

the Children and Youth Support Fund

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Background:

In 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) announced that Sure Start and four other funding programmes would be subsumed into the Cymorth Fund. All 22 Welsh Framework Partnerships received an annual Cymorth allocation, based on population weighted by deprivation indices, of which 4 per cent was to fund evaluation.

WAG published Cymorth funding guidance. The overall aim of Cymorth was described as being to impact positively, in the medium term, on the indicators of well-being for children and young people. Partnerships took a variety of approaches or none to the challenge of evaluation; the researchers were contracted by half of all Welsh local authorities to conduct Cymorth reviews of varying scale and complexity.

Evaluation Aim:

To investigate whether the Cymorth programme in one Framework Partnership area complied with the Cymorth guidance and whether it met the overall aim of the programme.

Methods:

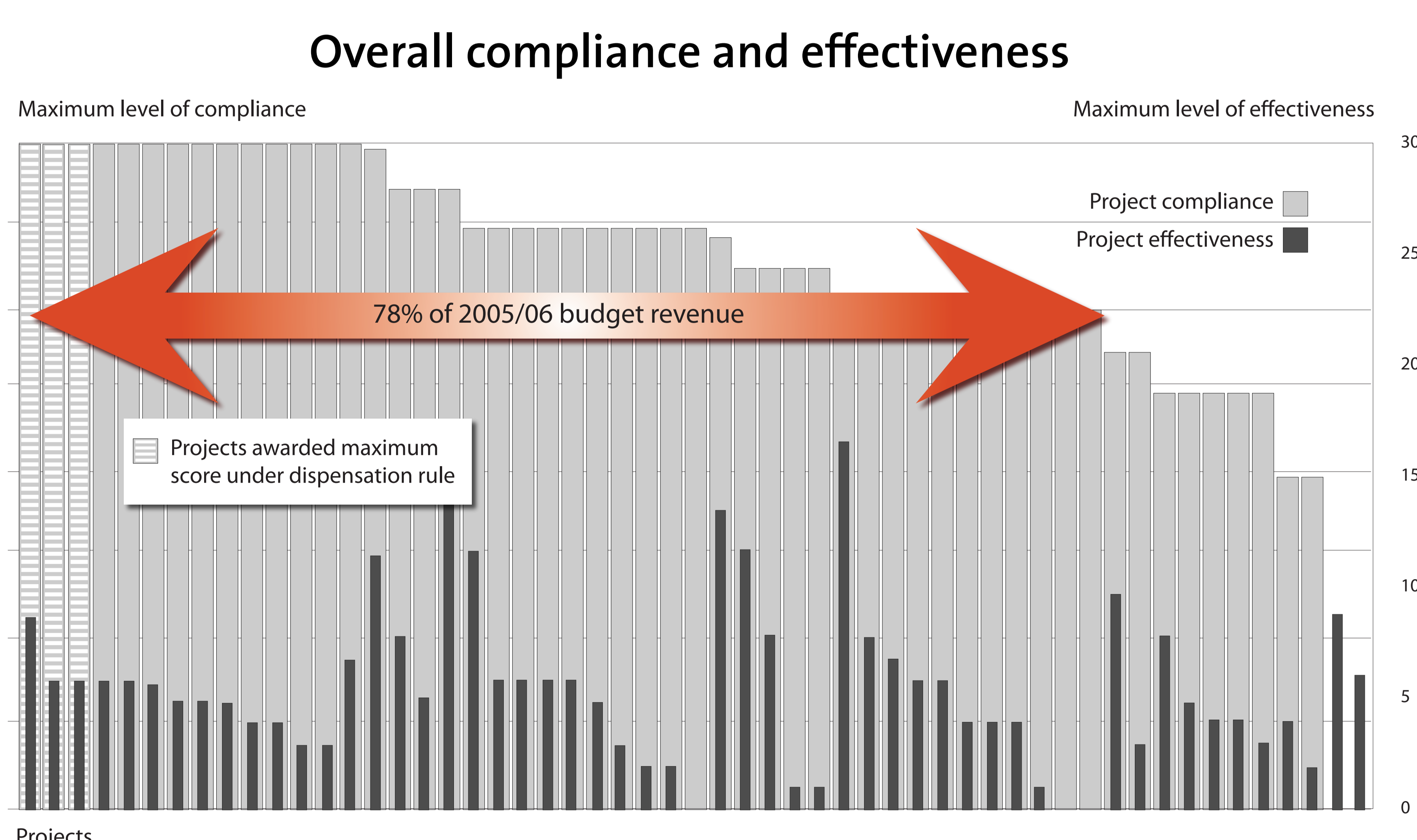
Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from

- Semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face and by telephone
- Local programme and individual project documentation
- Statutory and other programme guidance
- Local project evaluations and reviews
- International English language research citation databases

Programme and project managers were questioned about the history, purpose, nature and perceived effectiveness of the interventions contained in their Cymorth programme. Information was assembled about policy adherence, theoretical models, baseline data, the definition of intervention groups, the existence or otherwise of control groups and the quality of impact data. Projects in one area (n=56) were scored and scaled based on their replication or approximation to interventions of known effect and on the quality of locally gathered data, using a hierarchical scale adapted from the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination Guidance Report 4 (2nd edition). All types of evidence were given credit, but scores were weighted in favour of independent reviews and stronger research designs.

Results:

80 per cent of the projects broadly complied with the guidance, though only 36 per cent were suitably targeted and only about half (51 per cent) could be regarded as preventative interventions of a kind also suitable for Cymorth funding. It could not be shown that the programme aim was being met, principally because impact data was not available, not relevant or of insufficient quality to make an assessment. There was found no discernible relationship between policy compliance and potential or actual impact.



Comment:

Evaluation of Cymorth is severely limited by weak theorisation of interventions, the absence of baseline data, loosely defined target populations and a preoccupation with sustaining established employment patterns, particularly in local authority departments that draw on Cymorth funding. The 4 per cent evaluation element in the Cymorth fund was variously dissipated in non-evaluation activity; there must be considerable doubt about the status and security of evaluation activity as a valued component in children and young people's services.