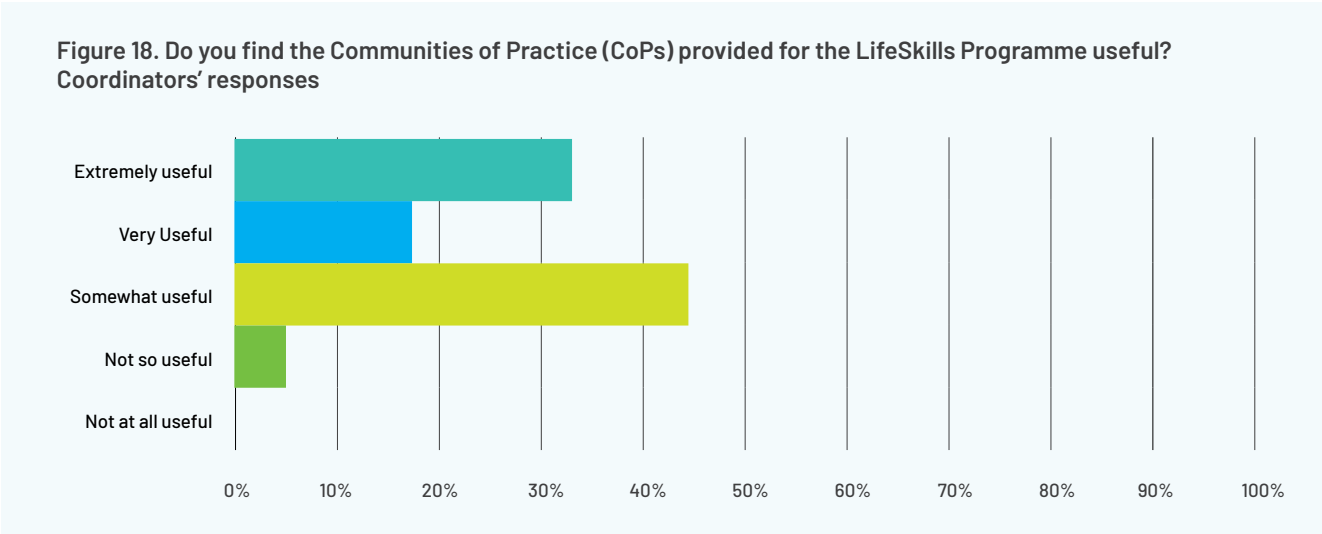
issue/question.' (Project Worker, survey)

Some Project Workers preferred a different type of support. For example, one Project Worker mentioned:

'Have not been involved in CoPs but have received support from LifeSkills Coordinator via email' (Project Worker, survey)

Both Coordinators and Project Workers were asked to evaluate the level of 'usefulness' of LifeSkills implementation support. Figures 18 and 19 illustrate the response to this question.

As seen in Figure 18, there were mixed views from Coordinators on the level of usefulness of CoPs - just under half respondents found them 'very useful' to 'extremely useful' and 44% found them to be 'somewhat useful'.



The majority of Project Workers stated that they found the CoPs 'very useful', however 10% of Project Workers rated CoPs as 'not so useful' and 3.5% 'not at all' useful.

In the Project Worker focus groups, CoPs were described as being very useful in the first year of delivery but, in subsequent years, as the facilitator becomes more experienced in the delivery of this programme, CoPs were identified as less important:

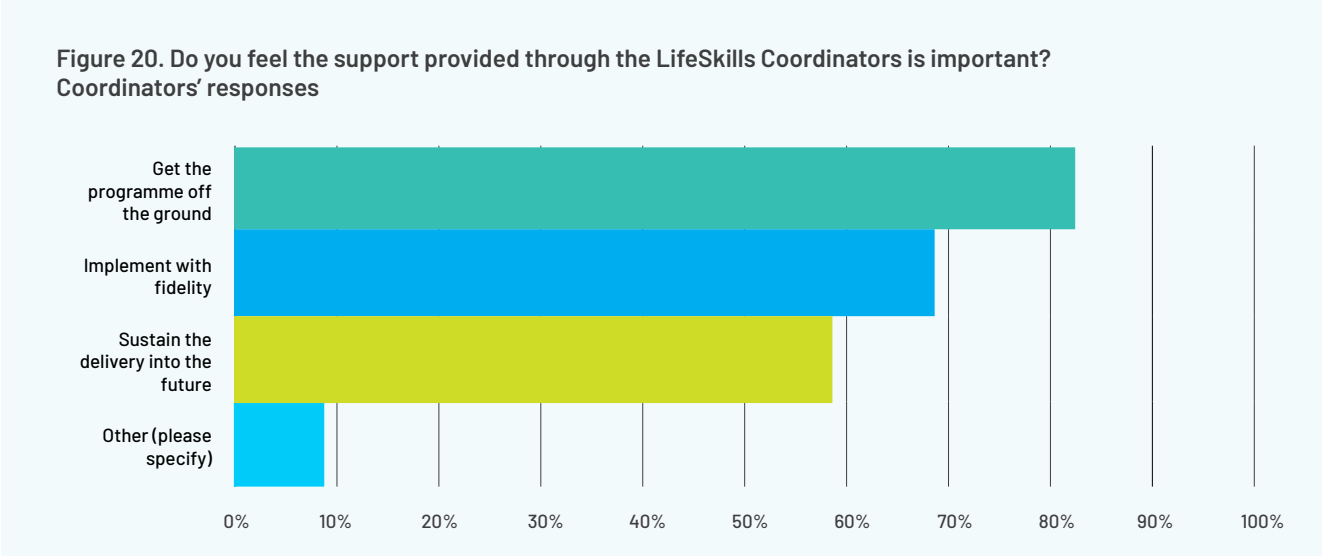
'I think... CoP definitely at the start when you start the program [...] it's important just for you to know how everybody else is feeling and to get feedback from others [...] how others are coping with let's say a weaker class... how they dealt with the session.... so definitely I think at the start COP is very important, as it goes on does it need to happen as often I don't know I don't think so but I suppose it's great thing to have a mentor or a link person that you can send an email to you and run something by them if you're struggling with something' (Project Worker focus group)

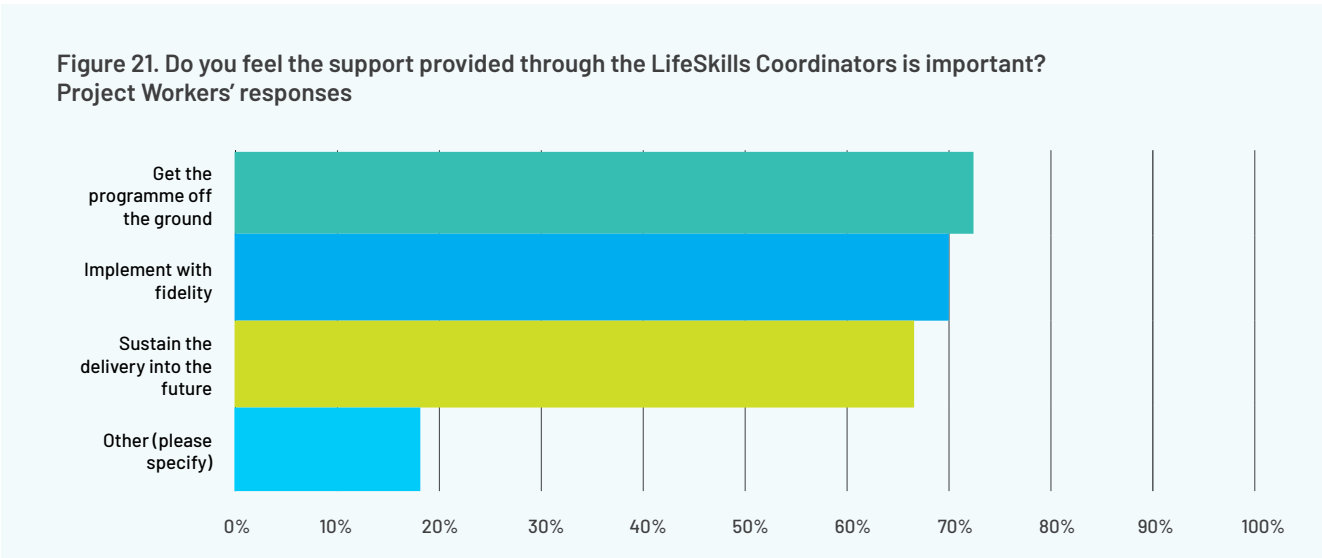
'For more experienced facilitators 3-4 CoP sessions throughout the year are sufficient' (Project Worker, survey)

One Project Worker in a focus group described how CoPs are important after the initial training as there are usually a few months between training and programme delivery, often some of the content learned at training is forgotten.

'Sometimes I find you go off and you do the trainings and stuff like that but then by the time you get back to your project...and then you go to implement this you can kind of forget the nuances and stuff of the program that that you can remember so clearly after it, so I think the CoP...worked really well' (Project Worker focus group)

Both Coordinators and Project Workers had similar views on the importance of the LifeSkills support at different stages of implementation with most stating its greatest importance in the initial stages of implementation of 'getting the programme off the ground' and a majority stating its importance in 'delivering with fidelity' and 'sustaining the delivery into the future'. Figures 20 and 21 illustrate the responses to this question.





Project Workers commented on the importance of CoPs supporting implementation with fidelity:

‘Supporting each other in the delivery of the programme and sharing experience’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘Workshopping ideas with other mentors, ensuring fidelity, having questions answered’ (Project Worker, survey)

[...] sharing with all who deliver the programmes and see what can be amended to the Irish and local context while remaining faithful to the programme’ (Project Worker, survey)

‘CoPs were really useful and I found it very valuable in terms of bouncing ideas & getting ideas from colleagues and it was a really nice way to meet colleagues as well’ (Project Worker, focus group)

The survey respondents were asked if they measure/evaluate the impact of LifeSkills (collect data). As illustrated in Figures 22 and 23 below, almost all Project Workers (90%) and most Coordinators (85%) stated that they measure the impact of LifeSkills. Of the few Coordinators who do not, they cited time being a barrier (*‘time restraints’*, *‘just to note it is time consuming’*).

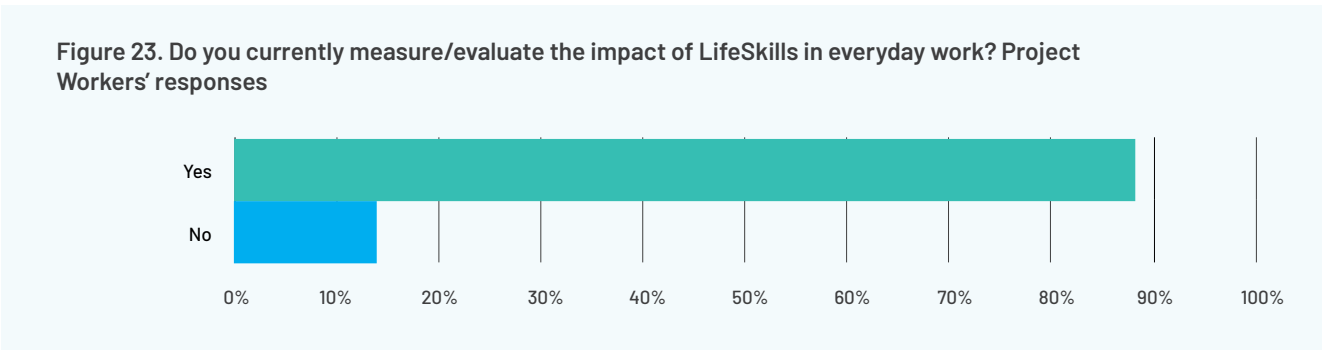
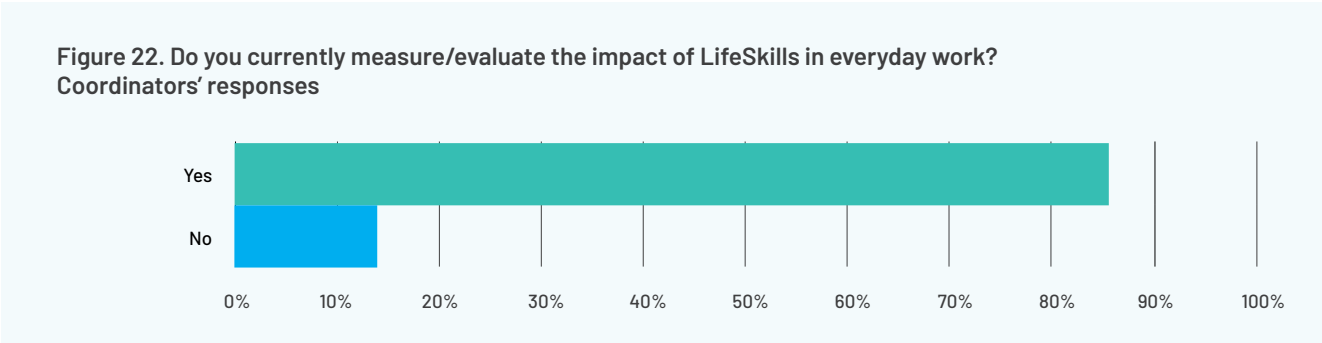
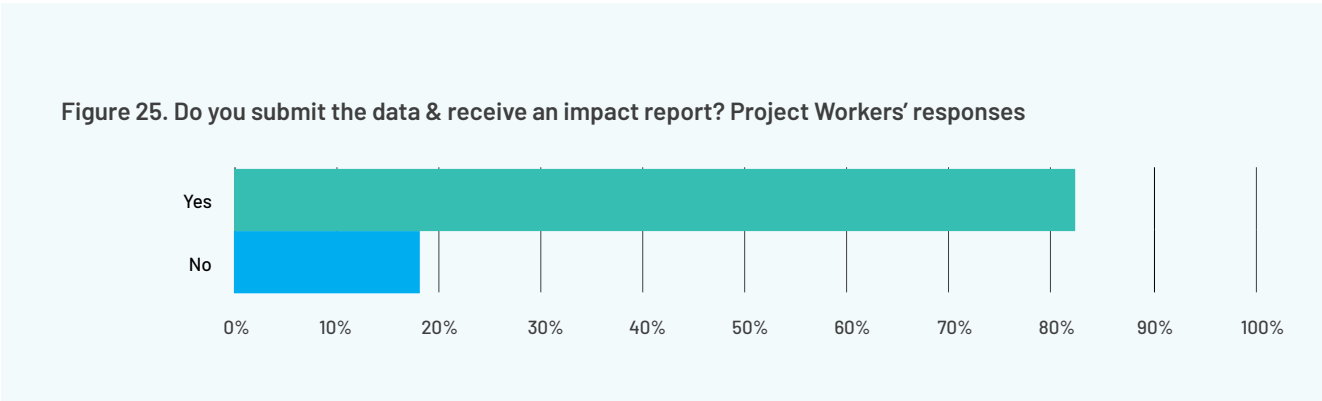
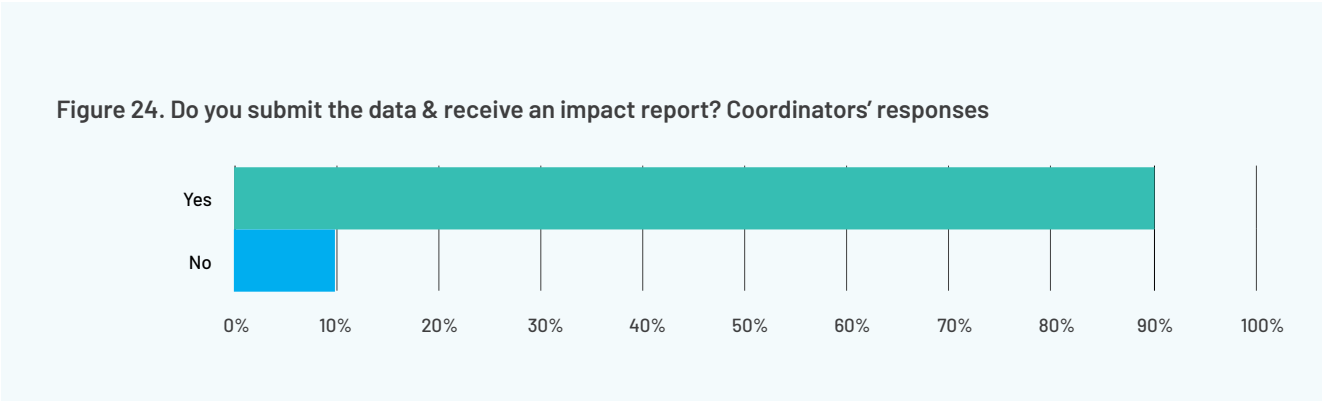


Figure 24 below illustrates that the majority of Coordinators submit the LifeSkills data¹¹, of the few who do not, *‘time restraints’* and *‘we are only starting delivery’* were cited as reasons. Similarly, as illustrated in Figure 25 below the majority of Project Workers submit the data, similarly reasons for not submitting included that they had not completed delivery of the programme yet, *‘have not yet started to deliver the programme’* or *‘I will be when*

done’. Time appears to be a challenging factor in submitting data, two Project Workers cited *‘time pressure on the project’* and *‘we do complete the measurements for LifeSkills in our cluster, but again this takes a lot of time to complete, and the report you get back is very short.’* School consent for submitting data was mentioned by one Project Worker *‘One school I run the programme does not want me to and just wants the programme to be run’*.



¹¹ Programme facilitators are asked to complete survey data pre- and post-programme and to enter the data into a spreadsheet which is then submitted to Barnardos (who hold programme licensing rights) to ‘generate’ programme impact report.

3.6.1 Implementation Barriers and Enablers

Coordinators cited issues around the LifeSkills Programme resources being UK based and also 'outdated' in terms of smoking content:

'Young people are more exposed to Vaping nowadays and the programme should reflect that.' (Coordinator, survey)

'Life Skills - [...] very outdated in terms of materials - far too focused on smoking when vaping is a far more common issue amongst young people.' (Project Worker, survey)

Coordinators indicated cost of resources as a barrier to implementation:

'The cost of resource material that goes along with the programme.' (Coordinator, survey)

'The cost is a huge thing and particularly programs like life skills but there is a level 1-2 and 3.' (Project Worker, focus group)

Time including time required for measuring the impact of the programme was cited by both Coordinators and Projects Workers as a challenge in the implementation of LifeSkills.

'Time constraints... Gathering evidence for returns i.e. LifeSkills takes up a lot of time.' (Coordinator, survey)

'...the input of data takes a lot of time.' (Project Worker, survey)

'Excellent programme but resource heavy' (Project Worker, survey)

'This is my 2nd year engaging in Life Skills. The students loved it last year and I am looking forward to following on with them this year. The only downside is the input of data takes a lot of time.' (Project Worker, survey)

Project Workers have described the LifeSkills Programme as being an 'easy' programme to deliver which is important to Project Workers as within a busy timetable in a school there appears to be limited time available for preparing for sessions.

'I've found that LifeSkills, for example, has been a great programme to implement, as the

training provides you with brilliant, ready to use resources (powerpoints, manual with detailed lesson plans, etc.). When the programme is easy to run and implement, it is very useful to me, because of time constraints.' (Project Worker, survey)

'I absolutely love this programme and find it easy to deliver and facilitate. Easy access to consents/ power point visuals/ relevant games and activities and fantastic workbook magazines for kids to work along with. Very relevant themes and great group discussions. A fantastic preventative program for students.' (Project Worker, survey)

Overall, Coordinators and Project Workers have described the LifeSkills Programme as being well suited to the scope of SCP, giving structure to a wide range of relevant topics:

'Life Skills covered a lot of topics that would have been done without the fidelity of an evidence-based program.' (Project Worker, survey)

'I find the LifeSkills very easy to follow and age appropriate at each level. I have now delivered to two groups and all of the children participate well and enjoy the variety of delivery LifeSkills has to offer, the magazine, group work, demonstrations etc.' (Project Worker, survey)

Coordinators in focus groups described the accessibility and the ease of use of the programme:

'I think it's very accessible [...] the resources are very good, I think that it's very deliverable within the timeframe of the school year [...]' (Coordinator, focus group)

'I'm a big fan of that programme [...] I think it's very accessible I think material is very good, the topics, and it's easy to deliver and that the children enjoy it' (Coordinator, focus group)

It seems that overall the barriers and enablers to the implementation of LifeSkills Programme reflect the barriers and enablers stated by the respondents in relation to other programmes, such as time and cost, 'ease' of delivery and availability of resources. Especially, the structure of this programme

(i.e., short in length, supported by a range of colourful resources) may be a significant enabler in its implementation.

3.6.2 Further training

A few Coordinators expressed a need for further LifeSkills training:

'More training spaces would be great...'

'If the training was run more often or more places available, so more staff can be trained'.

However, one Coordinator also cited *'There seems to be quite a lot of SCP resources going into the support and delivery of the programme.'*

Project Workers surveyed mentioned a need for a LifeSkills Programme in post primary schools.

'Post Primary...A 1st/2nd year programme would be very useful, and I feel our schools would cherish the opportunity to deliver such an information and life skill programme.'

Throughout the research, there did not seem to be a clear consensus among SCP staff on the benefits of delivering universal interventions. The data from the LifeSkills evaluation shows that most staff highly value this programme. On the other hand, however, staff commented:

'Using motivational interviewing is positive however Lifeskills would have been negative as it was covering a class as a whole and not just the target students. Target students will miss out on one to one time as my timetable would be taken up with delivering the programme and filling out paperwork' (Project Worker, survey)

'[in LifeSkills] target students weren't really engaging in the class I find myself engaging with the target students in a different way' (Coordinator, focus group)

'This is something the teachers could be doing' (Coordinator, focus group)

4

Discussion

4.0 Discussion

From the participant data described in the previous section, it is evident that there are numerous issues that require further discussion. These issues are discussed in this section, grouped so that they parallel the structure of the previous section; in other words, section 4.1 is a discussion of the most pertinent issues arising from section 3.1; section 4.2 relates to the findings from section 3.2, and so on. Throughout this section, the discussion of findings from the present study are augmented with reference to previous academic study in this area, helping to situate the current study in the broader educational and implementation context.

4.1

The research findings clearly highlighted that the introduction of the CPD Programme professionalised SCP workforce and introduced a structured and consistent way of working. The CPD Programme is highly valued by staff, both those long serving in SCP who highlighted previous absence of CPD in their work, as well as new staff who welcome guidance in their practice. The need for the CPD Programme in SCP was previously highlighted in a national evaluation of SCP (Smyth et al., 2015) and its importance for developing and sustaining quality professional practice has been backed up by extensive research (Kennedy, 2014). The findings of this research are clear in that training in EBPs have 'focused' SCP practice nationally, increased the efficiency of SCP work, and led to discontinuation of some previous practices which were not directly focused on supporting the national outcomes.

Importantly, the introduction of EBPs in SCP was viewed by many survey respondents as 'enhancement' not 'replacement' and this shows that the core value of SCP work has been and continues to be based on relationships with young people. Underscored by this relationship, SCP staff welcome a 'toolkit' approach in their practice, with a range of EBPs to select from to respond to the local needs in their context. Thus, overall, EBPs need to be integrated as part

of a broader toolkit in SCP practice, and while this was widely recognised by most SCP staff, some responses suggested a possible misunderstanding of this approach. Namely, throughout the research, some responses showed a potential lack of understanding among facilitators about the nature of certain types of EBPs and their methods of delivery. It appears that a small number of SCP staff continue to view the relational nature of SCP work and the implementation of EBPs are opposing each other, and within this, some staff appear to view the broader CPD Programme as simply a 'requirement' of funding and something needed for the Retention Plans to 'pass.' This is concerning as it may potentially reflect not just a resistance to a change in practice (potentially stemming from a wider resistance to TESS oversight in SCP which provides the CPD Programme centrally), but a potential misunderstanding of what EBP means.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is practice that is based on decision-making that *integrates* research evidence (and within this EBPs that have been evidenced to be effective) with practitioner's knowledge, and adapting it to the needs and preferences of those we work with and the context of our work (Albers et al., 2022; Ward et al., 2022). The CPD Programme does not currently include an introductory training on the general concept of evidence-based practice and the role of specific EBPs within it, as well as on how they should be implemented, and it is recommended that such a module is introduced.

4.2

While recognising that the national outcomes of attendance, participation and retention are influenced by a broad range of factors and a range of approaches, most participants stated that the EBPs included in the CPD Programme make a significant contribution to the achievement of these outcomes. Participants recognised, however, that the effectiveness of EBPs is dependent on the context in which they are being delivered, and this again includes the quality of the relationship with the young people. This

contextual influence is consistent with both previous research on EBPs as well as bioecological perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Damschroder et al., 2022). In this context, it is important to consider how previous skills of SCP staff may influence the effectiveness of EBPs as well as highlight the role of the Coordinator in selecting appropriate EBP training for the Project Worker and for the context in which they work.

The research showed some misunderstanding of the CPD Programme, especially among Project Workers, in relation to what EBPs are available to deliver to different types of students and how they can be delivered and adapted, for example, what EBPs can be delivered at post-primary level and/or to students with attendance problems. Research shows that effective implementation of EBP requires an understanding of the concept of fidelity and adaptation (Ward et al., 2022) and so it is recommended that an introductory module on the principles of EBP for all SCP staff would be helpful as an addition to a CPD Programme. Additionally, the process of adaptation of EBPs including adaptation to the needs of SEN students may be supported by developing professional learning networks (PLNs) or indeed communities of practice (CoPs) focused on specific EBPs. Currently, most CoPs in SCP are focused on specific EBPs and are 'facilitated' by programme developers who are more likely to prioritise fidelity over adaptation.

Overall, many respondents commented on the need for more input from SCP staff in not just the design of the CPD Programme (which is currently supported by the CPD Guiding Group) but also the development and active implementation of the CPD Programme. The findings also suggest that many SCP staff appear to be 'designing' their own programmes and interventions. There is a need for both support and evaluation of this practice nationally, in terms of for example its need and quality.

One Coordinator proposed devising and '*patenting own evidence-based programmes so we wouldn't have to be using programmes devised by ISPCC, Foróige, NEPS*' [...] *it is time we took ownership of SCP*'. The findings

of this research do show that the sense of 'ownership' in the CPD Programme could be strengthened, and it is possible that this would also minimise the resistance to change of practice likely seen in a small number of respondents.

At the same time, however, there was a genuine common concern that the existing EBPs do not meet the needs of the students with chronic needs, including students 'out of school' as well as students with mental health needs. Most of the EBPs included in the CPD Programme are what is broadly categorised as 'prevention and early intervention (PEI)' programmes and are listed as such in various PEI repositories (for example, What Works; DCEDIY), while SCP staff work with target students who have been identified to be at risk of early school leaving (ESL). While the current SCP referral system does not exclude children and young people with lower levels of risk from accessing support, with limited project capacity, it is natural that children and young people who are already 'out of school', for example those with 'pending or enacted expulsion' (TESS, 2019, p. 68) and with school attendance problems will be prioritised for supports.

4.3

While a majority of staff stated their satisfaction with the 11 EBPs included in the CPD Programme, a sizable number (30%) appeared dissatisfied with them. This may be to do with the diversity of needs among the students supported by SCP staff nationally. As aforementioned, the EBPs may be used to respond to the needs of most students, however, they are insufficient for students with chronic needs. It is also possible that the stated dissatisfaction with EBPs among some SCP staff again illustrates a degree of resistance towards change of practice, and indeed dissatisfaction with broader oversight of TESS in SCP (who provide CPD Programme at a national level).

The participants emphasised the utility of having a range of EBPs and EIPs in their practice toolkit. However, some responses indicated a possible lack of understanding of what EBP is and what it is not (in addition

to aforementioned misunderstanding of the broader concept of EBP implementation), with some responses indicating that some participants equate EBP with simply any 'programme' work. Again, this could be potentially addressed by additional training.

It is clear that staff adapt the EBPs to the needs of the students, and adaptation has been recognised in the implementation community as necessary for sustained, quality implementation (Chambers, 2023). However, some responses suggested also that fidelity of some EBPs may be compromised when staff stated that they deliver '*versions of the EBP*' or '*elements of the EBP*'. This is especially concerning in the context of recent research showing negative outcomes resulting from poor implementation of school-based interventions (Harvey et al., 2023). The quality and fidelity of local implementation can be partially addressed by booster and refresher training and the need for these was indeed cited by SCP staff who took part in this research.

There did not appear to be a consistent understanding of core programme fidelity among the participants and an understanding of what can and cannot be adapted in an EBP. The concept of adaptability is a complex topic which has received considerable attention in implementation research (Aarons et al., 2012; Chambers, 2023). Encouraging staff to engage in defining and reflecting on what empirically supported components of an EBP are immutable and which are the 'adaptable periphery' (Chambers, 2023) may require national consideration in the SCP context. Such reflection may be supported by both the recommended introductory module on EBP and in collaborative structures such as CoPs or PLNs. Overall, staff stated the need for more training in EBPs that can be utilised in 1:1 setting and for 'out of school' students. Considering this need, and that the facilitators already adapt programmes and practices, potentially compromising their fidelity, it is important to review the current CPD Programme for the degree of 'adaptability' of the EBPs in it, especially 'adaptability' for use in out of school settings and for chronic absenteeism.

Finally, it is notable that three EBPs most commonly discontinued by staff receive implementation support from programme developers. This shows that other factors, possibly related to the EBP itself (for example, its structure, ease of delivery etc.), the local school context and most likely, the needs of the students themselves (i.e., 'fit of the EBPs with the students' needs) have a greater influence on EBP sustainability in the SCP context than the current model of implementation support. Similar findings have been cited in the pilot study on MAP in Ireland (Kelly et al., 2011), where common challenges identified for delivering this programme were time restrictions and scheduling (thus, factors related to the structure and format of the programme itself). Likewise, it is interesting to note the characteristics of those EBPs which were most likely to be sustained include high adaptability and flexibility of delivery (incl. delivery in 1:1 context), as well as in the case of LifeSkills, 'ease' of delivery which is supported by rich programme resources.

4.4

Capacity, encompassing time, resources and staffing, was identified as a key barrier to EBP implementation in SCP projects. This is in line with other implementation research (Damschroder et al., 2022). Capacity issues are challenging to alleviate in SCP projects because SCP work is located in schools, which is a universal setting on which targeted work is built. Furthermore, most SCP projects deliver interventions at all levels of need, including universal, whole class programmes, some brief, targeted interventions and including intense, often 1:1 work with many students, including students with chronic needs. Important considerations for EBP implementation in this context include careful assessment of the students who are put forward by the school and/or Coordinators for participation in 'programmes'.



The stated 'busyness' of SCP staff poses a challenge for effective implementation of EBPs and for the facilitators' engagement in CoPs or similar implementation support structures. Thus, as suggested by some participants, the CoPs should be delivered online and on an 'as needed' basis, as they may be more supportive to less experienced facilitators in the initial implementation stages, and less in full implementation.

Participants consistently mentioned the importance of supportive school environments for EBP implementation.

'Hospitable' context for implementation is recognised by most implementation researchers as critical and a local school context being 'hospitable' to SCP practice is a critical enabler of effective implementation of EBPs. The recognition of context either enabling or hindering the outcomes from an intervention has been widely discussed by researchers (Damschroder et al., 2022; Kazmierczak-Murray & Downes, 2015) but its significance is rarely sufficiently acknowledged in practice. For the SCP context, this highlights the importance of collaboration and communication between

schools and SCP services that promote this 'hospitable' context. This communication is currently largely managed locally by SCP staff at each project level, but may need national support, for example, in the form of formal communication to schools from the Department of Education about SCP and its practices and approaches. The importance of such formal communication was discussed by Anderberg (2020) in the context of social pedagogy (which is relatable to the work of SCP) who noted that the roles and functions of social pedagogues in relation to teachers and other school staff are often confused and that they may be ascribed a lower position in the school hierarchy 'based on ignorance of or scepticism about their skills' (p. 6).

Many SCP staff commented on the need to improve the 'awareness' of what SCP does in schools, and while this can be thought to be the responsibility of SCP staff at a local level, the prominence of this finding shows it is challenging for some staff to create a hospitable context for implementation, and that they may need support (for example, a template presentation to school staff might be helpful).

Relationship with the young person was one of the most prominent themes throughout the research. This highlights that core SCP work is based on a relationship with a young person first and that the EBPs are used to support and 'build on' this relationship. Furthermore, it is the relationship with a young person that enables any EBP to be effective, especially in 1:1 support. EBPs may support cultivating these relationships, but the EBPs in isolation are insufficient - hence the importance of viewing EBPs from a 'toolkit' perspective and the fact that this 'toolkit' must be held 'in the hands of the right people' cannot be overstated.

Many participants commented on the isolated nature of SCP work, lack of professional learning networks (PLNs) and often a perceived lack of collegiality among SCP staff. 'Teaming' and collaboration are known as strong implementation enablers (Damschroder et al., 2022). The development of more team and collaborative structures in SCP - such as, for example, professional learning networks (PLNs) but also project team based training and similar - may be helpful in the future.

4.5

Current model of implementation support for EBPs appears inconsistent and is provided mostly by external providers who are programme developers. Most participants mentioned the need for 'more' implementation support in the form of CoPs and professional learning networks, as well as mentoring and coaching support. However, existing implementation supports appear sufficient for about a third of staff who stated that they do not require 'more' implementation support. This most likely reflects the fragmentation of current implementation support (with some EBPs receiving such support and others not; see appendix 8) and the diversity of SCP workforce with some long serving staff who are experienced in the delivery of EBPs stating that they have sufficient confidence in delivery. The expertise of these experienced implementers could be utilised internally in developing mentoring and coaching for staff newly trained in EBPs, or indeed in developing the 'train the trainer' model in SCP. This could

potentially improve access to training for staff (for example, in terms of training location) which was identified as a challenge by some participants. Access to training could also be improved by ring fencing financial resources specifically for this purpose.

Participants discussed the potential of Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) and Communities of Practice (CoPs) as a solution to the need for 'more' implementation support. There is extensive evidence in the literature on the benefits of such collaborative structures in professional development (Kennedy, 2014), and it is recommended that such collaborative structures are developed for SCP staff

Furthermore, participants raised a need for support with updating and adapting EBPs for SCP practice, as well as more evidence-based guidance to inform SCP practice in relation to supporting attendance. These requirements can potentially be met by an extended CPD department in SCP, and one which as aforementioned would utilise the experience of existing SCP staff.

4.6

The evaluation of the LifeSkills programme in SCP has shown the importance of implementation support. A majority of participants stated that such support is important in getting the programme 'off the ground', maintaining its fidelity and sustaining its delivery. This support was provided in the form of CoPs which were perceived as 'very useful' and 'useful' by a majority of respondents. Similarly to other EBPs, a buy-in from school and the characteristics of the programme itself, namely 'ease of delivery' and a range of resources, were seen as key influencing factors supporting effective implementation.

5

Conclusion & Recommendation

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendation

This report aims to provide a comprehensive review of the implementation of evidence-based (EBP) programmes and practices, thus overall giving an insight into evidence-informed (EIP) practice in the School Completion Programme. The purpose of this review was to measure the impact of significant investment in training and implementation of EBPs in SCP since 2016 and to inform future direction of CPD for SCP staff. The research findings clearly show that the introduction of the CPD Programme in 2016 was extremely valuable as it enhanced the structure, consistency, effectiveness and arguably also efficiency of SCP practice. Across the research data, there was a clear recognition that EBPs are part of an overall SCP toolkit and that their effectiveness is enabled by the philosophy and the culture of SCP practice which is based on a 'meaningful connection' with a child or a young person. While this appeared to be tacitly known by most participants, it is crucial to note, however, that the SCP Programme does not currently have a national practice guidance that codifies its theoretical principles and key components of its 'philosophy and culture'.

The CPD Programme has developed professional skills and competencies of both Coordinators and Project Workers, and it is important that continued investment in a review and development of its components is made. Key recommendations arising from the research findings are as follows:

Short-term:

Introduce an introductory module on the concept of EBP in the CPD Programme.

Establish regional professional learning networks (PLNs).

Develop consistent implementation support for all EBPs to support programme adaptation.

Increase communication to schools on SCP's scope of practice.

Medium-term:

Continue the review and development of the CPD Elective Programme and ensure that its content responds to the needs of experienced SCP staff.

Develop evidence-based guidance to inform SCP practice in relation to supporting attendance and in relation to practices that can be utilised flexibly in 1:1 interactions and reduce focus on group programmes.

Fund access to training at a national level and decrease reliance on EBPs that require ongoing investment for continued implementation.

Test provision of CPD components in hybrid and/or self-directed learning modes.

Reconsider the current CPD model with outsourced implementation support.

Utilise the experience of SCP staff in the delivery of training and support to new staff members.

To support the implementation of these recommendations it is proposed that some of the current investment in CPD in SCP is directed towards the development of a dedicated CPD team in SCP. This team should consist of experienced SCP staff and be tasked with not just training and reviewing of programmes, practices and resources used in SCP practice, but also with ongoing collegial implementation support.

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Appendices

Appendices

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Appendix 1: Membership of Research Working Group

Niamh Quinn, SCP CPD Manager

Jean Rafter, TESS Manager

Colette McGlynn, SCP National Manager

Jane Sharpe, SCP Practice Manager

Appendix 2: Membership of CPD Guiding Group

Paul Connaughton

Michelle Cregan

Gary Duffy

Becca Gallagher

Jody Garry

Sharon Grace

Bernie Lambert

Christina Nestor

Denise Nolan

Alanna O'Donovan

Julie O'Hagan

Noelle O'Toole

Katie Walsh

Appendix 3: Research Information Letter sent to all SCP staff

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

TESS has commissioned research on the extent and the impact of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices in School Completion Programme (SCP). This research will be conducted by Dr Sylwia Kazmierczak-Murray, DCU Institute of Education. Karen Dunne, SCP Coordinator Galway and LifeSkills Coordinator will act as ancillary researcher on this research. If you would like to ask any questions in relation to this research, you can contact Sylwia at sylwia.kazmierczakmurray@dcu.ie.

This research will examine the enablers and barriers to the implementation of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices in School Completion Programme and identify potential gaps in evidence-based or evidence-informed programmes or practices that would support SCP to meet its impact statement and the national outcomes (of attendance, participation, and retention). All SCP staff (both SCP Coordinators and SCP Project Workers) are asked to take part in an online *anonymous* survey that will contain approximately 20 questions and is estimated to take about 25 minutes to complete. You will receive the links to the survey on

Monday 4th September and please if you could complete it **by Friday 15th September**.

For the second stage of the research, we are inviting 12 SCP Coordinators and 12 SCP Project Workers to take part in focus groups. If you would like to take part in these focus groups, please indicate your interest to Kevin Keane, SCP Administrator **by Friday 8th September**. The focus groups will take place online on zoom. You will be asked to attend *one* focus group with three other colleagues for about 50 minutes; these focus groups will most likely take part in the **week of 18th September**, but we will confirm this with you as soon as possible. The focus groups will be conducted on zoom by the commissioned researchers and will be audio recorded to facilitate transcription.

The findings of this research will be captured in a research report for TESS, this report will be publicly available. Research findings may also be disseminated at relevant conferences and in academic and/or professional journals. You will have an opportunity to provide your feedback on the draft report before it is published.

Should the number of staff who volunteer to take part in focus groups be either smaller or greater than the planned 12 participants, diversity criterion such as length of service in SCP, geographical location of the SCP project, size of SCP project, and CPD training received from TESS to date will be applied. Thank you for considering your participation in this research. Please see the attached Plain Language Statement. If you would like to ask any questions in relation to this research, you can contact sylwia.kazmierczakmurray@dcu.ie.



PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT
Research Study Title:

Impact of Evidence-based and Evidence-informed Programmes and Practices in the School Completion Programme.

My name is Sylwia Kazmierczak-Murray and on behalf of DCU I have been commissioned by TESS to conduct research on the extent and the impact of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices in School Completion Programme (SCP). Karen Dunne, SCP Coordinator Galway and LifeSkills Coordinator will act as ancillary researcher on this research. If you would like to ask any questions in relation to this research, you can contact me at sylwia.kazmierczakmurray@dcu.ie.

This research will examine the enablers and barriers to the implementation of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes and practices in School Completion Programme and identify potential gaps in evidence-based or evidence-informed programmes or practices that would support SCP to meet its impact statement and the national outcomes (of attendance, participation, and retention). All SCP staff (both SCP Coordinators and SCP Project Workers) are asked to take part in an online questionnaire that will contain approximately 20 questions. In the second stage of the research, we will be inviting 12 SCP Coordinators and 12 SCP Project Workers to take part in focus groups. You will receive a separate invitation and consent form to participate in focus groups.

The findings of this research will be captured in a research report for TESS, this report will be

publicly available. Research findings may also be disseminated at relevant conferences and in academic and/or professional journals. You will have an opportunity to provide your feedback on the draft report before it is published.

While it may be beneficial to reflect on the SCP practice, if you have had any particularly negative experiences in relation to the implementation of evidence-based programmes, there may be a risk of revisiting these while taking part in the research. It is important therefore that you consider your experiences before agreeing to take part. In participating in this research, you will get the opportunity to reflect on your practice and highlight areas that may need addressing in relation to continuous professional development and professional support for SCP staff.

No identifying information about you or your SCP project will be contained in this research. The questionnaire data will be fully anonymised. The focus group data will be pseudonymised at the transcription stage and only general references such as 'SCP Coordinator/SCP Project Worker' will be used in the final report. All data will be stored on my DCU encrypted Google Drive. The ancillary researcher (Karen Dunne) will have access to the raw data from focus groups. TESS management who commissioned this research will have no access to the raw data. The analysed data with pseudonyms will be presented to TESS as a final report in December 2023. Coordinators and Project Workers who are members of the CPD Guiding Group will have an opportunity to provide feedback on a draft of this report before it is published.

The data will be destroyed by me, principal researcher, by permanently deleting the data from the DCU Drive. Data collected for this study will be retained for the duration of this research. All data will be destroyed on completion of the final report (by January 2024). Focus groups recordings will be deleted once transcription is completed (approx. 2 weeks after the focus groups had been completed). The data you provide will be kept confidential within legal limitations.

Involvement in the research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences and without giving any reason. If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to ask me.

If you have any concerns about the study and wish to contact an independent person, you are free to contact: Tusla Research Ethics Committee at **recadmin@tusla.ie**.

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for SCP Coordinators.

PART ONE

1. Have you worked in SCP a. more than 10 years, b. more than 5 years, c. less than 5 years but more than 1 year, d. less than 1 year.
2. What is your background discipline (in which you hold degree qualifications)? A. youth work, b. social care, c. psychology, d. therapeutic discipline (e.g., counselling, psychotherapy, creative arts therapy, etc.), e. education (incl. early years teaching), f. health related discipline, g. other (please specify).
3. What CPD Evidence-based Programmes/Practices does your SCP currently deliver (i.e., that were delivered in the last year and/or planned to deliver in 2023/2024) Please tick all that apply? Roots of Empathy, LifeSkills, The Decider Skills, DESTY, Incredible Years Classroom Dina, MindOut, Working Things Out, Mentoring for Achievement, Coping Power, Non-Violent, Resistance Training (NVR), Motivational Interviewing. As Coordinator do you deliver any of the above programmes, if yes please list. (check boxes question on Surveymonkey)
4. What Evidence-Based Programmes/Practices from the above list did your SCP deliver in the

past but have now discontinued to deliver (i.e., you have not delivered in the last 2 years)? Please list. Please provide reasons for this discontinuation.

5. Did you or your staff ever train in other Evidence-Based/Informed Programmes/Practices that are not mentioned above (for example, Theraplay, FUSE, ALERT, ZIPPY'S FRIENDS, The Drawing & Talking Programme, WHY Try, Friends for Life, or other). Please specify all relevant training. As Coordinator do you deliver any of the above programmes, if yes please list.
6. Did you or your staff ever deliver other Evidence-Based/Informed Programmes/Practices that do not require training? If yes, please list.
7. What support is provided to implement the programmes/practices listed/mentioned in Q3-Q6, beyond initial training? For example, mentor support, booster training, community of practice support, or other? Please identify these per programme.
8. Would you like to receive more implementation support for these Evidence Based/Informed Programmes/Practices? Yes/No
9. If yes what kind of support, please specify. If no, why not?
10. How do you currently measure the impact of these Evidence Based/Informed Programmes in everyday work? For example, do you collect any engagement or outcome data? What assessment tools, if any, do you use?

PART TWO

1. What influences you to adopt specific Evidence-Based Programmes/Practices in your SCP? Please rank from 1 being least important to 5 being most important.
 - a. Characteristics of the Evidence-based Programme/Practice (e.g., adaptability, format of delivery, etc.)
 - b. TESS support (e.g., available training, performance improvement pressure, etc.)
 - c. Local context (e.g., school culture, school preferences)
 - d. Needs of the target group
 - e. Capacity in your SCP (e.g., time, resources, staff skills)
 - f. Other (please specify)
12. What helps the Evidence-based Programme/Practice to be implemented with fidelity (that is exactly as intended) and with quality? Please rank in order of importance, with 1 least helpful and 5 most helpful.
 - a. Characteristics of the EBP (e.g., adaptability, format of delivery, etc.)
 - b. EBP support (e.g., TESS or programme developer support, CoPs, etc.)
 - c. Local context (e.g., school culture, relationships with school, etc.)
 - d. Needs of the target group
 - e. Capacity in your SCP (e.g., time, resources, staff skills)
 - f. Other (please specify)
13. What are the specific barriers to Evidence-based Programmes/Practice implementation in your own context?
14. What mostly influences that the EBP is sustained (i.e., is not discontinued) in your own SCP?

- a. Characteristics of the EBP (e.g., adaptability, format of delivery, etc.)
- b. EBP support (e.g., TESS or programme developer support, CoPs etc.)
- c. Local context (e.g., school culture, relationships with school, etc.)
- d. Needs of the target group
- e. Capacity in your SCP (e.g., time, resources, staff skills)
- f. Other (please specify)
15. What factors support Evidence-based Programme/Practice implementation in your own context?
16. What activities/interventions that were previously provided by your SCP have been discontinued & replaced with Evidence-based Programmes/Practices?
17. Has this had a negative/positive impact on the outcomes for the target group in your SCP? Please elaborate on your answer.
7. What influences you to adopt specific Evidence-Based Programmes/Practices in your SCP? Please rank from 1 being least important to 5 being most important.
 - a. Characteristics of the Evidence-based Programme/Practice (e.g., adaptability, format of delivery, etc.)
 - b. TESS support (e.g., available training, performance improvement pressure, etc.)
 - c. Local context (e.g., school culture, school preferences)
 - d. Needs of the target group
 - e. Capacity in your SCP (e.g., time, resources, staff skills)
 - f. Other (please specify)
12. What helps the Evidence-based Programme/Practice to be implemented with fidelity (that is exactly as intended) and with quality? Please rank in order of importance, with 1 least helpful and 5 most helpful.
 - a. Characteristics of the EBP (e.g., adaptability, format of delivery, etc.)
 - b. EBP support (e.g., TESS or programme developer support, CoPs, etc.)
 - c. Local context (e.g., school culture, relationships with school, etc.)
 - d. Needs of the target group
 - e. Capacity in your SCP (e.g., time, resources, staff skills)
 - f. Other (please specify)
13. What are the specific barriers to Evidence-based Programmes/Practice implementation in your own context?
14. What mostly influences that the EBP is sustained (i.e., is not discontinued) in your own SCP?
 - a. Characteristics of the EBP (e.g., adaptability, format of delivery, etc.)
 - b. EBP support (e.g., TESS or programme developer support, CoPs etc.)
 - c. Local context (e.g., school culture, relationships with school, etc.)
 - d. Needs of the target group
 - e. Capacity in your SCP (e.g., time, resources, staff skills)
 - f. Other (please specify)

15. What factors support Evidence-based Programme/Practice implementation in your own context?
16. What activities/interventions that were previously provided by your SCP have been discontinued & replaced with Evidence-based Programmes/Practices?
17. Has this had a negative/positive impact on the outcomes for the target group in your SCP? Please elaborate on your answer.

PART THREE

18. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with Evidence-based Programmes/Practices provided by TESS?
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - d. Dissatisfied
 - e. Very dissatisfied
19. How would you improve this? What can be done differently?
20. Would you like to add anything else?

PART FOUR – please answer the below only if you have trained in the **LifeSkills programme**.

1. Are you engaging in the support provided for LifeSkills delivery by TESS? Yes/No
2. If not, why not? Please elaborate.
3. If yes, do you find the Communities of Practice (CoPs) provided for the LifeSkills Programme useful? How useful would you rate them on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the least useful and 5 being the most useful.
4. Do you feel the support provided by TESS through the LifeSkills Coordinators is important for any of the following, tick all that apply and rate the importance from 1-5 with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.
 - a. get the programme off the ground
 - b. implement with fidelity
 - c. sustain the delivery into the future
 - d. other (please specify)
5. Do you currently measure/evaluate the impact of LifeSkills in everyday work? For example, do you collect the data for the impact reports Yes/No
6. If no, why not?
7. Do you submit the data & receive an impact report? Yes/No.
8. If no, why not?
9. Please give any other comments about the LifeSkills Programme support.

Appendix 5: Questionnaire for Project Workers

PART ONE

1. Have you worked in SCP a. more than 10 years, b. more than 5 years, c. less than 5 years but more than 1 year, d. less than 1 year.
2. What is your background discipline (in which you hold degree qualifications)? A. youth work, b. social care, c. psychology, d. therapeutic discipline (e.g., counselling, creative arts therapy, etc.), d. education (incl. early years teaching), e. health related discipline, f. other
3. (please specify).
4. Do you deliver/use Evidence-based Programmes/Practices in your SCP work? Yes/No If you have answered no, thank you for your time, you do not need to answer any further questions.
5. Which CPD Evidence-based Programmes/Practices do you currently deliver (i.e., that you delivered in the last year and/or plan to deliver in 2023/2024) Please tick all that apply? Roots of Empathy, LifeSkills, The Decider Skills, DESTY, Incredible Years Classroom Dina, MindOut, Working Things Out, Mentoring for Achievement, Coping Power, Non-Violent, Resistance Training (NVR), Motivational Interviewing.
6. What Evidence-Based Programmes/Practices from the above list did your SCP deliver in the past but have now discontinued to deliver (i.e., you have not delivered in the last 2 years)? Please list. Please provide reasons for this discontinuation.
7. Did you ever train in other Evidence Based/Evidence-Informed Programmes that are not mentioned above, (for example, Theraplay, FUSE, ALERT, ZIPPY'S FRIENDS, The Drawing & Talking Programme, WHY Try, Friends for Life, or other). Please specify all relevant training. (check boxes question on SurveyMonkey)
8. Did you ever deliver other Evidence-Based/Informed Programmes/Practices that do not require training? Please list.
9. What support do you receive to implement the programmes/practices listed/mentioned in Q3-Q6, beyond initial training? For example, mentor support, booster training, community of practice support, or other? Please identify these per programme.
10. Would you like to receive more support for these Evidence Based/Informed Programmes? Yes/No. If yes what kind of support, please specify, if not, why not?
11. How do you currently measure/evaluate the impact of these Evidence-based Programmes/Practices in your everyday work? For example, do you collect any engagement or outcome data? What assessment tools, if any, do you use?

PART TWO

11. What helps you deliver Evidence-Based Programmes/Practices (EBPs) with fidelity (exactly as it is intended) and with quality? Please rank from 1 being least helpful to 5 being most helpful.
 - a. Characteristics of the EBP (e.g., adaptability, format of delivery, etc.)
 - b. Specific Programme (EBP) support (e.g., TESS or programme developer support, CoPs, etc.)
 - c. Local context (e.g., school culture, relationships with school, etc.)

- d. Needs of the target group
- e. Other (please specify)

12. What are the specific barriers to EBP implementation in your own context?
13. What factors support Evidence-based Programme/Practice implementation in your own context?
14. What activities/supports that you previously delivered have been discontinued & replaced with Evidence-based Programmes/Practices?
- 15.
16. Has this had a negative/positive impact on the outcomes for the target group in your SCP? Please elaborate on your answer.

PART THREE

17. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with EBPs provided by TESS?
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - d. Dissatisfied
 - e. Very dissatisfied
17. How would you improve this? What can be done differently?
18. Would you like to add anything else?

PART FOUR – please answer the below only if you have trained in **LifeSkills programme**.

1. Are you engaging in the support provided for LifeSkills delivery by TESS? Yes/No
2. If not, why not? Please elaborate.
3. If yes, do you find the Communities of Practice (CoPs) provided for the LifeSkills Programme useful? How useful would you rate them on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the least useful and 5 being the most useful.
4. Do you feel the support provided by TESS through the LifeSkills Coordinators is important for any of the following, tick all that apply and rate the importance from 1-5 with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.
 - a. get the programme off the ground
 - b. implement with fidelity
 - c. sustain the delivery into the future
 - d. other (please specify)
5. Do you currently measure/evaluate the impact of LifeSkills in everyday work? For example, do you collect the data for the impact reports Yes/No
6. If no, why not?
7. Do you submit the data & receive an impact report? Yes/No.
8. If no, why not?
9. Please give any other comments about the LifeSkills Programme support.

Appendix 6: Focus Group Schedule: Questions for Coordinators.

1. What is your general experience of implementing Evidence Based/Evidence-informed Programmes/Practices in your SCP?
2. What are the specific barriers to Evidence Based/Evidence-Informed Programmes/Practice implementation in your own context?
3. What factors support Evidence Based/Evidence-informed Programme/Practice implementation in your own context?
4. How would you improve TESS CPD support? What can be done differently?
5. Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix 7: Focus Group Schedule: Questions for Project Workers.

1. What is your general experience of implementing Evidence Based/Evidence-informed Programmes/Practices in your practice?
2. What are the specific barriers to Evidence Based/Evidence-Informed Programmes/Practice implementation in your own context?
3. What factors support Evidence Based/Evidence-informed Programme/Practice implementation in your own context?
4. How would you improve TESS CPD support? What can be done differently?
5. Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix 8: Overview of the 11 EBPs included in the CPD Elective Booklet, and available implementation support.

LifeSkills Programme:

Implementation support: provided by 2 part-time Coordinators seconded to this role.

LifeSkills is a highly effective evidence-based early intervention and prevention programme for children aged 8-14 years. A universal (whole-class) programme, LifeSkills concentrates on a preventative approach which shares age-appropriate information with children, providing them with skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to make healthy choices. The Essential LifeSkills curriculum has been sequentially designed to use with children from 4th to 6th class. There is substantial international research and evidence on the efficacy of the programme.

Roots of Empathy

Implementation support: provided by the programme developer.

Roots of Empathy is a universal evidence-based classroom program that has shown dramatic effect in reducing levels of aggression among school children by raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy. A trained Roots of Empathy Instructor (SCP staff member) and local community parent and infant visit the classroom over the school year. These interactions and the accredited curriculum build children's social and emotional competence.

Incredible Years Classroom Dina

Implementation support: none.

The Incredible Years Classroom Dina Programme is designed to help prevent behaviour problems and promote social competence and emotional literacy in young children (aged 3-8 years). It focuses on ways to promote children's emotional literacy, anger management,

appropriate conflict management strategies, expected classroom behaviours and positive social skills or friendship behaviours with other children and adults.

Decider Life Skills

Implementation support: none.

The Decider Life Skills support children (aged 7+) and young people to recognise their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours, allowing them to monitor and manage their own emotions and mental health. The 12 skills are designed to be taught to groups or on a one-to-one basis. The Decider Life Skills enable children and young people to make changes in how they manage distress, regulate emotion, increase mindfulness, communicate effectively and live a more skilful, less impulsive life.

DESTY

Implementation support: none.

DESTY is a social-emotional resilience programme for primary school children (approximately 1st to 6th class). SCP staff are trained to be a DESTY mentor. This is a one to one, individualised and targeted programme where child and mentor work together over an average of fourteen 30 - 40 minute guided sessions aimed at building children's emotional resilience.

MindOut

Implementation support: none.

MindOut is an evidence-based resource developed in 2004 and recently revised by NUI Galway and the HSE Health and Wellbeing Division with support from NYCI. The resource was developed to support the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of young people aged 15-18 years. The programme focuses on the development of 5 core competencies for social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and responsible decision-making.

Working Things Out

Implementation support: provided by the programme developer.

Working Things Out is an Irish evidence-based CBT programme for adolescents (aged 11-16 years) promoting positive mental health and teaching coping skills to overcome specific problems. The programme sessions are designed around a DVD containing personal stories of adolescents who have coped with issues such as bullying, school pressures, conflict with parents, as well as more specific mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, OCD, self harm and suicide.

Mentoring for Achievement Programme (MAP)

Implementation support: provided by the programme developer.

The Mentoring for Achievement Programme (MAP) is a modified version of the American 'Achievement Mentoring Programme' for the Irish context. MAP is an evidence based, manualised programme that uses mentoring procedures to increase school engagement among targeted students (age 10-16 years) who have personal characteristics (i.e. inattention, disorganisation, disinterest or behaviour problems) that interfere with learning. It is a 2-year, school-based programme based on social learning theory. It can operate as a Primary School programme (5th + 6th Class), transition programme (6th Class + 1st Year) or as a Secondary School programme (1st Year- 4th Year). There is substantial international evidence to support the efficacy of the programme.

Coping Power

Implementation support: provided by the programme developer.

The Coping Power programme is a manualised preventative intervention delivered to upper primary school children. It is most suitable for small group delivery. The programme uses skills based training to increase social competence, self-regulation and positive parental engagement. There are child and parent components to the programme, which takes one academic year to deliver. The child component focuses on anger management, social problem solving, and practicing skills to resist peer pressure. The parent component of the programme focuses on supporting involvement and consistency in parenting, which also contributes to better adjustment.

Non Violent Resistance Training (NVR)

Implementation support: none.

Non Violent Resistance offers an integrated, structured and systemic response to child to parent violence. NVR can also be implemented in the areas of childhood anxiety and school non-attendance. The training will set the context for understanding and responding effectively to child to parent violence, what contributes to the violence, how to identify it and how to support parents to address it effectively. Key elements of NVR will be presented and strategies for implementing this approach within various settings will be explored. Issues relating to parental authority, child protection and anxiety will also be explored.

Motivational Interviewing (MI)

Implementation support: none at a national level. May be provided locally.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a client-centred approach that elicits behavioural changes by assisting individuals, of all ages, to explore and resolve ambivalence in a one to one or small group approach. It builds on the idea that the first step in any consultation is actually to get a conversation going. It then uses particular strategies to focus this conversation on behaviour change, and to ensure that the client is helped to consider change as an option.

