



Working in place: Collaborative funding in practice

Inclusion Plus: A Public Social Partnership in Dundee



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This case study is one of five exploring how independent charitable funders and local, regional and national public agencies can work together in a given geographic area.

The case studies are part of IVAR's wider work on place-based funding approaches, which includes *Working in Place: A framework for developing and designing place-based funding approaches* and *Working in Place: Collaborative funding in practice, learning from five case studies*.

This document shares the learning on independent and public funders working together in place from the perspective of the key partners involved. It is based on interviews with Apex Scotland, Includem, The Robertson Trust, Big Lottery Fund and St Paul's Academy and a document review of initiative progress reports, Dundee City Council evaluation reports, and individual partner documents that were shared with us.

For the full research series, please visit
www.ivar.org.uk/research-projects/place-based-funding/

Inclusion Plus 'at a glance'

Inclusion Plus aimed to 'develop a long-term national model for a school-focused intervention with additional family support that significantly reduces school exclusion while enhancing learning opportunities and improving the chance of moving into positive destinations by the young people involved'.¹

Inclusion Plus was a city-wide programme delivered in four secondary schools in Dundee by three voluntary sector delivery partners – Apex Scotland, Includem and Skillforce.

In its first two years, the programme supported 1,250 young people. In each school, Apex operated an Inclusion Unit, Skillforce offered an alternative curriculum once a week in place of one subject, and Includem provided intensive support outside school hours to a small number of families with complex needs.

¹The Robertson Trust (2016) *An Introduction from the Funders - Inclusion Plus Summary Report*

²The Robertson Trust is an independent grant-making trust in Scotland that has a vision to improve the quality of life and realise the potential of people and communities in Scotland – www.therobertsontrust.org.uk

Who provided funding?

The Robertson Trust² — £400,000

Big Lottery Scotland — £370,000

Dundee City Council — £85,600

The funding was provided in the form of a grant to the lead partner, Apex Scotland. It funded support for 1,250 young people across the four Dundee secondary schools.

As well as direct delivery, the funding was used for a Partnership Coordinator post based at the lead partner organisation. An independent evaluation of the programme by the University of Glasgow was also commissioned at an additional cost of £55,800.

Timescale of the initiative

October 2013 to June 2016.

This section summarises what we have learned about place-based collaborative funding from Inclusion Plus.

- **Importance of local history and context** — it is not possible to 'drop' a model from one area into another: to be successful it needs to reflect the local need and context. A version of 'Inclusion Plus' was initially tried in Fife, then moved to Dundee where there were new partners and schools as well as a different history/context around 'exclusion'. However, as participants noted, Inclusion Plus did not adapt to or build on the context in Dundee which caused challenges to the delivery of work.
- **The decision to use a 'place-based' approach influences who you might need to work with** — Dundee was selected as the geographic locality in which to work because, as a city, it provided a 'lens' for looking at exclusion and the opportunity to potentially scale the work city-wide. The partners required were, therefore, linked to that specific focus – education and schools.
- **Place is not always meaningful as a method of targeting** — the four schools selected for Inclusion Plus were chosen because they had high exclusion levels and were based in areas of high deprivation but, as participants pointed out, pupils did not necessarily live in the immediate vicinity of the schools.
- **Experiential learning is important and can help to build trust** — In Stage One of the work, the financial contribution made by Dundee City Council was relatively small. However, participation enabled Council representatives to trial a new approach/project and develop new working relationships. Once the approach had been trialled and relationships/trust were established, the Council was then able to contribute more substantially to Stage Two.

- **Different funders have different 'impact' needs** — The Robertson Trust and Dundee City Council varied in terms of what they needed to be able to demonstrate by way of outcomes and impact. To overcome this, the second phase of the work has focused on developing a shared understanding of what success will look like at the outset, to which all partners will sign up.
- **Ownership is important** — we heard that, at times, it was not always clear who owned the partnership or the programme. The funders expected it to be led by the delivery voluntary organisations, but were perhaps not aware of the degree to which the power they held as funders influenced the delivery partners.
- **Clarity about roles is key** — ambiguity about roles and responsibility during the initiative sometimes led to situations where partners were unsure who to feed back to or whether they had the autonomy to do so.
- **Challenging and recognising one's assumptions can help manage power imbalances** — with hindsight, the lead funder said that it had assumed the voluntary sector partners (who they knew and had worked with before) would tell them what was needed and speak up about challenges: in practice, this was not always the case. It emphasises the importance of challenging one's assumptions even when working with partners with whom there is a long-term history/relationship.



'Dundee was identified as able to benefit due to statistics around school exclusion being particularly high and an appetite for this approach from the local authority leadership.'
(Independent funder)

The broad aim of Inclusion Plus was to reduce school exclusion and increase attainment by testing out whether the three voluntary agencies involved could deliver a package that enabled teachers to refer pupils to support needed and move young people on a pathway of support:

‘To help young people re-engage with education and not drop out of school – if in Dundee we could reduce the exclusion rate and therefore have an approach that we knew worked.’

(Independent funder)

For the lead funder – The Robertson Trust – it was also about testing a new model of funding, what they described as a ‘public social partnership plus contract’. Public social partnerships (PSPs)³ are strategic partnering arrangements promoted by the Scottish Government that encourage the public sector to work with voluntary, charity and social enterprise organisations to share responsibility for designing services. Traditionally, they are based on an informal or goodwill agreement that, if work is successful, it will be sustained using public sector resources. The Robertson Trust was interested to see whether formalising this ‘goodwill’ agreement by explicitly embedding it in a contract would be a useful and workable model: *‘Does the PSP plus contract have legs – is there learning for national significance?’* The Trust felt that it was well placed to test this, as an independent funder that is *‘able to take risks – we can focus on learning and taking risk away from the public sector’*.

While there was a clear alignment on the issue that the partners were coming together to tackle – young people at risk of exclusion – Inclusion Plus participants varied in their understanding of **how** they might go about this. Some were clear about their offer within Inclusion Plus; some felt it was business as usual; and some were finding their way as the programme evolved: *‘We were never planning to provide a different type of delivery, we have a clear offer and know our strengths’* (Delivery partner). This was compounded by staff changes at one of the partner organisations during the early stages of the programme.

³<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/48453/0119024.pdf>

Dundee was identified as the right area for Inclusion Plus for several reasons:

1. It had high exclusion rates and high levels of deprivation. The four schools were selected as particularly high on both aspects within Dundee.
2. It was considered a good place to pilot the programme because the level of deprivation and poverty is widespread across the city (not just in specific pockets) and *'all of our secondary schools have similar characteristics'* (Council lead). This was thought to mean that if Inclusion Plus worked in those four schools it was likely to work in others locally too.
3. There were local statutory partners at Dundee City Council who were keen and interested in doing things differently. It was also an opportunity to contribute to Dundee City Council's reshaping of services, in terms of bringing social work and education together.

'Dundee was identified as able to benefit due to statistics around school exclusion being particularly high and an appetite for this approach from the local authority leadership.'
(Independent funder)

Three factors appeared to underpin the development of Inclusion Plus and the motivation of the various stakeholders.

Understanding of the need and a track record

Firstly, there was understood to be a high level of need around a specific issue: *'Because our exclusion rates were so high, they brought us a package of support that they felt was unique and could reduce exclusion'* (Council lead). The Robertson Trust had a background working in the criminal justice field and therefore understood that school exclusion can be a strong predictor of offending behaviour. It was interested in finding opportunities to fund preventative work.

This was underpinned by two delivery partners that had a history of working together and a desire to expand their joint activity. Apex and Includem had previously worked together on a similar model in Fife and had arrived at the understanding that young people were falling out of support services due to their home circumstances. They wanted to test out a model that provided support for

a young person at school – as well as one-to-one in the community and with additional family support – in order to mitigate the potential negative effects of home circumstances. They were interested in the invitation from The Robertson Trust – a funder with whom both organisations had a relationship – to explore working together. In addition, Includem already had a track record in Dundee, supporting young people with complex needs.

⁴Scottish Government (2011)
Commission on Future Delivery
of Public Services, Crown
Copyright (sometimes referred to
by participants as 'the Christie
Commission') [http://www.gov.scot/
Resource/Doc/352649/0118638.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/352649/0118638.pdf)

Policy context

There were two relevant policy drivers at the time:

- The findings of the Scottish Government's Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (2011)⁴, which pushed for a move to more preventative and early intervention work: *'We were thinking about how to use universal services – like schools – to make up for anything lacking in young people's lives, to provide more holistic support and create well-rounded individuals'* (Council lead).
- The work aligned well with political priorities – *'attainment in education is the First Minister's key objective so that helped'* – both in terms of engaging Dundee City Council and making the case to schools.

Spending money more effectively

As noted earlier, The Robertson Trust wanted to test the 'PSP plus contract' model, which arose from discussions at the Scottish Funders Forum around exploring social investment opportunities:

'Robertson are interested in new and different funding models – they are known for it in Scotland.'

(Delivery partner)

‘The Robertson Trust, along with another funder, invited all three delivery partners to meet and discuss whether there was a way in which we could work together under the PSP model. We did that and came up with Inclusion Plus, though we didn’t have a location in mind at the time... The Trust was interested in testing a new funding arrangement by attaching it to individual organisations that had a proven track record.’

(Delivery partner)

The rationale behind this was to enable local resources to be spent more effectively and to find ways to sustain ‘what works’ beyond the lifetime of a grant. Staff at Dundee City Council were also interested in the idea of PSPs and saw Inclusion Plus as an opportunity in light of the merging of education and children’s services earlier that year (2013/14):

‘It was an opportunity to reframe the way we think about services and be a bit creative.’

(Council lead)

‘We had some hard evidence that it worked [from the work in Fife] but it needed an alternative investment. We took it to Dundee and they were interested.’

(Independent funder)

4.0

How Inclusion Plus worked in practice

4.1

Design and delivery

Inclusion Plus ran between October 2013 and July 2016 in four secondary schools in Dundee. In each school, Apex operated an Inclusion Unit; Skillforce offered an alternative curriculum once a week in place of one subject; and Includem provided intensive support outside of school hours to a small number of families with complex needs.

The overall programme was managed by Apex as the lead partner responsible for delivery, coordination of the partnership, monitoring and reporting to the funders. This role was held by the Director of Finance and Corporate Development at Apex.

4.2

Relationships

Within the Inclusion Plus partnership there was a mix of organisations and individuals who knew each other and had worked together before, as well as those coming together for the first time. The leads from the three voluntary organisations were required to work together closely throughout the programme.

The relationship between the three voluntary organisations was described to us as strained and difficult at times. Apex and Includem already knew each other well and had worked in the same field for many years: specifically, they delivered the work in Fife together. They were keen to pursue working together, building on their previous work in Fife.

However, they did not choose Skillforce as a partner, but were introduced to them by a funder from the Scottish Funder Forum (The Robertson Trust hosted a meeting with another interested funder). Building the relationship with Skillforce at the same time as delivering the work was complicated by the CEO leaving and an interim

replacement joining the partnership who was perceived as lacking the confidence or authority required to engage as fully as was hoped.

The level of involvement of each partner and funder also varied widely – for example, Big Lottery Scotland was happy for The Robertson Trust to lead the work and deferred to their monitoring requirements. The Robertson Trust and Apex Scotland, as lead funder and lead delivery partner, were heavily involved and had, organisationally, more invested in the programme.

These findings highlight the importance of shared history in effective partnership working – Apex and The Robertson Trust, The Robertson Trust and Includem, and Apex and Includem, had worked together before, trusted one another and felt that there was an alignment of culture and values. Includem and Skillforce had also worked in Dundee before so were trusted and known by the Council leads involved in Inclusion Plus and schools (*'we'd already had Skillforce in school for two years and it worked really well'*). The lead partner noted that even with a pre-existing relationship as a positive foundation to the programme, the work was hard and led to difficult discussions at times: *'Of course it's always better to have a good understanding of each other and respect but even with this it was sometimes still tricky.'* However, they reflected that the relationships were mature enough to enable challenge and disagreement to be aired without being problematic.

One participant described the kinds of relationship that they had needed for Inclusion Plus to be successful as *'honest, action-oriented, strategic, able to come together for a bigger picture'*.

The findings also show the need to consider the style of leadership required within a programme. Apex had the skills and expertise for delivering the programme but reflected that it was hard to hold the lead partner role, particularly in a partnership with other strong characters and where relationships were not always well-established:

‘The lead partner role requires agreed authority – we didn’t have this. It became apparent that the other delivery partners were not willing to have their staff ‘managed’ by the Partnership Coordinator. Perhaps it would have helped if I had set clear roles, responsibilities and authority for all partners. It’s not my style but then it made it hard to effect change. I attempted to create a collaborative environment where I could lead, influence and reflect the views of the other partners.’

(Lead partner)

Finally, there was also learning about the kinds of people who need to be involved in a programme such as Inclusion Plus. Participants noted that it helped to have Dundee City Council’s Education lead on the Programme Board in order to give the work credibility with schools, but also to have a strategic local lead on board: *‘Paul [Council education lead] was operational, our route to the schools, but Michael [Council strategic lead] was able to take papers to elected members and was the route to getting the partnership funded.’* This was about understanding the local power structures and decision-making processes.

4.3 Structures

There were four main structures within Inclusion Plus – a lead partner, a Programme Board, an Operations Group and, for some of the time, a Partnership Coordinator.

Lead partner

Apex was appointed as lead partner to the initiative, overseeing and 'holding' the partnership between delivery organisations. It was responsible for directing funding for the programme to the relevant organisations as well as monitoring and reporting on the grant to The Robertson Trust. This role was sometimes uncomfortable in that Apex often felt that it was sitting 'between' the funders and delivery partners (taking somewhat of a compliance role) whilst also needing to work collaboratively in delivering the programme with Includem and Skillforce. For example: *'For the reporting process, we wove together the three partners' individual reports to give to the funder. But the partners were disappointed that their individual work wasn't shown clearly. So, next time we did three separate reports and I provided a composite summary. Then the funder was disappointed, because they wanted to see the whole picture. It was fair enough; they wanted to see the read-across, how it wove together, but it was hard to manage. It just looked like three loosely linked initiatives.'* (Lead partner)

In addition, while the structure suggested that Inclusion Plus was a partnership between the deliverers and funders (as well as between the delivery agencies themselves), in practice it did not always feel like one to participants. We heard of a lack of clarity about who *'owned the partnership'*, with one participant citing the imposition of Skillforce as the third partner by the funders as an example of it not being truly collaborative. Another noted that it did not always feel that, as delivery organisations, they had an equal say, despite the fact that the work couldn't be delivered without them:

'Voicing our power is important and feeling that we have an equal say.'
(Delivery partner)

The Programme Board

A Programme Board was convened to oversee the whole programme, comprising the Director of Education and Social Work at Dundee City Council and Scottish Government, Education Scotland, along with the funders and delivery partners.

The group, chaired by The Robertson Trust's Director, operated as the primary governance mechanism and structure within Inclusion Plus – everything came through them: decision-making; reviewing progress and strategy; making adaptations to the approach; and overseeing the evaluation. It had *'the authority to make decisions'*; the lead partner would bring suggestions to the Board but the Board had ultimate sign-off and was seen as *'holding the initiative to account'*.

The principle behind the Programme Board was the desire for Inclusion Plus to operate collaboratively as a partnership – it therefore aimed to provide a democratic process for decision-making.

Operations Group

The Operations Group was co-chaired by the lead delivery partner and the education lead at Dundee City Council, and worked with the four schools to help to broker and develop school relationships. At the outset, the group was aimed at providing a strategic, influencing role to schools – for example, convening the group to examine new research and learning.⁵ However, participants described receiving scepticism from schools, which undermined the effectiveness of the Operations Group in achieving these ambitions.

The shared leadership of this group was a pragmatic response to resistance from schools; the Group was initially chaired by the lead delivery partner but one partner reflected that schools seemed to want *'an initiative that worked for them not with them'*. Another participant thought that schools in Dundee were perhaps not used to working with the voluntary sector and that the Group therefore needed to be led by someone who the schools knew and respected.

Partnership Coordinator role

A Partnership Coordinator was recruited to the programme with the ambition of being a central point for referrals from across the four schools to coordinate support from the delivery partners. In addition, they would also provide additional resources for supporting the collaboration. The role was hosted by Apex as the lead partner organisation.

⁵For example, a session was held to explore implications of The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime – longitudinal research looking at questions about the causes of criminal and risky behaviours in young people. <http://www.esytc.ed.ac.uk/>

In practice, participants felt that the role was hindered by the structure of the programme:

‘We assumed that the coordinator would assist with joining up the three services as a pathway across individual young people. In reality, the schools controlled that and wanted to communicate with each partner directly. So the coordinator role in effect became redundant.’

(Delivery partner)

It also did not work in the way it was hoped to have one person coordinating referrals who was removed from the delivery experience. In effect, this role was seen as diagnosing need but without the knowledge required.

5.0

Benefits of Inclusion Plus

5.1

Benefits for young people

Inclusion Plus provided support to over 1,200 young people at risk of exclusion: *'we found and supported the right people'*. The programme was able to provide schools with a range of options to support young people at different stages of exclusion and with different needs – i.e. from classroom-based work to alternative onsite provision, to working in communities with young people and their families.

There were significant benefits achieved for young people that took part in Inclusion Plus.⁶ A participant from one of the four schools explained the benefits they had seen as a teacher:

'The support from Includem was invaluable to some of our families ... one girl, her parents were begging for support. She had attempted overdoses and been talked down off the bridge, pierced everything she could, she was drinking, confused about her sexuality. They got her living back at home and with a college place. The parents are so grateful, that's support that we couldn't have provided ourselves.'

(School lead)

During the time of Inclusion Plus all four schools saw a significant reduction in exclusion figures, though participants noted that this was also the case in other areas of Dundee that were not involved in the programme. Regardless of the exact contribution made by Inclusion Plus it was said that: *'it still helped us in beginning to reframe exclusion'* (Council lead).

Both participants and the evaluation noted the challenges of demonstrating the benefits for young people, given the range of different needs within Inclusion Plus and the three quite different types of support provided. One participant explained that the evaluation perhaps missed some of the incremental changes seen in

⁶The benefits noted in the case study report are drawn from the evaluation and perceived benefits discussed by interviewees. The full evaluation findings are available at www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/innovation-and-learning/publications/inclusion-plus-summary-report.

young people with the most complex needs, focusing on *‘what was easy to measure rather than agreeing collectively what was important’* (Delivery partner).

5.2

Benefits for the organisations involved

The two main funding organisations – The Robertson Trust and Dundee City Council – spoke separately about the degree to which the experience of Inclusion Plus had helped them to understand what each other brought to the table and how best to complement one another’s offer:

‘As an independent funder they have agility, they can respond quickly and are more contractually flexible.’

(Council lead)

‘I actually think that these statutory partners were more positive than the independent funders we’ve engaged in the past.’

(Independent funder)

The Trust reflected that this may have been aided by the fact that *‘we can fund across years, bring evaluation and project management experience, help tick the partnership box. We aren’t looking for money so we are seen as independent and not threatening.’* For the lead at Dundee City Council, working with the Trust on Inclusion Plus had been an opportunity to gain an alternative viewpoint and see a different way of working. As a result, it is looking at doing some things differently:

‘I’m exploring new ideas just from having a fresh and different perspective ... before we seconded teachers out into businesses but now we’re thinking of bringing employers into schools instead.’

(Council lead)

The Trust has also made some changes as a result of the experience, such as restructuring the grants team to free up more time for the Head of Innovation &

Learning to work on similar strategic programmes. It also recruited an Evaluation Officer, partly because this experience showed that data management took up a lot of the lead partner's time, but also to enable learning to be gathered across its grant-making portfolio.

Some of the schools involved felt that they benefited from the experience and have since made changes to their working practices:

'Funding this model gave us the opportunity to do things differently – we would never go back now. We've learned a lot and do things differently in terms of pupil support. We are starting to see a culture change from using immediate exclusion to changing staff expectations towards finding alternatives ... we have been enabled to use our knowledge about the young people to judge what is appropriate support because we have alternative options to use now.'

(School lead)

Since Inclusion Plus ended, this school told us that it has embedded what had been the 'Apex room' (on-site alternative provision) because it worked so well: *'now we've replaced it with our pupil support worker, it worked – that's why we've continued with it.'*

5.3

Benefits for policy/practice

Inclusion Plus aligned well with wider service and structure changes that were happening within Dundee City at the time. For example, Education Services were being combined with Social Care, which provided an opportunity to feed learning from the programme into the planning and design of services: *'we were able to make observations to Dundee about the route young people came from in terms of education and social provision'* (Delivery partner). This was seen as giving the voluntary organisations a seat at the strategy table and a chance to share their knowledge and expertise.

6.0

Challenges encountered

6.1

The vision and 'model'

The initial aim and vision of Inclusion Plus was to provide a model of support around exclusion that saw the three delivery partners providing a joined-up offer to schools. While participants agreed in an overarching vision – *'It was what kept us going – that we did have alignment in our overarching vision – wanting the best for young people'* – they held different opinions about how this would be delivered in practice. For example, the funders wanted to test the model developed by Includem and Apex in Fife and felt that any changes to the model would dilute it. In contrast, the delivery partners felt it was appropriate to adapt the model in order to respond to, and embed support into, schools' approaches, even if this sometimes meant providing a bespoke package of support. Some reflected that the reason for Apex's provision, in particular, operating differently within each school was because schools felt that they should and could have delivered this element and therefore drew Apex delivery staff into their own structures.

Views on whether or not Inclusion Plus was a model or simply three individual services varied across partners:

'The aim was not a 'new' model but joining up the edges of different but complementary services ... it didn't work due to the schools not using it this way and that was probably not helped by excluding them from design.'

(Delivery partner)

'To have made it a model we would have needed to be better about clarity of focus, success. And to be working with agencies that shared our values and fitted with our culture.'

(Delivery partner)

‘On paper – the model was that there are different needs that can be met by the different levels of support but in practice it wasn’t great, although the partners worked really hard to present a united front.’

(Funder)

On reflection, some participants thought it was probably too soon for Inclusion Plus to operate as a model across Dundee, since the delivery organisations were still trying to create it and learn about what was needed, and this required the ability to adapt and flex the design:

‘We had a logic modelling day – and this confirmed to us that there was not alignment. We realised it wasn’t possible to have a composite model as we were all doing quite different things. Inclusion Plus wasn’t easy to define. I think at that point people got it – that there wasn’t really a partnership or model. The aspirations met reality and we kind of refocused to just look at impact and delivering well for young people.’

(Delivery partner)

6.2

Schools and local context

Part of the implication of the challenge outlined above was that once delivery began, schools selected the elements of support that they wanted rather than using Inclusion Plus as a package.

Because of this, the plan that partners started with – to coordinate referrals centrally – didn’t really work. The schools wanted to retain control of their referrals to partners, partly, it seems, because they didn’t feel the Apex worker had the right skills or experience: *‘If we did it again I’d want to select our own Apex Worker, the schools were all quite different and it would have been better had each school been able to select an Apex Worker that matched their needs’* (School lead). Another reason was that they valued the opportunity to work closely with Includem

staff to support individual young people. This all meant that there were essentially four mini Inclusion Plus models running in parallel.

There were thought to be several reasons for these challenges:

- Schools were not involved in the design or planning stages for the programme, which meant that Inclusion Plus wasn't situated in existing support: *'Schools didn't see it as a whole offer – plus they already had lots of support and wanted to choose the bits of support to use as they saw fit'*. Several participants referred to the schools as the 'missing partner' in the initiative: *'Schools were the missing partner in it all – they weren't included in the beginning and were missed from the evaluation'*. Because of this, the programme wasn't clear about how it fitted with other support or how teachers should use it: *'In hindsight, we can see the value of investing more time in creating a clearer pathway map for what existing support could contribute – teachers, assistants and others. There was variation across the schools which meant it wasn't designed explicitly to link with existing provision'* (Funder).
- It took schools more time than expected to work out how to use the programme, making the two-year time frame quite squeezed to include: set-up, building awareness and relationships, delivery, and exit. In addition, Skillforce were already working in three of the four schools, which made it hard for Inclusion Plus to be seen as a joined-up offer. Finally, each school had differing demands and expectations of Apex and, as the lead partner, it found itself having to negotiate, organise and deliver to these.
- The lead funder had (wrongly) assumed that engaging the Education lead at Dundee City Council would mean that schools' views were represented, but in practice it didn't work this way: *'Dundee didn't communicate with schools in the way we had thought or anticipated ... the heads were really resistant to being given this command from the centre.'*
- The four schools did not want to operate as a cluster (as envisaged) – they actually saw each other as competition. The schools were all quite different and had different views about how to use Inclusion Plus; they also had different approaches to inclusion. They were less keen to share learning with each other than had been anticipated by the funding and delivery partners.

- There was resistance to some parts of the model that perhaps ‘trod on their toes’, for example, the ‘in school’ delivery by Apex was seen as more of a threat than the ‘out of hours’ support provided by Includem: *‘we weren’t sensitive enough to the fact that the schools were resistant and often fearful that this was overlapping with their roles. We hadn’t anticipated that’* (Council lead).

With hindsight, participants agreed that, to some degree, the programme was designed in a vacuum:

‘It wasn’t co-designed with the public body or the schools. We presented the idea to Dundee Council but without asking them would it work, how, what is different here? etc ... I think for the schools it felt, at times, that the initiative was imposed on them.’
(Delivery partner)

‘Schools are a community – staff, support workers, etc – and they are not sitting on their hands about exclusion. The programme just wasn’t linked in to existing structures.’
(Council lead)

While Inclusion Plus was clearly situated and aligned with local strategy around the transformation of social care and education, participants felt that some of the challenges they had faced came from failing to build on the existing context for schools, specifically around exclusion practice and culture. The value of drawing in stakeholders that can provide local knowledge was noted as a learning point for the future: *‘we’d always partner with those who can bring this [local knowledge] as it is more important than perhaps we’d realised’* (Independent funder). For example, we heard that the history and context around exclusion in Dundee was a generation of teachers that had a zero-tolerance approach to discipline, perceived as linked to the pressures on schools to raise attainment. We heard that exclusion had, historically, been used as a method to remove pupils that might jeopardise school attainment figures and this was part of the reason why exclusion levels were high in Dundee

– ‘*exclusion figures went through the roof and some teachers only knew this way of working*’. We heard that the delivery of Inclusion Plus coincided with a number of local head teachers retiring and new teachers joining with a more restorative approach to education. This may have meant that they were more receptive to ‘inclusion’ and using Inclusion Plus but, as one participant pointed out, also made it harder to unpick the exact contribution of the programme.

6.3

Partnership working and relationships

The delivery partners were brought together by the funders (though two had an existing relationship). This resulted in the partnership feeling contrived from the outset, though all partners tried hard to make it work. One participant explained that they were ‘*delivery partners with different agendas and different histories*’. This was compounded by the lead officer at Skillforce leaving shortly after work began, with a new representative joining the grouping while work was underway. Despite these perceived differences, the lead at Dundee City Council was able to see similarities between the three delivery organisations: ‘*they all had a very similar approach really, about encouraging young people to think, reflect and develop confidence.*’

Participants spoke of the ‘*disproportionate*’ amount of time that was spent trying to develop and maintain a relationship where there was not a natural fit. With hindsight, some participants said that there were times when they should have spoken up about concerns – either initially or when leadership at one of the partner organisations changed – but were unsure about their authority to do so. For the delivery partners, this difficult relationship had proved frustrating and disappointing and was seen as undermining the effectiveness of the programme. The impact of this difficult partnership had been an eye-opener for other participants:

‘I was actually asked to intervene and referee at points ... it was a good reminder for me that third sector organisations have their agendas too – they are people with jobs, careers, funding to preserve. It was an eye-opener for me.’
(Council lead)

'I think in honesty we kept Skillforce in the initiative for too long ... partly because we wanted to showcase the work to the funders forum.'

(Independent funder)

The issue of who truly 'led' or 'owned' the work was also challenging. Despite the desire to operate as a collaboration, leadership was needed; indeed, Apex were assigned as the lead partner. However, at times, partners were unclear about who had ultimate authority or responsibility. For example, participants described how at one point the media became interested in the programme. The delivery partners were asked not to talk to the media but for some, Inclusion Plus was part of their organisation's core work – *'it was business as usual for us in a lot of places, the bit in Dundee was classed as work for The Robertson Trust but the approach we used wasn't'* (Delivery partner). This lack of clarity also meant that some found it hard to know when and where to give input on the work: *'We would like to have offered more help, when the partnership hit some tricky issues – but probably held back as the more junior partner'* (Independent funder).

There were also specific challenges around the Partnership Coordinator role, as noted earlier. This was swiftly revised when partners realised it was not working: *'[the Partnership Coordinator] was seen as a programme worker, which wasn't useful. Then we reshaped to support Apex as the lead organisation around data collection.'* There was also perceived to be some resistance among the partners to the role, with the post-holder seen as inexperienced and therefore lacking authority: *'It was not an easy role as the partnership wasn't working well at that point so I think that they [the Partnership Coordinator] were seen as a threat more than anything'* (Lead partner). Participants noted that the role was perhaps doomed to failure from the outset due to the way the role was structured:

'They faced the risk of unfair criticism within a position where they are carrying responsibility but not authority.'

(Delivery partner)

‘They were in a difficult position – trying to satisfy three delivery agencies, four schools and three funders all at the same time.’

(Delivery partner)

6.4

Impact and learning

As noted, some participants felt that the evaluation missed important parts of the journey for young people. They and others also reflected that the plans for the evaluation didn’t move and adapt with the programme, which undermined its usefulness:

‘The framework was agreed at the outset when we had assumptions about process – but it lagged behind the work’

(Delivery partner)

There was also discussion during interviews about the kind of information and learning required by different partners:

‘We don’t have the money anymore. For it to continue I needed to be able to say that it saves money... we tried economic analysis but it wasn’t meaningful in terms of the measures we were told to use. I think we are still trying to define success but the difference for me is that I’ll see it because I’m here and have the relationships with schools.’

(Council lead)

Learning from participants about how they overcame challenges



- Achieving senior engagement at multiple levels at the Council by representatives who 'got' what Inclusion Plus was trying to achieve and were open to driving change.



- Having a lead funder that is grounded in reality – who understood the context of the work and the organisations delivering: *'they understand the context and are appropriately demanding'*. The Robertson Trust was open to supporting innovation and testing funding models to drive change.

Summary of what participants felt could help in future initiatives



- Clarity about expectations and the ambition for the initiative, agreed with all partners.



- Starting with need and designing 'who and how' around it: *'Our aim was to start with need and build around it – so the first question should have been what's the evidence base, and then who do we need to work with for this.'*



- Ensuring a culture and value fit between key partners and engagement from each organisation's CEO. The lead funder also talked about *'being able to eyeball the board'* as a way of getting a feel for whether they could work together as partners.



- Inviting schools onto the Operations Group to help co-design the programme.



- Openly discussing how to structure accountability appropriately, rather than imposing a lead partner and Partnership Coordinator. This includes considering what coordination means for monitoring and accountability: *'have an open discussion between partners – privately outside the governance group. Looking back, we didn't really have a delivery/operations level and in hindsight needed it.'*



- Possibly providing development funding: *'In future I would think about providing development funding to organisations and support them to getting to the starting point.'* (Delivery partner)

What happened next?

Dundee City Council, The Robertson Trust and Includem have discussed the next steps for Inclusion Plus and agreed a course of action. Dundee City Council was keen to build on the learning from Stage One and, in partnership with Includem, designed an enhanced exclusion and attainment service across all Dundee City Council secondary schools.

This means that Includem are continuing to focus on those young people and their families with the most complex needs who without non-compulsory intervention are most likely to progress in need and risk to levels requiring statutory recognition, with the potential of compulsory referral to Includem's Dundee City Council social work funded service: *'We felt it was complementary to the statutory provision, compared with other parts of Inclusion Plus it [the provision by Includem] was a better fit. We've kept that bit and all schools can have it if they want it'* (Council lead).

Includem will employ a team of project staff and a Team Manager to ensure full coverage across all secondary schools in Dundee. This will give them the ability to work with a total of 100 young people a year at an annual cost of £470,000, which is match-funded between The Robertson Trust and Scottish Government Attainment Challenge funding.

An external evaluation of the service has been commissioned, the focus of which has been agreed with Dundee City Council and Includem, to look at their approach to decreasing school exclusion and increasing attainment as a whole, as it will be meaningless to separate out the individual contribution made by Includem. Outcomes and targets have been agreed by all parties and these will form the basis of a contract with Dundee City Council who have committed to continue funding the Includem element of the intervention if they are met.

What has been done differently in Stage Two of Inclusion Plus:

- Treating the schools as partners – including meeting the head teachers early on.
- More face-to-face engagement with schools.
- Spending time planning together with all stakeholders, including agreeing outcomes and success criteria at the outset.
- A collaboratively designed evaluation: *'We have collaboratively shaped the evaluation specifically for this next phase and aligning with the statutory framework.'*

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