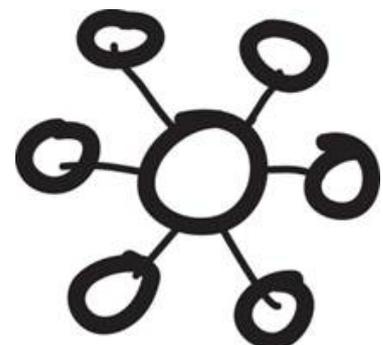




A process report

Piloting The Journey to Employment (JET)
Framework in Northern Ireland

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Inspiring Impact

Inspiring Impact is a programme that aims to change the way the UK voluntary sector thinks about impact and make high quality impact measurement the norm for charities and social enterprises by 2022.

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- How do we know what we need to measure?
- How do we measure it?
- How can we compare with and learn from others?
- What's the role for funders?

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Introduction

Tackling youth unemployment is a priority. Over 36,000 young people are not in employment, full time education or training (NEET)—almost 1 in 5 of 16 - 24 year olds in Northern Ireland.

Unemployment has a damaging effect on a young person's social and economic well-being, as well as a negative impact on local communities and the wider economy.

The Northern Ireland NEETs Forum and the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) want to improve the impact measurement and practice of organisations and interventions working with young people to reduce youth unemployment. Understanding and measuring impact will help them to show what they achieve, identify problems and learn how to improve. The Journey to Employment (JET) Framework was selected by the Northern Ireland NEETs Forum as a tool to help with this goal.

The original JET Framework was launched in May 2013, and further refined and developed in April 2014. It is designed to help organisations understand how their work contributes to young people's employability, and plan approaches to evaluation. Based on evidence from the literature and insights from consultations with experts and practitioners, the framework identifies seven areas that contribute to successful job outcomes for young people: personal circumstances; emotional capabilities; attitudes to work; employability skills; qualifications, education and training; experience and involvement; and career management skills. It then provides a series of indicators and measures for each outcome, enabling organisations to effectively gather data on the impact they are having.

NPC worked with the Northern Ireland NEETs Forum, DEL, and partners in the Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland programme to customise the JET Framework for the Northern Irish context. Six organisations received support from Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) to pilot the adapted framework, with a further eight organisations participating in the pilot on an unsupported basis, owing to high demand. The pilot took place from June to September 2014, after which the framework was adapted to reflect the feedback of the participating organisations.

This paper explains how we developed the JET Framework for Northern Ireland, with information on:

- our approach;
- additional outcomes;
- the pilot organisations;
- feedback; and
- next steps.

Our approach

A core aim of the pilot was to test the adaptability of the JET Framework to different contexts. A roundtable was held with members of the NEETs forum, government representatives, NPC and CENI to discuss the existing outcomes and any that needed to be added. NPC then considered the newly proposed outcomes, reviewing the evidence for

their link to employability and researching indicators and tools to measure them. NPC also confirmed that the existing tools and measures within the JET Framework were appropriate for Northern Ireland.

At a workshop in Belfast, NPC and CENI explained the adapted framework to the six supported and eight unsupported pilot organisations. CENI assisted the six supported organisations throughout the pilot period, and gathered feedback on the new outcomes and the JET approach more generally. Once the pilot phase was complete, NPC adapted the JET Framework to reflect any issues that were raised.

Additional outcomes for Northern Ireland

The four new outcomes agreed by experts to be important within a Northern Irish context and added to the original framework are:

- **Perceptions of personal safety**
 - Individuals can be reluctant to travel outside their communities to use facilities and search for employment opportunities because of fears about personal safety, intimidation and the potential of discrimination. Owing to the legacy of the conflict, personal safety is a concern for many young people in Northern Ireland.
- **Inter-community engagement**
 - Negative perceptions towards outsiders can prevent young people searching for employment opportunities or accepting work where the workplace is dominated by people outside of their communities.
- **Support from family and friends**
 - A family's ability to cope and support their children through education, and as they make plans for the future, is affected by trans-generational trauma, low-incomes, multi-generational poverty and poor health and well-being.
- **Resisting negative peer influences**
 - The ongoing legacy of the conflict means that young people in Northern Ireland are still seen as potential recruits for paramilitaries, and gangs. If young people are recruited to these groups and paid it can deter them looking for legitimate work. Concerns over personal safety also restrict a young person's freedom to leave a gang and seek other opportunities.

Pilot organisations

The JET Framework was tested by organisations that vary in size, location, intervention, urban/rural mix, and familiarity with impact measurement approaches. The organisations selected already used a mixture of evaluation processes and tools; most commonly: evaluation forms and before and after surveys, alongside case studies and participant journals.

The six pilot organisations were:

- **The Sandy Row Community Forum**
 - A small community-based organisation working with young people in Belfast. For the JET pilot, Sandy Row delivered a diversionary youth programme over the summer months. The project aimed to help young people who were struggling in school and at risk of negative influences from their peers. Sandy Row tested four of the JET measures during the pilot.
- **Digital Media Choices**
 - A social enterprise that offers young people in Belfast the opportunity to enhance their digital and employability skills through work placements and training. For the pilot, Digital Media Choices used five measures from the JET Framework, including one of the new measures. The JET measures were the key focus of data collection over the pilot period.
- **Barnardo's NI**
 - A large national organisation, its BU4Work project involves an innovative partnership with Business in the Community Northern Ireland (BITCNI). The project addresses the root issues of social exclusion faced by young people and helps them to overcome the barriers of low educational achievement and poverty. Barnardo's used four measures from the JET Framework, alongside its existing measurement practices.
- **Tides Training**
 - A small organisation working with young people across Northern Ireland. It offers training and support to help young people deal with the challenges of everyday life, address the legacy of political violence, and engage with a more globalised society. Tides Training tested four of the JET measures, including two specific measures for Northern Ireland: personal safety and inter-community engagement.
- **Start 360**
 - A medium to large organisation working across Northern Ireland. Its Switch onto Employment programme is an intensive 12-week course designed to help participants achieve essential skills in English and Maths, and an ICT qualification. Young people can also work towards gaining Open College Network qualifications in Employability and Personal Development. Start 360 used one JET measure alongside its existing measurement system: the Self-Esteem scale. It felt this would sufficiently capture data where there was currently a gap, without overloading service users with lengthy questionnaires.
- **The Prince's Trust UK**
 - A medium-sized organisation working across Northern Ireland. It used the JET Framework for its Get into Health and Social Care programme. This provides intensive training and work experience for young people in the health and social care sectors, helping to improve their teamwork, communication skills and confidence. The Prince's Trust UK has a measurement system in place, which project staff had to maintain alongside the JET pilot. Staff tested five of the JET measures in order to assess their applicability and appropriateness for use in future programmes.

Feedback and learning

The pilot of the JET Framework for Northern Ireland was successful and feedback was broadly positive. NPC has since addressed any issues arising from the pilot to strengthen the framework for future use.

Feedback on outcomes and measures

The pilot captured feedback on the original and additional outcomes. All the pilot organisations were pleased that the JET Framework includes a broad and useful range of outcomes, including 'hard to measure outcomes' such as confidence and aspirations.

'The JET model provided a tool that enabled us to explore how attitudinal/soft outcomes like confidence and self-esteem might become more readily measurable and demonstrable.' **Programme participant**

The pilots said they liked that the framework had been customised, and the measures adjusted, to reflect the particular issues faced by NEET young people in Northern Ireland.

'Having an approach to measuring impact that recognises these factors and the challenges of the journey that we are on is very welcome.' **Programme participant**

The measures within the JET Framework are all taken from other surveys and have been externally validated and tested. All the groups welcomed using validated measures because they felt it gave greater credibility to the evaluation process.

'The use of externally validated measures strengthens the evaluation process and provides some credibility for the work when reporting about achievements more broadly.' **Programme participant**

The organisations found it a challenge to limit their choice of outcomes because often many were relevant to their work. However, they acknowledged that this process kept the questionnaires to a reasonable length and focused their minds on the priorities for measurement. Most organisations chose to measure four or five outcomes, with one choosing only one outcome to avoid overburdening their users with evaluation.

The four projects that used the Employability Skills measure found it useful as it combined a number of softer skills in one tool. The use of tick boxes also made it easier for users who struggle to write down their views.

However, there were challenges with two of the additional outcomes: inter-community engagement and personal safety. Organisations using the former outcome felt that its main focus was on intra-community relationships instead of inter-community relationships. NPC has adapted the measure so that it now captures this data.

Organisations using the personal safety measure agreed that this was a valid outcome for NEETs projects. However, they were concerned that it could not be within a project's power to influence certain external factors, such as gang violence. NPC edited the tool to emphasise the measurement of perceptions of personal safety as a barrier to young people's journeys to employment.

Feedback on the JET eight-step approach

Organisations welcomed the opportunity to engage with the JET pilot, which created opportunities for shared learning at different levels.

'We were keen to see a model that looked at impact in a more systematic way across the funding programme as well as project level and a more joined up approach to impact.'

Programme participant

Many organisations found the amount of information provided in the JET Framework challenging. They stressed the value of CENI's support in understanding how to administer the measures in the JET Framework and analyse the data. CENI also helped organisations to use the JET Pack: an eight-step guide that explains how to implement the measures in the JET Framework. The JET Pack guidance was highlighted as particularly useful by many organisations, as it provided a point of reference throughout the process.

Some of the steps in the JET Framework, such as developing a theory of change, were entirely new to the pilots and yet vital to its success. Developing a theory of change helped the organisations to agree what impact they wanted to make and how they intended to achieve it.

'I have learned that you cannot miss a step—each element of the JET process is important. The theory of change helped us to know what information to collect and the measures helped to ensure we had good quality information.' **Programme participant**

The organisations found the Word version of the JET Framework useful in enabling users to cut and paste required elements into a questionnaire. A case study that was available to the organisations was also helpful as it illustrated how the JET Framework could be used in practice.

Organisations also gave important feedback on the process of analysis. They found the analysis spreadsheets straightforward to use in terms of inputting data. However, the use of statistical concepts like T-test and P-Value were new to many. For organisations without in-house skills or capacity, this was seen as too complicated for self-evaluation.

Issues were also raised around sample size. Some projects only had a small number of participants, but organisations welcomed the opportunity to test the model before taking it forward. Combining data over a longer period will give a bigger sample for analysis and strengthen evidence around impact. Organisations agreed that the quantitative data gathered during the pilot process should be complemented with qualitative data.

Organisations felt that the JET process supported and encouraged the development of good impact practice across their organisation and were keen to learn more about how to improve. Good measurement practice can be used to support on-going reporting and future funding proposals.

Case Study

Barnardo's NI BU4Work

The Barnardo's BU4Work JET pilot consisted of an employability skills training programme for young people who would not otherwise have access to learning or employment. The training was followed by opportunities for work experience delivered in conjunction with Business in the Community Northern Ireland (BITCNI) partners. 19 participants were recruited onto the programme. This suited the timeframe for the pilot, which had to be delivered between June and September.

Bup4Work was a new project for Barnardo's and staff were keen to imbed impact measurement from the start. The JET pilot offered a useful way of incorporating reflective learning: *'we need to be able to look at the impact we are making and understand the best way to deliver it.'* Staff also said that the JET Framework helped them gather good quality evidence of their work, which they could use when reporting to funders and other stakeholders on their impact.

Some of the concepts in the JET Framework were new to the team; for example, developing a theory of change. Although staff found it difficult at first, it proved a useful exercise: *'your instinct is to go straight to the measures, but once we got our heads around the theory of change, it was good to be able to put down on paper what we are trying to do.'*

The team found compiling the measures straightforward. They collected information from participants before the programme began and after it finished. The Excel spreadsheets were pre-coded which assisted analysis. Although the sample was relatively small, the findings were *'very encouraging'* in terms of the impact made. Combining the data with future results will produce a bigger sample and strengthen Barnardo's evidence of impact.

Barnardo's intends to use the JET Framework beyond the timeframe of the pilot. It is exploring using the tools to analyse the impact of other projects.

Next Steps

The JET Framework has huge potential to encourage better impact measurement practices across the charity sector. It can save organisations time and money in working out how to measure their impact. It can also help charities learn from each other—helping the sector as a whole to become more effective. The original JET Framework has been downloaded over 6,000 times in the past two years in the UK, and Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland are committed to supporting and encouraging its uptake in Northern Ireland.

'This approach has great potential for neighbourhood-based community development organisations to demonstrate impact and the role they play in contributing towards the journey to employment. We are keen to see how this might be taken forward in funding across departments.' **Programme participant**

All the pilot organisations are keen to carry on using the JET Framework—either with new or ongoing programmes. Some are also looking to apply aspects of their learning—the theory of change in particular—to their organisations more widely.

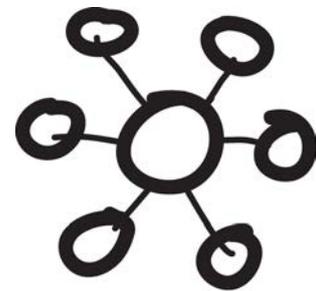
The pilot organisations, NEETs forum and CENI agreed that some impact measurement tools are prohibitively expensive for smaller organisations; they therefore appreciate that the JET Framework is free.

'We do not have a budget for external evaluation so a framework like this strengthens our capacity to demonstrate impact.' **Programme participant**

NPC has used feedback from across the sector to develop the JET Framework further. Future plans include making the framework available online as an interactive tool. Organisations suggested a web-based version, with drop down menus for every stage, would make the framework easier to navigate. An online platform would simplify the process of data collection and analysis, as well as help organisations to present their results visually.

'We like young people to be able to see, in a visual way, the distance travelled.'
Programme participant

NPC and the Inspiring Impact partners in Northern Ireland and Great Britain will continue to collect feedback from organisations using the JET Framework and the JET Pack, to hear about their experiences and suggestions for ways to improve our approach.



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