

Evaluating the outcome of employment enhancement programmes for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET): Does organisational type affect delivery?

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Abstract

As work-integration social enterprises (WISEs) become providers of programmes that aim to improve the employability of socially disadvantaged groups, performance evaluation becomes an issue they must address in order to both justify their current funding and to help secure future funding. There is growing pressure on WISEs to improve their performance evaluation processes by ensuring evaluation is based in social science concepts rather than 'common sense' notions of improvements that lack rigor in their measurement. The ongoing research reported in this paper builds upon work conducted in a prior pilot study and reveals the NEET perspective of engagement in two employment enhancement programmes (EEPs), one provided by a WISE situated in the East Midlands, the other by a work-integration private enterprise (WIPE) company situated in Birmingham. The research adopted an intervention methodology involving a total of 106 participants, from both WISE and WIPE completing questionnaires at Time 1 (T1) and 49 participants at Time2 (T2) (24 from the WISE and 25 from the WIPE). In order to provide a rigorous outcome measure, in addition to eliciting the participant perspective, all participants completed General Self-efficacy (GSE) questionnaires and a random sample engaged in individual semi-structured interviews with researchers before and after engagement in their respective programmes (15 from the WISE and 6 from the WIPE). Results from the qualitative analysis of the interviews and the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data are triangulated to evaluate the outcome from both programmes, providing the participant perspective alongside changes in GSE. The results from the two programmes provided an opportunity to compare and contrast programmes delivered by a WISE and a WIPE in order to give an insight into differences between the programmes based on the orientation of the delivery organisation.

Introduction

The current study extends prior research, conducted in a small scale pilot study, that established a research method for the evaluation of *outcome* benefits experienced by young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) following engagement in an employment enhancement programme (Denny, Hazenberg, Irwin & Seddon, 2011). The research method employed in the prior pilot study was an intervention procedure, conducted within a qualitative paradigm, employing semi-structured interviews conducted pre- and post-participant engagement in the employment enhancement programme (EEP). The pilot study also tested the suitability of

employing a general self-efficacy scale (GSE) to measure changes in GSE after participant engagement in the EEP. Denny, Hazenberg, Irwin & Seddon (2011) proposed that the employment of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to articulate the *outcome* benefits that were important for them whilst the GSE scale provided evidential support for researcher interpretations of the interview data through the triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data. The current study applied the same methodology as the prior pilot study, this time with a larger participant group, in order to enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis of the questionnaire data. In addition, the current study employed a comparison group to examine potential differences in *outcome* benefits for NEET participants based on whether the delivery of the EEP was undertaken by a work integration social enterprise (WISE) or a work integration private enterprise (WIPE).

Overview

Securing robust, valid and reliable tools for the evaluation of EEPs presents a range of problems. The evaluation of EEPs can be both simple and complex depending upon whether the focus of the evaluation is on *output*, *outcome* or *impact* (McLoughlin, Kaminski, Sodagar, Khan, Harris, Arnaudo & McBrearty, 2009). *Output* can be defined as the relationship between the number of unemployed individuals accessing the programme and the number who subsequently gain employment. However, if *output* is employed as a singular measure, the evaluation will not include important longer-term participant benefits, i.e. *outcome*. An *outcome* represents psychological benefits experienced by participants that will enhance their future employability. *Impact* is an even longer-term benefit and is the *impact* on society resulting from the reduction of unemployment, for example, reduced unemployment benefits, lower impact on the health service and higher income tax receipts. As government policy increasingly looks towards organisations such as WISEs to provide EEPs, a need for the effective evaluation of EEPs and their delivery organisations arises. Evaluation is required to provide policy-makers with ‘evidence’ of the positive benefits of EEPs. At present there is very little academic research into the performance evaluation of social enterprises (Paton, 2003), with the notable exception of studies that promote ‘business-like’ evaluation tools for example, ‘Balance’ (Bull, 2007) and ‘practical toolkits’ such as ‘Prove and Improve’ (New Economics Foundation, 2008) and ‘Outcomes Star’ (London

Housing Foundation and Triangle Consulting, 2006). Although these are examples of useful tools in the evaluation of social enterprise, they are either focused on *outcome* from the perspective of the social enterprise or are targeted at specific populations such as the homeless. The limited prior research available, has reported some positive benefits of WISE interventions (Borzaga and Loss, 2006), but much of this prior research lacks academic rigour. This lack of academic rigour stems from a sub-optimal methodological approach to research that involves WISEs evaluating their own performance. These often subjective and anecdotal evaluations form the majority of research into WISE performance and tend to focus on overall unemployment interventions that fail to examine specific unemployed groups such as NEETs.

NEETs

Yates and Payne (2006) interviewed 855 young people through the Connexions agency and from these interviews concluded that NEETs are a more heterogeneous than homogeneous entity. Yates and Payne defined three potential NEET subgroups, (1) 'transitional' i.e. those who are temporarily NEET due to individual circumstances but who quickly re-engage with employment, education or training; (2) 'young parents' i.e. those who are young parents and make a conscious decision to disengage with employment, education or training in order to look after their children and (3) 'complicated' i.e. those young people who are NEET and who also exhibit a number of 'risks' in their lives that contribute to them being NEET, for example, being homeless, engaging in criminal behaviour, and/or having emotional/behavioural problems (Yates and Payne. 2006).

Prior research also provides strong evidence of a close relationship between 'social exclusion' and NEET status (Yates & Payne, 2006; Payne, 2002; Williamson, 1997). 'Social exclusion' can be predicated on poor academic achievement, low levels of school attendance, chaotic living arrangements, low socio-economic status and exclusion from school based on truancy or bullying (Payne, 2002). Prior research into general self-efficacy reports that, success in life; persistent positive vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and psychological states can augment general self-efficacy (Chen, Gully and Eden, 2001). The authors of the current study propose that the negative influences of social exclusion reported above could similarly have a negative effect on general self-efficacy.

General self-efficacy

An individual's motivation, well-being and personal accomplishment are strongly associated with their efficacy beliefs, which influence their choices and resultant actions (Pajares, 1996). Individuals base their assessment of the achievability of specific goals in perceived self-efficacy related to past experience and anticipation of future obstacles (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). In the context of EEPs, it is critical to address issues of self-efficacy because highly efficacious individuals will have more confidence in their abilities to succeed in gaining future employment (Lucas & Cooper, 2005; McLellan, Barakat & Winfield, 2009). The Bandurian concept of self-efficacy is related to task-centeredness and is domain specific but other self-efficacy concepts are more general and relate to an individual's level of confidence in performing everyday tasks (Sherer *et al.*, 1982). General self-efficacy has been shown to be a reliable predictor of performance in educational and vocational activities (Locke, Durham and Kluger, 1998).

Prior research provides evidence of predictive relationships between increased self-efficacy, job searching and job procurement (Creed, Bloxsome & Johnson, 2001; Eden & Aviram, 1993; Meyers & Houssemand, 2010; Wenzel, 1993). According to Eden & Aviram (1993) there is a reciprocal relationship between self-efficacy and employment status, which can lead to entrapment in a vicious cycle of job loss, reduced self-efficacy, lack of job seeking effort and prolonged unemployment. Eden & Aviram (1993) propose that an intervention designed to boost self-efficacy can result in intensification of job search activities and subsequent reemployment. Despite a tendency towards the employment of specific self-efficacy scales (SSE) in prior organisational psychology research (Bandura, 1986; Locke & Latham, 1990; Caplan, Vinokur, Price & van Ryn, 1989; Gist, Schwoerer, & Rosen, 1989), personality psychologists view self-efficacy as a generalised trait that influences an individual's expectation of mastery in new situations (Eden, 1988; Eden & Kinnar, 1991; Sherer, Maddux, Mercandante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs & Rogers, 1982).

Eden & Aviram (1993) examined the impact of training, specifically designed to boost general self-efficacy (GSE), on unemployed participants' job search activities and subsequent reemployment. Eden & Aviram (1993) reported that participants with higher levels of GSE,

occurring naturally or resulting from the intervention, were more likely to become reemployed. One of the more interesting findings of Eden & Aviram's (1993) research was the non-uniform manner in which participants responded to the intervention. Eden & Aviram (1993) reported that participants with low initial levels of GSE had statistically significant increases in GSE after training when compared with participants with high initial levels. Interpretation of this result indicated higher levels of behavioural plasticity in the participants who displayed lower initial levels of GSE. Behavioural plasticity refers to the tendency of individuals who display relatively low levels of the concept being measured prior to an intervention, scoring significantly higher levels of the same concept after the intervention, when compared to individuals who displayed high levels of the concept to begin with (Brockner, 1988). Later research (Creed, *et al.*, 2001) provided support for the concept of behavioural plasticity reported by Eden & Aviram (1993).

The current research

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews and completed questionnaires at two points in time, T1 before engagement in the EEP and T2 on completion of the EEP. The qualitative paradigm adopted in the current study assumes that reality is subjective and multiple, offering participants the opportunity to perceive their world in many different ways. During investigatory research, participants may therefore be regarded as the most appropriate informants (Forsman, 2008). Quantitative instruments in the form of questionnaires, such as the General Self-Efficacy scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Scherbaum *et al.*, 2006) are very useful tools for measuring changes in participant changes in GSE after engaging in EEPs. Additionally, triangulation of results of the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data provides support for researcher interpretations of participant interview data that further enhances the rigour of evaluation procedures in the evaluation of EEPs.

Aims of the research

As the research in the current study was inductive, deductive hypothesis testing and comparative, the primary aim of the research was to reveal and compare the *outcome* benefits from the participants' perspective, after their participation in an EEP, which was designed to improve

their employability and delivered by either a WISE or WIPE. A secondary aim of the research was to seek relationships between the participant's perceived *outcome* benefits and the constructs measured in the GSE scale in order to provide support for researcher interpretation of the participant interview data and to further the comparison between the delivery agencies.

The current research sought to evaluate two EEPs for NEETs, one delivered by a WISE and the other by a WIPE (the comparison group). The research involved a quasi-experimental intervention methodology within a qualitative paradigm employing semi-structured interviews to elicit the participant's perspective and questionnaires designed to measure GSE. The interviews and the questionnaires were conducted and administered at two points in time, 'T1' before and 'T2' after the intervention training programme.

The qualitative element of the research sought to elicit the participants' perspective of their engagement with the EEP through an inductive analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted at T1 & T2

The quantitative element of the research tested the following hypotheses, which are based in the research reviewed above:

Hypothesis 1: participants will display an increase in their levels of GSE from Time 1 to Time 2.

Hypothesis 2: Participants with lower initial levels of GSE will display greater plasticity.

Hypothesis 3: The participants taking part in the training programme delivered by the WISE will display greater increases in their levels of GSE from Time 1 to Time 2 than their counterparts at the WIPE comparison group.

Method

Participants

A total 106 participants engaged in the research at T1 (48 at the WISE and 58 at the WIPE). However, of these initial 106 participants only 49 were still present at the EEPs at Time 2.

WISE

There were 24 participants (18 males, 6 females) with an average age of 19.46 years. Of the 24 participants who completed questionnaires at T1 & T2, 15 were randomly selected to engage in semi-structured interviews with the researchers also at T1 & T2.

WIPE

There were 25 participants (17 males, 8 females) with an average age of 16.96 years. Of the 25 participants who completed questionnaires at T1 & T2, 6 were randomly selected to engage in semi-structured interviews with the researchers also at T1 & T2.

Measure

The questionnaire employed at Time 1 and Time 2 was identical and was designed to measure GSE. The questionnaire utilised Likert response scales in which the participants rated their ability at certain tasks. General self-efficacy was measured using Schwarzer & Jerusalem's (1995) GSE scale. Prior research has shown this to be a reliable measure of GSE with reported Cronbach's α of between .75 and .91 (Scherbaum, 2006). Additionally, the scale has been used in research involving thousands of participants across 23 different countries (Schwarzer, 2011). Participants are asked to read 10 statements relating to their ability to deal with general tasks and then rate how well each statement applies to them on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all true) through to 4 (Exactly true). Sample questions are 'I can always manage to solve difficult

problems if I try hard enough’ and ‘I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events’.

Intervention

The WISE intervention consisted of participation in a 6-week programme that aimed to raise participant’s generic skills in ICT, maths and English, improve their team-working and social skills, and improve their confidence and motivation. It also focused on employability skills such as CV writing and job applications. Participants were not pre-selected and the course was open to anyone who wished to attend. The WIPE intervention consisted of participation in a 16-week programme that aimed to raise participant’s generic skills in ICT, maths and English, as well as improving their team working skills, social skills, and confidence. It also focused on employability skills such as CV writing, interview skills and job applications. Participants were pre-selected by interview and as such the course was only accessible to those participants who passed the interview stage.

At both the WISE and the WIPE, the participants were seen individually by the research team at T1 where they completed the questionnaire. A random sample was then selected to take part in interviews on the same day. Upon completion of the programme at T2 the participants again completed the questionnaires and those that took part in a T1 interview also took part in a second T2 interview.

Qualitative analysis

The method employed to analyse the transcripts of the participant individual semi-structured interviews was ‘Constant Comparative Method’ (CCM) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The CCM is an iterative procedure designed for the qualitative analysis of text and is based on ‘Grounded Theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The CCM has been successfully applied in previous studies across a wide range of disciplines from social venture creation (Haugh, 2007) to music composition strategies (Seddon & O’Neill, 2003) and musical communication (Seddon, 2004 & 2005). This method of analysis focuses on a process where

categories emerge from the data via inductive reasoning rather than coding the data according to predetermined categories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The CCM involves five main stages: 1) immersion; 'units of analysis' are identified, 2) categorisation; 'categories' emerge from the 'units of analysis', 3) phenomenological reduction; 'themes' emerge from the 'categories' and are interpreted by the researchers, 4) triangulation; support for researcher interpretations of 'themes' is sought in additional data, 5) interpretation; overall interpretation of findings is conducted in relation to prior research and/or theoretical models (McLeod, 1994).

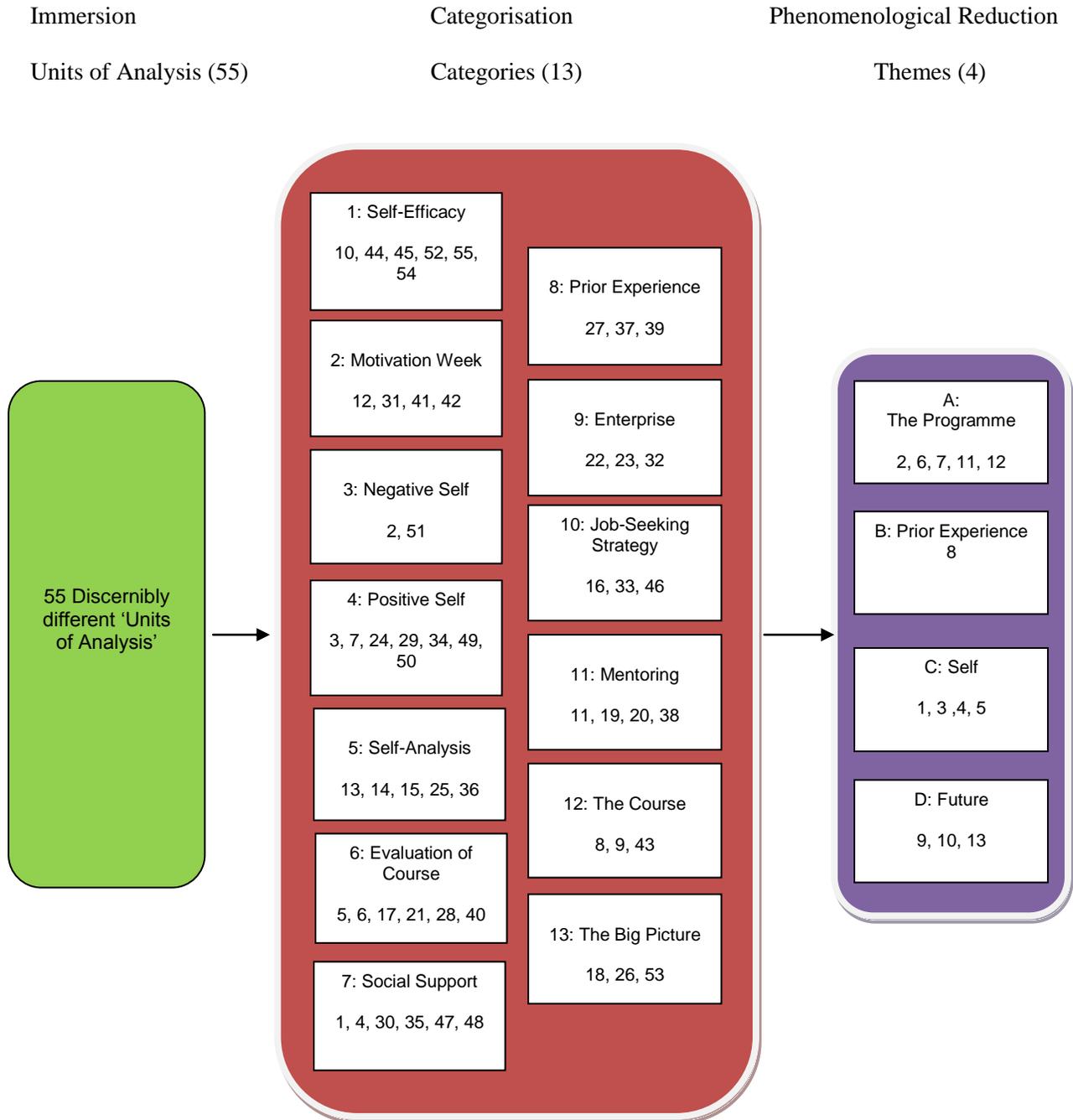
WISE Time 1

Analysis of the Time 1 interview transcripts involved researchers engaging with the five stages of CCM. During 'immersion', the researchers identified 67 discernibly different units of analysis from the data (e.g. long-term unemployment and 'negative school experience'). During 'categorisation', these 'units of analysis' were grouped into 15 'categories'. These 15 categories were then reduced to four themes through a process of 'phenomenological reduction'. These four emergent 'themes' were subsequently interpreted by the researchers as: 'environmental influence', 'prior experience', 'self' and 'future'. A diagrammatic illustration of this qualitative analysis process is provided for further clarification (see Fig.1). This process was replicated for all the subsequent CCM analyses.

WISE Time 2

During immersion, the researchers identified 55 discernibly different 'units of analysis' (e.g. business idea; 'mentoring' and 'assertiveness'). 'Categorisation' resulted in 13 'categories' emerging from the 55 'units of analysis'. During 'phenomenological reduction', four 'themes' emerged from the 13 'categories'. These four emergent 'themes' were subsequently interpreted by the researchers as, 'the programme' 'prior experience', 'self', and 'future' (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Phases of CCM analysis from the WISE at T2:



WIPE Time 1

During immersion 33 discernibly different ‘units of analysis’ emerged from the data (e.g. ‘family breakdown’, ‘aspiration’ and ‘previous courses’). ‘Categorisation’ resulted in 10 ‘categories’ emerging from the 33 ‘units of analysis’. During ‘phenomenological reduction’, four ‘themes’ emerged from the 10 ‘categories’. These four emergent ‘themes’ were subsequently interpreted by the researchers as ‘environmental influence’, ‘prior experience’, ‘self’ and ‘future’ (see Fig.3).

WIPE Time 2

During immersion 34 discernibly different ‘units of analysis’ emerged from the data (‘family breakdown’, ‘aspiration’ and ‘locus of control’). ‘Categorisation’ resulted in 10 ‘categories’ emerging from the 34 ‘units of analysis’. During ‘phenomenological reduction’, four ‘themes’ emerged from the 10 ‘categories’. These four emergent ‘themes’ were subsequently interpreted by the researchers as ‘supportive environment’, ‘the course’, ‘self’ and ‘future’ (see Fig.4).

Figure 3 – Phases of CCM analysis from the WIPE at T1:

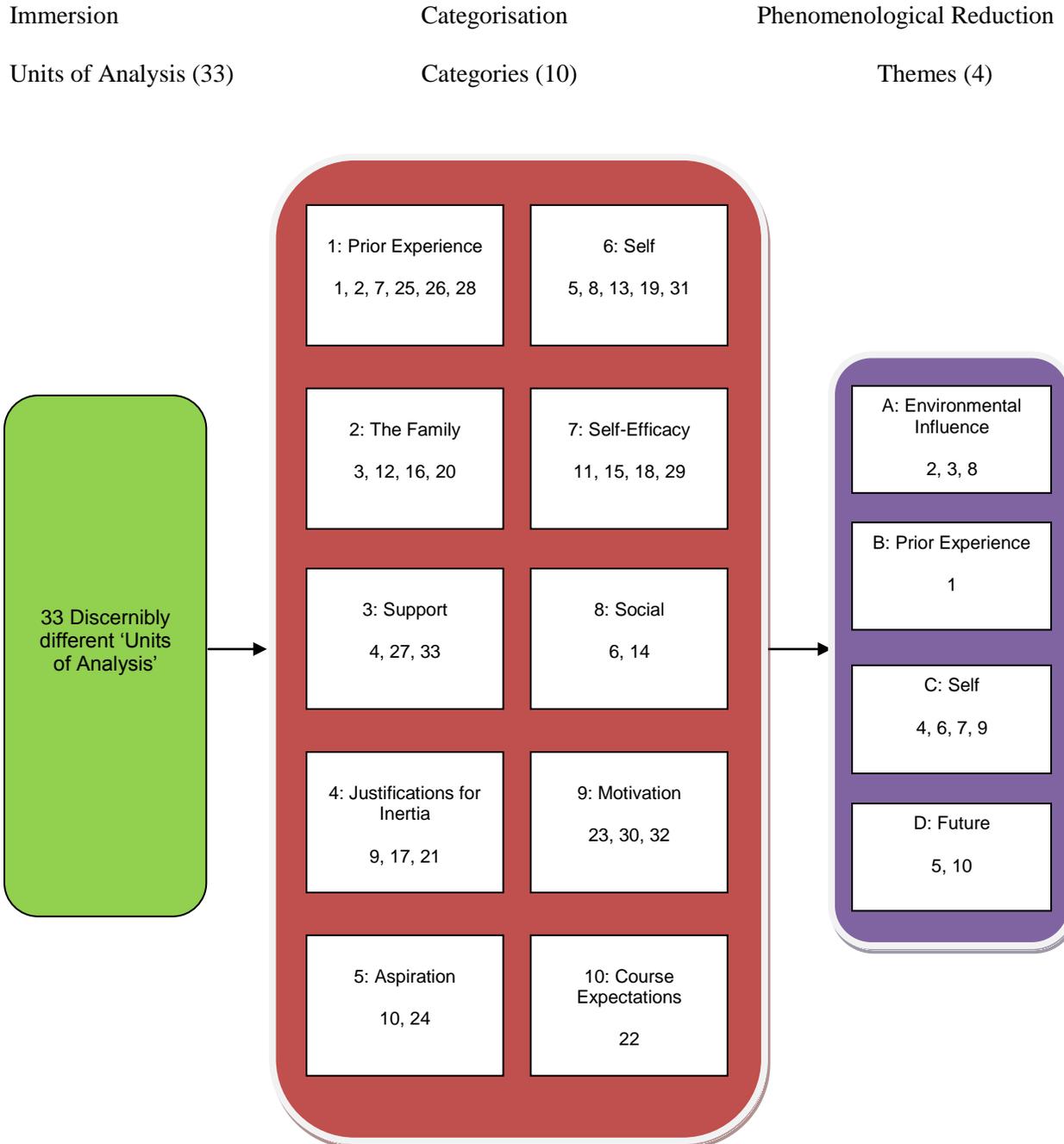
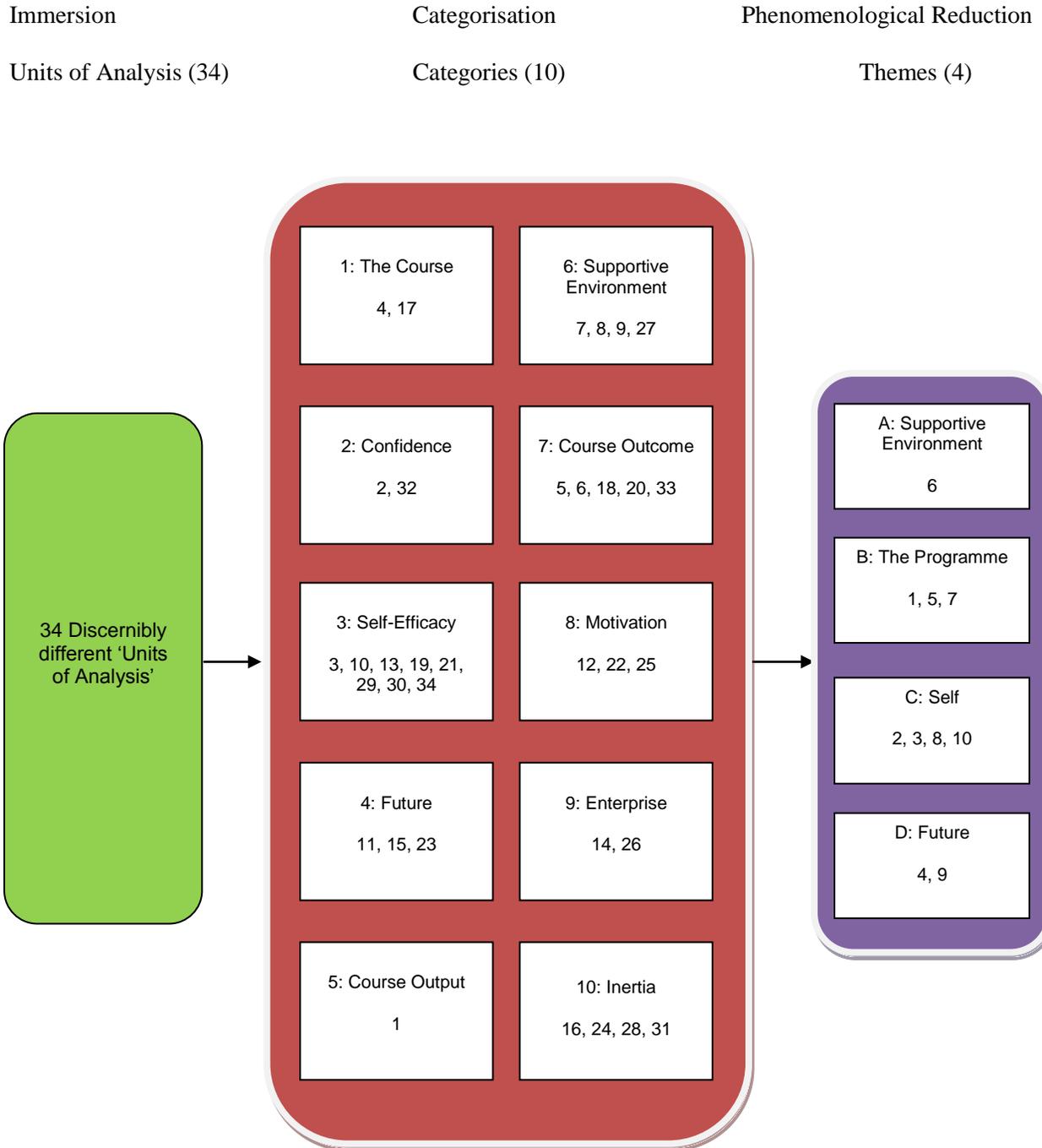


Figure 4 – Phases of CCM analysis from the WIPE at T2:



Qualitative results

WISE

Eight overall themes emerged from the analysis of the WISE interview data (four at Time 1 and four at Time 2). These themes were interpreted by the researchers as participant perceptions.

Three of the themes that emerged at Time 1 ('prior experience', 'self' and 'future') re-emerged at Time 2. One of the themes that emerged at Time 1 ('environmental influence') did not re-emerge at Time 2 but was superseded by a new theme ('the programme'). It is proposed that an examination of the similarities and differences between the themes at Time 1 and Time 2 will reveal the participants' perspective of the *outcome* benefits of the EEP. In the following discussion the participant quotations selected represent examples taken from 'units of analysis' relating to each relevant theme.

Time 1

Theme A: 'environmental influence'

The major environmental influences cited by the participants were the negative influences resulting from the breakdown of their family and positive influences gained from role models.

"Unfortunately, last October due to family breakdown I was asked to leave so I was pretty much forced to grow up and live in my own, but I'm getting used to it now it's been eight months nearly now" P13

"No they split up when I was three.....but my Mum's married again and I don't get along with him at all so I try and keep away from there as much as possible". P37

"My stepdad now, he's changed me, well he's got some very strong views about how a person should be and how they should act in today's world. And he speaks to me like a friend as well, and he just makes you feel comfortable..." P28

Theme B: 'prior experience'

Much of the prior experience cited by the participants was related to negative school and work experience often involving bullying, disruptive behaviour and poor achievement in Maths and English.

"I left there [School] in year ten because of bullying and things like that and then I came here [Youth Centre] 'cos they had like a school for kids who'd left school early and I was here for about a year doing my GCSEs." P29

"So, then like from the years messing about every day the teachers started not liking me. So, every time I walk in my lesson she'll be like 'No you're out because I know you are going to mess about'." P4

"No I feel myself I've got to have Maths because everywhere like warehouse jobs they always say like you have got a test like to pass" P4

Theme C: 'self'

Participant descriptions of 'self' were often grounded in issues of self-confidence. Often poor performance in school has undermined their confidence in 'performance' situations, which can lead to them faking confidence. Lack of self-confidence often results in anxiety when entering new social situations. However, some report that success in performance situations can reverse poor self-images.

"When it's something that I believe in and that I, you know believe I can do, yeah I'm very confident but when it's something I'm not too sure about, I don't know or something I'm not familiar with, I could still fake confidence in it..." P29

“I don’t know. Obviously, I’m nervous because I’m going to meet a lot of new people but that comes with it do you know what I mean? That’s it really, a bit nervous about meeting new people and that’s it”. P5

“And I just done that [building course] and passed that so I was doing skills two days and then the college three days so I passed that and that got me a bit better more confident in myself as well like.” P4

Theme D: ‘future’

Participant future aspirations tended to be very vague, uncompromising and unrealistic, often not really predicated on opportunities available to people with their qualifications and experience.

“Well, I think erm I don’t know it’s hard to explain. I don’t want to be someone who just goes and does a waitress job, or a cleaning job. I want to have a job that I know I am going to keep for more than 6 months.....” P18

“Because I am not prepared to do anything I don’t want to, I’ve made a conscious decision about two months ago to never do anything that I don’t want to do and that’s the way I am going to live my life...” P25

“No. I will be famous, I know it might sound deluded, I will be famous. A lot of people are saying I am good because I can write my own lyrics and sing my own songs.” P28

Time 2

Theme A: “the programme”

Participants were generally very positive about their engagement in the programme. They said they enjoyed having structure to their day and trying new activities. Many of the participants expressed positive attitudes to changes in their outlook resulting from activities they engaged in.

There was also a sense of community through the realisation that finding work was difficult for many of their peers.

“Erm, it's been more structured like I knew for definite what I would be doing each day of the week erm so it helped me plan the week.” P13

“When I got asked to do it [look after 20 children] I thought bloody hell, but actually it wasn't too bad, it was quite fun and a new experience. So basically I've learned to try new things and that's what this has given me the opportunity to do so far.” P38

“Like I am not the only one to have been struggling to get a job and I am like not the only one who does this kind of thing. I have met new people and people who are interested in the same things that I am interested in and its being quite good.” P5

Theme B: ‘prior experience’

This theme of ‘prior experience’ re-emerged at T2 but with a very different emphasis. Instead of talking about the negative prior experience from school and work, participants talk about the positive prior experiences they had while engaged with the programme. They also compare the current programme with other programmes they have completed previously. At T2 ‘prior experience’ is a more positive influence on their outlook for the future.

“The other ones that I went on, at the end of the courses, I felt abandoned. So it was like go home, say ‘bye bye, ta-ra, go on’, then go on to another course...But from this course, I have managed to perhaps get a future job out of it or an apprenticeship.” P5

“I have been through three E2E courses I've done college, I've done school and none of it sort of put things into perspective as well as this did.” P3

“Yeah definitely, it has made me feel more like it's more attainable, like it's made me feel like....like...say ‘I know I can do it now’.” P27

Theme C: 'self'

As with the previous theme, when 'self' re-emerged at T2 it was a much more positive theme with participants describing how their experiences on the programme had changed how they felt about themselves. They describe how they learned new social skills, evaluated negative previous behaviours, gained in self-confidence and respect. This learning process and receiving deserved praise exemplified how experiencing a more positive environment in the EEP can reverse poor participant self-image.

"We went round the group and we'd tell each other our strengths and the day after we'd tell each other our weaknesses. And it helped me realise what I'm good at and what I'm not so good at..." P3

"I got a lot of confidence out of the project and I got some motivation out of it cos I've never motivated myself really to push myself to do something. And doing that, I actually pushed myself to do something and get something out of it." P7

"Yeah, with the pats on the back and everyone around me saying 'yeah you got potential, and you got potential for marketing'. I mean I don't know about what's in my head but apparently it's good. So yeah, so much, so much more; that's probably what I lacked. I know confidence comes into it, but I had the confidence just not much self belief. But now that boost is there it's really kicked in." P38

Theme D: 'future'

Again, as with the previous re-emerging themes, 'future' re-emerged at T2 with participants describing much more specific and realistic plans for the future. These plans included more structured job searching activities, considered and realistic potential career development and in some cases participants had actually succeeded in finding jobs.

“I’ll have to write CVs and send them out and be ready for it. I’ll have to research for the job I’ll be applying for as well. I need to know what I am doing and basically go from there. P7

“Yeah I have got a plan. A Plan of where I want to go and what I want to do if you know what I mean and I’ve figured out my steps of how to get there. So, the Plan B [name of EEP] and the mentoring training is giving me the steps I need to get the apprenticeship that the woman said I could have.” P5

“The mock interview that I had here [EEP], really, really, helped with the interview I had at [company] because that was two days after I had the mock interview. And yeah I went into the interview and got offered the job the same day.” P18

WIPE

Eight overall themes emerged from the analysis of the WIPE interview data (four at T1 and four at T2). These themes were interpreted by the researchers as participant perceptions. Two of the themes that emerged at T1 (‘self’ and ‘future’) re-emerged at T2. Two of the themes that emerged at T1 (‘environmental influence’ and ‘prior experience’) did not re-emerge at T2 but were superseded by two new themes (‘supportive environment’ and ‘the programme’).

Time 1

Theme A: ‘environmental influence’

As with the WISE participants, the major environmental influences cited by the WIPE participants were negative influences resulting from the breakdown of their family for various reasons. There were also examples of positive role models.

“My parents split up when I was about three months old so I've never really known them together. My mom went to prison for drug dealing and shoplifting when I was six. I've always lived with my Dad my Nan and Granddad, but now my Dad lives in Stoke.” P1

It was all right until my Mom went away and then I went a bit off-track, like not going in [to school] and playing up. Then the teacher started not liking me and I didn't get any help.” P5

“He's [Step-Dad] the one that inspired me to do my football coaching at College. So I do look at him as a role model. I'm not sure why really he gives me the opportunity to prove myself, which not many people do.” P6

Theme B: ‘prior experience’

WIPE, T1 interviews revealed that many of the participants gained higher qualifications than the WISE participants. They also tended to have more work experience but even with these potential advantages their ‘prior experience’ was still largely negative. The qualifications didn’t lead to better opportunities and work obtained was both transitory in nature and poorly paid. Maths and English were again perceived as problematic subject areas.

“I'm 18 I left school when I was 15. I completed all of my GCSEs. I got three B's, six C's and two D's. I got two B's in English and a B in art...Then after I went to Cadbury College for about three weeks and started to do my A-levels, but I couldn't be bothered so I got a job at McDonald's.....Then I did an apprenticeship in childcare but the woman wasn't recording my work or anything so I quit and then I got a job in McDonald's again for three weeks. Then I left that and I have been doing like nothing for over a year, I am here now because I need to get a job and I can't get one.” P1

“I didn't really like it [school] because I don't like writing much. I am like an active person and so school, I just didn't get along with.” P2

“I was working there [butchers] for one and a half months and the manager came up to me and he said to me ‘We are finding it difficult to pay staff I’m afraid we are going to have to let you go. You are temporary staff and we have a tight budget this and that.’ So, he gave me this letter and said ‘We are going to have to let you go next week’.” P3

Theme C: ‘self’

Unlike the WISE participants, the WIPE participants didn’t seem to focus on issues of confidence but instead gave fairly ‘honest’ self-assessments. They described themselves as aggressive and only motivated by things that interested them, and requiring ‘respect’.

“I was a bit of a troublemaker [at school]. I always used to get into fights and stuff but like I got all of my GCSEs so I couldn’t have been that bad. I just an attitude problem, arguing with people all of the time” P1

“Well, when it comes down to pen and paper I’m not very motivated at all, but when it’s the active side anything active I’m pretty much motivated a lot. It’s like when I was on this apprenticeship and we had to do stuff on the railway I was always motivated.” P2

“A lot of people give you respect [when you are wearing a suit]. I realise because I work in a butcher’s, people don’t speak to you right. They just say ‘Give me that, give me that’. You aren’t given any respect like them saying ‘Give me that please’.” P3

Theme D: ‘future’

Once more the WIPE participants differed from the WISE participants in that the WIPE participants had more specific aspirations that were perhaps a bit more realistic in relation to their qualifications and experience. They also aspired to improve their qualifications perhaps to raise their chances of finding more interesting work.

“I'm hoping to probably get a few extra qualifications because that's what I wanted to do at College and I didn't get it. Qualifications are what I want to get out of it [the EEP] and probably an apprenticeship at the end.” P6

“From here I really want to get the qualifications, but I think the whole thing to get an apprenticeship in plumbing and once I get into plumbing I'll just stick to the plumbing and get the best out of it.” P4

“I only did childcare because that was the only thing that was on offer. I didn't know what I wanted to do. My aim now is to get into Retail and Customer Service because you just get new things every day, you know, new things to deal with.” P1

Time 2

Theme A: ‘supportive environment’

At T2 the participants’ responses during interviews focused on the positive support they received on the programme rather than referring back to the negative environmental influences that pervaded the T1 responses. They described the staff on the programme as being more helpful and understanding than teachers at their previous schools and colleges providing more support and a more relaxed and friendly environment.

“Here [on the EEP] it is more laid-back compared to College, because I can't deal with rules sitting in the classroom all the time. Whereas here, you have got a bit more freedom so it's better and the staff are easier to talk to...” P1

“Yeah I think improved, it definitely improved. We have help from [teacher] and I liked it when she helped, she would help you on the side.” P3

“The teachers back in my old college they wouldn't really help you, it is just basically they will go through it once and then that's it you have to do it. The ones that come here you have got more support from these people than the last place.” P4

Theme B: ‘the programme’

The participants described the employability content of the programme as being the most useful. They obviously saw direct practical links with what they were doing and how it could help them find work in the future. What also emerges from the statements below is the impression that the participants were gaining confidence in their ability to present themselves and to function appropriately in the workplace.

“To make it clear and to promote yourself and that and to let them know what you can do as opposed to what you are quite good at.” P1

“...well they [EEP staff] give you a bit of help of how to take a phone call, what to say in a phone call, so that you are prepared. With the interview skills they prepare you for real-life interviews and all this.” P2

“...I would sometimes say something bad about myself instead of saying something positive, whereas now I would always say something positive. Recently I just had an interview and the person said after the interview I did a really good interview so I can see straightaway it has helped me a lot.” P6

Theme C: ‘self’

At T1, the participants’ views of ‘self’ were largely negative. At T2 they describe themselves in much more positive terms.

“I know what I want to do and be able to do because I'm creative and I can cope with ideas for practically anything, obviously like design wise and stuff like that.” P1

“I know that you have to start somewhere at the bottom, obviously you have to start at the bottom, but I just want to work my way to the top.” P3

“So once I started into this teamwork it was all right, my confidence went more. And as it carried on my confidence just carried on. I thought it was really hard at first and I was really nervous because I didn't know anyone and I just carried on.” P4

Theme D: ‘future’

Participant perceptions of ‘future’ at T2 changed from focusing on qualifications and job aspirations to specific actions they were taking to realise those aspirations. The statements made by the participants at T2 reflect a general feeling of optimism for the future.

“It's got better because I found something that I really, really, want to do. Set design stage lighting the management that kind of stuff. Whereas before, I didn't know what I wanted to do I just wanted a job.” P1

“I'm going to stick to carpentry for now because it was one of my main choices, I'm going to see what road that takes me down.” P2

“My future, my future plan is to move on to College and get an apprenticeship in plumbing or electronics and once I have finished college I would hope to get my own business in plumbing or electronics and just carry on.” P4

Quantitative analysis

All questionnaire data was inputted into SPSS version 17.0 and all analyses were conducted using this software. The data was checked for normality utilising histograms and P-P plots and found to be normally distributed. The relationships between demographic data (age, gender, time spent unemployed etc.) were explored using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVAs.

Changes in participant self-efficacy between Time 1 and Time 2 were analysed using paired-sample t-tests. Differences in changes in participant self-efficacy levels over time at the two organisations were explored using independent-sample t-tests. As the data was normally distributed, all tests used were parametric.

Instrument Reliability

Cronbach’s α for the GSE scale used in the research were run both at Time 1 and Time 2. The GSE scale performed reliably, achieving a Cronbach’s α of .77 and .75 (T1) and .80 and .67 (T2).

Quantitative Results

Hypothesis 1: participants will display an increase in their levels of GSE from Time 1 to Time 2.

Paired-sample t-tests were employed to explore the differences between the GSE scores at Time 1 and Time 2 at the WISE intervention programme. Results of the paired sample t-tests revealed a statistically significant increase in GSE ($p < .01$) between T1 and T2 for individuals that completed the WISE intervention programme (see Table 1).

Table 1 – WISE - Paired-sample t-test for GSE scale at T1 and T2:

Scale	N	Descriptive statistics for time 1 to time 2 changes			
		Intervention Phase	Mean (%)	+/- (%)	SD (%)
GSE	24	Time 1	74.90	+ 4.06**	7.46
		Time 2	78.96		8.81

NB. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$ and NS = non-significant.

Paired-sample t-tests were also employed to explore changes in GSE between Time 1 and Time 2 at the WIPE intervention programme. Results of the paired-sample t-tests revealed a statistically significant increase in GSE ($p < .01$) (see Table 2).

Table 2 – WIPE - Paired-sample *t*-test for GSE scale at T1 & T2:

Descriptive statistics for time 1 to time 2 changes					
Scale	<i>N</i>	Intervention Phase	Mean (%)	+/- (%)	SD (%)
GSE	25	Time 1	77.80	+ 3.60**	4.58
		Time 2	81.40		6.04

NB. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$ and NS = non-significant.

Overall results revealed that both the WISE and WIPE interventions had a statistically significant positive effect on the GSE levels of the NEET participants that completed the EEPs. *Hypotheses one confirmed.*

Hypothesis 2: Participants with lower initial levels of GSE will display greater plasticity.

In order to test for behavioural plasticity, the GSE scores for the sample at Time 1 were dichotomised into two groups on the basis of a median split. The lower complement consisted of participants who scored lower than the median GSE value for the sample at Time 1, and the upper complement consisted of participants who were equal to or above the median. A paired-sample *t*-test was performed on each complement independently, to examine the effect of plasticity on the interventions' impact. The median values for GSE at both organisations is presented below (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Median Split for GSE at T1 for both groups of NEETs:

Median Split for GSE at Time 1					
Organisation	Scale	<i>N</i>	Median (%)	Lower Complement (n)	Upper Complement (n)
WISE	GSE	48	73.75	24	24
WIPE	GSE	58	77.50	28	30

Paired-sample t-tests were then conducted on both the lower and upper complement. In selecting the lower complement, SPSS was asked to select cases lower than the median i.e. (GSE_T1 < 73.75); for the upper complement SPSS was asked to select cases equal to or greater than the median i.e. (GSE_T1 ≥ 73.75). The median split was calculated in this way to ensure that no participant in the lower complement had a GSE score that was equal to the median, thus ensuring that it truly was a representative ‘lower’ complement. The results for the lower and upper complements for those individuals that completed questionnaires at T1 and T2 (n = 49) are presented below in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 – Plasticity effect - Changes in GSE between T1 & T2 (lower complements):

Descriptive statistics for time 1 to time 2 changes (lower complements)						
Organisation	Scale	N	Intervention Phase	Mean (%)	+/- (%)	SD
WISE	GSE	12	Time 1	68.75	+ 5.00 (CS)	2.72
			Time 2	73.75		6.95
WIPE	GSE	9	Time 1	73.06	+ 7.50**	1.67
			Time 2	80.56		5.12

NB. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$, CS = Close to significance and NS = non-significant.

Table 5 – Plasticity effect - Changes in GSE between T1 & T2 (upper complements):

Descriptive statistics for time 1 to time 2 changes (upper complements)						
Organisation	Scale	N	Intervention Phase	Mean (%)	+/- (%)	SD
WISE	GSE	12	Time 1	81.04	+ 3.13 (CS)	5.16
			Time 2	84.17		7.41
WIPE	GSE	16	Time 1	80.47	+ 1.41 (NS)	3.32
			Time 2	81.88		6.61

NB. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$, CS = Close to significance and NS = non-significant.

The results revealed that behavioural plasticity had a statistically significant effect ($p < .01$) upon the changes in GSE levels of lower complement NEETs at the WIPE, but only had a close to

significant effect ($p = .06$) upon the change in GSE levels of the lower complement NEETs at the WISE. This suggests that the improvement in GSE levels for NEETs at the WISE was much more evenly spread across the cohort of participants than at the WIPE. This may be related to the higher average Time 1 GSE levels at the WIPE when compared to the social enterprise. Equally, it could also be indicative of greater impact at the WISE organisation when compared to the WIPE. Unfortunately, the small sample-sizes involved limit the conclusions that can be drawn from this. *Hypothesis two partially confirmed.*

Hypothesis 3: The participants taking part in the training programme delivered by the WISE will display greater increases in their levels of GSE from Time 1 to Time 2 than their counterparts at the WIPE comparison group.

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to ascertain if there was a statistically significant difference in the changes in GSE levels over time for those participants at the WISE when compared with those at the WIPE (see Table 6 below).

Table 6 – Independent sample t-tests on changes in GSE levels between T1 and T2 with organisation as the factor:

Descriptive Statistics for Comparative Changes in GSE					
Scale	Scale	<i>N</i>	Change in GSE	Difference (SE – CG)	SD
GSE	WISE	24	4.06	0.46 (NS)	6.79
	WIPE	25	3.60		6.04

NB. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$, CS = Close to significance and NS = non-significant.

Results revealed that whilst the average increase in GSE was greater for those NEETs on the WISE intervention programme than for those on the WIPE programme, this difference was not statistically significant. *Hypothesis three not confirmed.*

Discussion

The overall results of the research support the conclusion reached by Denny *et al.* (2011) that an intervention methodology utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods in the form of semi-structured interviews and a GSE scale is an appropriate measure of *outcome* in assessing an EEP. Additionally, the mixed-methods approach allowed the quantitative results from the GSE scale data to support the researcher interpretations of emergent themes from the semi-structured interview data, which can be regarded as a process of triangulation (McLeod, 1994).

In relation to the NEET participants involved at both the WISE and WIPE, the interview data at T1 supports prior research by Yates and Payne (2006) that NEETs are a more heterogeneous than homogenous entity. However, the majority of the NEETs involved in this research belonged to what Yates and Payne (2006) labelled the ‘complicated’ NEET subgroup, and the results of this research suggest that within a particular subgroup NEETs tend towards homogeneity in their experiences. Clearly, whilst every NEETs’ prior experience will be unique to that individual, most of the participants involved in this research had at some time experienced family breakdown, educational exclusion and difficult peer relations that sometimes involved being victims (or instigators) of bullying. The themes of ‘environmental influence ‘ and ‘prior experience’ that emerged at T1 at both the WISE and the WIPE related to the issues outlined above, often with family-breakdown leading to problems at school, low academic achievement and hence subsequent problems in the labour market. The interview data also supported prior research by Payne (2002) which articulated a link between chaotic living arrangements, low academic achievement and problems at school, with ‘social exclusion’. The NEETs interviewed in this study at T1 articulated a negative view of themselves and of their future employment prospects that was based in their negative past experiences. These views resulted in the emergent themes of ‘self’ and ‘future’ that appeared at T1 at both the WISE and WIPE, in which participants articulated a self-image characterised by low self-confidence, a lack of motivation and being lazy, as well as vague and often unrealistic aspirations given their current qualifications. Whilst the NEETs interviewed at the WIPE seemed to have experienced less traumatic backgrounds compared to their counterparts at the WISE, their experiences were still commonly in line with those outlined above. Whilst the slightly more positive prior experience

of NEETs at the WIPE had resulted in better qualifications, this had not led to improved employability and had consequently left them with a negative future outlook that could be characterised by feelings of social exclusion. Therefore, the researchers suggest that the emergent themes from the T1 interview data support prior research linking NEET status with 'social exclusion' (Yates & Payne, 2006; Payne, 2002; Williamson, 1997). The researchers also propose that the negative emergent themes of 'self' and 'future' are also indicative of low self-efficacy amongst the participants, predicated upon the emergent themes of 'environmental influence' and their 'prior experience'.

Researcher interpretations of the T1 and T2 data from both the WISE and the WIPE revealed participant perceptions of positive changes in their psychological make-up, mainly related to increases in confidence and motivation. As both of these constructs are key components of GSE (Judge *et al.*, 1997), the researchers interpreted this as an assertion of increased GSE amongst the participants that engaged with the both programmes. This was illustrated by the emergent themes at T2 at both the WISE (the programme; prior experience; self; and future) and the WIPE (supportive environment; the programme; self; and future). At the WISE this was characterised by participants talking about their positive engagement with the programme and how the daily structure and 'mastery experiences' that they had experienced had led to higher social confidence and increased motivation. These positive experiences led to a positive change in self-image and future outlook that was encapsulated in the themes of 'self' and 'future' as increased confidence and more structured job-searching strategies. At the WIPE the participants talked about their experiences of the programme, particularly in relation to the employability module, and the supportive environment that they found there in positive terms. This replaced the negative 'environmental influences' and 'prior experiences' that had emerged as themes at T1. This led to the emergence of a more positive theme of 'self' at T2 in which the participants talked about increased confidence, motivation and creativity. The fourth emergent theme of 'future' was thus also positive with participants articulating more realistic career aspirations, but more importantly they had plans of how they would achieve their goals. Researcher interpretations of the emergent themes at T1 and T2 indicate the positive effect that both the WISE and the WIPE programmes had upon the NEET participants in terms of *outcome* benefits. This is supported through triangulation (McLeod, 1994) with the quantitative data which showed statistically significant

increases in GSE at the WISE of 4.06% ($p < .01$) and at the WIPE of 3.60% ($p < .01$). The researchers therefore believe that the positive mastery and vicarious experiences, coupled with verbal persuasion and a supportive environment that seems to have been indicative of the programmes run by both the WISE and WIPE, augment participant GSE to produce a positive course *outcome* (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001).

The effects of behavioural plasticity (Brockner, 1988) were also partially evidenced in the quantitative data gathered from the WIPE, but interestingly not the WISE. For those NEETS that completed the WIPE programme, there was a statistically significant increase ($p < .01$) of 7.50% in GSE for those with below average GSE at T1, compared to an increase of only 1.41% for those with above average GSE at T1. However, at the WISE, whilst the overall GSE change between T1 and T2 was a statistically significant increase ($p < .01$) of 4.06%, when the results were split into the lower (+ 5.00%) and upper complements (+ 3.13%) both sets became non-significant (albeit close to significance $p < .06$). Such results only partially confirm the prior research findings relating to plasticity in previous work-integration programmes (Eden & Aviram, 1993; Creed *et al.*, 2001; Denny *et al.*, Under Review). This suggests that the WISE programme had a broader positive effect on the GSE levels of the NEET participants than the WIPE programme, which had a significant impact only on those who had lower than average GSE levels at T1. The researchers propose that the differing selection policies of the two organisations may be responsible for this result. As the WIPE operates a selective policy of inducting NEETs onto the programme utilising interviews, the NEETs entering onto the programme at T1 have higher average GSE levels (77.80%) than the NEETs at the WISE (74.90%) which operates an open policy of inducting any individual. This statistical result is also supported by the interview data which showed that whilst both samples had suffered broadly negative prior experiences, these experiences and the resulting 'social exclusion' were more broadly entrenched for the NEETs participating at the WISE programme. Therefore, the reduced 'social exclusion' and subsequently higher GSE levels of the NEETs participating at the WIPE impact upon the plasticity effect and so reduce the change between T1 and T2 in GSE levels. As the WISE is recruiting a cohort of NEETs that is more 'socially excluded' and hence has lower GSE levels at T1, the scope for improvement in GSE is greater. Nevertheless, caution must be

applied before generalising these results, as the NEET and organisational sample-sizes are very small. Further research is required to explore this finding.

The final area for discussion relates to the differing overall impact of both the programmes on the NEETs that participated in them. The statistical results revealed that there was no significant difference in GSE change over time between the WISE (+ 4.06%) and the WIPE (+ 3.60%). This result was also evident in the qualitative interview data that showed similar themes appearing at T2 at both the WISE and the WIPE in which the participants outlined the positive *outcome* effects that the programmes had upon them and how this had changed their perceptions regarding their futures. Such results would seem to suggest that the whilst the WISE and WIPE both positively effected the NEETs that engaged with them, the WISE offered no obvious additional value in terms of GSE related *outcome*. However, a number of factors must be considered before reaching such a conclusion. First, the WISE programme only lasted six weeks compared to the sixteen week programme offered by the WIPE, yet it had an equal impact in terms of *outcome* benefits when compared to the WIPE. Second, the WISE through its open-door selection policy achieved the same *outcome* performance as the WIPE, even though the former worked with individuals suffering greater levels of ‘social exclusion’. Finally and in relation to the last point, plasticity was not the factor behind such *outcome* performance, as whilst those NEETs at the WISE did have lower average levels of GSE than their WISE counterparts, this difference was *not* statistically significant and the positive WISE *outcome* performance was spread across both complements. Whilst such conclusions cannot be confidently asserted without additional supporting research, the researchers suggest that the ‘added value’ that WISEs can offer may not be evident in *outcome* data, but rather in the way that they operate an ‘open access’ policy on their programmes.

Summary

The findings of this ongoing research support the prior research of Denny *et al.* (2011) in confirming a mixed methods research approach as a robust, viable and effective measure of *outcome* benefits resulting from engagement in EEPs. The research also supports prior NEET research by Yates and Payne (2006) into the heterogeneous nature of NEET experiences, albeit

suggesting that such differing experiences can still be thematically homogenised to a degree. Additionally, the results reveal only partial support for prior research into the effects of plasticity in work-integration programmes (Eden & Aviram, 1993; Creed *et al.*, 2001; Denny *et al.*, Under Review). Perhaps most importantly, the results suggest that WISEs do offer ‘added value’ in relation to their WIPE counterparts in relation to their willingness to take on more ‘complicated’ NEETs suffering from greater degrees of ‘social exclusion’ (Payne 2002; Yates & Payne, 2006). Nevertheless, more research is required before the above conclusions can be asserted with any degree of confidence. This research reported in this paper has involved only two organisations and a small sample of NEETs and so it would not be correct to generalise the findings without further research being conducted. As this research is an ongoing study interviews are now being planned with the staff and owners/managers at the WISE and WIPE to try to offer further insight into how the differing organisational types and structures effects the delivery of the work-integration programmes and the subsequent *outcome* benefits experienced by the NEETs.

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