Alford House

Building Lambeth's Young Communities

Evaluation

2019 -2020

Foreword

This evaluation, prepared by Eastside Primetimers, was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The report is focused on Reaching Communities outcomes, but it must be acknowledged that several funders have helped this project to develop over a number of years and still do. Significantly, they include Woodroffe Benton Foundation and Walcot Foundation. In addition, the support, both financial and professional, received from Lambeth Council continues to facilitate such projects.

One of the greatest strengths of youth work is that young people choose to come. The choice to attend means a different power dynamic is "structured into" the relationship between the young person and the youth worker: the power for young people to walk away means these relationships have to be negotiated in a constant process of give and take.

Targeted youth work in schools risks compromising this dynamic. Set against this, it means that we can bring the benefits of youth workers and a youth work 'curriculum' to young people who may not access youth clubs, building relationships of trust with supportive adults and enabling discussion of key topics such as consent, identity and masculinity. Events over the pandemic so far have underlined how crucial this presence and these discussions are. The onus on Alford House and others is to ensure young people in schools benefit as fully as possible from the youth work 'way of doing things.'

I hope that the 'flavour' of youth work comes out in this evaluation, not only in the parts that touch on work within the walls of Alford House, which I would expect, but in particular the work with three Lambeth Schools, whose support made the work possible.

Tim Saunders
Club Manager

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement is due to London Youth, The Centre for Youth Impact and the New Economics Foundation whose work has had a significant influence.

Our thanks also to our staff. Patrick Davis and Safiya Bashir and the growing list of volunteers who are beginning to have a significant impact.

Evaluation of Alford House Reaching Communities Project, 2019-2020

1. About Alford House

1.1   Founded in 1884, Alford House works to promote the well-being, training, and recreation of young people in Lambeth. It does this through a mix of open access club nights; after school and early evening health and fitness training; regular weekly workshops and targeted work in schools. One-to-one support and group work is also offered at the club for young people seeking help with particular challenges or to achieve their goals.

1.2   Activities are geared towards young people aged 8 to 22, with a particular emphasis on young people aged 15-20. Alford House's ambition is that, through its work, young people will:

- have a happy, fun, safe and motivating experience of club life

- be helped to become active, socially aware, resilient and ready for leadership

- be enabled to become active members of society, able to make change happen.

2. About the Reaching Communities Project

2.1   From October 2019 to September 2020 Alford House was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) to deliver targeted work with young people aged 8-15 at risk of youth violence. The aim was to support young people to have healthy relationships with themselves, their families, their peers and within their community. Specific outcomes sought were:

- an increase in young people's self-reported aspiration due to them having positive, accessible, achievable alternatives

- reductions in perpetrator behaviour and victimisation from abuse, exploitation and violence through improved peer relationships

- young people having increased self-esteem and emotional control, leading to healthier decision-making.

2.2   One strand of project delivery involved one-to-one support and group work in three Lambeth secondary schools (The Elmgreen School, Archbishop Tenison's School and Lilian Baylis Technology School) with young people identified by teaching and/or pastoral teams as at risk of school exclusion or likely to benefit from additional support. This school-based delivery enabled reach to young people not already in regular contact with informal youth provision while also responding to a growing body of evidence on the relationship between

school exclusion and a heightened risk of youth violence and gang involvement.[1] A second strand of delivery involved one-to-one support and group work in the more informal setting of Alford House itself. This support was integrated into wider activities but focused on young people identified by youth workers as most likely to benefit based on observation and discussion.

2.3   The project was inevitably disrupted by COVID19. This curtailed work in schools from mid-March to September 2020 and meant remote contact only with young people identified as most vulnerable to school exclusion and exposure to youth violence. Enough evidence has, however, been gathered from a range of sources to make project evaluation worthwhile.

2.4   This report has been compiled by Dr Rosie Chadwick on behalf of Eastside Primetimers, designated evaluation supporter for this project. Itself a social enterprise, Eastside Primetimers provides specialist support aimed at increasing the sustainability and effectiveness of charities and social enterprises, with specialisms including governance, strategy development and impact evaluation. Rosie herself brings two decades' experience of working in and with youth organisations, including helping organisations to evidence and learn from what changes through their work.

2.5   The report describes the thinking - or 'Theory of Change' - behind Alford House's approach. It outlines the work delivered then draws on feedback from young people, schools and youth workers to look at what changed for young people taking part and how far this supports Alford House's Theory of Change. A final section makes recommendations for the future.

3. Alford House's Theory of Change

3.1   Alford House's Theory of Change for its targeted work (attached at **Annex A**) sets out core assumptions that inform Alford House's approach. Emphasis is placed on helping young people to function well and build up their personal resources as distinct from making changes in external factors. The rationale is that if young people feel good and function well they are better placed than they would be otherwise to shape their conditions, broaden their experiences, make a good transition to adulthood and flourish as active members of society. This approach chimes closely with Framework of Outcomes 2.0 produced by the Centre for Youth Impact, which highlights key domains of social and emotional skills that can read across to different settings and that help young people flourish into adulthood.[2]

3.2   Across all Alford House activities the aim is that young people should have a range of experiences – such as thinking critically, having fun, feeling trusted, feeling included,

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[1] *Preventing gang and youth violence: a review of risk and protective factors* Review commissioned by the Home Office from the Early Intervention Foundation (2015)
[2] *A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0 Revisiting and revising the Catalyst Framework of Outcomes 2012* Bethia McNeil, Gill Millar and Sara Fernandez November 2019

expressing their feelings, learning about themselves and the world around them – that help them develop key capabilities, in turn supporting the achievement of a range of long-term outcomes. Alongside one-to-one support, group work, creative music and health and fitness sessions, inspiration sessions are an important and distinctive part of the Alford House activity mix. Sessions are delivered by Guest Speakers all of whom have similar backgrounds to the young people engaged by Alford House and who have gone on to do well in different professional fields from acting to stock broking. The aim through these sessions is to motivate and inspire young people, giving them a vision of what they can achieve.

4. Project delivery

4.1   Table 1 below gives a breakdown of the number of young people engaged in group work and/or 1:1 support across the different settings along with total attendances.

Table 1: Young people engaged and attendances by session type and setting.

Session type	No. of young people	No. of sessions	Total attendances
Group work (2 x Year 10 groups) Elmgreen	18	13	50 *
Group work (Y7, 8, Girls Group) Archbishop Tenison	24	21	126
Group work (Year 9, Sept 2020) Archbishop Tenison	4	1	4
1:1s Elmgreen	9	15	15
1:1s Lilian Baylis Technical School	8	67	67
1:1s Alford House	7	49	49
Targeted support, Alford House	25	115	334

* based on 11 sessions.

4.2   The curriculum for the school-based group work included:

- Identity & Masculinity
- Communication
- Relationships
- Sex and Consent
- Behaviour in School
- Emotional Control
- Self-confidence
- Intellectual Flexibility
- Managing Emotions
- Faith & Spirituality
- Motivation

4.3   From time to time the curriculum was flexed to respond to emerging situations. For example, one school saw a notable rise in cannabis use in a certain year group, prompting concerns both about the use and its effects and about how it was being funded. In response, the Alford House lead worker spent some time focussing on risk aversion, understanding the risks associated with cannabis, its impacts on revision, short-term memory etc.

4.4   Group leaders also used Appreciative Inquiry[3] to highlight young people's strengths and assets which may have previously gone unrecognised, tapping into these to encourage self-determined change. Work in the youth club covered many of the same topics included in the school-based group work but in a more informal way.

5. What changed for young people.

5.1   Evidence from a range of sources allows for an assessment of what (if anything) changed for the young people Alford House supported and whether this supports Alford House's Theory of Change. The evidence combines:

- **Survey data** gathered from 33 young people using the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ). Developed by James Neill, LEQ is a simple to use, psychometrically valid tool that explores different areas of young people's life skills development by asking young people to rate how far specific statements are False (not like me) or True (like me) on a scale of 1-8. The areas explored are: time management; achievement motivation; emotional control; social competence; task leadership; active initiative; self-confidence; and intellectual flexibility.[4]

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[3] Forming new futures through appreciative inquiry | Iriss
[4] Wang, C-K., NEILL, J., Liu, W-C., Tan, O-S., Koh, C., & Ee, J. (2008). Project work and life skills: Psychometric properties of the life effectiveness questionnaire for project work. *Educational Research Journal*, *23*(1), 21-43.

- **Stories of change:** Stories were gathered from 4 young people engaged in school-based group work or 1:1s. Broadly based on the 'Most Significant Change' technique, the format used invites young people to say what has been the most significant change for them arising from their involvement in the project and why they think this is important. Young people are also encouraged to give their story a title and say which heading(s) their story falls under, choosing from headings linked to project outcome areas but with scope to give a more open-ended answer.

- **Youth worker observations** of shifts in young people's attitudes, behaviours and aspirations.

- **Schools feedback:** Eastside Primetimers carried out semi-structured interviews with teachers at each of the partner schools, all of whom had experience of working with Alford House for between two and four years, i.e. both before and during the pandemic.

- **Informal feedback** from young people themselves, and from guest speakers.

Young people's experiences: 'I'm really excited about the future.'

5.2   School feedback, comments from young people and young people's stories of change all point to young people enjoying themselves, building relationships of trust, learning to see things differently and feeling challenged and inspired to think about their future, all of which are elements in Alford House's Theory of Change.

5.3   Noting that *'Patrick [the youth worker] has a really good relationship with the school'* the staff member from Archbishop Tenison's School highlighted students' enthusiasm for attending his sessions, in turn encouraging good behaviour in school as *'they know if they are badly-behaved they'll be prevented from going*.' Benefits this interviewee envisaged from the work included:

'A better understanding of the world from a different perspective from what teachers can offer. Understanding their position and role in society. A better work ethic. Respect for the elders and people in authority.'

5.4   The school colleague from The Elmgreen School also talked about young people asking to go to the guest speaker sessions and wanting to talk to the speakers after sessions. This was backed up by feedback from parents about young people coming home after speaker sessions feeling really positive. The colleague underlined the value of the talks in broadening young people's thinking about their future options, *'not just seeing being a footballer or rapper as the only options for success'* but hearing from *'people who could say I came from Lambeth, I got my head down, I became a stockbroker*.' Her sense was that this was much more motivating than the talks from ex-offenders saying 'don't do what I did' that used to be the order of the day, and vital injection of cultural capital for young people who couldn't look to their immediate families for this wider sense of what they could become.

5.5   For the staff member from Lilian Baylis, '*Kids are - maybe not exactly looking forward to it but always aware that they have their time.*' For this colleague, a key factor was young people who often lacked positive role models having access to '*an independent ear (not family or friends) someone with their vested interest at heart':*

'What's really key is that they are child-centred. Also their consistency. They're consistent in the time they come, their approach their manner. It's all about the kids when they're here. They never bring anything else into school.'

5.6   The same themes of enjoyment, trust and different ways of thinking run through young people's feedback:

Alford feels like a second home to me. There are never any dull moments. Not only is it a lively place to be at, they have friendly staff that are here for you if you're going through any sort of problems".

"During my time I've had the privilege of meeting new dependable people to boost my confidence as a person and distract from the violence in the outside world".

"It has opened my mind and helped me to think in different ways, and I feel I have gained someone I can talk to that actually cares".

5.7   Similarly one young person's story of change describes how:

'the sessions were good and we talked about a lot of things that are not taught in school, like confidence and perception… the session made me think about what I want to do in life.'

5.8   Another young storyteller, chosen for the group work because of poor behaviour in class, notes that 'I*nitially the group for me was a good reason not to attend the lesson...I soon realised that I not only enjoyed the sessions but started to learn from it.*' This young person singles out one particular occasion where:

'Patrick got a guest speaker in the school who encouraged us to think about our future. He talked about the businesses that he started, that made me think about what I want to do. Because of this my friend (who was also in the group) and I started a small clothing business. We have the support of our families and the guest speaker said that he will help us make a business plan and give us new ideas. I'm really excited about the future.'

Young people's capabilities: 'It has taught me to manage my time and temper.'

5.9   23 young people supported in school through group work (18) or 1:1 (5) and 10 young people supported at the youth club completed the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire at two time points, in all representing some 40% of young people supported through the project. Surveys were typically completed within a couple of sessions of young people accessing

support, then repeated a couple of sessions before support was due to end, though for young people in the youth club the start and end points of support tended to be less clear cut.

5.10   Findings from the LEQ surveys are at **Annex B**. The LEQ is designed for completion by young people aged 13+. A number of young people completing the LEQ in school settings were aged 11 or 12 and this may well have a bearing on the findings. With this caveat, LEQ scores show improvements in young people's overall assessments of their capabilities in 27 of 33 cases, and for all bar one of young people aged 13+. Improvements in young people's ratings of their self-confidence was particularly marked, with notable improvements also seen in scorings for emotional control, young people's willingness to get actively involved in things (active initiative); their feelings of confidence in social situations (social competence); and their time management.

5.11   Other data supports this evidence of young people's increased capabilities, in particular increased confidence and better emotional control, aided by young people's sharper focus on their future ambitions and how these could be affected by things that happened now. Among examples:

The staff member from Lilian Baylis commented on the practical changes he'd observed, demonstrated both from statistics and from conversations. '*When we do 1-2-1 chats with students there's real acknowledgement that the work's having the desired effect*.'

With project worker Safiya the main shift observed was in confidence: *'bringing the child's confidence and self-esteem up. I've noticed a distinct improvement in mood and attendance – that's up as well. With Patrick it's behaviour – lower behaviour points and increased motivation. They want to do well. '*

The staff member from Archbishop Tenison's talked of seeing '*more focus in terms of positive behaviour management from some students and positive relationships with adults*' adding that more positive behaviour had knock-on benefits for school: *'if students have a more positive attitude to learning it makes our jobs easier.'*

Youth worker observations chart young people's shifts in behaviour, including one young person's shift from being a disruptive class clown to taking school seriously, often prompted by hearing from guest speakers to whom they could relate.

One young storyteller titled his story of change 'With confidence' while another explained that 'I am more confident than I was.'

Young people's feedback tells a similar story. As one young person put it: *'I feel a lot of confidence when I do things, even when I'm out of the session. I think it improved my way of speaking to people because I didn't know Patrick at first and he's like an older brother and my leader.'* For another young person: '*My experience at Alford has been the best and it has taught me to manage my time and temper'*.

Reaching Communities Outcomes: 'I've been thinking about my future more'

5.12   As outlined in para. 2.1, outcomes sought through the Reaching Communities project focused on increasing young people's self-reported aspiration, reducing perpetrator behaviour and victimisation from abuse, exploitation and violence through improved peer relationships and increased self-esteem and emotional control leading to healthier decision-making.

5.13   Increased aspirations and healthier decision-making feature strongly in the stories of change collected, with the caveat that stories are few in number. Asked 'which of these headings do you think your story falls under?' and with scope to add headings of their own, all four story-tellers chose 'Making better decisions', while three also chose 'Fresh hopes and plans for the future.' Story titles suggested by young people also had a strong future-orientation, with titles including: 'Moving forward!' 'Keep on Changing! and 'Brand new me.'

5.14   Young people's aspirations for the future and healthier decision-making are closely linked in young people's stories. For one young person: '*I have been thinking about my future more and how what I do now will affect me later. Now whatever I do I make sure that it's helping my future.'* Commenting on why this was significant, this young person explained that *'I want to have a life to be proud of, do things that will make me happy so thinking about my future now will let me have a good plan that I can take on',* adding that they were now much more careful about who they hung around with *'which I never really thought about before.'*

5.15   Another young person described how *'The session made me think about what I want to do in life…Patrick explained that we are all adults in training and acting like an adult now will help us in the future.'*

5.16   While less prominent, improved peer relationships also feature in young people's stories. Two story tellers chose 'getting on better with others' as a heading that fitted their story. A third young person described being helped to 'deal with some of the problems I have with my friends' resulting in them feeling safer and also gaining courage from learning how to deal with problems.

5.17   While not explicit project outcomes, the staff members from all three secondary schools highlighted the impact of the project in improving young people's school attendance and reduced sanctioning for some students, offering to confirm this with statistics if helpful. This supports Alford House's own monitoring, with a finding that no young person given targeted support in school or in the youth club has been permanently excluded during the year. While eleven young people have received some temporary exclusions they remained in school. Support had also continued for one young person subject to a managed move. In this instance, the school contact felt that Alford House's ability to provide continuity of support even though the school link had been broken was an important asset.

5.18   The staff member from Elmgreen offered an important corrective in stressing that young people referred for Alford House support often had behaviour traits that were deeply entrenched, having been developed over many years. They also faced particular challenges in

their lives at home and/or in the community. Against this background, expectations of change needed to be realistic: in some cases, not getting worse was progress.

6. Looking ahead.

6.1   The evidence gathered highlights many positives from Alford House's Reaching Communities-funded targeted work. It supports key assumptions within Alford House's theory of change, underlining the importance of enjoyment, trust, inspiration and support to think differently in building young people's capabilities and helping them frame and work towards positive ambitions for the future. The work is clearly highly valued by all three schools, whose staff members spoke in glowing terms of the relationships built with the Alford House team; Alford House's therapeutic and child-centred approach; and its contribution to the school as well as for individual young people. For the staff member at Elmgreen, Alford House's understanding of the challenges schools faced, flexibility and responsiveness – 'working with young people who the school identifies rather than young people in certain categories' and responding to school needs swiftly - were key. This colleague noted how quickly a young person can get sucked into negative peer group influences which made speed of response critical.

6.2   One suggestion from school interviewees which Alford House might usefully explore involves 'making their support into a proper package and offering it to more schools,' in turn enabling more robust evaluation.

6.3   The speaker programme is clearly highly valued. Teachers saw it as a strong example of how Alford House added value to their work by opening up access to wider community networks. One interviewee also talked of turning speaker sessions into more of a programme, pulling together a yearly plan and linking this to key times of the year (e.g. the time of UCAS applications) when speaker involvement could be particularly influential. Plans were also mooted of virtual lunchtime lectures that could continue regardless of COVID restrictions.

6.4   Schools feedback suggests a willingness to share evidence to assist with project evaluation that Alford House can usefully pursue. Evidence cited included data on school attendance and sanctioning plus teacher and parental feedback – information typically gathered and reviewed to justify withdrawing a young person from class.

6.5   Additional areas meriting detailed evaluation include:

- if/how Alford House's work benefits young people's mental health (a factor identified in schools' feedback)

- the specific role and development potential of inputs from inspirational guest speakers to whom young people can relate

- the links between Alford House's work in schools and at the club and the case /opportunities for developing these further. School interviewees describe students in year 11 *'on the verge of getting involved in crime and other detrimental things outside*

of school. They've really attached to Alford House and spend a lot of time there going to the gym and music studio where they could have been doing detrimental things outside of school.' The scope for and impact of strengthening these links seems well worth further investigation.

**Alford House Targeted Work   Theory of Change**

Core Concept	Activity	Experiences	Capabilities (Measured)	Reaching Communities Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
Whilst the subject of 'wellbeing' might be subjective, a conceptual model developed by the New Economics Foundation in response to the debate on measuring human well-being, is one of the frameworks around which our outcomes are clustered.	Group Work	Setting realistic and achievable goals. Access progress and feel motivated and inspired to achieve those goals.	Emotional, Social & Intellectual	Increased self-reported aspiration as a result of positive, accessible, achievable alternatives.	Reduced Youth Violence
	Individual support		_____		Improved Mental Health and Wellbeing
	Inspiration Sessions	Think critically about the information they receive, e.g., from friends and social media.	Achievement Motivation		Improved Communication, Leadership and Problem Solving
	Creative Music		Active Initiative		
	Health & Fitness		Social Competence		
Our outcomes centre on the personal functions and resources of young people e.g., self-confidence and emotional control, rather than external factors e.g., material conditions, work and income.		Feel positively challenged and a sense of enjoyment			
		Feel a sense of purpose, achievement and contribution.	Self Confidence	Display reduced perpetrator behaviour and victimisation from abuse, exploitation and violence, through improved peer relationships	
			Social Competence		
The model also highlights that many relationships between constituent parts are dynamic. First, and most obviously, someone who is, for example, functioning well particularly in terms of feeling autonomous and having strong social relations, is better able to shape the conditions they are in. Secondly there is growing evidence that feeling good on a regular basis allows individuals to broaden their experiences in the short term and in the long term, build up their personal resources.		Express verbally, physically and creatively their feelings about the issues that affect their lives.	Task Leadership		
		Feeling trust and feeling trusted; children and young people feel respected, don't feel judged or punished. Young people feel safe and secure.	Time Management	Display/report increased self-esteem and emotional control leading to healthier decision making.	
			Intellectual Flexibility		
		Learning in active forums about themselves, the community in which they live and society, including how better to deal with risk and threats to safety of themselves and others, intergenerational relationships and global issues.	Emotional Control		
If we can improve the functions and personal resources of young people we believe they will be more content, happy, satisfied and secure and will be better able to move into adulthood as active members of their communities and society.		Children and young people feel included and a greater sense of connection with their community.			

Causality: Some activity is obviously centered on discussion but each activity is designed to bring about discussion without which the process of change would not take place to meet the outcomes. The capabilities measured through the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire will give us an effect size. Each capability measured could relate to each of the outcomes but we have highlighted those most prominently directed towards each outcome.

Annex B: Summary of findings from Life Effectiveness Questionnaire responses

The bar chart and table below show the average change, or effect size, for each life skills area across all participants based on the 33 LEQs completed at two time points.

Bar Chart of Factor Effect Sizes Time 1 to 2
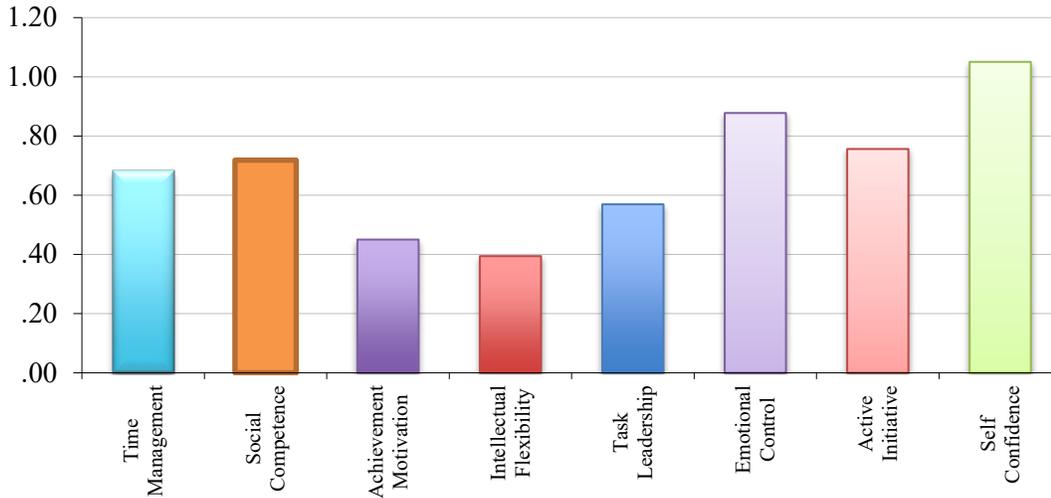
LEQ Factor Effect Size, Significance and interpretation			
LEQ Factors	**Effect Size**	**Significance**	**Interpretation**
Time management	0.68	Significant	Strong
Achievement Motivation	0.45	Non-Significant	Moderate
Emotional Control	0.88	Significant	Strong
Social Competence	0.72	Significant	Strong
Task Leadership	0.57	Non-Significant	Moderate
Active Initiative	0.76	Significant	Strong
Self Confidence	1.05	Significant	Very Strong
Intellectual Flexibility	0.39	Non-Significant	Moderate

The bar chart below shows the overall change, or effect size, for each young person. Bars below the .0 line indicate negative overall change, while bars above the .0 line indicate positive overall change.

Bar Graph of Individual's Overall Effect Sizes Time 1 to 2
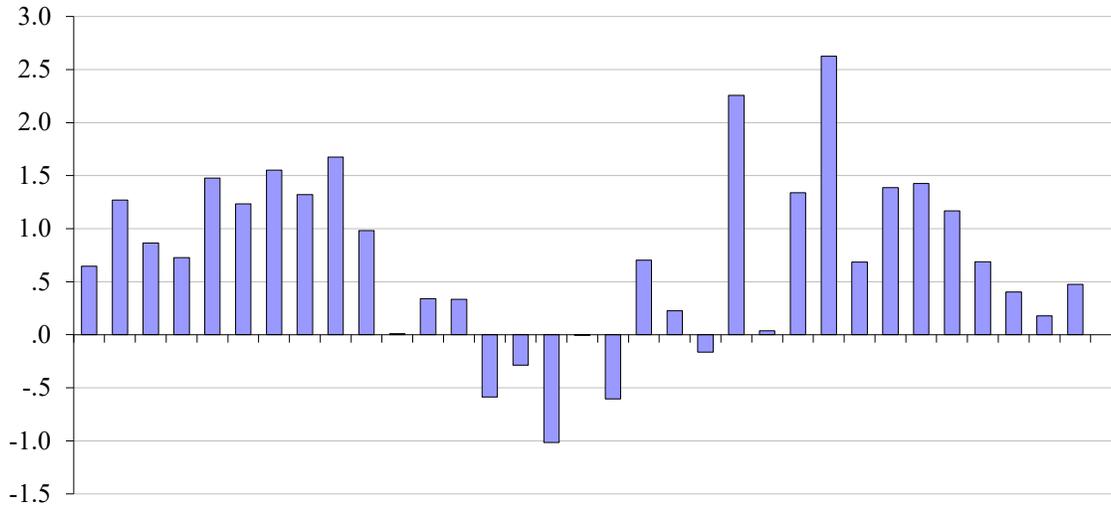
Finally, this table shows the proportion of participants in each factor whose responses indicate negative, positive or no change.

Proportion of Participants in Each Change Category by Factor			
LEQ Factors	Negative Change <0.2	No Change	Positive Change >0.2
	%	%	%
Time management	18	06	76
Achievement Motivation	24	09	68
Emotional Control	24	09	68
Social Competence	21	09	71
Task Leadership	21	12	65
Active Initiative	15	15	71
Self Confidence	15	12	74
Intellectual Flexibility	32	12	56
Overall	**09**	**18**	**71**