**Process Evaluation: Design of Realist-informed case studies**

Twenty-fourlongitudinal case studies were selected for qualitative analysis from those receiving the intervention and taking part in the RCT trial. The ‘case’ based approach was used because the individual participant in receipt of the intervention was the unit of delivery for the intervention. As our aim was to work out ‘what works for whom in what circumstances and why’, the sampling strategy for the longitudinal case studies was theoretically-driven purposive.

We used RCT baseline characteristics from the CORE-OM as a means to purposively sample across the two sites and across practitioners caseloads. Opportunity sampling was sometimes used when we were unable to recruit the prison-leavers we identified.

Each aspect of our data collection tested out our theoretically informed logic model (components delivered, mechanisms activated and outcomes achieved) and examine whether it had any sustained effects after the intervention had finished. We completed realist informed semi-structured interviews with:

* Case study participants, where possible at a maximum of four time-points (pre-release, 1-month post-release, 6-month post-release, and/ or 12-months post-release);
* Engager practitioners;
* Other service practitioners who had contact with one or more case study participants;
* Participant family members and/ or friends

We also collected timesheet data from Engager intervention sessions, practitioners’ session note records, and ethnographic field notes from observations of intervention delivery. An additional data collection exercise was carried out in the form of ex-offender focus groups with previous Engager participants (from both the pilot and main trial). Early findings were presented to these focus groups in order to validate our findings, inform and improve theory, and refine our thinking. Focus group participants were recruited from one site through opportunity sampling, using contact details stored from earlier participation.

*Realist informed Interview Schedules*

The process evaluation developed an interview schedule based on two general principles:

1. The schedule should explore experience and meaning through a framework of events and process.
2. The schedule should be flexible enough to capture unanticipated mechanisms but structured enough to be able to hypothesise about the Context-Mechanism- and Outcome configurations involved in a case

The schedule started with an open question, for example, ‘What sort of things were you hoping to do when you left prison – did you manage to do any of them?’ This was followed by ‘Did you get any help from anyone to do those things?’ Starting with an open question meant that we could assess the value participants placed on Engager support as we waited to see if it featured in their response. This also provided an opportunity for the participant to discuss other types of support/or lack of, so that we could explore and possibly eliminate other causal explanations for positive outcomes that were achieved. Dependent on their initial response, we sometimes asked a more direct follow-up question ‘Did your Engager Practitioner help with any of these plans?’

[**Box 1: Interview Topic Guide**](#Box4)

* **How have things gone since the release? – last time you talked about… – how do you feel about things now?**
* **Can you talk me through what you’ve been doing since I saw you last?**
* **Do you feel like you have been supported by people since the release?**
* **Where have you been living?**
* **How did you arrange that? Did anyone help you with that? Did your Engager Practitioner do anything to help with that?**
* **How is it going living there?**
* **Last time you mentioned that you hadn’t seen (friends/family) since…. And you weren’t sure about what things would be like when you got released? How are things going with them now?**
* **It sounds like things are going well/aren’t going so well, do you have any idea of why that might be?’**
* **Do you talk to Engager Practitioner about your friends/family – have they met with them?**
* **Have you been in contact with any services since you have been released?**
* **How did that go?**
* **How did you hear about that service – did you get referred?**
* **Has anyone offered to come with you to any of those appointments?**
* **How, if at all, did it help with them being there?**
* **Can you talk me through how your release day went?**
* **Did anyone meet you at the gate?**
* **Did you meet Engager Practitioner at the gate? Was that offered to you? How helpful did you find that? What difference do you think it made?**
* **What did you do next?**
* **Are there other ways your Engager Practitioner helped you that day?**
* **How often have you seen your Engager Practitioner since you have been released? How helpful do you find seeing them?**
* **How did you agree on how often you would see each other and how you might use the time?**
* **Last time you mentioned that you were quite anxious about your release – you weren’t sure about what would be in place for you? I am just wondering what it was like compared with what you thought it might be like?**
* **How did your Engager Practitioner help?**
* **Can you talk to me about whether this is your experience of Engager support?**
* **How do you feel now since you have left prison? How is your Engager Practitioner helping you with that?**
* **What sort of things are you talking to your Engager Practitioner about since the release?**
* **Last time you mentioned that you were planning to do this…..? How is that going?**
* **Have your plans changed?**
* **I wondered if you could talk about some of the difficulties you have experienced since the release?**
* **Is anyone helping you with your plans**
* **How did your Engager Practitioner help you when that happened?**
* **You mentioned that you are going to be working on …… can you talk me through your plan - how to go about doing that?**
* **Overall, can you talk about what difference has the Engager support made to you so far?**

|  |
| --- |
| 1 Month Interview Schedule Post Release from Prison |
|  |

Interview schedules had clear logics attached to each question and were scrutinised by our consultation groups for the potential ways they could be interpreted. Table 1 shows how the strategy and logic behind how we would test out trust and engagement work.

**Table 1: Testing Trust and Engagement in Pre-Release Interviews**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Interview Question** | **Logic** |
| What help if any have/are you getting to support you in prison? | By not directly referring to Engager, participants are given the opportunity to talk about other services, as well as Engager, which might be involved in their care. This will help us consider what part the Engager Programme had in any outcomes achieved. If Engager support is not mentioned this can be explored further in the questions below.    This question is asked to both the intervention and control arm; which allows us to compare responses and determine the effects the resource mechanisms offered by Engager are having on the participants experiences. |
| What [other] types of support do you think ideally should be in place for people? | “What other” – assumes that the intervention arm has been offered some form of support through the programme; depending on the response of the last question. |
| How often have you seen your Engager Practitioner? | This will help us determine intervention fidelity and whether the practitioner making consistent efforts to engage the participant |
| Can you talk to me about how you get on with your Engager Practitioner? | We are trying to glean whether the practitioner has managed to develop a good rapport with their practitioner |
| If I asked you to describe what your Engager Practitioner was like what would you say? | Here we are looking for characteristics identified in our programme theory. (i.e. non judgemental, actively listens; shows concern etc) |