Research Briefing 7:

Benchmarking Resurgo

February 2020

Impetus transforms the lives of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring they get the right support to succeed in school, in work and in life. We find, fund and build the most promising charities working with these young people, providing core funding and working shoulder-to-shoulder with their leaders to help them become stronger organisations. In partnership with other funders we help our charities expand and we work to influence policy and decision makers so that young people get the support they need.

Author: Tamara Baleanu

Data processing and outputs: Dr Matthew Bursnall, Dr Héctor Espinoza, Jamie Moore, Dr Stefan Speckesser (all NIESR and CVER)

🐦 @ImpetusPEF
#YouthJobsGap

Contents

List of tables and figures

Chart 1   Characteristics of 18–24 year old Resurgo participants who were NEET when they enrolled on the Spear programme between 2014 and 2017, and characteristics of overall NEET population for seven cohorts of young people aged 18–24 in London

Chart 2   Resurgo beat the overall benchmark EET entry rates at three, six, nine and 12 months

Chart 3   Resurgo's performance is sustained for each level of qualification, disadvantage, and age, and at all of the four check points

Introduction

Impetus finds, funds and builds the most promising charities focused on transforming the lives of disadvantaged young people. We help our charity partners refine programmes, embed impact management and strengthen their organisations to ensure more of their participants achieve meaningful outcomes. We want the young people our charity partners support to achieve better outcomes than they would have otherwise done.

As part of our support to charity partners to improve their impact management, Impetus published an impact briefing on our work with Resurgo. In it, we detailed how we supported Resurgo to start collecting meaningful data on their performance, using it to improve their programme supporting disadvantaged young people into work and drive up results. We found that:

Despite this challenging target group, of those who complete the Resurgo Spear programme, 75% are still in work one year later. While this looks like a good outcome, is it good enough? Resurgo were determined to find out. However, they were unable to find official statistics for disadvantaged young people's progress in to work. (p. 9)

The key question we want to be able to answer about a programme's impact is 'how many of the participants would have achieved the desired outcome if they *had not* been on the programme?' (the counterfactual). We can never know for certain what would have happened in the alternative universe where the exact same young people did not take part in a programme.

Randomised control trials are the best approximation of the counterfactual but are both resource intensive and very expensive. Short of running an RCT, we can start getting closer to the answer by looking at what outcomes young people with similar characteristics to those who took part in a programme achieved. This is particularly important for high-need groups where comparing them to national averages can be very misleading.

Historically, the lack of high-quality data tracking the outcomes of disadvantaged young people has meant that our charity partners have not been able to assess their performance against meaningful benchmarks. While the Labour Force Survey gives us official statistics on young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), these are not broken down by characteristics such as attainment and free school meals (FSM). This makes it difficult for charities like Resurgo to assess whether their outcome rate is meaningful for the young people that they work with.

We partnered up with the Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER) to access newly available government data, the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data, to provide better, local level statistics on NEET young people and their journey back into work. LEO, which links school data with data from further and higher education, as well as employment, has opened the possibility of tracking young peoples' outcomes through education into employment. And it allows us to compare for the first time the impact of our long-standing charity partners to the best-available robust external benchmark.

About Resurgo

Through their award-winning Spear programme, Resurgo helps to get the most disengaged young people ready for work and into a job. Resurgo's Spear programme supports 16 to 24 year olds through intensive coaching and careers support, in partnership with employers. Resurgo is sector-leading in its approach to impact management: it collects data on the socio-demographic characteristics and support needs of the young people it supports, and it tracks whether participants progress to a positive Employment, Education or Training (EET) destination three, six, nine and 12 months after they have completed the Spear programme. Resurgo operates in eight centres in London and has recently opened centres in Leeds and Brighton.

The fact that Resurgo collects such robust data for all the young people they work with has allowed us to benchmark the outcomes of Spear programme participants against the outcomes of all NEET young people in Resurgo's geographies. We have also been able to deep dive into the performance of specific groups in terms of age, economic disadvantage and prior educational attainment.

We can compare the young people Resurgo supports, with the overall NEET population in London for different characteristics such as disadvantage (eligibility for Free School Meals year 11), age (18 to 24) and prior attainment at age 18 (Level 1 or below, Level 2, Level 3 and above).

Chart 1: Characteristics of 18-24 year old Resurgo participants who were NEET when they enrolled on the Spear programme between 2014 and 2017, and characteristics of overall NEET population for seven cohorts of young people aged 18-24 in London

Data & methodology

The LEO dataset allows us to track entry into EET of previously NEET young people. The data we requested access to covers six academic cohorts, starting with those young people who took their GCSEs in 2007. Each cohort had their NEET status checked four times per year (in this dataset, unusual outcomes such as self-employed, deceased, imprisoned, volunteering and emigrated people are counted as NEET).

Cohort	Year EET / NEET observed							
	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
2007	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
2008		18	19	20	21	22	23	24
2009			18	19	20	21	22	23
2010				18	19	20	21	22
2011					18	19	20	21
2012						18	19	20

Looking at London specifically, we calculated the rate of formerly NEET young people who were EET after three, six, nine and 12 months respectively across all available years. We then calculated the same rate for subgroups by disadvantage (eligibility for Free School Meals year 11), age (18 to 24) and prior attainment at age 18 (Level 1 or below, Level 2, Level 3 and above). We were comfortable with using data across all the available years as we had not seen significant year-on-year differences for any type of outcome and subgroup.

We compared the EET rate of Resurgo participants measured after three, six, nine and 12 months from the end of Resurgo's six-week Spear programme to the relevant EET entry rates from the LEO dataset. We took an 'intention-to-treat' approach and performed the analysis for all 18 to 24 year old Resurgo participants who were *enrolled* on the programme between 2014 and 2017: 2,300 Resurgo participants, with those who dropped out midway through the programme counted as NEET. This conservative approach means we do not expect any retention bias in the findings – without this, there would be a risk of the comparison flattering Resurgo's performance by only looking at the young people who completed the programme who are likely to be different to those who did not complete the programme in significant ways (e.g. more committed).

We also accounted for Resurgo's young people whose EET status was 'unknown' as NEET.
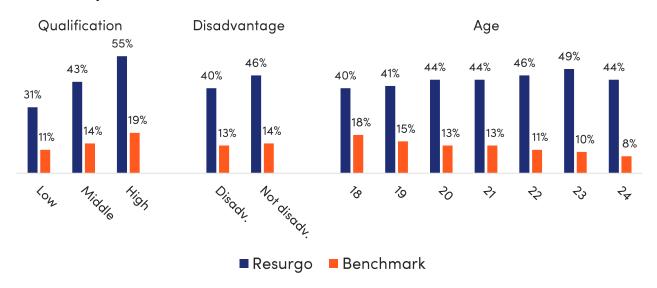
Findings

Resurgo's Spear programme beats the benchmark for EET entry rate regardless of qualification, disadvantage, or age.

Chart 2: Resurgo beat the overall benchmark EET entry rates at three, six, nine and 12 months

	3 months	6 months	9 months	12 months
Resurgo	43%	48%	47%	50%
Benchmark	14%	21%	27%	31%

■ Resurgo ■ Benchmark

Chart 3: Resurgo's performance is sustained for each level of qualification (left), disadvantage (centre), and age (right), and at all of the four check points. Chart below shows EET entry rates at three months

Qualification / Disadvantage / Age

	Low	Middle	High	Disadv.	Not disadv.	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Resurgo	31%	43%	55%	40%	46%	40%	41%	44%	44%	46%	49%	44%
Benchmark	11%	14%	19%	13%	14%	18%	15%	13%	13%	11%	10%	8%

■ Resurgo ■ Benchmark

To further stress test the results, we compared Resurgo's outcomes with benchmark outcomes at several points in time. Resurgo's performance is sustained for the overwhelming majority of check points and age groups. There are only two exceptions we could identify: at one check point in 2014, outcome performance of 18 year olds at nine and 12 months is lower than the benchmark.

7

Potential sources of bias

We explored different potential sources of bias, from the outcome definition to the underlying characteristics of the two populations we compared. We concluded that:

Resurgo's performance could be driven by disproportionately supporting more motivated young people. This analysis cannot account for potential selection bias.

- It is likely that Resurgo participants are different to the benchmark in some important but unobservable way. Resurgo proactively identifies participants from job centres and through referrals. These are NEET young people mostly 'known' to the system and who have taken some steps towards improving their circumstances.
- This might mean that Resurgo participants are more motivated to begin with which might go some way in explaining the difference in outcomes.

We do not expect significant bias from comparing EET outcomes at different times for Resurgo and the benchmark

- Resurgo data covers outcomes for young people who were NEET from 2014–2017. Benchmark data covers outcomes for young people who were NEET from 2009–2017.
- However, we do not expect major bias in the findings. The benchmark shows minor year–on–year differences in terms of EET entry, with rates marginally going up over time for the younger age groups (i.e. higher in 2017 than 2009) and marginally going down for the older age groups (i.e. higher in 2009 than in 2017).

There is a minor misalignment between the definition of EET for Resurgo and the benchmark which is unlikely to significantly bias the findings

- In the benchmarks, young people on zero–hour contracts who had not worked any hours the month their EET status was checked were counted as NEET.
- A small proportion of Resurgo young people with EET outcomes were engaged in casual/contract work and within that group, some would probably fall in the zero–hour contract definition above.
- This would only marginally overstate Resurgo's performance.

Resurgo's performance could be driven by underlying geographical differences but that is unlikely to have a major impact on findings

- The benchmarks cover all of London whilst Resurgo only serves young people in around 15 London Local Authorities, most inner city.

- There is a possibility that the outcomes of young people in those local authorities are significantly better than the London average but it is highly unlikely that the differences are large enough to fully explain the difference in outcomes between Resurgo and the benchmarks.

Resurgo's performance could be driven by disproportionally supporting very recent NEETs but there is emerging evidence that most Spear participants are long term NEETs

- The NEET definition used in the benchmarks is 'NEET for at least three months' whilst for Resurgo it is 'NEET at the point of enrolment'.
- Resurgo have recently started collecting information about how long their young people have been NEET and there is emerging evidence that a majority have been NEET for six months or longer.
- However, the data is recent and only covers a small proportion of their young people.

Resurgo's performance is unlikely to be driven by engaging an 'easier' to serve population

- We know there are other factors, aside from qualification, FSM status and geography that are likely to impact on EET rates in the wider population. These include disability, parenthood, experience of the criminal justice system etc. We are not able to account for all these differences in our benchmarks.
- However, notwithstanding relatively poor data completion on these characteristics for earlier years, Resurgo's population seems to over-represent categories that are shown in the research to be at higher risk of NEET and are hence expected to have poor entry into EET outcomes. In 2016, 10% of Resurgo's young people had a criminal record, for 24% of them their wider family was involved in crime, 14% were care leavers, 7% had caring responsibilities, and around 30% faced physical or mental health challenges.
- This gives us some confidence that Resurgo outperformance is not driven by engaging an 'easier to serve' target population.

The benchmarking does not assess Resurgo's performance for all its young people

- We only benchmarked the Resurgo outcomes for their 18–24 year old participants. They make up 70% of all young people they served.
- We only benchmarked the Resurgo outcomes for the young people they serve who were NEET when they were enrolled on the Resurgo Spear programme. They made up 86% of all 18–24 year olds they served. A further 6% had their prior NEET status unknown.

We cannot ascertain Resurgo's performance in terms of EET sustainment

- Both Resurgo and benchmark data reflect EET outcomes at a point in time and are not a measure of how long the young person has been in education, employment or training.

Conclusion & next steps

Our conclusion is that while Resurgo's performance is likely somewhat overstated, overall the strength of our findings holds: compared to a high quality benchmark, Resurgo Spear participants achieve better education, employment and training outcomes.

For Resurgo, the quest for understanding and maximising impact for disadvantaged young people doesn't end here. The benchmarking process has not only evaluated their impact but identified areas for improvement. They have learned that Resurgo participants with low or no qualifications, whilst still outperforming the benchmark, are doing so at lower rates than other groups. This is also true of their younger participants. Resurgo is currently exploring improvements to their programme design and delivery that will help ensure these groups are better served by the Spear programme.

For Impetus, this has been a proof of concept. It has shown us that with commitment to impact and transparency and with the right data, we can build a sophisticated picture of a charity's impact performance against a meaningful benchmark and highlight key areas for improvement. We intend to compare the results of all our employability partner charities to the benchmark. We invite third sector employability organisations to compare their results to the benchmark and invite more funders to bring financial and non-financial advisory support to help them get there.

We know that access to high quality, longitudinal data is critical. We want to work with government to make invaluable data sources like LEO more readily accessible to researchers – and in turn frontline providers – so we can better understand the impact we are having on young people.

We also know that young people are stuck in a 'NEET trap' and national policy and sector interventions must address this. Resurgo is doing great work to tackle this issue but there is no escaping that the benchmark is low; less than a quarter of NEET young people have broken out of NEET status within a year. We need more interventions like Resurgo addressing this and sustained funding to allow them to do so.

If you would like more information and to discuss Impetus, our charity partner and benchmarking capabilities further, please contact policy@impetus.org.uk

Methodology reference notes

The following is a summary of the terminology used in this briefing for reference. We have published in parallel a full methodology document, *Methodology for the Youth Jobs Gap*.

Cohort – a group of students who all sat their GCSEs in the same year, from 2007 to 2012 (six cohorts), included in our analysis.

Disadvantage – eligible for free school meals (FSM) in Year 11. This briefing only covers young people who were in mainstream English schools in Year 11 and about whom disadvantage status is known.

Qualification – qualification categories are based on highest qualifications at age 18. The categories are:
- high (A–level or equivalent);
- middle (five GCSEs A*–C or equivalent);
- low (fewer than five GCSEs).
- Five A*–C GCSEs, including English and maths (48% of the young people in the Youth Jobs Gap study)

In each case, the qualifications are GCSEs or equivalents.

While detailed figures for groups 1, 2 and 5 listed above are not included in this report, they are as you would expect, with group 5 having better outcomes than groups 3 and 4, group 2 having worse outcomes and group 1 having the worst outcomes of all.

EET – young people recorded as being in education, employment or training (EET) at a point in time. Due to limitations with LEO at the time of developing this project, self–employment is not included as a form of EET.

NEET – not EET for at least six consecutive months up to March 2016 or 12 consecutive months up to September 2016 (i.e. including the six months to March).

Age – approximate age, based on the year young people left school and the point in time NEET or EET is being measured at. This is based on academic age and therefore academic years (see table on page 7). Every young person in the same cohort is the same age; age acts as an intuitive measure of 'how long since the cohort left school.'

Impetus

All young people can
succeed at school and work
with the right support

Impetus

Floor 4

Evergreen House North

Grafton Place

London NW1 2DX

Impetus.org.uk

@ImpetusPEF

policy@impetus.org.uk

0203 474 1000