

Closing The Opportunity Gap Programme: Phase 1 Evaluation

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This summary reports the main findings from an interim evaluation of the Scottish Executive's Closing the Opportunity Gap (CtOG) social inclusion strategy. The study assessed initial progress towards achieving CtOG Aims, Objectives and Targets up to 2007. The research involved secondary analysis of CtOG monitoring data, survey analysis and interviews with key stakeholders.

Main Findings

- Closing the Opportunity Gap (CtOG) is the Scottish Executive's main social inclusion strategy. It was launched in 2004 as the successor to the Social Justice Strategy and encompasses a programme of activity addressing six broad Objectives and ten specific Targets in pursuit of three core Aims: to prevent individuals or families from falling into poverty; provide routes out of poverty for individuals and families; and sustain individuals or families in a lifestyle free from poverty.
- To complement continuous routine monitoring, the Scottish Executive has proposed a multidimensional evaluation of the CtOG strategy. This Report summarises findings from an interim evaluation of progress toward achieving CtOG Aims, Objectives and Targets to January 2007. This evaluation was undertaken at an early stage in the implementation of CtOG, and is only able to provide indicative findings on the direction of travel and pace of change at this stage.
- Progress towards CtOG Aims: overall levels of poverty in Scotland are falling, although these reductions are not experienced evenly across all groups. This trend predates CtOG and reflects wider UK trends, and cannot yet be attributed to CtOG itself.
- Progress towards Objectives: evidence of progress towards CtOG Objectives is limited; adequate information is only available to assess progress towards Objective 5, which demonstrates a positive direction of change.
- Progress towards Targets: Targets A, C, D, K show strong progress, while the impact of Targets E, F, H, J cannot yet be assessed or show little movement. Notwithstanding limitations with data available to evaluate Target B, there is no evidence of improvement for Targets B and G.
- Although it is too early to reach definite conclusions, it is apparent that CtOG is addressing most of the key aspects of social exclusion in Scotland, and that some positive changes are evident in some of these areas, particularly employment, ill health and access to financial services. However, in other important areas of activity there is no evidence of improvement - particularly poverty among working age adults, and outcomes for disadvantaged young people.

Introduction

The Scottish Executive committed to 'closing the opportunity gap' in its *Partnership Agreement* in May 2003. Six Closing the Opportunity Gap (CtOG) Objectives were announced in July 2004 and ten CtOG Targets in December 2004.

The three core Aims of CtOG are to:

1. prevent individuals or families from falling into poverty
2. provide routes out of poverty for individuals and families
3. sustain individuals or families in a lifestyle free from poverty

The six broad CtOG Objectives are to:

#1: increase the chances of sustained employment for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups - in order to lift them permanently out of poverty.

#2: improve the confidence and skills of the most disadvantaged children and young people - in order to provide them with the greatest chance of avoiding poverty when they leave school.

#3: reduce the vulnerability of low income families to financial exclusion and multiple debts - in order to prevent them becoming over-indebted and/or to lift them out of poverty.

#4: regenerate the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods - in order that people living there can take advantage of job opportunities and improve their quality of life.

#5: increase the rate of improvement of the health status of people living in the most deprived communities - in order to improve their quality of life, including their employability prospects.

#6: improve access to high quality services for the most disadvantaged groups and individuals in rural communities - in order to improve their quality of life and enhance their access to opportunity.

The ten specific CtOG Targets are as follows:

■ Target A - reduce the number of workless people dependent on DWP benefits in Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Dundee, and West Dunbartonshire by 2007 and by 2010

■ Target B - reduce the proportion of 16-19 year olds who are not in education, training or employment by 2008

■ Target C - ensure that public sector and large employers tackle aspects of in-work poverty by providing employees with the opportunity to develop skills and progress in their career. NHS Scotland will set an example by providing 1,000 job opportunities, with support for training and progression once in post, between 2004 and 2006 to people who are currently economically inactive or unemployed

■ Target D - reduce health inequalities by increasing the rate of improvement for under 75 Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) mortality and under 75 cancer mortality for the most deprived communities by 15% by 2008

■ Target E - ensure that by 2008, children and young people who need it have an integrated package of appropriate health, care and education support

■ Target F - increase the average tariff score of the lowest attaining 20% of S4 pupils by 5% by 2008

■ Target G - ensure that by 2007, at least 50% of all 'looked after' young people leaving care have entered education, employment or training

■ Target H - by 2008, improve service delivery in rural areas so that agreed improvements to accessibility and quality are achieved for key services in remote and disadvantaged communities

■ Target J - promote community regeneration of the most deprived neighbourhoods, through improvements by 2008 in employability, education, health, access to local services, and quality of the local environment

■ Target K - by 2008, increase the availability of appropriate financial services and money advice to disadvantaged communities to reduce their vulnerability to financial exclusion and multiple debts.

The CtOG strategy seeks to integrate Aims, Objectives and Targets so that Targets contribute to the achievement of Objectives and in turn, Objectives contribute toward the achievement of Aims.

Objectives and Methods of the Study

From the outset, the Scottish Executive has monitored progress towards achieving the ten CtOG Targets. However, the Executive decided that an overall evaluation of the CtOG strategy is required to complement routine monitoring.

The framework for evaluating CtOG comprises three parts:

1. On-going monitoring of the ten CtOG Targets
2. Assessing the effectiveness of Departmental activity contributing to the achievement of Targets
3. Assessing the effectiveness of CtOG as a whole

The assessment of the effectiveness of the CtOG as a whole (part three) itself comprises three phases:

- i. overall evaluation of the CtOG programme
- ii. analysis of the impact of CtOG on the opportunity structures of people in Scotland
- iii. analysis of CtOG processes

This study deals with phase one of the third part of the CtOG evaluation, by evaluating overall progress toward achieving CtOG Aims, Objectives and Targets to January 2007 in the context of wider Scottish Executive and UK policy interventions.

The availability and quality of appropriate evidence for this task varies: in the case of several Objectives and Targets there is no valid or relevant data to assess the impact or value added of CtOG, or to compare progress between different groups, particularly those vulnerable to social exclusion. Such limitations mean that only an interim evaluation of CtOG is possible at this stage, which estimates the direction of travel, and whether the pace of change appears sufficient for outcomes to be achieved by the proposed end dates.

Progress Towards CtOG Aims

There has been a consistent trend towards the reduction of poverty in Scotland since the mid-1990s: falling from 1,240,000 (25%) people living in absolute poverty in 1994/95 to 550,000 (11%) in 2004/05; and 1,230,000 (25%) in relative poverty to 910,000 (18%) over the same period.

This trend cannot be attributed CtOG as it pre-dates it and reflects general UK trends. Future analysis should ascertain whether CtOG coincided with any significance developments in this trend, e.g. a quickening of the pace of poverty reduction.

An outstanding challenge to meeting these CtOG Aims is the persistence of poverty for some groups of children, and continuing poverty among working age adults.

The Scottish Executive should continue to utilise HBAI data to monitor progress toward achieving CtOG Aims. However, further attention should be directed at utilising the Scottish Household Panel Survey and the Scottish Household Survey to monitor poverty in Scotland.

Progress Towards CtOG Objectives

Only a qualified evaluation of progress towards CtOG Objectives is possible, as these are still being developed and implemented, and the data necessary to assess progress is not available.

Progress is uneven across different Objectives: improvements are evident in health status (Objective 5), but difficulties persist in effecting change in both enhancing sustained employment (Objective 1) and improving the confidence and skills of young people (Objective 2). Trends are also highly uneven across sub-populations.

Objective 3: low income households are less likely than higher income ones to possess savings; nevertheless, two fifths do possess some savings. The key financial inclusion issue seems to be enabling low income households to save in the first place, rather than encouraging existing low income savers to save more. Access to a range of financial services has improved among the lowest income groups in recent years. Provision of money advice services has also increased, but there is little information on uptake of this improved access among the most deprived and financially vulnerable households.

Objective 4 overlaps with CtOG Target J, and there is little scope for additional evaluation of community regeneration.

Objective 5: health in the most deprived areas in Scotland improved between 2003-2005. The rate of improvement was both higher than for the previous period, and impacted upon the most severely deprived areas.

It is premature to evaluate progress for Objective 6 as the CtOG work programme to improve services in rural Scotland did not start until 2005; there are plans to evaluate the outcomes of this by the end of 2007.

Progress Towards CtOG Targets

Progress across the Targets varies: some Targets show strong progress (e.g. Targets A, C, D, K), while the impact of others cannot yet be assessed with certainty or show little movement (Targets B, E, F, G, H, J).

Target A demonstrates some progress: there have been significant reductions in the numbers of people claiming DWP benefits in the CtOG Target areas. However, while benefit reduction trends are on track to result in 55,463 fewer people claiming workless benefits by 2010, this is 10,537 short of the Target.

Target B shows no evidence of progress: there has been a slight increase in the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). However, there are limitations with the data that are available to assess progress.

Target C has been partially successful: 1,043 people have been offered supported employment opportunities in NHS Scotland. However, the transition rate to jobs for these was 56%, rather than the Target goal of 70%.

Target D is on track to be met: both under-75 cancer and coronary heart disease mortality rates are now decreasing in the most deprived areas at higher rates than before CtOG.

Target E is a process and output-based rather than an outcome-based Target - data is not available to assess impact, but the relevant service process and outputs required to meet this Target are either in place or under development, and to that extent, the Target may be said to have been met.

Target F shows no evidence of progress: the available data pre-dates CtOG, but there has been no positive trend in this Target in recent years; indeed there was a slight fall in the average tariff score for the lowest attaining 20% of S4 pupils from 53 in 2002/03 to 51 in 2004/05.

Target G shows no evidence of progress: there was a slight decrease in the proportion of looked after young people leaving care to enter education, employment or training between 2005 - 2006.

Target H: it is premature to evaluate progress. Target H entails local specification of priorities, and processes of Target specification and monitoring are protracted. 32 of the 90 Rural Service Priority Areas target services had been introduced by 2006, and progress is being made to introduce the remainder.

Target J covers five dimensions: it is not yet possible to evaluate the extent to which these are being fulfilled, but baseline measures have been set for future evaluation. A significant minority (around one in five) of the most deprived

neighbourhoods in 2004 were no longer among the most deprived in 2006. Positive change is also evident across several domains in the majority of neighbourhoods in Scotland over this period.

Target K has been achieved in part: the proportion of low income households with no bank or building society account has fallen from over 30% among the poorest fifth of households in 1994-95 to 10% in 2004-05. The availability of money advice has been addressed through funding to train approved advisers, but only 84 of the target 100 trained advisers were in place by the end of 2006.

It appears that progress towards Target outcomes varies significantly by equalities groups. No single trend adequately describes the circumstances of all sub-populations: progress varies for different groups and different Targets.

It is not yet possible to estimate the impact of CtOG on outcomes or changes in conditions; however, for Targets A, C, D and K, it seems likely that improvements occurred at least in part as a result of the programme.

Conclusions

It is still too early in the development and implementation of CtOG to offer anything other than qualified comment on the rate and direction of progress. However, this interim evaluation identified increasingly sophisticated data collection and analyses which will assist future evaluations of Scottish Executive social inclusion policy.

CtOG Aims, Objectives, Targets and policy activities address most of what are known to be the principal factors contributing to poverty and social exclusion in Scotland, to the extent that these are within the scope and responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

Integrating CtOG Targets into the responsibilities and policies of most Scottish Executive Departments appears to be a valuable means to sustain a co-ordinated strategy for mainstreaming social inclusion policy.

Some positive changes in the condition and extent of social exclusion in Scotland are evident: more people are working, fewer are suffering from certain serious illnesses, and more have access to financial advice. It is reasonable to attribute some of these improvements to CtOG, and provisionally conclude that they would not have occurred without this programme.

However, in other areas of activity - particularly poverty among working age adults, and outcomes for young people - there is either no evidence of improvement, or changes cannot yet be discerned.

About This Report

This interim evaluation was carried out by a team from the Scottish Poverty Information Unit (SPIU) at Glasgow Caledonian University in partnership with the Centre for Economic and Social *Inclusion* in London.

The evaluation involved secondary analysis of UK and Scottish survey data, examination of CtOG monitoring and evaluation data, and interviews with both Scottish Executive staff responsible for overseeing and implementing CtOG, and representatives of disadvantaged communities and equalities groups.

The period to which this evaluation of *Closing the Opportunity Gap* pertains, is that of the second Scottish Executive.

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