Ipswich Opportunity Area: Youth Engagement

Exploring methods of engagement and feedback on the Ipswich Opportunity Area delivery plan with young people

Katie Tyrrell

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on qualitative evidence, gathered from 36 young people, aged 9-24 years, who engaged voluntarily in focus group interviews undertaken by the University of Suffolk, between May-August 2018. The purpose was to investigate their perceptions on the most appropriate and efficient methods for communicating and engaging with young people in Ipswich, as well as their views of current or upcoming activity of the Ipswich Opportunity Area (IOA) programme.

Overall, young people appeared to positively support the proposed actions of the IOA programme; however, it was clear that the most emphasis from young people's perspectives should be placed upon mental health provision, supportive, safe environments and increasing awareness around careers and employments prospects. Young people across all focus groups arrived at the consensus that in terms of engagement and involving young people in programme delivery and feedback, no one method was most effective, and instead a multitude of different methods should be employed to ensure inclusion, empowerment and choice for young people. Young people's perceptions and subsequent recommendations are outlined below:

Table 1: Methods of Engagement Summary

Method	Young People's Perceptions	Recommendations
Online Platforms	Many young people suggested that social media and online platforms would be a good way to engage with young people, and if used the best social media platform to engage and communicate with young people would be Instagram. Younger children were concerned that use of online methods alone would be exclusionary for some.	An online platform should be generated as part of the IOA website, co-produced with young people alongside subsequent social media platforms (Instagram), which update young people upon the IOA programme, opportunities for involvement and action resulting from their input.
Youth Parliament/Youth Ambassadors	Young people interviewed did not have very positive views about youth parliaments or youth councils, mainly because it wasn't necessarily representative, or the same young people were likely to be involved. Young people suggested that advisory groups	Consolidate with local organisations and existing youth parliament, create a youth advisory groups based on existing networks and local youth organisations. Young people who volunteer to participate should be rewarded or paid for their time. Efforts should be made to liaise with local youth organisations to ensure young

	may be useful, but only if they include those who are less likely to be represented by involving rewards or incentive for participation.	people who are typically underrepresented or are less likely to participate have the opportunity to do so. The IOA should consider funding a paid youth ambassador role, or two part-time ambassadors, who coordinate youth engagement throughout the duration of the programme, which is influenced heavily by the UNCRC Children's Rights Framework.
Group Discussions	Young people preferred to be involved in providing feedback and consulted by engaging in group discussions. Most young people suggested that capturing young people's views would be best if they could take part in 'groups like this'. Young people also engaged positively in having an interactive task embedded in the session.	Led by a youth ambassador and youth advisory group, group discussions with young people should be held at significant points of the programme where possible. Group discussions should be interactive in nature, including activities which embed creative methods.
Survey Methods	Young people suggested that surveys would be more useful to get a representative sample of young people, as well as inclusive for those who felt they wouldn't be comfortable in group discussions. However, they considered them to be ineffective if used inappropriately and without flexibility and incentive.	If used, surveys should be online and should ideally be generated by young people for young people. There should be incentive for participation and flexibility in which young people can complete surveys. It is recommended that surveys are distributed through local networks and via social media to ensure increased likelihood of inclusivity and representativeness.

Table 2: Ipswich Opportunity Area Priorities: Young people's perceptions

Theme	Young People's Perceptions	Recommendations
Fulfilling Primary Needs: Emotional Resilience and Safety (**Priority 1**) (**Priority 2**)	The most significant and consistent support was toward providing young people with support and opportunities to build life skills, self-confidence and resilience. Young people reflected that this was of importance not only for much younger children but across all age groups, and that greater psychological wellbeing would contribute to better learning outcomes.	In addition to parents, carers and families, the IOA should consider investing in training for all school staff, including but not limited to teachers, pastoral staff and teaching assistants, across all year groups, to support resilience and emotional skills development and increase awareness of mental health. Consider funding of specialist professionals, including clinical psychologists or mental health nurses, within school settings.

Support: Inside and Outside of the Classroom **(Priority 1)**	The need for support also extended outside of school, with most young people describing the importance of social and group activities outside of the classroom. Consistency in activities for youth outside of school was of importance to the young people, with some describing the need for sustainable programmes to provide additional opportunities for young people in Ipswich as well as to build lasting social connections.	Redirecting external activities, including Youth Social Action programmes, to incorporate a focus upon developing resilience. As well as training programme leaders and staff. Additional attention should be paid to extending and increasing existing youth provision, working closely alongside local organisations and ensuring the sustainability of programmes developed as part of the IOA.
Career Aspirations **(Priority 4)**	Careers guidance was of high importance across the majority of young people interviewed. Young people were clear that they wanted careers guidance on a one-to-one basis from individuals who knew them on a more personal level and could help them think about an appropriate career. Young people discussed the importance of including what careers are available and options to them, particularly at the end of Key Stage 3 when deciding which GCSE options to take. Despite many employability and careers initiatives young people still appear to be uncertain about their options and what is available to them at key stages.	Consider extending the world of work offer to young people in Key Stage 3, so they can make more informed decisions about their GCSE options and subsequent career choices. The IOA may also want to consider coordinating and formulating a targeted campaign to increase awareness around the career and employability initiatives available to young people.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ipswich was identified by the Department for Education (DfE) as being one of 12 opportunity areas which had comparatively lower opportunities to enable young people to succeed and lower educational performance than elsewhere in England, as identified by comparing Social Mobility and Achieving Excellence Areas Index scores[1]. The primary focus for the DfE identifying opportunity areas is to subsequently focus national and local resources on increasing social mobility within these locations. The programmes are tailored to the regional context, with a whole-education approach from early years to employment.

Young people in Ipswich on average achieve poorer outcomes in comparison to areas within other Local Authority Districts, and according to local datasets, young people in Ipswich are likely to be not in employment, education or training (NEET)[2]. Based on statistical data and wide consultation, the Ipswich Opportunity Area partnership board have identified four programme areas for intervention in the Ipswich education system.

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[1] Department for Education (DfE) Opportunity Area Selection Methodology: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650036/Opportunity_areas_selection_methodology.pdf

[2] Department for Education (DfE) Social Mobility Opportunity Area Plan: Ipswich (2017-2020) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696854/Social_Mobility_Delivery_Plan_Ipswich_v11_FINAL_WEB.PDF.PDF

These include:

Table 3: Ipswich Opportunity Area Priorities

Priority Area	Description	Proposed Action
1	Ensure all children in Ipswich are prepared to learn for life by developing key behaviours such as resilience and self-regulation	• Package of support for parents, early years settings and primary schools. • Programme of Youth Social Action, which is designed and led by young people.
2	Strengthen the teaching profession in Ipswich by providing world-class support and development	• Provide high quality career and professional development opportunities for education and childcare professionals. • Support Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) • Attract new educational professionals to Ipswich.
3	Improve attainment for disadvantaged pupils by embedding evidence-based practice in the teaching of English and Maths	• Embed evidence-based practice and support in English and Maths across educational settings. • Support pupils through each educational phase and transition.
4	Inspire and equip young people with the skills and guidance they need to pursue an ambitious career pathway	• Raise quality and availability of personal careers guidance, reaching all pupils in key stage 4. • Create a 'world of work' offer for primary aged pupils.

Note: For a full description of all priority areas and proposed action, see the DfE Opportunity Area Report for Ipswich (2017-2020)[3].

The Ipswich Opportunity Area seeks to put young people at the heart of the programme by enabling a genuine input and contribution toward co-production, steer and challenge of the activity programmes. The partnership board thus felt that it was important to understand how far these four areas of intervention resonated with young people in Ipswich, in addition to finding appropriate methods of programme engagement by exploring young people's perceptions.

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[3] Department for Education (DfE) Social Mobility Opportunity Area Plan: Ipswich (2017-2020)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696854/Social_Mobility_Delivery_Plan_Ipswich_v11_FINAL_WEB.PDF.PDF

The aim of this research was therefore to ask young people themselves about the most appropriate and efficient methods for communicating and engaging with young people in Ipswich, as well as their views of current or upcoming activity of the OA programme. The focus is on young people and 'at-risk' young people, who are typically a 'marginalised population and therefore may be prevented from accessing resources and opportunities available to others[4]'.

2. BACKGROUND

Children have frequently been excluded from research, evaluation and policy decisions due to adults being considered as having superior knowledge and understanding in comparison with children. If children and young people are involved in policy decision-making this is often met with tokenistic gestures and low priority, as opposed to true participatory inclusion of children and young people. Researchers have criticised this approach in devaluing young people's perspectives, as in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC, (1989) guidelines[5] (*Figure 1*), children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously as experts in their own lived realities:

> *'Adults do not have the sufficient insight into children's lives to be able to make effective and informed decisions on the legislation, policies and programmes designed for children'* (Lansdown, 2011, pg. 5)[6]

Fortunately, there has been as substantial shift in policy, practice and research with regard to young people's participation and involvement, with increasing recognition that young people are the experts in their own lives. As part of this movement, there has been a development of child-centred methodological techniques employed within contemporary social science research, which focus on emphasising young people's strengths in the research process. More attention has been paid toward participatory

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[4] Yoshitaka Iwasaki, Jane Springett, Pushpanjali Dashora, Anne-MarieMcLaughlin, Tara-Leigh McHugh & Youth 4 YEG Team (2014) Youth-Guided Youth Engagement: Participatory Action Research (PAR) With High-Risk, Marginalized Youth, Child & Youth Services,35:4, 316-342.

[5] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf

[6] Lansdown (2011) Every Childs Right to be Heard: A resource guide on the UN Committee on the rights of the child general comment No.12: https://www.unicef.org/french/adolescence/files/Every_Childs_Right_to_be_Heard.pdf

methods in which enable children and young people's voice to be heard, as well as addressing possible issues of power imbalance (Palaiologou, 2017; Cahill 2004).

As briefly mentioned above, the Convention of Children's Rights (UNCRC, 1989) has had great impact upon emphasising importance of children and young people's consultancy and involvement in activities affecting their lives (Bond, 2014). In particular, Article 12 and 13 (Figure 1) highlight the right for children to be listened to and taken seriously, as well as the right to have freedom of expression.

Figure 1: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)

Article 12

- 1. State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or throuhg a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consstent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

- 1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, recieve and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the childs choice.

Since the introduction of the UNCRC in the UK there have been increasing consultations and participatory initiatives working alongside children and young people to gain their perspectives on topics surrounding education, health and social care (Franklin & Sloper, 2005). Furthermore, following the publication of Every Child Matters: Change for Children by the Department for Education (DfE, 2003), and the appointment of a children's commissioner, children and young people have played a more active part in public life, policy development and service provision, although this is still a work in progress[7].

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[7] Christensen, P., & James, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Research with children: Perspectives and practices*. Routledge.

Methods for engaging young people in consultation and research thus need to reflect the ongoing need for children to be active participants and to ensure their voices and ideas are taken seriously. Various methods of engaging young people in research, evaluation, programme and policy development have been created, most moving away from more traditional methods used in isolation, which have been criticised for researching on children as opposed to with children (Baker and Weller, 2003). Instead, new methodologies involve mediums that can enable children and young people to communicate in a variety of creative means, such as photography and drawings. Such methods facilitate inclusivity, as well as, for example, disregarding age and children's literacy abilities, whilst increasing participation and reducing social exclusion. This is of particular importance in reducing inequality and accessibility. As for example, young people from higher socio-economic status groups are typically much more likely to participate in research and consultation.

Including children and young people's voices is thus vital, particularly when developing services, policy and programmes which directly influence their lives, such as education, social and health care. Children and young people's meaningful participation involves consideration of their 'developing identity, agency and interest in the process' (Johnson, 2011). As well as this, use of more participatory and child centred approaches assists in empowering young people to have their rightful say in matters central to their lives and the lives of others (Cahill, 2004).

Throughout this report, methods for engaging young people in research, evaluation, programme and policy development are considered. There is a particular focus on those considered as disadvantaged or more likely to face social exclusion, who are subsequently less likely to have a chance for their voices to be heard. The current literature around creative methods, traditional methods, participatory methods, virtual and multi-method approaches to youth engagement is reviewed. In addition, young people were consulted directly, around not only the choice of methods but also their thoughts on the priority areas outlined in the Ipswich Opportunity Programme itself.

3.METHODOLOGY

3.1 Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)

REAs provide a more structured and rigorous search and assessment of the evidence than a literature review, but it should be noted that they are not as exhaustive as a systematic review.

According to the Department for International Development (2015)[8] REAs can be used to:

♦ gain an overview of the evidence on a particular issue

♦ support programming decisions by providing evidence on key topics

♦ support the commissioning of further research by identifying evidence gaps.

The REA addressed the following question:

♦ What, if any, effective engagement strategies exist in engaging young people in research, evaluation or programme development?

Both academic and grey literature (including policy documents, government and NGO reports) were included in the search. Key pieces of research identified are included in Table 4 below and throughout the report.

The University databases were used primarily to identify relevant published research and literature using the key search terms. Other databases, including Google Scholar, were also consulted using the following search terms:

Population: Child*, young*, youth* adolescent*

Methods: 'engagement', 'participatory' 'research methods' 'rights' 'child-centred' 'voice' 'perspectives' 'views'

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[8] Department for International Development (2015), Rapid Evidence Assessments. Accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rapid-evidence-assessments

The researcher conducted an initial scan of titles and abstracts to discard all immediately irrelevant texts. Items, which appeared to meet basic relevance requirements, were subsequently retrieved in full and reviewed further.

3.2 Qualitative Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups were used as the qualitative method to engage young people in discussions, as well as elicit a depth of meaning around their preferences for consultation, participation and perceptions of the Ipswich Opportunity Area (IOA) delivery programme (see Barker and Weller, 2003; Shier, 2006; Clark, 2010). Focus groups enable re-dressing the adult: child power dynamics in favour of the young person to lead discussions and determine what is disclosed and shared in the group (Kitzinger, 1994; Kamberalis and Dimitiriadis, 2013). Focus group discussions can also be empowering for sharing ideas with others who can relate to their experience and for considering the extent to which their needs are met within lived everyday environments and contexts (Hill, 2006).

A total of 8 focus groups were facilitated by the researchers and conducted with 37 young people (M = 13, F = 24) between the ages of 9-24 years. Each focus group focused on asking for feedback about:

- The IOA priority areas
- Education and what matters to them within and outside of school
- Their perceptions around best methods and mechanisms of engaging young people in the process of programme development.

The qualitative data and qualitative responses were analysed using a thematic content analysis framework (Sarantakos, 2013; Punch, 2014) to identify common shared and unique themes amongst the young people's perceptions and experiences. During the focus groups, a q-sort methodology was also employed with various statements reflecting priority areas, which were adapted, based on the age of the young people taking part. This method was piloted and tested for effectiveness during the first session, with young people providing positive feedback for use of this method to initiate conversation.

For clarity, quotes provided by young people are presented throughout this report in grey boxes (see below), young people were provided with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

> *'Quotes' (pseudonym, age of young person)*

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The young people who engaged in focus groups as part of the evaluation were active participants in activities and volunteered to participate. All participants were provided with information about the evaluation being undertaken by the University of Suffolk, as well as how the findings would be circulated. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and they were informed about their rights to anonymity, confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the evaluation study. The research team are highly experienced researchers, working with individuals across the lifespan, have enhanced DBS certificates and have all undergone appropriate safeguarding training.

The evaluation was subject to University of Suffolk's ethical scrutiny and approval, and it complied with the British Sociological Association and the British Psychological Society's Guidelines. Adherence to guidelines set out by the United Kingdom Research Integrity Office's Code of Practice for Research ensured that the research followed the principles of the Singapore Statement of Research Integrity:

- Honesty in all aspects of research
- Accountability in the conduct of research
- Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others
- Good stewardship of research on behalf of others

Where participants consented, focus groups were audio recorded, and the verbatim data was subject to thematic framework analysis as devised by the National Centre for Social Research[9].

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[9] Richie, J.; Lewis, J.; McNaughten-Nicholls, C. and Ormston, R. (2014). *Qualitative Research Practice.* London: Sage.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Engaging with Young People

Key literature was interrogated to identify appropriate methods to engage young people, predominantly in research practice, but also on evaluation, programme and policy development. The most frequent methods employed when engaging in research with young people typically fell into five broad areas as outlined in Table 4. It should be noted that there is a tendency for multiple methods to be employed when working alongside children and young people as opposed to one method of engagement alone.

For the purposes of clarity, this section of the report will be broken down into the five areas presented in Table 4, accompanied by extracts from the REA and quotes provided by young people themselves.

4.1.1 Youth Engagement: Traditional Methods

Throughout this report, quantitative and qualitative methods such as one-to-one interviews, focus groups and survey methods will be referred to as traditional research methods. Some researchers suggest that certain traditional methods may be inappropriate for use with children and young people. Traditional methods have been criticised for researching or consulting on children, rather than developing and conducting research with children. For instance, questionnaires or surveys may be considered intimidating, require a certain level of literacy or considered inappropriate or uninteresting by young people (Baker & Weller, 2003).

> *'Teachers always use surveys, I hate them, there's just no point of them' (Ryan, 16 years old)*
>
> *'You'd end up just ignoring it because it just looks useless, need a free £10 voucher or something' (Tyler, 19 years old)*
>
> *'I think it's better to talk in person, because you may feel like you have a different opinion to what is on the survey' (Millie, 16 years old)*

Survey and questionnaire formats tend not to be child-centred, however there are opportunities to use pictorial Likert scales, to account for differing levels of literacy, as well as open-ended questions to ensure young people's voices can be recorded in greater detail (Baker & Weller, 2003). This was reflected by one of the young people interviewed:

> *'I think as well people just tick random boxes, I think like then it seems pointless, if you shortened it and gave different people different questions and don't give options because then it kind of shortens what you think you need to be able to write an answer to what you think like a proper response because you don't, whether you say you agree or disagree you don't know what your opinion is, you need to be able to explain yourself.' (Lauren, 15 years old)*

In developing surveys for young people, the questions should be piloted with or developed for young people by young people to ensure terminology is used appropriately and is relevant to young people's everyday contexts. Young people also believe that if themselves or their peers influence the questions, the survey is more likely to have a better response rate (Hill et al., 2006). In 2012, Amplify, the Children's Commissioner advisory group of children and young people, assisted an externally commissioned company to create and design an online interactive questionnaire, so that it could read multiple respondents. Despite being considered as 'boring', young people in the focus groups conducted generally considered online surveys to be a good method to reach a large number of young people, as well as being beneficial in ensuring young people's voices are heard who are less likely to come forward in group situations or unable to access a group.

> *'I'd say surveys because if you do things in groups everyone will be able to hear your point and I don't think young kids like and people feel comfortable with people hearing their point of view, so I would say like a survey so they be heard separately and they wouldn't be so anxious about their point of view.' (Lexi, 11 years old)*

The most popular method of engaging with young people which was apparent across all discussions was visiting the young people themselves and discussing their views

with them in a face to face context. Qualitative methods, such as focus group interviews, are valuable in eliciting children and young people's views and perceptions and allow the exploration of their unique individual experiences in a group context (Morgan et al, 2002). Such methods are particularly effective when taking place with an already established group and in an environment young people are familiar with, also reducing the likelihood of power imbalance.

> 'Well, maybe if they saw a young person somewhere' (Jake, 9 years old)
>
> 'Groups like this, it's safer' (Lily, 10 years old)
>
> 'You could contact the adult and tell them what we've said, and say that it was talked about this, and hopefully we can get change and all that' (Luke, 11 years old)
>
> 'Like do this [group discussion], but at a school or something' (Jake, 9 years old)

Focus groups also enable the adoption of child-centred techniques, for example, a focus group can be accompanied by creative, visual or digital methods to encourage positive engagement with more fun and stimulating activities which are typically employed when working alongside children and young people (Punch, 2002). Young people may also then have the opportunity to decide upon a favoured activity to complete during the session to explore their ideas.

4.1.2 Youth Engagement: Visual Methods

Visual methods, such as photography or drawing, are frequently used as child centred techniques for engaging children and young people in research, as well as a form of data collection. Such creative methods rely less upon written or verbal literacy and provide a basis for discussion in focus group or individual interviews with young people. It is important to note that while such methods can be used as a means of data collection and analysis, it is recommended that a discussion either during the creation of images or afterward takes place to ensure accurate interpretation of the imagery.

Baker and Weller (2003) provide an in-depth discussion around case studies of creative methods used to conduct research with young people. Methods using photography appear to be more applicable to older groups, with drawing being a more appropriate and preferred method for use with younger children.

Photography is becoming increasingly popular in researching with young people and has been described as the 'new currency for social interaction' (Van Dijick, 2008). Photography as a method of data collection has also been suggested not only as a good method of engagement, but also sustains interest across the duration of a project (Yamada-Rice, 2017). Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), a particular visual method using photography, is frequently used for projects eliciting action for social change or reflecting community and cultural concerns, particularly within marginalized groups, through individual perspectives (Sutton- Brown, 2014). Livingood et al (2017) asked participants to submit images via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and email, creating a unique hashtag to collate images taken as part of the project.

The use of photography may be useful for certain aspects of the Ipswich Opportunity Area programme, for example engaging young people taking part in Youth Social Action projects to document their involvement via shared online spaces or social media platforms, such as Instagram, run by young people for young people. Most of the young people mentioned Instagram as a viable source of communicating with young people, as this is the online platform they use most regularly.

> *'You could post pictures from meetings, or tell people when there will be meetings and events, and post pictures of it so people know what they can come along too' (Kasey, 16 years old)*
>
> *'For that sort of thing, like I would say Instagram would be easier, because Snapchat goes away, whereas Instagram you have a whole profile you can go to' (Lauren, 15 years old)*

Visual, as well as other arts-based methods, such as poetry, music, theatre or dance, enable participation, but also break down barriers in terms of voice, which some more traditional methods may exclude.

4.1.3. Youth Engagement: Digital Methods

Digital methods, particularly utilizing online social media platforms, enable a far greater reach as young people are increasingly active across online environments (Livingstone et al., 2011). Bond and Agnew (2015) created an online digital scrapbook to collect and collate feedback from over 500 young people in Suffolk around their experiences of education. The internet and online methods are being used increasingly to engage young people in research. For example, using photovoice as a method, Livingood et al (2017) recruited a youth advisory board, who created a project hashtag for social media and asked young people to send images of what they thought contributed to obesity in their local areas via social media platforms and email. Other have also selected digital methods to engage and research with young people, using online platforms such as blogs to understand perceptions and engaging with young people to collect feedback and disseminate findings (Snee, 2012; Weller, 2012).

> *'If you want anything to do with, if you want to get any information out, just post it on Facebook and you'll get loads of people' (Jacob, 13 years old)*
>
> *'I reckon a lot more people would do it as well because it's quicker, and you're doing it in your own time so it's not like, say when you're sitting in the classroom and you don't want to write something different, say if you're sitting doing it on your phone no one is going to see what you're writing and you're going to be a lot more open. (Lauren, 15 years old)*
>
> *'A kid safe website, where you can take pictures' (Alice, 14 years old)*

However, digital methods were not considered positively by all, particularly the youngest participants. This is also reflected by others, who suggest young people are sceptical of online methods because of their experiences and suggested that not everyone may have access to the internet (Borland et al., 2001). The digital divide exists, and many young people suggested that although online and digital methods might be the most effective and efficient ways to reach a representative sample of

young people, some do not have access to technologies, therefore meaning for some this method may be exclusionary.

> *'If that happens you have to go on the internet and stuff like that, some people don't have the technology' (Emily, 13 years old)*
>
> *'If they don't have social media and stuff like that, how are they going to do it' (Lucy, 14 years old)*

Nonetheless, digital methods for engaging with young people appear to be effective if used appropriately and in conjunction with other methods. Young people considered this method to be effective in reaching a wide audience and ensuring young people's voices were heard, particularly those who may not have the chance to do so in a more pressured or social space.

> *'I guess like, you could do an anonymous website so they could write whatever down, yeah cause I mean I would say people actually coming in and speaking to you would be better because you can have a proper conversation but then like as well as that there would be some people who don't really speak and they don't want to speak in a conversation so like, just a website where they can put it on social media even if it's just sending a message to someone that would be a lot easier for them, it depends whether they could speak about it openly.' (Lauren, 15 years old)*
>
> *'I would talk more, but I have anxiety and don't feel comfortable talking. Online would be better' (Jacob, 13 years old)*
>
> *'I'd say that would be really helpful, kids nowadays really like technology and having somewhere where they can say their point of view would really help.' (Lexi, 11 years old)*

4.1.4. Youth Engagement: Multi-method Approaches

Multi-method approaches to research, consultation and co-production with various modalities enable broader participation and focus on young people's strengths. In

addition to digital methods mentioned above, Bond and Agnew (2015) employed activity-based focus groups, based on methods chosen and favoured by young people themselves. The use of mixed method approaches enables children and young people to express themselves in ways in which they choose, and which resonate most closely with their everyday lives and experiences.

For example, Barker and Weller (2003, pp.50) suggest:

"Qualitative methods are seen as more effective in enabling children to communicate in their own terms. However, we have also argued that there is a place for quantitative methods such as questionnaires. Although they may not allow children friendly communication to the same extent, they are invaluable in providing large-scale information for children's advocates in the policy process. A multi method approach helps to reflect the diversity of children's experiences and competencies, by engaging as many children as possible of different ages, backgrounds and abilities."

It was evident throughout discussions with young people that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach. Young people were conscious of both the advantages and disadvantages of various methods for engagement, which was also different depending on the age of the participant. Similar findings were also reflected by Weller (2012), in which young people commented upon the efficacy of having a variety of activities, in addition to interviews in order to portray their perceptions. A variety of methods and approaches to engaging children and young people in programme design, delivery and evaluation thus appears to be the most effective approach to ensuring that the voices of young people are captured effectively.

4.1.5. Youth Engagement: Participatory Approaches

The majority of research presented thus far has been participatory in nature, using child-centred techniques to engage with young people effectively and appropriately. However, this section refers to participatory approaches moving a step beyond this to considering young people as researchers, co-producers and decision makers in their

own right. According to Kirby et al (2003), meaningful participation is a process, which requires the development of child/adult relationships built upon trust and respect.

A lot of decision-making, programme development and evaluation has focused upon views from a group of young people in a structured format, such as youth forums and youth parliaments. Despite this being a popular method for increasing youth voice and participation, the majority of young people do not appear to have very positive views of such methods. Young people in the focus group sessions referred to youth forums, parliaments and school councils as being unrepresentative of the majority.

> *'Oh god, we've already got one of those anyway [youth parliament]' (Nicole, 17 years old)*
>
> *'School councils are like stereotypical nerds' (Jack, 18 years old)*
>
> *'If you get a good range of people, the cool kids and the not cool kids, you'll have to bribe them' (Josh, 20 years old)*

Youth parliaments and councils are frequently criticised for not equating to any direct social action, with a failure also to directly engage with the majority of young people themselves (Thomas, 2007). In addition, a majority referred to school councils as being a 'waste of time', primarily because there appeared to be no obvious outcome, and it was thus considered tokenistic as opposed to impactful, similar findings were reflected by Borland and colleagues (2011).

> *'Our school has one, but the school council say is meant to speak to the form group, but they don't follow up with it, they don't go along with it, so they'll say whatever but it's not really consistent' (Lauren, 15 years old)*
>
> *'I'm one of the school council, and everyone sits there and everyone says something, but when the teacher actually writes it down, it just feels like it's put in a draw and nothing happens.' (Ellie, 13 years old)*
>
> *'So many empty promises' (Liam, 24 years old)*

Alternative participatory methods include children as co-researchers or researchers themselves. Bucknall (2012) suggests that children becoming researchers themselves or leading on projects provides both a sense of ownership but also motivation to continue to engage and proceed with projects. In the context of the Ipswich Opportunity Area programme, young people interviewed, particularly those from the older age groups, commented upon successful engagement resulting from events and activities run by young people for young people.

'Yeah, because we can invent and make it the way other young people want, they find it easier to sit and talk to us' (Millie, 16 years old)

'I think in general, more young people should be involved, because mostly it's been this adult has done this thing, but if its kids as well they'll want to get involved because it's other young people.' (Kasey, 16 years old))

In contrast, much younger children had reservations about speaking to other young people, and would prefer an adult or young adult to facilitate discussion with them. Many suggested this was due to other children not understanding or not having the opportunity to implement as much change.

'The adults can understand what we're saying, but if it was someone in the first few years of high school they wouldn't understand' (Jake, 9 years old)

In addition to participatory approaches, many young people suggested that engagement and feedback upon programme efficiency and effectiveness could be gained simply by visiting the places in which young people reside, such as youth groups and schools. This would reduce the likelihood of power imbalance and enable young people to feel more confident in responding in settings in which they are comfortable, amongst their peers. It would thus be useful to make use of existing networks, particularly when seeking young people considered to be disadvantaged, in order to encourage active and meaningful participation in programme development and evaluation.

4.1.6 Youth Engagement: Summary

Overall, there appears to be no one best method when considering previous research, as well as most importantly, the views of young people interviewed themselves. Young people reflected upon the subjectivity of preferred methods of engagement, with there being no 'one size fits all' when it comes to involving young people, due to the complexity and differences featuring across their everyday lives. Flexibility and a multitude of approaches is thus necessary when involving children and young people in research, evaluation and programme development. Based on young people's perceptions, a combination of face-to-face interaction through attendance via existing networks and groups, in addition to online methods including online surveys and use of social media platforms, such as Instagram, in combination would be some of the most effective means of engagement. Co-production appeared to be a more preferred method by older children, with younger people devising activities and events for other young people being an effective means of engagement. Although it was acknowledged that in order to involve children who were less likely to be represented, rewards or payment may encourage participation and increase the likelihood that a representative viewpoint is received.

Table 4: 'What works' in engaging young people in research, evaluation and programme development *

	Findings from REA		Focus groups data
Traditional Methods	The format of surveys and questionnaires tend not to be child-centred – less likely to empower and record the voices of children appropriately. However, they can provide some useful information and with various adaptations – length, pictorial Likert scales etc – and understanding children's perceptions via a larger representative sample. Surveys need to be developed by children for children, including relevant questions, language, images and content.	Barker & Weller (2003); Amplify et al (2013); Borland et al (2001); Carney et al (2003)	Young people thought questionnaires/survey methods were uninteresting, particularly if used ineffectively, for example used at inappropriate times, or did not include enough space for text-based comments. Online surveys were preferred to offline, as well as surveys with incentive and with the capacity to complete in their own time or at school. Young people suggested that surveys would be more useful to get a representative sample of young people, as well as inclusive for those who felt they wouldn't be comfortable in group discussions.
	Young people typically receive group discussions and focus groups positively. Focus groups enable young people to have fun together, share common experiences and address potential power imbalance between the researcher and participants.	Holland et al (2010); Punch (2002); Borland et al (2001); Morgan et al (2002)	Young people preferred to be involved in providing feedback and consulted by engaging in group discussions. Most young people suggested that capturing young people's views would be best if they could take part in 'groups like this', so focus group discussions in locations in which they were comfortable with a trusted individual.
Visual Methods	Creative methods can be used to effectively engage young people without relying on literacy skills, as well as empowering young people. Photography is used frequently in research with young people to enable children and young people to explore their experiences, without relying directly upon written or verbal literacy. Photography has also been described as the 'new currency for social interaction' (Van Dijck, 2008). Using	Barker & Weller (2003); Van Dijck (2008); Yamanda-Rice (2017); Punch (2002)	Young people engaged positively in having a form of interactive task embedded in the focus groups to facilitate discussion. Many young people suggested that if to use social media platforms the best to engage and communicate with young people would be Instagram, a visual social media platform based solely around images. This way, young people could follow a single profile. One young

	photography for data collection appeals to children and young people and can facilitate long-lasting interest in the project. Similarly to photography, drawing enables young people to express and communicate freely, with control over the process. Whilst older children may better receive photography as a research method, drawing is suggested to be a popular method for engaging younger children. Creative methods require further clarification and discussion with children to ensure effective interpretation.		person suggested an Instagram platform which could be used to update other young people upon outcomes and events.
Digital Methods	Digital and online platforms are often the focus of children and young people's interest in today's society. Using such platforms for exploring young people's perceptions, experiences and means of communication therefore makes it a powerful tool for use in social research. Online surveys are used increasingly by researchers, evaluators and policy makers to facilitate representative sampling. Online platforms for engaging with young people, enabling them to feedback upon topics important to them have also been used successfully in research.	Bond & Agnew (2015); Borland et al (2001); Weller (2012), Carrington (2008), Snee (2012); Livingood et al (2017)	Older children thought contact via social media and online methods would be appropriate – particularly visual platforms such as Instagram. Young people also suggest that this would be the best way to enable a representative response. Younger children (9-11) felt that use of online methods only might be exclusionary and were concerned with online risks.
Participatory Methods: Children as researchers and co-production	Participatory methods which encourage children and young people as researchers and/or decision makers in a bottom up process have been praised for enabling young people to voice their experiences and perceptions in an empowering way. This mutually respectful relationship between young people and researchers is also suggested to lead to better outcomes and dedication to projects.	Bucknall (2012); Livingood et al (2017); Iwasaki (2015); Iwasaki et al (2014); Thomas (2007)	Older young people were more likely to prefer events and activities led by young people for young people when gathering feedback or running group discussions. Younger children preferred for discussions and activities to be led by an adult, as opposed to another young person. Young people interviewed did not have very positive views

| | | | about youth parliaments or youth councils, mainly because it wasn't necessarily representative, or the same young people were likely to be involved.

Young people suggested that advisory groups may be useful, but only if they include those who are less likely to be represented by involving rewards or incentive for participation. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Top down processes, where young people sit on boards or committees have been criticised by some, due to the associated tokenism resulting from a lack of action and typically being unrepresentative of the majority of young people. | | |
| **Multi-Modal/ Mixed Methods** | Using a multitude of different mediums for collecting feedback and data from young people enables insight and does not restrict how young people can respond.

Multi-modal approaches to research, evaluation and consultancy with young people enables a breadth and depth of responses, as well as being responsive to young people's abilities and preferred methods of participation.

Combinations of innovative, creative methods with traditional methods have worked successfully in multiple projects. | Hine et al (2015); Bond & Agnew (2013;2015); Wyness (2012); Allan (2012); Holland et al (2010); Cavet and Sloper (2004) | Young people described a multitude of different methods of contact – social media, group discussions, participatory events led by young people for young people.

Young people acknowledged that there were advantages and disadvantages to each method of engagement.

A multitude of methods which are embedded within a children's rights framework is most suitable to ensure children and young people of all ages and backgrounds are able to participate in a meaningful way. |

***Note:** It should be noted that findings presented here do not reflect all the available literature and methods/methodological approaches.

4.2 Young People's Perceptions: Ipswich Opportunity Area Priorities

As part of the focus group discussions, young people were asked for their views upon the four priority areas proposed by the Ipswich Opportunity Area, which were of most importance to them and why. Young people were also asked more generally what could make Ipswich a better place for them, in order to decipher whether any areas were missing from the IOA programme. Firstly, young people were asked to arrange statements reflecting priorities set out by the IOA in an order of importance to them, this also aided discussion more generally around Ipswich and what is important to them in order to thrive both inside and outside of the classroom.

4.2.1 Theme One – Fulfilling Primary Needs: Mental Health and Safety

Poor mental health has become increasingly prevalent amongst young people of all ages, but particularly during high school, as reflected by recent figures presented in the Good Childhood (2018) report[10]. It is not surprising therefore that whilst discussing the IOA priorities with young people, the most significant and consistent support was toward providing young people with support and opportunities to build life skills, self-confidence and resilience. Young people reflected that this was of importance not only for much younger children but across all age groups, and that greater psychological wellbeing would contribute to better learning outcomes.

'I'd choose that one [statement] because loads of people at school are low on self-esteem and everything' (Charley, 14 years old)

'If you don't feel good about yourself, you won't feel good about learning.' (Jade, 14 years old)

'I can focus better on my work when I'm being happy' (Jasmine, 11 years old)

'The more support in essential life skills, the better confidence' (Daniel, 21 years old)

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[10] The Children's Society (2018) The Good Childhood Report. Accessed via:
https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_good_childhood_report_full_2018.pdf

In line with the priorities outlined by the IOA, as well as the government's plan to alter England's school curriculums in 2020 to embed mental health across the syllabus[11], this provision and awareness was considered to be important a lot earlier in child development by younger participants. Some young people also discussed the importance of early screening for developmental conditions and learning difficulties and the negative impact late diagnosis had upon their wellbeing and school life. Not only this but emotional support within schools was considered of high priority by all young people interviewed, which was also reflected when discussing teacher support and training provision.

> *'Only recently we had a place to go – but we weren't aware of it' (Cristian, 11 years old)*
>
> *'I'd like someone to talk to, I have one person to talk to, a counsellor, but sometimes I get a bit sad and frustrated.' (Jake, 9 years old)*
>
> *'I think we need to bring in teachers who are mental health trained' (Amelia, 15 years old)*

In addition to emotional support and awareness around wellbeing and mental health provision, almost all groups discussed personal and collective safety, particularly outside the classroom as a major influencing factor in their day to day lives and subsequent performance at school. The everyday lives of these young people have thus been shaped and disturbed by recent gang-related violence as a result of county lines within Suffolk[12], and therefore requires subsequent support and reassurance. Many young people described the influence upon themselves and their community, as well as possible measures and preventative strategies by means of activities, youth clubs and safe spaces for young people to go.

> *'It affects the whole community and people around it, because people don't want to live near stabbings and stuff like that, even though you can't get away from it, but then people want to move' (Lucy, 14 years old)*

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[11] Department for Education (2018) New relationships and health education in schools. Press released, accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-relationships-and-health-education-in-schools

[12] Andell, J., & Pitts, J. (2018). The End of the Line, The Impact of County Lines Drug Distribution on Youth Crime in a Target Destination. *Safer Communities.*

> *'At our school they don't even offer help, the headteacher just said 'we have to get over it', they don't offer support' (Elena, 13 years old)*
>
> *'For like people getting into the gangs and that, a place for teenagers to go to get out of gang warfare and that' (Luke, 11 years old)*

4.2.2 Theme Two – Support: Inside and Outside of the Classroom

Similarly to the previous theme, all young people discussed the importance of having supportive staff and teachers to enable a positive school experience. There was a reflection, in line with Priority 2 set out by the IOA, that positive relationships with teaching staff and teachers, who were able to respond to their needs effectively would positively influence their learning. This need for support also extended outside of school, with most young people describing the importance of social and group activities outside of the classroom. Consistency in activities for youth outside of school was of importance to the young people, with some describing the need for sustainable programmes to provide additional opportunities for young people in Ipswich as well as to build lasting social connections.

> *'I think activities would be better because then you're socialising, and they can really change your attitude.' (Chloe, 12 years old)*
>
> *'What I love doing every month is coming here, because you can let all your worries go' (Maria, 11 years old)*
>
> *'I think that as well, as well as support they also need support having a social life because they'll get stressed out, they need opportunities to do that, but like with groups and everything you meet people, say you go to a group, like everyone doesn't know each other at first so you're not the odd one out, everyone is singled out and you meet new people.' (Lauren, 15 years old)*

4.2.3. Theme Three – Career Aspirations

Careers guidance was of high importance across the majority of young people interviewed. Young people were clear that they wanted careers guidance on a one-to-

one basis from individuals who knew them on a more personal level and could help them think about an appropriate career, as opposed to ad hoc meetings with careers advisors. Work experience before university was considered important. One young person interviewed also suggested that the first time she learnt anything about employability was when she attended an employability course at college. It is thus apparent, in line with the IOA Priority 4, that these young people need additional opportunities to consider the world of work, as well as further and higher education, at a much younger age.

> *'I think there should be more things like openings at the uni so you can have an ambition to focus on, like now I have an ambition to work with young children, and I think all young people have an ambition.' (Chloe, 12 years old)*
>
> *'Quite a lot of people are quite nervous about what they're going to do when they're older, so if you give them careers advice they might have a better picture of it' (Ellie, 13 years old)*

A lot of the participants discussed the importance of having organisations visiting schools to talk about careers and opportunities, and this should be extended to all ages. More specifically, young people discussed the importance of including what careers are available and options to them, particularly at the end of Key Stage 3 when deciding which GCSE options to take. Thus, despite various initiatives to increase awareness around employability, a more concentrated effort during high school in addition to primary years may also be important as reflected by young people themselves:

> *'Young people 14/15 decide what to do for their GCSE's, if they've got no experience of what they want to do as a career how are you going to decide, that's what I struggled with when deciding my GCSE's.' (Daniel, 21 years old)*
>
> *'I think it should be like the last 2-3 years of school, because then by the end of it you actually have an idea of what you want to do' (Millie, 16 years old)*

5.CONCLUSIONS

Effective methods for engaging children and young people in research, programme development and evaluation are variable, but a focus on empowering young people as key contributors to participate in any form or mode, which enables inclusion, is fundamental. **The young people interviewed described a multitude of methods in which to involve young people in feedback and co-production, all of which were accompanied by various strengths and weaknesses**. In general, young people believed that there was no one single effective method to encourage engagement and facilitate effective collaboration and feedback from young people. However, group discussions with interactive and creative approaches were favoured, followed by methods that would enable larger representative sample to have the opportunity to be heard, such as online surveys and platforms to feedback upon programme development. Youth parliaments and youth/school councils were not considered to be as appropriate for young people in ensuring representation of youth voice, if young people from diverse backgrounds were to be included in advisory groups, it was suggested that reward or incentive to be included. Young people described frustration with a lack of action arising from these groups, following up and feeding back to young people regarding progress and actions taken as a result of their participation is thus crucial in ensuring sustainable and trusting relationships.

Young people reacted positively to areas outlined by the IOA for development, but in particular felt that primary needs, such as essential life skills, resilience and psychological wellbeing should remain a priority in order to increase positive learning experiences. Young people would benefit from inclusion in decision making across the whole of the IOA programme; however, it was apparent that Priority 1 and 4 were of upmost significance to young people; their involvement, contribution and engagement in steering these areas of the programme are thus of importance. Overall, a movement away from consultation toward active participation is important, via the use of multi-modal and flexible approaches when working with young people. The findings are consistent with previous literature and give further insight into best methods to engage and consult with young people from young people themselves, but also reflects their thoughts around the priorities outlined by the IOA.

6.RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, young people appeared to respond positively to the proposed priorities and areas for attention outlined by the IOA programme. The findings from this project reflect the views and perceptions of young people regarding methods of engagement, ensuring their voices are heard during programme development and delivery, in addition to perceptions of IOA delivery plan priorities. In accordance with young people's perceptions and as with projects of this nature, some factors needing further consideration were identified during the research process. The research team has therefore devised the following recommendations to guide future development and youth engagement strategies.

Methods of Engagement:

Overall, young people across all focus groups arrived at the consensus that in terms of engagement and involving young people in programme delivery and feedback, no one method was most effective, and instead a multitude of different methods should be employed to ensure inclusion, empowerment and choice for young people. As a result, the research team has suggested the following recommendations as potential methods of engagement:

1. Youth Ambassadors/ Youth Advisory Group

The IOA should consider funding a paid youth ambassador role, or two part-time paid ambassador roles, whose roles are heavily influenced by the UNCRC Children's Rights Framework[13]. These individuals can coordinate youth engagement throughout the duration of the IOA programme. Such individuals would be responsible for coordinating outreach, liaising with schools and local organisations, particularly those working with disadvantaged young people and facilitating the creation and coordination of methods to ensure young people's voices are heard throughout the duration of the IOA programme delivery.

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[13] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf

Consolidating with local organisations and the existing youth parliament, create a youth advisory group based on existing school networks and local youth organisations. Young people who volunteer to participate should be rewarded or receive incentive for their time. Efforts should be made to liaise with local youth organisations to ensure young people who are typically underrepresented or are less likely to participate have the opportunity to do so.

2. Online Platforms

An online platform should be generated as part of the upcoming IOA website, co-produced with young people alongside subsequent social media platforms (for example, Instagram), which update young people upon the IOA programme, opportunities for involvement and action resulting from their input.

3. Group Discussions

Led by a youth ambassador and youth advisory group, group discussions to develop the IOA programme with young people should be held at significant and regular points of the programme where possible with established groups within local organisations and schools, providing permission and young people's voluntary participation. Group discussions should be interactive in nature, including activities, which embed creative methods.

4. Online Survey Methods

If used, surveys should be online and should ideally be generated by young people for young people. There should be incentive for participation and flexibility in which young people can complete surveys. It is recommended that surveys are distributed through local networks and via social media to ensure increased likelihood of inclusivity and representativeness.

IOA Priority Area Feedback: Young People's Perceptions

In addition to methods of engagement, young people were asked about the IOA priorities, opportunities and educational experiences in Ipswich more generally. As a

result of themes derived, the research team also suggests the following recommendations to be considered by the IOA.

1. Fulfilling Primary Needs: Emotional Resilience and Safety

Young people interviewed consistently discussed the importance of essential life skills, emotional resilience and mental health, in addition to feeling safe in their communities in creating positive learning environments. Thus, in addition to parents, carers and families, the IOA should consider investing in training for all school staff, including but not limited to teachers, pastoral staff and teaching assistants, across all year groups, to support resilience and emotional skills development and increase awareness of mental health. The funding of specialist professionals, including clinical psychologists or mental health nurses, within school settings, could also be considered.

2. Support: Inside and Outside of the Classroom

Young people described seeking support at school, but also the importance of external activities and organisations in providing support and a safe space. Redirecting external activities, including Youth Social Action programmes, to incorporate a focus upon developing resilience may therefore be useful, in addition to extending any training to programme leaders and staff. It is recommended that additional attention be directed toward extending and increasing existing youth provision, working closely alongside local organisations and ensuring the sustainability of programmes developed as part of the IOA.

3. Career Aspirations

Young people, particularly those within older groups, frequently discussed the importance of developing an awareness of career choices and options, particularly during high school. It may be useful for the IOA to consider extending the world of work offer to young people in Key Stage 3, so in addition to primary aged children, young people in the first few years of high school can make informed decisions about their GCSE options in accordance with their career aspirations. The IOA may also

want to consider coordinating and formulating a targeted campaign to increase awareness around the career and employability initiatives available to young people.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Example of priority areas broken down into statements for use in focus groups discussions with young people. Style, format and wording were changed slightly depending on the age of the young people interviewed.

Some children in Ipswich are not ready for school when they are 5 years old. We will help these children become more prepared to start school.

We want to support young people with their English and Maths so that they can catch up and get good grades.

We will offer young people the chance to experience work and university, and give better careers guidance so everyone understands their choices.

We want to attract the best teachers to Ipswich and then to keep them by offering support and training.

We want to provide more opportunities outside of school for young people, like group and social activities to help the local area.

We want to help young people with life skills such as self-confidence, personal and social skills to give them the best chance of doing well at school.

We are going to help current teachers by giving them support and training.

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