'My mates are dead jealous 'cause they don't get to come here!'

An analysis of the provision of alternative, non-school-based learning activities for 14–16 year olds in the East Midlands

East Midlands
Learning and Skills Research Network

research report

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Contents

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Summary

1. This report presents findings from a research project carried out in the East Midlands between January and June 2002 under the remit of the regional Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN). The project focused on researching the extent of alternative educational provision for young people aged 14–16 years and on both their experiences and those of the practitioners involved.

2. Alternative provision was defined as that which was provided by schools, colleges, training providers and employers to young people aged 14–16 who were not attending mainstream school full-time and following the National Curriculum. The primary aim was to determine the modes and levels of provision on offer. In addition, the project sought to gain views as to the provision's effectiveness from young people and practitioners involved in the planning and delivery of programmes.

3. Across the East Midlands region, there are many models of 14–16 provision in place, with most providers planning further changes for the academic year 2002/03 in the light of the Increased Flexibility Programme. Given the range of organisations involved in this provision, it proved impossible to collect anything other than estimated numbers of the young people involved. There is an urgent need for one organisation to collect and disseminate quantitative data on behalf of a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) area.

4. Although some young people felt that they were following programmes because they were 'different' from other young people, it was reassuring to hear many young people exploring and explaining their experiences so positively. There appeared to be an attitudinal shift taking place, with young people giving greater parity of esteem to vocational and work-related learning and a move away from seeing academic programmes as superior. Some of the young people explained that their peers showed interest in what they were doing, and would have liked to have tried some of the options themselves.

5. Young people expressed their enjoyment in being part of 'college life' and their general satisfaction with the choices on offer to them. Some gaps do exist. Young people on alternative programmes are not always offered a broad and balanced curriculum. For example, colleges are not obliged to offer non-core subjects such as physical education, for younger students, to meet the aspirational target of 2 hours per week that is recommended for young people in schools. A holistic partnership approach in planning and delivery could help to bridge such gaps.

6. Young people were generally pleased with the courses they were following and enjoyed the atmosphere of the organisations in which they studied. Highlights included learning in a different way; that learning had a purpose and meaning; and being away from school, which was often described as a stressful environment. For many young people, the alternative provision was seen as providing them with a second chance.

7. Respectful and positive working relationships were observed by and described to the researchers from both adults and young people participating in alternative provision. This was something the young people very much valued, and it gave them a positive impression of what working life may be like.

8. As acknowledged in the recent Green Paper on 14–19 education (DfES 2002), there is concern over the slow progress that children make between the ages of 11 and 14 years. The young people in this research frequently commented that the alternative options they were undertaking were offered too late, and that they would have benefited from access earlier in their school careers.

9. Practitioners expressed major concerns over the funding of 14–16 provision, particularly the access to additional funds to support young people with many and varied specific needs. Increased Flexibility Programme funding is currently available from September 2002 to July 2004 (QCA 2002), so again partnerships are being asked to make long-term plans with relatively short-term funds.

10. With the changes being introduced from September 2002, it was noticeable that many of the organisations were still not clear as to who would take overall responsibility for the young people on alternative programmes. Given the increase in numbers of such young people and the range of providers involved, including workplaces, this report asks whether school staff are equipped to carry out the necessary monitoring of young people. The DfEE (2000) report on *Partnerships that work* highlights some concerns for schools to raise with providers regarding, for example, health and safety and the lines of responsibility for participating organisations. There were some discussions with organisations in this research with respect to the anticipated role of the Connexions Service personal advisers and targeted workers, in supporting 14–16 year olds under the new initiative.

11. Schools and colleges themselves expressed concerns over the availability of suitable staff to plan, teach, support and administer the range of new options to students from younger age groups, some of whom may have additional learning needs. They said they will look to funding bodies to provide appropriate training, to give willing staff the skills and knowledge they require.

12. Effective and equitable partnerships are vital if the Increased Flexibility Programme is to succeed. Practitioners working in positive partnerships had gained much from the support of colleagues and the strength within networks. In local LSC areas where partnerships were weaker, the potential strength of working together was recognised, and there was a call for key partner organisations to facilitate work between schools and colleges to support improvements.

13. There is a clear need for guidance and curriculum materials to be developed to support providers in the design and delivery of alternative programmes.

14. In one county, local careers service research suggested that young people in residential care were not achieving their potential. It would be useful to

know whether alternative provision is being considered for these young people.

15. Given the very tight timescale for this research study, the research team is aware that it will not have captured every example of 14–16 provision available within the East Midlands. In addition, the nature of that provision and the partnership arrangements between the various agencies involved are changing all the time. This is a dynamic area of the education and training system and, hence, this report provides a partial picture of a complex landscape.

The research project

1. Introduction

1.1. This report presents findings from a research project carried out in the East Midlands between January and June 2002 under the remit of the regional Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN). The project focused on researching the extent of alternative educational provision for young people aged 14 to 16 years and on both their experiences and those of the practitioners involved.

1.2. Alternative provision was defined as that which was provided by schools, colleges, training providers and employers to young people aged 14–16 who were not attending mainstream school full-time and following the National Curriculum. The primary aim was to determine the modes and levels of provision on offer. In addition, the project sought to gain views as to the provision's effectiveness from young people and practitioners involved in the planning and delivery of programmes.

1.3. The project was funded by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and the five local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in the region: Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Rutland, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire. Five researchers were appointed to carry out the research (one in each of the LSC areas) and the project was managed in two ways: by a steering group comprising representatives from the LSDA, the LSCs and academic members of the LSRN, and by a designated management group comprising one of the researchers, the LSDA Regional Director and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the LSRN.

1.4. The project, which builds upon previous East Midlands LSRN research (LSDA 2001), was undertaken during a period of considerable national and local development within 14–19 education. The local LSCs had been operational for 1 year at the end of the research period, and the region has seen the gradual inception of the Connexions Service, with some areas yet to become fully operational.

2. Research methods

2.1. Each researcher was responsible for gathering data in their designated LSC area using a multi-layered approach. Data collection involved the following activities.

- Contacting key informants, including personnel from LEAs, careers services/Connexions, LSCs, voluntary agencies, schools, colleges and training providers, to gain information on the nature of their involvement in the planning and delivery of alternative provision and the numbers of providers and young people participating.

- Conducting semi-structured interviews with practitioners in each area.

- Conducting discussion groups (or individual interviews) with, where possible, up to six young people at two provider sites.

- Collecting documents related to the organisation and delivery of learning activities (eg leaflets explaining programmes to young people).

2.2. The following questions highlight the issues which researchers were asked to cover in their interviews with young people and practitioners involved with 14–16 provision. The researchers adapted some of the wording to suit their own style and to suit their interviewees. Each of the researchers used the questions provided as a guide to the research, and the research group considered the young people's questions to be more of a discussion group than a focus group in the traditional sense. Some individual interviews were undertaken with young people, where numbers did not allow for group interaction.

Questions to young people

- Who at school told you about the course/option/activity?

- Did you understand what the course was about?

- Were you given any written information (eg a leaflet) about the course?

- Were you given a choice about attending the course? (Follow-up questions depending on answer: if they say NO, then how do they feel about being made to attend; if they say YES, then why did they decide to join the course.)

- Who explained the course to you at the college/training provider? (Was there an induction, were they shown round, were they given a leaflet, etc.)

- What are you doing at school and is there a relationship between your school work and the college course?

- How are you finding the college course?

- Would you recommend the course to other young people?

Questions to practitioners

- What is your organisation's strategy vis-à-vis 14–16 provision?

- What is your role?

Depending on the organisation, further questions should explore:

- how the organisation works in partnership with other organisations

- which groups of young people are being targeted

- how the aims of the course are explained to young people

- what the organisation's view is of the current approach to 14–16 provision in its area

- whether the organisation is developing further plans/ideas for 14–16 provision

- any general views they have on 14–16 provision and policy.

2.3. In each LSC area, staff at the schools, colleges and training providers willing to participate in the research selected young people to meet with the researcher. In a small number of cases, members of staff were present during the discussion groups.

2.4. The researchers each compiled a report on their findings from their LSC area and these appear as separate case studies in this report. The style of the case studies reflects the individual approach taken to the research within each area, and the variety of modes of delivery in place.

3. The research process

3.1. The appointment of five researchers, from different backgrounds, based across the region and with a variety of expertise and experience, afforded a broad base for the research. There was also continuity, since two of the team had been involved in gathering data for the LSRN's 2001 project.

3.2. In all LSC areas, samples were chosen opportunistically, and the researchers were very grateful for the willingness of the participants to share their experiences, and to provide access to their young people, within the very limited timeframe.

3.3. Because of issues of confidentiality, not all information from the 2001 research project with regard to appropriate contact names and institutions that participated during the project could be given to the new research team. This may have wasted crucial time in the initial stage of the research, as 'gatekeepers' had to be identified and contacted.

3.4. Good communication between the management group and the researchers was usually achieved with questions, queries and suggestions being dealt with promptly. Communication between the researchers and the steering group, via the management group, was not entirely unproblematic, as some of the recommended tasks were not achievable, in terms of time or access.

3.5. Given the timescale for the project, it was not possible to contact everyone involved with alternative provision in the region. Therefore, a number of 'voices' were not heard, in particular those who were not participating, and parents or carers of participants and non-participants.

3.6. The initial project plan encouraged the researchers to contact young people who had progressed from 14–16 provision into mainstream college provision. Some of the participating organisations eventually identified some individual young people who would have been useful informants, but, because of limited time, meetings were not arranged. The project did identify a distinct lack of tracking systems to identify and monitor the progress of young people once they leave alternative provision.

3.7. Local LSCs in each of the areas were keen for researchers to inform them of the numbers of young people involved in 14–16 programmes. Quantitative data was collected from all organisations visited and contacted,

but researchers were unable to find one body or organisation which could accurately detail the numbers and modes of study in operation, in any of the areas.

4. Background to alternative provision

4.1. Since September 1998, disapplication of the National Curriculum has been permitted to enable pupils to participate in extended work-related learning (QCA 2002). Though welcomed by many as an opportunity to offer young people a variety of ways of working, disapplication has been described in the recent Green Paper on 14–19 education as unsatisfactory, undermining attempts to establish vocational provision as a high-quality option for a wide spectrum of pupils (DfES 2002).

4.2. A further development in 14–16 provision took place in November 2001 with the introduction of the Increased Flexibility Programme by Ivan Lewis, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Young People and Learning. The objectives are to raise attainment in national qualifications, improve social learning, and increase retention in education and training post-16. There will be £38m available nationally until July 2004. The programme coincides with the introduction of vocational GCSEs, and there will be more time available in the Key stage 4 curriculum for vocational study.

4.3. General FE colleges have been invited to build upon existing relationships and form new partnerships with schools, training providers and other agents to put these changes into effect. A comprehensive programme of training and support is to be provided to partnerships by the LSDA. Local LSCs will have a key role to play in the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and the allocation of funding.

4.4. The DfEE's booklet, *Partnerships that work* (DfEE 2000), has good advice for schools wishing to initiate links with other providers, to support all forms of work-related learning, but does not specifically address provision for 14–16 year olds undertaking a high proportion of vocational and work-related learning. There is a clear need for guidance and curriculum materials to be developed to assist providers.

4.5. Current government proposals call for a move away from providing mainly academic qualifications for all young people. They also call for clear stages of 14–16 and 16–19, where those stages are marked by substantial assessments, towards a more inclusive 14–19 strategy, with a greater range of options. In the LSRN's 2001 report (LSDA 2001) it was highlighted that there was an assumption that 14–16 alternative provision was always about tackling disadvantage. This may not be the case in the future, with broader options for all, not merely those previously considered to be 'underachieving'.

4.6. The Green Paper's proposed 14–19 framework recognises the need to encourage parity of esteem of vocational and academic qualifications, as well as flexibility to accommodate changes in young people's aspirations, and the nation's skills needs. New qualifications for September 2002 include vocational GCSEs in subjects such as Applied Art and Design, Applied

Business, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Applied ICT, Leisure and Tourism, Manufacturing, and Applied Science. Each will be a double award, equivalent to two GCSEs (DfES 2002).

4.7. Many practitioners in each LSC area shared information with the researchers on the long histories of formal and informal alternative provision for young people, and there was a sense that this research may close a chapter on the informal, locally designed and short-term funded, remedial approach to this work. September 2002 could herald the start of, or perhaps a return to, a curriculum with more flexibility for some students.

5. Views of young people

5.1. Over 80 young people from across the East Midlands were interviewed to gain their views and opinions as Year 10 and 11 learners who were involved with learning provision outside the school environment. Wherever possible, small discussion groups were held, though, if this was not feasible, one-to-one interviews were undertaken. In most cases the use of small discussion groups worked well as it allowed the young people to give their comments in an informal setting. The majority of discussions took place without a member of staff present; however, on a few occasions staff were present in the room because of the vulnerability of some of the young people.

5.2. The learning provision being undertaken by the young people ranged from full-time attendance at a school unit, college or training provider to one day per week using various models of infill and discrete provision.

5.3. The majority of young people commented positively on the relationship with their tutors. They appreciated being treated as an adult by the tutor rather than being in a traditional student/teacher relationship. They cited being allowed to call the tutor by their first name, feeling they received respect from the tutor, and not being told 'do as I say'. Comments included:

> *[Tutors] were alright with you if you are alright with them.*

> *not treated as a baby*

> *staff have a laugh with us*

> *College is loads better than school. They treat you like a grown-up. At college we can call the teachers by their first name. They don't talk to you like you're a kid, like they do at school.*

5.4. College was felt to be more relaxed than school, which in turn had a positive effect on the students' own behaviour:

> *more relaxed, calms you down*

> *makes us act more maturely*

5.5. Another factor that appears to motivate young people and enable them to enjoy their provision was the fact that the provider acted as a break from the norm, relieving boredom. It provided them with an opportunity to undertake a range of activities they would otherwise have been unable to pursue, in a different, non-traditional environment:

You get to do loads of different things at college that you can't at school. We get out on visits and do more interesting things in class.

If I'm having a bad day at school, I can look forward to getting away and going to the training centre.

In school I felt forced into doing things I didn't want to do – so I wouldn't do them.

5.6. Mixing with older students was often mentioned as a positive aspect of attending college, and generally meeting new people, and learning new subjects or familiar subjects in a different way, was welcomed.

5.7. Another positive aspect raised was the ability to be able to work in a live working environment seeing tangible results for their efforts. It was important that their learning was relevant:

When you go into the garage there is always something that has got to be done. You look on the rota or in the book. Half the students look in the book and half on the rota so the jobs get done. Learning is not just about vehicles but about fire risk etc too.

We're not just bored copying and writing all the time.

5.8. Going back to school was mentioned negatively, and some young people who were attending for one day per week wished they could spend more time each week at their training centre to avoid school. Attending on Wednesday was popular because it was felt it broke the week up.

5.9. Some young people mentioned that there were too many tutors around, and so they did not have any time to themselves. However, this was viewed by some as positive as it meant they got more attention from tutors, and more support when help was needed. A number of learners talked about duplication of teaching in the colleges:

we had different teachers so we had to do the work again

said done it once and he said you should be good at it

5.10. One of the girls interviewed would have preferred not to have had to wear school uniform during her time at college, as this was sometimes a barrier to mixing more fully with other students.

5.11. Some young people had concerns over the less-structured nature of the college day, as compared with the school day, and one concern was the amount of time that they had free while at college:

I didn't expect so many breaks.

Just sit at home on day off and get bored.

5.12. Although some of the young people are attending because they are no longer comfortable with the school situation, this did not necessarily mean that the relaxed atmosphere at college suited them either:

It's not easy the discipline problem, it's easy to fall out of line, because it's really laid back.

5.13. Many negative references were made to school subjects in which abstract concepts had been presented, such as mathematics and science,

and how much more interesting the study of practical subjects had been. There was, however, still some resistance over written elements of vocational courses:

> *Don't like the theory, where you have to look back on what you have been doing – it's boring.*

5.14. Young people at one school resented the way in which the alternative provision meant they could be singled out as different to the rest of the school:

> *in a separate faculty and everyone knows you're different*

5.15. While the young people who took part in the discussion groups were satisfied that they were on courses that interested them, and met their needs, they identified that while not attending school at all, or being out of school for significant amounts of the week, they missed out on some of the options offered to mainstream school attenders, such as physical education and personal and social education.

5.16. Most of the young people felt that they had been involved in the decision-making process to attend their courses and their initial interview process had been a two-way meeting. A number of young people openly stated that they attended because they wanted to:

> *[do] anything to get out of school*

5.17. For some of the excluded young people, there were no other choices available but it was apparent that they perceived themselves as being part of the decision-making process.

5.18. Choosing the actual courses to study was often left to the students. However, at one school this was not the case, and it was reported that a lot of pressure was exerted by school staff. Some of the comments included:

> *when we had to make choices we got a letter, you then tick the box for the college and course*

> *parents helped me choose*

> *school told us it was up to us*

Generally the young people were happy with the advice they had received from their schools and the attending colleges when making their choices:

> *we had a meeting telling us what we were doing*

> *teacher came up to us and told us about it and we picked choices*

> *we got a booklet that tells us about what's going on … gave us information on college and the courses*

> *I discussed it with my mum and dad … the school said take it home and bring it back next week.*

5.19. The young people were very aware that attending a college gave them the opportunity to pursue courses of study they would be unable to do at school:

> *wanted to do engineering, can't do that at school*

5.20. A number of the young people realised that their choice was actually between the alternative course or nothing. One group did think that they:

had been picked because we are 'thick'

5.21. Some young people viewed the alternative provision as a last chance, otherwise they would have been out of the education system.

5.22. Although broadly happy with the subjects being offered, several of the students expressed a wish to study other subjects.

5.23. Responses about course expectations produced mixed replies, from indifference to having their expectations exceeded, with more options available than at a school and more social activities to get involved in (eg five-a-side football).

5.24. While the training provider attended by some young people was a smaller organisation than expected, this was seen positively because the local college was thought to be overwhelming.

5.25. Some young people had had to attend an interview at their college and stated that they had felt some concerns over the likely differences in culture and the extent to which they would fit in. In all cases these reservations had proved to be unfounded:

I'd been nervous about going to college, 'cause everything would be different to school. I wasn't sure if I'd fit in, if I'd get on with the other students, but everyone's just been dead nice.

5.26. Young people have some general awareness of differences existing between school and college. While talking to them, it was found that some underlying misconceptions of what the world of work and training may involve existed prior to them entering alternative provision. Some other young people could not describe the courses they were following, and where they may lead them. Taster events, offered by many institutions, are one way of providing young people with more of an opportunity to learn for themselves what college or work will mean to them. In addition, 'buddy' schemes or shadowing may provide support that can only be offered by members of their own peer group.

5.27. A mixed response was received from the young people when asked if they would recommend their courses to others. A group of engineering learners said they wouldn't but couldn't give any reasons why! Other replies included:

Yes – but it must be at the decision of the youngster, not forced to do it.

It can give a youngster a 'fresh start'.

it's fun

it's more relevant to you

[it] was better than doing nothing

One young person commented:

it is good if you don't fit into mainstream schools

and felt

it should be made available to Year 7 and 8 students

They further commented that it would help younger people to continue with their education instead of dropping out.

5.28. One group who would not recommend their courses said they would have welcomed having some older pupils already on the scheme to talk to so that they could get a different perspective to that given to them by their teachers.

5.29. One young person observed that it was necessary to get into trouble or difficulty in school in the first instance, in order to be offered some form of alternative provision:

I didn't deserve a second chance but I am glad I got one.

5.30. One young person identified the chance to learn skills that would make it easier for them to obtain a job:

Because if you want to get a job, you have to have skills and confidence and all that, haven't you?

One Year 11 engineering student said that:

it depends on what you want to do after school

though he went on to say that he hadn't thought like this when he took his options.

5.31. The importance of qualifications was an issue raised in one county, where it was viewed as being very important for all the young people attending college on a part-time basis. The young people were keen to explain what they were studying and what they had already achieved. Having certificates to put in their record of achievement was clearly seen as a positive factor. One girl said:

it would give me something to talk about when I attend interviews

The young people studying for NVQs in Engineering with a training provider felt the qualifications would help them get a job and this was important to them. One mentioned that he liked:

the satisfaction that you can get qualifications

Another group undertaking engineering qualifications felt:

it would give them a better start in life

and held the view that they would be 2 years in front of students who had started college at 16, so it gave them a better chance.

5.32. Many of those interviewed stated that school was now more bearable than it had been before because of the 'break' they had at college:

I'm not sure if it's better than school. But I'm doing different things. I get to do car maintenance at college which I don't at school. It's somewhere else to go, so that when I am back at school it seems more interesting than before.

5.33. Few young people could describe any links between the subjects studied at school and their college courses, and there was *no* recognition of

links between key skills and school work. Young people did, however, recognise that there was a relationship between the work they were doing as part of their alternative route, and the world of work. When describing the practical skills that were acquired, one said:

You're not going to forget how to do it … it's important.

5.34. Some variation exists in the perceptions reported about the programmes as viewed by individuals' peer groups. Some of the young people stated that some of their peers were envious of the opportunity they had been given to study different things in a new environment:

My mates at school are dead jealous 'cause they don't get to come here [college].

In contrast, the perception of other peers was less complimentary. Here, the programme was viewed as 'less worthy' than academic study by other students in the school, and primarily aimed at 'thickos'. This was felt to be very unfair by the youngsters involved with the provision, who believed the programme really suited those who were simply more vocationally biased.

5.35. The Year 11 young people who were studying for a qualification were more likely than those who were not studying for qualifications to have plans for their post-16 life, with the majority going on to attend a further course at a college or with a training provider. The research discussions indicate that many of these young people were more likely to attend college than they had been prior to their participation on a course outside the school environment. One young person commented that, while he was not studying something that directly led to a job, he recognised the value of 'keeping him in the system'. It was felt that their time at college was invaluable because it had given them a 'taster' of potential careers before committing fully to an apprenticeship or full-time course. A further view expressed was that time on the alternative programme had been very useful in deciding what to do next, primarily because it had raised awareness of the opportunities available. It was also mentioned that time spent at the college had been important in helping to gain a better understanding of the college culture and a clearer view on what to expect. Some young people identified themselves as being better equipped to cope with the transition:

Because we're going to that college when we've finished school and we've had more experience.

The young people had the view that if they were to continue into further education, they would stay with the same college, as they now knew their way around and felt comfortable. One individual was positive that his prior experience would be of great benefit, and that he would be 'ahead of the game'.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Across the East Midlands region, there are many models of 14–16 provision in place, with most providers planning further changes for the

academic year 2002/03 in the light of the Increased Flexibility Programme. Given the range of organisations involved in this provision, it proved impossible to collect anything other than estimated numbers of the young people involved. There is an urgent need for one organisation to collect and disseminate quantitative data on behalf of an LSC area.

6.2. Although some young people felt that they were following programmes because they were 'different' from other young people, it was reassuring to hear many young people exploring and explaining their experiences so positively. There appeared to be an attitudinal shift taking place, with young people giving greater parity of esteem to vocational and work-related learning and a move away from seeing academic programmes as superior. Some of the young people explained that their peers showed interest in what they were doing, and would have liked to have tried some of the options themselves.

6.3. Young people expressed their enjoyment in being part of 'college life' and their general satisfaction with the choices on offer to them. Some gaps do exist. Young people on alternative programmes are not always offered a broad and balanced curriculum. For example, colleges are not obliged to offer non-core subjects such as physical education, for younger students, to meet the aspirational target of 2 hours per week that is recommended for young people in schools. A holistic partnership approach in planning and delivery could help to bridge such gaps.

6.4. Young people were generally pleased with the courses they were following and enjoyed the atmosphere of the organisations in which they studied. Highlights included learning in a different way; that learning had a purpose and meaning; and being away from school, which was often described as a stressful environment. For many young people, the alternative provision was seen as providing them with a second chance.

6.5. Respectful and positive working relationships were observed by and described to the researchers from both adults and young people participating in alternative provision. This was something the young people very much valued, and it gave them a positive impression of what working life may be like.

6.6. As acknowledged in the recent Green Paper on 14–19 education (DfES 2002), there is concern over the slow progress that children make between the ages of 11 and 14 years. The young people in this research frequently commented that the alternative options they were undertaking were offered too late, and that they would have benefited from access earlier in their school careers.

6.7. Practitioners expressed major concerns over the funding of 14–16 provision, particularly the access to additional funds to support young people with many and varied specific needs. Increased Flexibility Programme funding is currently available from September 2002 to July 2004 (QCA 2002), so again partnerships are being asked to make long-term plans with relatively short-term funds.

6.8. With the changes being introduced from September 2002, it was noticeable that many of the organisations were still not clear as to who would take overall responsibility for the young people on alternative programmes.

Given the increase in numbers of such young people and the range of providers involved, including workplaces, this report asks whether school staff are equipped to carry out the necessary monitoring of young people. The DfEE (2000) report on *Partnerships that work* highlights some concerns for schools to raise with providers regarding, for example, health and safety and the lines of responsibility for participating organisations. There were some discussions with organisations in this research with respect to the anticipated role of the Connexions Service personal advisers and targeted workers in supporting 14–16 year olds under the new initiative.

6.9. Schools and colleges themselves expressed concerns over the availability of suitable staff to plan, teach, support and administer the range of new options to students from younger age groups, some of whom may have additional learning needs. They said they will look to funding bodies to provide appropriate training, to give willing staff the skills and knowledge they require.

6.10. Effective and equitable partnerships are vital if the Increased Flexibility Programme is to succeed. Practitioners working in positive partnerships had gained much from the support of colleagues and the strength within networks. In local LSC areas where partnerships were weaker, the potential strength of working together was recognised, and there was a call for key partner organisations to facilitate work between schools and colleges to support improvements.

6.11. There is a clear need for guidance and curriculum materials to be developed to support providers in the design and delivery of alternative programmes.

7. Recommendations for further research

7.1. Because this research project was conducted in a very short period of time, it necessarily captures a 'moment in time' from which a number of issues and themes have been identified. The aim was not to provide a comprehensive map of the provision, produce an exhaustive list of models, nor talk to every provider. Given the extent of the provision, there is a clear need for a more comprehensive follow-up study. This should aim to:

- collect more comprehensive statistical data on participation, achievement and progression

- capture the views of a wider range of young people and professionals

- capture the views of those people not covered in this report, particularly those young people who were undertaking alternative provision, and were not in attendance when researchers were present, and those who have not been given the opportunity to participate. Of equal interest would be discussions with those not in school full-time, and not taking part in any work, college or training provider-based provision.

7.2. A subsequent study should also aim to capture the views of parents. Many young people cited their parents as an integral part of their support mechanism both before and during the programmes. It would be useful to

interview parents to ascertain their views on their children's development as a result of involvement in alternative provision.

7.3. Employers play a key role in the delivery of some alternative provision programmes, and are consulted by schools and colleges and careers services as part of the planning process. A number of key questions could be explored in relation to employer involvement: What are their views?, How does their involvement support their organisation's aims?, To what extent do young people become prepared for the world of work through taking part in alternative programmes?, and Do Education Business Partnerships have a role to play?

7.4. There are clearly many young people who are dropping out of education and who might benefit from alternative provision who are not being reached under current arrangements. Research is needed to ascertain who and where they are and how their needs might be met.

7.5. Given the scale of alternative provision, more research is required to examine the impact upon schools, colleges and other organisations directly involved. Such research might examine:

- the impact upon organisational structures

- the impact upon teaching and support staff

- the relationship between alternative provision and the organisation's other activities.

8. References

DfEE (2000). *Partnerships that work: guidance for schools and colleges providing work-related learning for 14–16 year olds.* Department for Education and Employment.

DfES (2002). *14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards.* Department for Education and Skills.

LSDA (2001). *The nature of 14–16 collaborative partnership between schools and colleges in the East Midlands and the impact of this on provision.* Learning and Skills Development Agency.

QCA (2002). *Disapplication of national curriculum subjects at key stage 4.* At www.qca.org.uk/ca/14–19/disapplication, July 2002.

Northamptonshire case study

1. Local strategy

1.1. There was a range of activities with this target group found to be underway in Northamptonshire. All of the four FE colleges were involved in the provision of this support, along with a range of coordinating agencies and support providers.

1.2. The LSC representative provided a draft strategy document, which, at the time of this research, was in the public domain for comments by interested parties. The document, while designed to develop strategy for the organisation as a whole, nevertheless contained a significant number of references and sections devoted solely to the organisation's changing and expanding role in relation to the 14–19-year age group.

1.3. None of the colleges interviewed had a written strategy on their work in this area, although it was noted that their bids for funding from the Increased Flexibility Fund were a good source of information on their policy (copies of the final versions of these may be available at some point from the LSC). The themes behind their involvement in this field were common across each of the colleges. These centred upon the commitment to helping all individuals locally to access a quality education and an ongoing desire to help reduce disadvantaged and social exclusion.

1.4. All four FE colleges were clear that they had no real financial imperative to provide for 14–16 year olds. What was clear, though, was that all the colleges were extremely keen to attract large numbers in this age group as they hoped to 'convert' a significant proportion of them to mainstream full-time students post-16. They were therefore seen as a significant potential income stream.

1.5. The representative of the careers service explained both the current role of the service in relation to the client group but, more particularly, was keen to describe and discuss the changed and expanded role of the Connexions Service in the county.

2. Nature of provision for 14–16 year olds

2.1. Provision for 14–16 year olds in Northamptonshire was found to fall into two broad areas:

- programmes that sought to give the young people a vocational/practical experience within a college environment

- programmes that included a significant work-based element.

Further details on each of these categories are provided below.

Vocational/practical experience courses within colleges

All of the four FE colleges within Northamptonshire operated a number of such programmes, which were offered in partnership with local schools. These courses were designed to give the young people concerned a vocational/practical alternative to their normal school curriculum and to provide recognised qualifications in such a way as to help them experience a sense of achievement.

Although there were a number of variations, the colleges' models had some key features in common.

Target audience for taster programmes

Students who participated in the taster programmes tended to be either disaffected at school, or perceived by the school to be likely to benefit from undertaking the college experience. In either case, the young person's confidence and self-esteem was usually thought likely to be boosted from their participation on the programme.

Referral and induction on the programme

Referral onto the programme invariably came directly from the schools themselves. Schools also took the lead in explaining the format of the programme, and the rights and responsibilities of the young people participating on it.

In all cases there appeared to be a strong wish to offer this provision to the young people concerned as something other than an alternative curriculum that would in some way signify a second-best provision. Great pains were taken by all the school representatives interviewed to use a language that did not denigrate the provision and so ultimately lead to a form of 'ghettoisation' of the young people. Interestingly, though, particularly at one school, the students interviewed were aware of their position in the hierarchy of curriculum provision and talked about the loss of certain subjects in the rest of the school offer as a result of being on the provision. They talked about being in a separate unit within the school with a dedicated faculty, staff and buildings that very much singled them out as different from the mainstream.

In all three sample schools choices were introduced in Year 10 for the next 2 years. Various booklets and other information materials setting out the possibilities were given to the young people and from that information, and with help, support and guidance from teachers and parents, choices were made.

Each college provided additional support to the young people. This usually began with a tour of the building in which they would be studying. All the colleges had a dedicated member of staff to support school pupils while they were in the college. More generally, students were told to report any problems they may have to either their tutor or the college reception. All colleges offered a range of pastoral services to all of their students, covering issues such as

drugs, sexual health, etc. These were also available to the students who studied at the college on these link programmes.

Attendance at the college

In each instance, the young person had to undertake a period of regular attendance at the college. The length and frequency of this was typically one or two days a week. Participation usually began at the start of Year 11.

In all cases investigated, the provision lasted for at least one academic year. Three colleges gave students a college induction at the start of the course, although students interviewed were not in the main very complimentary about them. One college was offering 'taster' weeks to help the young people make more informed choices and two had introduced a taster term whereby young people followed three options for a term before having to decide on one option only.

Curriculum covered

The types of activity offered by the colleges typically reflected their broader curriculum activities and were generally vocational in nature.

Courses and options available to the young people tended to revolve around health and social care and hairdressing for the female students, and woodworking, computers and motor vehicle maintenance for the males. This was obviously different for the college which specialises in agricultural and rural subjects.

Accreditation

There was some variation in the way in which individuals' participation on link programmes was accredited.

All the partnerships investigated for this research were very keen on there being a high level of accreditation and certification involved. Reasons for this seem to have been twofold: first it was seen as beneficial to the learners to gain a nationally recognised qualification to add to their portfolio – this gave the programme a greater coherence and increased status, and second the partnership organisations were able to draw down funding. Originally, one college had awarded college certificates, but was now moving towards NVQ certificates (Level 1), which could, they hoped, be added to in subsequent years. There was a clear objective 'to show them that they can achieve and that achievement is recognised'.

In a number of other instances, participation in taster courses was linked to the pursuit of other awards, most notably the ASDAM Youth Award. In these cases, short courses on issues such as first aid and health and safety formed individual modules of the overall award.

Scale and scope of link programmes

Table 1 summarises the numbers of individuals studying on link programmes in Northamptonshire colleges at the time of the research. It shows that there

were around 1000 students participating on link programmes in Northamptonshire at that time.

Table 1. Summary of the scale of link programmes at Northamptonshire colleges

College	No. of participants
Tresham Institute	470
Northampton College	180
Moulton College	300
Daventry College	50
Total	1000

Source: Information gained from colleges listed above.

All the colleges report rising numbers on a year by year basis and are expecting to expand their provision in the next academic year and beyond.

Significantly, Daventry College was recruiting learners from a wider background than the other colleges and the college representative talked about learners attending for reasons of 'disruptive behaviour, school exclusion … bullying and significant learning difficulties'. The other three colleges did not appear to take learners with such attributes.

In all cases the criteria for admittance to the scheme was that 'student's needs will be best met by learning opportunities on offer'.

'Discrete' and 'infill' educational provision within colleges

Provision for 14–16-year-old learners within FE colleges was a mix of 'discrete' and 'infill' provision.

Infill

In the main, infill students participated in mainstream programmes, along with older students. As a matter of course, the college undertook an assessment of the specific requirements of every young student, including a full risk assessment, and additional areas of curriculum development they required (eg core skills) were provided on a bespoke basis.

At all four FE colleges, students who attended on an infill basis were assimilated into existing provision, according to their needs and personal wishes. Some additional bespoke support was provided to address issues relating to the development of key skills. All individuals had a personal tutor who provided personal support to them as required.

Discrete

All the four colleges appeared happy, where sufficient numbers allowed, to offer discrete provision for their partnership schools and in many cases this was happening.

Referrals process

While parents or individual students themselves sometimes approached colleges, the actual referral to study at any of the colleges had to come from the pupils' existing schools. This was because the school had to reassign the pupils' funding to cover the cost of tuition. In the case of individuals who were already excluded, the referral needed to come from the relevant pupil referral unit.

Work-based training provider arrangements

While none of the schools sampled for this research were currently using work-based training providers for their learners, there is some degree of take-up of this provision within the Northamptonshire area. The researcher was supplied with names, addresses and contact details of three such organisations but, of those, two had no students within the age range and the third, who only had very small numbers, was unable to meet with the researcher during the timescale of the fieldwork for this research.

3. Partnership arrangements

3.1. Typically, each college worked with a range of partner organisations in this area of activity. Foremost among these were the schools themselves, who played *the* crucial role in referring youngsters to the colleges in the first place, and remained key throughout the period in which the pupils studied at the college.

3.2. Schools were also key partners in helping to develop the programmes offered by the colleges. Moulton College was working with between 8 and 10 schools at any one time – most of which were county schools. The assistant principal interviewed was extremely happy with the arrangements in place. A new appointment from the schools sector was soon to take up their post as manager of the 14–16 provision.

3.3. Tresham Institute also worked in partnership with a number of school providers. This college had appointed a full-time schools network manager. There is a practice of school teachers working in the college several days a week and college lecturers likewise working in the schools. It was interesting to note that respondents talked about certain 'frictions' occurring as a result, they believed, of the different terms and conditions of employment and pay scale differences between college and school employees.

3.4. The main area of concern for colleges related to the problem of ensuring effective communications over the specific needs and causes facing individuals referred to them by schools. While some information was received from schools, this was often felt to be incomplete and more detail was needed to ensure that the college was able to give the appropriate level of support to each individual referred. This was a particular concern in instances where the

individual referred had serious personal problems that presented a potential danger to themselves, staff and other students.

3.5. There was no discernible feeling of schools 'dumping' troublesome students on to the colleges. This may reflect the effective nature of the partnerships' operations or conversely the high degree of need by the colleges to recruit more learners. Further investigation into this aspect might be useful.

4. Careers service's perspective

4.1. In Northamptonshire, the careers service is currently called Career Path. Like the rest of the East Midlands, Northamptonshire is moving towards setting up a Connexions Service. Relationships with Career Path were very good. All the schools and colleges talked very highly of the service given by Career Path and received by them. There was evidence from the interviews conducted of representatives from the careers service being on numerous partnership groups, both with the schools and colleges as well as with other interested agencies.

4.2. Career Path were particularly interested in Year 11 onwards: 'most of our work concentrates on Year 11 when young people start making decisions about what they are going to do next'. Provision for 14–16 year olds is being seen as a priority for the new Connexions Service. Career Path worked closely with partners at the operational level, helping to plan and coordinate non-school provision for 14–16 year olds. The chief executive of Career Path also worked strategically with partners to plan the range of provision for 14–16 year olds across the county. Other key partners included the LSC, the FE colleges and the LEAs.

4.3. On balance, these partnerships were felt to be very effective. At both the operational and strategic level, Career Path felt able to make a real contribution to this area of work and that this area of work provided a good example of how the LEAs could work together. All of the respondents interviewed for this research spoke favourably about the level of interest and effort from Career Path and the very positive part it had played in partnerships.

4.4. Resources were being targeted at those students seen to be 'at risk': 'for the last few years because of the government's agenda we have concentrated on those young people who have disengaged with learning or are in danger of disengaging'. Therefore targeted provision was based on 'needs testing': 'rather than giving everyone one interview each it's saying those people over here have got support and can sort themselves out…'. This means concentrating on those who need extra help and support and 'more hand holding through the transition'. Career Path have produced criteria to try to undertake the analysis of young people's needs, who is in which group and who they need to do more work with.

4.5. In terms of analysing which young people were currently benefiting from the schemes, Career Path said:

we have a number of criteria … special project groups – exclusion, learning disabilities, care issues, offending. We need to ask are they achieving what they should do, reaching their potential, are we unsure or unclear about plans that could cut across other parts of their experience and so inhibit their learning potential.

4.6. Career Path say that their research shows that young people in care are not achieving their full potential. They said, 'we have a good relationship with the Leaving Care team … they tell us who are their clients and we try and work with those'.

4.7. Career Path suggested that each school manages the service in their own unique way according to the school's ethos, style and culture.

4.8. Work experience was seen as a difficult area to get right as there is a tension between demand and the number of placements available.

5. Local education authority's perspective

5.1. Commitment to partnership work was seen to be very strong among all of the key local players. In recent times there had been increased communications between partners and real efforts to increase the closeness and effectiveness of working relationships. Regular meetings now took place with college principals and there was a county-wide post-16 education management group. The right organisations and the right individuals were now thought to be involved, with most displaying a very positive view to addressing the main issues.

5.2. The LEA representative interviewed spoke very favourably about the arrangements currently in place for 14–16 year olds receiving part of their education in colleges.

6. Learning and Skills Council's perspective

6.1. The LSC have a clear acknowledgement of the new post-14 agenda and of their crucial role within it:

to increase the accessibility of learning opportunities within the county

for young people we will ensure access to a broad balanced range of learning opportunities

…seek to pilot … and seek to promote collaboration not competition

work with the local authorities to provide integrated solutions

6.2. The LSC are appointing a new head of department of 14–19 provision by way of reorganisation and the new LSC draft strategic plan makes a number of references to the 14–16 provision within it. The strategy document talks about 'relevance and responsiveness and appropriate response to needs of 14–16 age range … develop an appropriate response to the government's

14–19 strategy including undertaking a strategic review of the pre-16 activity…'.

7. Northamptonshire Inspection and Advisory Service (LEA)

7.1. Northamptonshire Inspection and Advisory Service (NIAS) works primarily, though not exclusively, with schools in its area. It believes that the primary agencies for initiatives are the Northamptonshire upper schools, as 'primarily the schools are directing the young people'. NIAS felt that there are a myriad of reasons why young people find themselves on the scheme and that some of their problems begin way before they reach secondary school. For NIAS, deciding on the type of provision that is appropriate for young people is a complex business:

> we don't get to 14 and it just happens … it's a long process

7.2. NIAS believes there should be an alternative curriculum and that it should not be separate but rather part of the whole school offer. Again, as with LSC, NIAS is aware of very many examples of good delivery and of effective partnerships cross-sectors and that for many, if not most of the learners, a major value of the scheme is that their education takes place away from school.

7.3. NIAS sees young people in care/residential accommodation as perhaps not having the same access to the scheme as others. It would like to see more involvement with work experience, key skills, information technology and science for the young people on the programmes and feels that programmes should lead to certification.

8. Future developments

8.1. All the institutions sampled for the purposes of this research were very keen to continue to increase the provision. All saw it as a very valuable addition for particular sections of their young people. Financial issues, however, did surface. The colleges said that there was not enough money in it for them but they saw it as a 'loss leader'. For schools, tight budgets were also a major hurdle to further expansion of the scheme. Despite the funding problems, however, all four FE colleges thought that they would be expanding their intake in the next academic year. One college in particular is looking to expand to other neighbouring schools outside the 'tertiary–secondary' partnership. The colleges also had other ideas and one had made a joint 14–19-curriculum provision/development bid to the DfES.

8.2. All the colleges and the schools were getting to grips with the impending vocational GCSEs. Already discussions were underway about the best way to structure and deliver these to the students for whom they are seen as being most appropriate.

9. Conclusions

9.1. There is a wide range of non-school-based learning activity for 14–16-year-old students currently underway in Northamptonshire. The colleges and schools sampled for this research were clearly increasingly involved in this area and plans were being drawn up to further expand the range of and target number for the provision.

9.2. All organisations spoke highly of and value the level of support they gain from the various partnerships to which they belong. These seem to be working very well within the Northamptonshire area.

9.3. Less positive issues seem to be around funding. These issues concern both the level of funding, and the minefield of 'death by a thousand funding initiatives', as one respondent put it.

9.4. Everyone involved seems to welcome the schemes and to be committed to them. All tried very hard not to talk about them as in any way second-class.

9.5. Clear and unambiguous advice and guidance is very important to help learners make informed choices.

Derbyshire case study

1. Local strategy

1.1. There is a considerable range of activities being undertaken within Derbyshire for this group of pre-16 learners. It would appear, however, that there is currently no coherent strategy for the work with the 14–16 year olds involving liaison between colleges and schools. The view that there was a real requirement for a stronger strategic approach to be taken across the county was mentioned on a number of occasions. Some interviewees hoped that the launching of a new Connexions agency would not only help strengthen partnerships but also provide further strategic support.

1.2. Derbyshire Education Business Partnership (DEBP) would like to extend its role within the county to: 'bring partner organisations together and facilitate and enable but not necessarily do themselves'.

1.3. No strategy documents were available at the time of the research although Derby LEA was in the process of developing its strategy and was able to provide a draft copy of a relevant priority.

2. Nature of provision for 14–16 year olds

2.1. All of the colleges of further education are involved with providing support to this group along with a number of training providers and other agencies. Various types of provision are on offer.

- **Taster provision** – This is provided by colleges to Year 10 and Year 11 students. This provision is available in a number of formats involving attendance at a college for half a day per week for a set period of time (eg 12 weeks or 30 hours over a 5-week period). Taster provision is usually taught discretely and provides learners with a flexible choice of subjects to sample. This type of provision has proved very popular with young people who are able to undertake more than one 'block' of taster provision.

- **School link provision** – This provision involves attendance at a college for up to one day per week. It is practically based and enables a learner to work towards a recognised qualification (eg GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism).

- **Full-time education provision by a college** – Derby College, Chesterfield College, University of Derby High Peak and North Derbyshire Tertiary College provide education to excluded young people or those that are in danger of becoming excluded. They have a contract with the relevant LEA for this provision. Colleges follow different models of provision, some believing infill provides positive role models to the 14–16 year olds and lessens behaviour problems, while other colleges believe

discrete provision is better for the young people, having tried infill provision.

- **Work-based learning** – This provision offers an out-of-school experience and practical learning that is not available within a school (eg in engineering or hairdressing). Training provider companies work closely with schools and contract directly with them. They also work with local employers to offer work experience placements.

- **Step Forward** – A further provider of support to 14–16 year olds in Derbyshire is the educational trust, Step Forward. It runs programmes in Derby, Chesterfield, Ripley and Chapel-en-le-Frith for excluded or at risk, vulnerable young people. It offers a more flexible approach to learning with a range of educational opportunities in a supportive environment. Young people attend the programme full-time for a year and study core subjects of the National Curriculum. They may also attend college placements and be involved with voluntary projects.

2.2. Colleges reported experiencing difficulties providing a totally flexible programme for these young people. To achieve any type of qualification requires a minimum period of attendance. One college does not take young people on its full-time provision after December in a given academic year. This is a problem for the LEA who have to try to place young people throughout the year, but the college believes a 14 year old would not be able to cope with the added pressure of achieving a qualification within a shortened timescale. This raises the issue of conflict between successful provision as defined by qualifications achieved with providing education for a set time to a young person because it is required legally.

2.3. It was often mentioned that there is a need to find a meaningful qualification that can be taken in the hours that the young people have available in a week. The role of qualifications was perceived as being 'far more important to the young people and their parents than it seems to be to the schools'.

2.4. The importance of offering progression opportunities was often cited. Courses must be accredited to help with this as 'it gives them something that they can move on with'.

2.5. For a college to provide a wider choice of courses will require a 2-year commitment from schools, and to make it a stimulating and engaging experience will require minimum numbers of attendees if based on discrete provision. The developing provision of vocational GCSEs will highlight issues with funding, resources and staff flexibility. It was felt that alliances or partnerships will become even more important with these new developments.

2.6. The practical experience provided by work-based learning providers obviously offers something different. It was apparent, through the interviews with staff and young people, that this practicality can motivate young people who have been unable to develop their practical skills in a school environment. However, not all young people who are disaffected are suitable for work-related learning because of behavioural and other problems. It was also mentioned that schools have to think about the reputation of their school with local employers when placing young people on work experience.

2.7. There appears to be an issue with developing staff skills within colleges to deal with this group of 14–16 year olds, particularly if they are undertaking infill provision. It was felt that tutors do not always understand the different attitudes to learning. As one interviewee commented, 'it is a big jump for people who work or trained in FE to deal with 14–16 year olds with different abilities and behavioural problems'.

2.8. A view often mentioned was the need to extend provision to other Year 10 and Year 11 students including, for example, the occasional attendees who are not excluded but are not really attending school. Because of the funding streams, these young people 'get a very poor service'. The new Connexions Service, in particular, would like to address this issue.

2.9. Colleges have an issue with how to get schools to release their middle-of-the-road and potentially high achievers into vocational training. Schools are often very league table focused. There is a need for timetable space to be made available for young people to attend more out-of-school provision. It was felt that unless schools acted in a more flexible way, it will be impossible for this type of provision to move forward: 'Schools have to step outside the "academic" mind-set and release the more able youngsters.'

3. Partnership arrangements

3.1. All interviews with the professionals involved discussions about partnership working. The organisations involved in this partnership working include FE colleges, Derbyshire Careers Service, Derby LEA, Derbyshire LEA, DEBP, schools, training providers, Derbyshire LSC, and the two Education Action Zones.

3.2. While partnership arrangements could be quoted, the perceptions of how successful these partnership arrangements were was varied. One college interviewee described their partnerships with local schools as having 'hot and cold patches' in their catchment area. Another college offering provision to excluded young people liaised regularly with its LEA contact, and this was seen as being important. Feedback from the LEA about the personal profile of the student was helpful when matching the personal needs of the young people with the courses on offer.

3.3. On a wider scale, it would appear that there are problems with collaboration county-wide. An interesting perception that was stated is that Derbyshire is suffering because of an underactive LEA, with a further perception that Nottinghamshire works well with its partnerships and has guidelines to follow developed by its LEA. It was felt that Derbyshire LEA needed to take the lead in promoting positive initiatives.

3.4. Developing working relationships with youth workers, education social workers and specialist workers (eg drug action workers) is vital. A future aspiration of Connexions is to be able to 'pull in from a network of resources and workers'. Youth workers from Derby City Youth Services have been used to work with Afro/Caribbean and Asian young people to provide role models. It has worked well as they are seen as part of the school staff: 'the more it links

into the mainstream school, the more successful it is'. These working relationships must also be utilised by the colleges.

3.5. On the whole, positive commitment to partnerships and the development of a county-wide strategy was often expressed. One interviewee believed that 'expectations are fairly high, by working together there will be tremendous improvements'. The role of the soon to be introduced Connexions Service should have a positive impact on developing partnership working involving this particular group of young people.

4. Funding

4.1. From a college perspective, it was felt that the 'biggest difficulty to date has been schools have struggled to find funding for these initiatives. This may be because of internal battles for funding between heads of years and the headteacher, or it can be dependent on the internal school culture relationships'. Another interviewee noted that there were 'quite exciting things going on but it is just a pity you can't get the funding through one stream and be sure of what you are getting so you can do some longer term planning'.

4.2. Funding in Derbyshire is available from a number of sources (eg the LSC, European Social Fund (ESF) and Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)). Issues were raised about the piecemeal nature of this funding. Long-term plans are not always possible because of short-term funding. Some schools do not attract benefits as they do not have large numbers of disaffected students. The role of the DEBP was noted as being particularly important for these schools but 'funding is piecemeal and it would be better as one big pot'.

4.3. A further funding complication which needs to be explored is the perception/reality of schools keeping poor attendees on their school roll to continue receiving funding for them. It was commented upon that it is important for organisations to work together to ensure the individual young people receive an appropriate service.

5. School/college relationships

5.1. Throughout the research project, when talking to the college staff, cultural differences were often cited and the problems they can cause between schools and colleges mentioned. The view was raised on several occasions that schools 'seem to be more concerned with filling their timetables, especially if they get them off site'. It was felt this particularly occurred when the students involved were 'difficult' students. The colleges felt that the 'most successful pupils are those that come from schools that have thought about the course options and who to send, not just got rid of the difficult student for the day'.

5.2. The support of headteachers is vital for effective provision to this group of young people. As one college interviewee stated, 'it is all down to how they [Heads] see this. Heads have a very strong influence on kids, parents, staff …

if they are not on board it is extremely difficult to do this'. It was felt that headteachers were very influential in the successful implementation of alternative provision for their students.

5.3. Problems have been experienced when the decision-maker from a school has not been involved in discussions for partnership working, as the school representative has to return to their school and raise the issue at a higher level. However, conversely, it was noted that difficulties have also been experienced when headteachers have been involved with the discussions for college courses but have returned to their school and delegated to a coordinator who may not be fully informed or committed to the provision.

5.4. There is a need to overcome the lack of awareness that exists about each other's roles – teachers in schools, training providers, tutors in colleges. One college had experienced some difficulties when working with local schools, 'because the schools had preconceptions about the college, negative preconceptions that had been difficult to overcome'.

5.5. Echoing current thought, the problems experienced by 14–16 year olds cannot be seen in isolation. The role of parents was often mentioned during the research. Wider involvement of parents and working with younger age ranges to try to avert the problems experienced by the current 14–16 year olds was seen as being vital to avoid escalation of disaffection.

6. Quantitative data

6.1. Collecting statistical data on the numbers of young people participating in alternative provision in Derbyshire proved to be a very difficult task as there is no central data collection point for this group and most planners, coordinators and providers were only able to give estimates. This may have been because they did not know the exact size of the provision they gave, but also taster programmes are run throughout a year and final numbers are not known until the end of the academic year. Where the provider had a contract with an LEA for example, exact figures from the contract could be quoted, but this still does not mean this is the number attending the provider because of drop-outs, non-attendance, etc. Derbyshire LEA contract with a number of colleges outside the county. Furthermore, the number of placements with training providers involved with the 14–16 years olds is unknown for the county. These training providers contract directly with schools.

6.2. Derbyshire Careers Service collates county-wide management information about young people but the data is often not detailed enough to isolate this particular 14–16-year-old group (see Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated participation in alternative provision for 14–16 year olds in Derbyshire*

	One day a week/taster
South East Derbyshire College	20
Chesterfield College	50
Derby College	50 per programme**
University of Derby High Peak	65
NLT Training	50
Burton College	30

*The figures in the table are estimations and should only be used as a guide. The data was gathered directly from the providers, while figures for Burton College were provided by Derby LEA.

**Derby College run six taster blocks/programmes per year, which equates to 300 places. However, this does not mean 300 different students are accessing this provision, as because of the popularity of the programme students are attending more than one taster programme in an academic year.

7. Marketing/literature

7.1. At present, colleges generally do not feel they are able to directly target their provision for the young people. As one interviewee noted, 'we provide what the schools want'.

7.2. All the colleges and the training provider interviewed undertook some marketing through attendance at school open evenings for Year 9 students or through presentations to the young people if the college/provider had a good working relationship with the school.

7.3. One college hopes that all the young people will receive 'good quality, neutral but informed careers advice and guidance, so that when they join the programme it is the best thing for them'.

7.4. Interestingly, one school packaged the programme on offer as a really special opportunity for the youngster that others won't be able to access. It was felt this helped raise the young people's self-esteem and expectations.

7.5. An assortment of literature was collated from the various organisations which highlights the widely differing practices of information provision to this group of young people. Some providers did not have any literature available, with one commenting that this was not their strong point, while other providers have produced in-house leaflets or briefing papers which outline what is available. This information was not only targeted at young people but often also at parents.

8. Future developments

8.1. This research has been undertaken during a time of development with regard to the young people involved. At all the interviews held with providers there was acknowledgement of these changes and all had plans for the new academic year 2002/03.

8.2. Future plans involve offering a wider choice of vocational subjects (seen as a positive development away from the stereotypical motor vehicle maintenance and hairdressing). It was also reported that the LEA were keen to extend the full-time provision offered to the young people to 25 hours a week with the introduction of new options for full-time attendees (eg physical education and religious education).

8.3. The developing importance of vocational GCSEs was also reported. Funding from the Derbyshire LSC for the new academic year 2002/03 had been applied for at the time of research. Some joint initiatives involving colleges and schools were being developed and one college is hoping to offer its vocational GCSEs through joint delivery with a school.

9. Conclusions

9.1. To obtain a comprehensive view of the non-school learning provision available to 14–16 year olds in Derbyshire further investigation would be beneficial, especially with regard to the role of the two Education Action Zones in the county, along with a thorough survey of schools across the county.

9.2. Provision for 14–16 year olds is complex and involves a large number of organisations. It is obvious that to unite these organisations within a county-wide strategy can only help improve the services on offer to these young people. The introduction of the Connexions Service is timely and can help with developing the services that will enable Year 10 and 11 learners to achieve a meaningful education outside the traditional academic set-up. All the players are on the field but there is a requirement for someone to 'captain the team'.

9.3. One interviewee raised a question that could be a challenge for the local LSCs: with this type of provision being 'funding driven, where is there room for innovation?'.

9.4. Quantitative data detailing the group of young people involved with learning in a non-school learning environment was very inconsistent and the introduction of a coordinated management information system would help clarify who is involved with this provision and help track the size and format of the provision being offered.

9.5. Finally, and importantly, the views of the young people interviewed provided an excellent insight into how the users of these programmes judge the provision they receive. Most of the youngsters were looking for something different to do and appreciated getting away from school. Offering this provision to a wider audience, not just those who are at risk of failing, can only encourage young people to enjoy participating in vocational education, and

gaining qualifications, while also raising their self-esteem and future aspirations.

Nottinghamshire case study

1. Local strategy

1.1. There is a considerable range of activities under the heading 'alternative provision' underway in Nottinghamshire. All of the colleges were involved in the provision of this support, along with a range of training providers and coordinating agencies and support providers.

1.2. At the time of the study, a strategy for learning for 14–19 year olds was currently being developed by the LEA, but was not yet in the public domain. The strategy is expected to cover all forms of education in the county and, as such, not simply focus upon disaffected and non-school-based education.

1.3. None of the colleges interviewed had a codified strategy on their work in this area although, as in Northamptonshire, it was noted that their bids for funding from the Increased Flexibility Fund were a good source of information on their policy. Again, as in Northamptonshire, the themes behind their involvement in this field were common across each of the colleges. These centred upon the commitment to helping all individuals locally to access a quality education and an ongoing desire to help reduce disadvantaged and social exclusion.

1.4. As in Northamptonshire, there was no real financial imperative for colleges to become involved in 14–16 provision. Several colleges said they effectively made a loss on this area of provision, and relied on other areas of activities to subsidise their work with this age group.

2. Nature of the provision for 14–16 year olds

2.1. Work with 14–16 year olds in Nottinghamshire was found to fall into four broad areas:

- programmes that included a significant work-based element, such as Work to Qualify

- 'taster' programmes that sought to give youngsters a vocational/practical experience within a college environment

- 'discrete' and 'infill' educational provision within colleges for youngsters, which provided excluded youngsters with an educational experience

- miscellaneous/ad hoc programmes that aimed to address causes of disaffection, low self-esteem or poor levels of self-confidence (eg Compact Link).

2.2. In addition to these categories, several colleges noted that a number of youngsters were also enrolled on evening classes, studying subjects that they were unable to pursue at school. This area was not explored further as part of

this study, however, as it was viewed as incidental to main thrust of the project.

2.3. Work to Qualify and Steps to Success are described below as examples of programmes which included a significant work-based element.

Work to Qualify

Work to Qualify was only undertaken in the former North Nottinghamshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) area. Around 250 students from the 29 schools in North Nottinghamshire participated on this programme each year. It was aimed at 'at risk' pupils in Year 11, such as persistent non-attenders and those individuals with behavioural problems. Its objective was to provide young people with the skills they required to make a positive transition at age 16, primarily into work-based training but also into further education if appropriate. Potential participants were identified by the school, which then explained the programme and its benefits to the young people themselves.

The programme began with a consideration of health and safety issues during the autumn term. This was then followed by 2 days' placement each week with an employer, arranged by a training provider. Training on the programme included study towards a vocational qualification. This was normally via individual units on key skills.

Usually the programme ran through to the end of the Easter term, when pupils were expected to begin preparations for their GCSE examinations. However, it could continue past this point in some instances.

In Newark and Bassetlaw, individuals worked towards the Vocational Access Certificate. In Mansfield and Ashfield, pupils on the programme worked towards the alternative National Skills Profile, an Entry level certificate which covered a range of vocational issues, including health and safety, careers progression, dress expectations, etc. However, at the time of the study, the suitability of the National Skills Profile was under review.

In Ashfield and Mansfield, Work to Qualify was delivered by STS Training. In Bassetlaw, North Nottinghamshire College delivered the programme, while Newark Training Services (a subsidiary company of Newark and Sherwood College) delivered the programme in Newark.

On completion of the programme, training providers were required to attempt to place students on Modern Apprenticeship or Foundation Modern Apprenticeship programmes.

Steps to Success

This initiative was supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and was similar in format and approach to the Work to Qualify initiative outlined above. The main difference between the two was that Steps to Success began in Year 10, whereas Work to Qualify began a year later.

As with Work to Qualify, Steps to Success involved placement for 2 days a week with an employer or training provider, which was used to provide an understanding of the world of work. It was also used to develop and accredit

individuals' key skills. As part of the programme, training providers worked directly with the schools themselves to build the capacity of the trainers involved in the delivery of the key skill components of the initiative.

Steps to Success was operated within the former Greater Nottingham TEC area. Approximately 120 students from across the various schools in Nottingham City participated in this each year.

2.4. Taster/link programmes are described below.

Taster/link programmes

'Taster' programmes sought to give youngsters a vocational/practical experience within a college environment. Most of the colleges within Nottinghamshire operated a number of such programmes, which were offered to local schools. Only Newark and Sherwood College did not undertake link programmes with local schools in the county.

Although there were a number of variations, each of the college's models had a number of key features similar to those identified in the Northamptonshire case study. The greatest variation was in the number of weeks the courses lasted. For instance, People's College provides a range of part-time taster courses for young people, under its Vocspop programme, which lasted between 5 and 34 weeks. North Nottinghamshire's courses typically lasted 8 weeks. At New College, Nottingham, the courses generally lasted for half a term.

The types of activity offered by the colleges typically reflected their broader curriculum activities and were generally vocational in nature. Many colleges offered courses in core subjects, such as information technology, first aid and health and safety. Childcare, mechanical engineering, sport, motorcycle maintenance, catering and hairdressing were also popular options.

Accreditation

There was some variation in the way in which individuals' participation on link programmes was accredited.

The short length of time spent on the programmes meant that, on the whole, accreditation came via a college certificate. However, again there were variations in this. For instance, the People's College Vocspop programme included both unaccredited and accredited modules. While the former were acknowledged through a locally awarded certificate, the latter were formally recognised through national certification provided, for example, by the Open College Network (OCN). Of the colleges contacted, only West Nottinghamshire did not run any taster courses that were externally accredited.

In a number of other instances, participation in taster courses was linked to the pursuit of other awards, most notably the ASDAM Youth Award. In these cases, short courses on issues such as first aid and health and safety formed individual modules of the overall award.

Scale and scope of link programmes

The table below summarises the numbers of individuals studying on link programmes in Nottinghamshire colleges at the time of the study. It shows that there were around 1300 students participating on link programmes in Nottinghamshire at that time.

Table 1. Participation in link programmes at Nottinghamshire colleges

College	No. of participants
New College, Nottingham	708
North Nottinghamshire College	200
People's College	178
South Nottingham College	70
West Nottinghamshire College	100
Broxtowe College	30
Total	1286

Source: Direct from colleges listed above, except for Broxtowe College figures, which come from GuideLine Career Services.

3. 'Discrete' and 'infill' educational provision within colleges

3.1. This provision was generally aimed at individuals who had either been excluded from school or were in serious danger of exclusion. In Nottingham, New College and Broxtowe College were the primary providers of support in this field.

Across the county, South Nottingham, Newark and Sherwood, and West Nottinghamshire colleges all provided support to these young people.

4. Discrete provision

4.1. New College provided discrete provision for six students at the time of the interview. These were participants on The Bridge programme, which was directly contracted by the LEA. Participants on this programme had been excluded from at least two schools in the county.

4.2. At New College, accreditation for students' studies came from recognised national sources, thereby increasing the level of currency this provision had with the individual and the wider community.

5. Infill provision

5.1. Around 110 students aged 14–16 years attended New College on an infill basis. Of these, seven had been excluded from schools, with the remainder deemed 'at risk'. However, it should be noted that the current system saw schools fined up to £6000 for each child excluded and, as a result, many of these 'at risk' were in reality 'exclusions'.

5.2. On balance, the college preferred to deal with 14–16 year olds on an infill rather than a discrete basis, as such an approach increased their level of integration in to the college, eliminated peer group pressure and reduced the disruptive influence that these students caused.

5.3. In the main, infill students participated in mainstream programmes, along with older students. As a matter of course the college undertook an assessment of the specific requirements of every young student, including a full risk assessment, and additional areas of curriculum development they required (eg core skills) were provided on a bespoke basis.

5.4. At South Nottingham College, pupils who attended the college on an infill basis were assimilated into existing provision, according to their needs and personal wishes. Some additional bespoke support was provided to address issues relating to the development of key skills. All individuals had a tutor who provided personal support to them as required.

5.5. A large proportion of these pupils attended the college on a 'full-time basis', although this term was misleading as full-time for the college could constitute as little as 14 hours of taught study a week. The college was the main educational provider for all individuals there on an infill basis and thought that only a few of the students would be accessing additional provision elsewhere. In 2000/01 there were 33 students at the college on this basis. At the time of the study there were 28.

5.6. North Nottinghamshire College also offered support for students who had been excluded or suspended by school, either in Nottinghamshire or North East Derbyshire. Again the college worked to identify the specific requirements and develop a programme of support appropriate to each individual's needs. At the time of interview there were 12 children aged 14–16 studying full-time at the college on this basis.

5.7. There were nine Year 11 students who had been excluded from local schools and were attending West Nottinghamshire college full-time (2 days a week). These individuals were studying vocational subjects, with accreditation through the ASDAM Youth Award and OCN units. No additional study was undertaken elsewhere, to the best of the college's knowledge.

6. Referrals process

6.1. Parents or individual students sometimes approached colleges directly, but the actual referral to study at any of the colleges had to come from the pupil's existing school as the school had to reassign the pupil's funding to

cover the cost of tuition. In the case of individuals who were already excluded, the referral needed to come from the relevant pupil referral unit.

6.2. At Newark and Sherwood College, parental referrals were seen as a particular problem, not least because they often came at rather late stages in the academic year. In an effort to reduce this problem, the college had stopped accepting referrals after the October half-term.

6.3. Generally students had a personal interview with the college, usually co-attended by an adult. At New College the curriculum head also interviewed students before they were admitted onto the specific course of their choice.

The known levels of infill and discrete provision, at the time of the study,.are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the scale of discrete and infill provision at Nottinghamshire colleges

Provider	Programme description	No. of participants
Broxtowe College	Discrete provision	30
New College, Nottingham	Pre-16 enrolled (infill)	110
New College, Nottingham	Pre-16 enrolled (discrete – 'The Bridge')	6
Newark and Sherwood College	Pre-16 enrolled (infill)	8
Newark and Sherwood College	Stepping Out	20
North Nottinghamshire College	Pre-16 enrolled (infill)	12
South Nottingham College	Pre-16 enrolled (infill)	28
West Nottinghamshire College	Pre-16 enrolled (infill)	9
Total		223

Direct from colleges listed above, except for Broxtowe College figures, which come from GuideLine Career Services.

7. Programmes which aimed to address causes of disaffection

7.1. As noted above, many of the link programmes operated by local colleges were intended to address causes of disaffection among young people. Often these programmes were targeted at youngsters who were disaffected with school, as a means of breaking up the week and providing a range of

alternative opportunities that were not currently available within the school environment.

7.2. Conversations with college staff indicated that there were a number of schools locally that had their own bespoke activities to tackle disaffection among young people, in addition to link programmes. These often connected with existing link programmes and were possibly supplemented with additional aspects, such as outward-bound activities or work placements. The alternative curriculum models at two schools (Dayncourt and Elizabethan High) are examples of these and are explored later in this case study.

7.3. There were also other programmes funded by the Nottinghamshire Education Business Partnership (EBP) which sought to tackle disaffection. These were Compact Link, Skills Force, Employability Graduation Award and the ACE Programme.

Compact Link

Compact Link consisted of 3 weeks' intervention with Year 11 pupils. It was targeted at individuals who had low self-esteem and poor levels of self-confidence. The aim of Compact Link was to raise the self-esteem of these individuals, improve their performance within mainstream education and increase their employability.

The first week of the programme involved a residential placement. This included a range of exercises intended to develop individuals' key skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills, motivation and understanding of the skills and attributions they needed to develop to improve their potential employability. This was followed by 9 days' work experience with an employer, undertaken to improve their key skills and improve their employability. Some post-programme follow-up had been undertaken in the past with pupils, but this had been rather ad hoc in nature. Compact Link had, to date, only been undertaken in the former North Nottinghamshire TEC area.

Skills Force

This initiative was undertaken in the Ashfield area of Nottinghamshire only. Part-funded by the Ministry of Defence, 'Skills Force' was targeted at severely disaffected pupils, aged between 14 and 16. Its main focus was on providing the skills and understanding needed by these individuals to make a positive transition at the end of Year 11.

It was operated by newly retired members of the army. The programme involved up to 2 days a week out of school over 2 years. Individuals undertook a range of activities, aimed at developing their key and personal skills. Examples of these included problem-solving work, working in the community, teamworking exercises and study trips. Pupils on the programme were encouraged to work towards youth awards such as ASDAM and the Prince's Youth Award. Each of the three secondary schools in Ashfield participated, submitting 25 Year 10 pupils each to the programme.

Employability Graduation Award

This programme was funded and managed by Nottingham LEA and involved 11 schools from their area. It was aimed at Year 10 pupils who did not see school as important, were in danger of becoming or are disaffected, or were unlikely to access further education, work or work-related training at post-16. The aims of the programme were to raise attainment, achievement and attendance at Key stage 4 and raise aspirations for progression at post-16. The programme also sought to develop skills for working life and support the establishment of a cohesive approach to the work-related curriculum.

The award comprised the accreditation of a range of specific issues that were not normally recognised. These included basic skills, ICT, at least one vocational unit and work experience. Evidence of a contribution to community service or action was also included in the award.

Provision was delivered by New College, People's College and South Nottingham College. Two training providers were also involved in the programme. The Employability Graduation Award was launched in September 2001 and was anticipated to last for all of Key stage 4 (ie 2 years). In the city, 170 pupils were participating in the programme. Typically, participants spent around one half day a week out of the school classroom. This was usually spent at one of the training providers or colleges identified above. Time was freed up by disapplying participants from two out of the three National Curriculum subjects of modern foreign languages, science, and design and technology.

The programme was sold to the pupils in a range of ways that varied depending on the school involved. In the best examples, pupils were told of the programme through advice and guidance sessions, the benefits of it were explained and their commitment clarified and obtained, prior to their joining the initiative. In the worst instances, some pupils were unaware that they were actually on the programme at all.

ACE Programme

Newark and Sherwood College also operated a programme targeted at disaffected youngsters. This was called the Alternative Curriculum Experience (ACE) Programme and was viewed as an important step in ensuring the participation of young people who would potentially benefit from college-based learning support. Potential participants were identified by the school. Usually individuals had low self-esteem, suffered from disaffection with the school process or had poor attendance records. Traditionally attenders were expected to be lower achievers, likely to secure only grades F–G at GCSE.

Individuals undertook a residential event, which focused on issues such as teamworking and the development of social skills. The events were further supported by work with personal and social education lessons, which looked to develop a fuller understanding of individuals' aspirations and needs. ACE was extremely popular with many pupils and the programme was consistently oversubscribed.

8. Partnership arrangements

8.1. Typically each college worked with a range of partner organisations in this area of activity. Foremost among these were the schools themselves, who played *the* crucial role in referring youngsters to the colleges in the first place, and remained key throughout the period in which the pupils studied at the college. Schools were also key partners in helping to develop the programmes offered by the colleges.

8.2. Generally colleges felt that their relationships with schools were very good and partnerships effective. Relationships were better with those schools that had more resources to commit to this cause, particularly if they had a nominated inclusion officer. As one college noted:

> *Mr X really makes a big effort with the youngsters. It's very clear how much commitment he has to this. He doesn't just drop the kids off here – instead he makes sure that they're fully aware of what's going on. He makes sure they're ok.*

8.3. North Nottinghamshire College was particularly happy with partnership arrangements in Bassetlaw. This stemmed in no small part form the existence of the Bassetlaw Alliance of School Heads (BASH), whose membership included headteachers from all the secondary schools, together with representation from the college, LEA, EBP and Lifelong Learning Alliance. This group provided the college with the opportunity to act as a strategic player in the development of provision for 14–16 year olds locally, as well as a key provider.

8.4. People's College was also broadly happy with its arrangements with local schools. It should be noted though that the college invested considerable resources in this area and employed a full-time schools liaison officer, responsible for developing relationships with schools locally. This was done through regular correspondence on new initiatives at the college, personal sessions with individual schools, and regular attendance at events such as careers conventions at schools, intended to provide students and parents with a better understanding of the options open to them. People's College noted that it did encounter some problems when attempting to work more closely with schools that have a sixth form however, and that this was an area where partnerships could be improved.

8.5. The main area of concern for colleges related to the problem of ensuring effective communications over the specific needs and causes facing individuals referred to them by schools. While some information was received from schools, this was often felt to be incomplete and more detail was often needed to ensure that the college was able to give the appropriate level of support to each individual referred. This was a particular concern in instances where the individual referred had serious personal problems that presented a potential danger to themselves, staff and other students.

8.6. Some colleges were suspicious of the motivations behind the retention of personal information on potential students. At its most extreme, colleges spoke of being treated like a 'dumping ground' by schools keen to remove troublesome pupils from their institution. One college lamented:

Sometimes we just feel like a dumping ground for schools looking to get rid of 'problem' students. Often we get little or no information about their real problems or why they're really here. We've had incidents where students have repeatedly self harmed, but this hasn't been passed on to us.

One college was also worried about some misunderstanding of the general role of the college and, in particular, the problems it faces internally when trying to establish new provision.

9. Social services/pupil referral units

9.1. Where highlighted by the colleges, communications with social services and pupil referral units' other partners were, on the whole, seen to be pretty poor. Central to this was the fact that social services and other care agencies often held case conferences concerning the education of a pupil and did not invite the college to attend these meetings. A lack of accurate and relevant information at the time of referral was also a concern with these partners.

Several informants cited the fact that Derbyshire had produced a support guide for agencies involved in this provision and hoped this would be copied by Nottinghamshire.

10. Relationships with GuideLine Career Services

10.1. Relationships with GuideLine Career Services were on the whole poor. Several colleges were highly critical of the contribution made by GuideLines, often noting that, to date, they had simply not been involved at all in this area of activity:

Potentially, GuideLines has had a lot to offer, particularly in helping to assess the needs of youngsters, but they've just not been there.

At best relations were seen as mixed and highly dependent upon which GuideLines officer was involved. One college mentioned that a couple of individuals locally were excellent, and often identified specific individuals 'at risk' early in the process. Others were less effectual, however.

10.2. For several colleges, the introduction of Connexions was hoped to be an opportunity for a fresh start in this regard.

11. Existing working groups/other colleges

11.1. The 14–19-year-old work-based learning group was seen by one college as providing a good opportunity to develop additional working relationships with partner organisations, and was broadly effective in this regard.

11.2. On the whole, however, relations between colleges were hit and miss. While North Nottinghamshire and West Nottinghamshire enjoyed good working relations with partners in the coalfield area, those elsewhere in the county were less likely to be working together. A handful of colleges felt that the absence of a cross-college working group in this field was an oversight and one which should be addressed:

> It would be really helpful to know how other colleges address the issues we face with some of these kids.

12. Local education authorities' perspectives

12.1. As in Northamptonshire, commitment to partnership work was seen to be very strong among all of the key local players. Communications had increased between partners and real efforts been made to increase the closeness and effectiveness of working relationships. Regular meetings now took place with college principals and there was a county-wide post-16 education management group. It was felt that committed organisations and qualified staff were now involved, although it was also felt that the number of partnerships is too great, resulting in too many meetings and some concerns over the capacity of local partners to service these groups.

12.2. The changes in structure over recent years were another concern. The replacement of the former county-wide LEA with two bodies, and the establishment of the LSC in place of the two TECs, had both caused confusion and these, together with other reorganisations, had had a negative impact on communications in this field.

12.3. There were also a number of concerns relating to the differing levels of funding available to address the various issues across the county. As a general point, schools in the city of Nottingham were far better funded than their counterparts elsewhere in the county. Excellence in Cities, Excellence Challenge and the Education Action Zones/mini Action Zones in Bulwell, Basford and at Elliot Durham were all sources of additional resources to schools in the city. There was also a greater level of human resources available for city schools, which meant that they tended to fare better in terms of the extent to which they could access support for less well performing pupils of this age group.

12.4. There were also marked variations in the level of resources available to county schools, which meant that different establishments could access differing levels of support. Schools in the former coalfield areas were often able to access support from the Coalfield Alliance, through Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding and via the Neighbourhood Renewal programme. In addition, these differing initiatives were often supported by a range of local schools' support programmes, making it very difficult to get a really cohesive view on what was going on across the county:

> It's very difficult to get a clear view on what's available to what school – there's just so many pots of money scattered around.

On balance, links between the city and county schools needed to be improved and greater cohesion was required in the development of initiatives to address disaffection and non-participation among 14–16 year olds. There were positive signs however, including a relatively new network that facilitated discourse between schools across the county. A county-wide conference to address issues relating to 14–19 year olds is also taking place in March 2003.

12.5. The main partnership covering this work in the City of Nottingham was the 14–19 Partnership, set up to steer the local work-related learning agenda. This partnership was also interested in work being undertaken to develop key skills of young people and the Excellence Challenge initiative in the city. Partners in the partnership included:

- Nottingham LEA

- Nottinghamshire LEA

- People's College

- New College, Nottingham

- Bilborough College

- Nottinghamshire LSC

- South Nottingham College

- SNTA (representing private training providers)

- East Midlands Development Agency (Emda)

- Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM)

- The Nottingham Trent University

- University of Nottingham.

The partnership was set up in November 1998 and had since become very well established and well regarded. On balance it was seen as a successful initiative. Positive points in this assessment included:

- people wanted to be involved in the partnership

- it had proved to be productive

- it had sought to promote the cause of increased collaboration from a relatively early stage, and certainly before it had become one of the key agendas for partners

- it had the right level of representation: senior officials were involved in the partnership, thereby ensuring it had the authority to make decisions, but the presence of the officer working group means that specific practical actions can be completed.

12.6. Examples of activities that had stemmed from the presence of the partnership included the development of the Employability Graduation Award and the audit of activities with 14–19 year olds undertaken by partners. No specific ways in which the work of the partnership could be enhanced further were identified.

13. GuideLine Career Services' perspective

13.1. GuideLines worked closely with partners at the operational level, helping to plan and coordinate non-school provision for 14–16 year olds. The chief executive of GuideLines also worked strategically with partners to plan the range of provision for 14–16 year olds across the county. Other key partners included the LSC, the FE colleges and the LEAs.

13.2. On balance, these partnerships were felt to be broadly effective. At both the operational and strategic level, GuideLines felt able to make a real contribution to this area of work and that this area of work provided a good example of how the LEAs could work together.

13.3. GuideLines saw clear scope for further collaborative working between local partners, particularly for teachers to be encouraged and enabled to work more closely and share good practice. GuideLines saw a role here for itself in providing resources to release teachers to attend such meetings.

13.4. Finally, closer working relations between Connexions and the local EBP to support the work of schools in this area was a future priority.

14. Schools' perspective

14.1. For all three schools investigated in the study, the main partners in this area of work were FE colleges and training providers. Relationships with these were felt to be broadly satisfactory. The only area of concern highlighted was relations with actual and potential funders. One school was particularly disillusioned with both the LEA and the LSDA, neither of whom were felt to have given adequate support to its initiative. Another school was also critical of the LEA in this regard:

> There's a lot of support available to schools in the city, but what they [the LEA] don't understand is that a lot of kids [at the school] are actually from the Meadows. They bring their problems with them, but now we don't get the extra funding to tackle them.

14.2. Views on the LSC and EBP were more positive, reflecting the greater level of financial commitment they had provided to this work.

15. Good practice in schools

15.1. Two of the three schools interviewed as part of this project were selected on the grounds that they were felt to represent good practice in this field. These schools were Dayncourt and Elizabethan High. They had each developed their own approach to alternative curriculum activity, and a brief summary of the model used in each of these schools is provided below.

Dayncourt model

Dayncourt has developed its own approach to helping disaffected youngsters, which it first launched in 1997. There were two variations to this approach, details of which are summarised below. Both were very carefully targeted, with a 'long list' of potential participants (still in Year 9), developed and reviewed by heads of year and the faculty team. Parents of these pupils were contacted at the options phase, with the school recommending these programmes as the most suitable option for the youngster concerned. This approach was felt most likely to secure commitment and ownership among those individuals who subsequently participated in the programme. In both instances, timetabling had been refined to allow individuals to undertake some alternative activities, while continuing to study for a number of GCSEs.

The aim of both approaches was to increase the motivation and participation of youngsters who were struggling with the full GCSE programme by providing an alternative with a strong vocational element. There were approximately 24 pupils in Years 10 and 11 participating in this alternative model. This was broadly split between the two strands.

Option 1

This involved youngsters working with South Nottingham College one afternoon per week, on a number of areas to support their vocational pathways. These include topics such as first aid, and leisure and tourism. Pupils began to work with the college during Year 10, with an expectation that by the completion of their studies they would have attained either a complete NVQ Level 1 or a number of units towards it.

Option 2

This option took a more inclusive approach towards the development of students' 'life skills'. Pupils undertook non-GCSE related programmes for 1–2 days per week. In previous years, this had involved them attending South Nottingham College or Grantham College but, as from 2002/03, this will be linked to the Vocspop programme at People's College. As noted above, Vocspop ran for 2 hours per week and gave Year 11 students the opportunity to experience a range of vocational areas that they may otherwise have not considered. Courses lasted between 5 and 34 weeks. The link courses were intended to raise awareness of the opportunities available to students when they leave school and encourage them to consider progressing into further education. Pupils on this strand also undertook a variety of other activities including work on wider key skills and community work (eg Cotgrave allotment project).

Accreditation on the programme was via established, national agencies, including NVQ awarding bodies, OCN and the Youth Award. Participants were also encouraged to develop their portfolio during their time on the course.

Pupils on this programme received considerable support from staff, which the school felt was one of the critical factors in its success. Real results had been seen with not only the youngsters themselves, but also with their parents, who

increasingly recognised the real contribution that the programme made to pupils' attitudes and attendance at school.

Steps to Success

A number of pupils also participated in the Steps to Success programme – an extended work placement initiative aimed at addressing disaffected youngsters or those who would simply benefit from an enhanced work experience programme. Positive results had been seen in terms of attendance and attitude from participation in this programme.

Initially teachers and students within the school had been sceptical about the programme. This was due in part to the perception that academic work was more valuable than vocational work, as well as reluctance to accept new ideas by teaching staff. However, the programme had displayed good results in terms of progression into work over a consistent period, which had gone a considerable way to seeing it established as almost a mainstream option within the school.

There was a range of aspects of the programme that Dayncourt felt displayed good practice. Support for the youngsters came from dedicated non-teaching support workers, who were viewed as neutral and well trusted. Many students addressed these workers by their first names and viewed them almost as surrogate parents. The school had a very clear policy of supporting disaffected and under-achieving youngsters, led by the senior management team. It also had a 'can do' attitude, and a willingness to try new practices, even if ultimately they proved to be unsuccessful. The school worked well with its partners (principally the local college), but did feel that there was further scope for this partnership work to be extended, to include additional collaboration with local schools. At the time of the study there was no such forum to support this type of information sharing concerning this activity.

Dayncourt would like to do additional work with higher achievers in the school, possibly linking with other schools or colleges to provide a more practical element to courses such as music and design. The school was also developing a Leisure and Tourism GCSE with South Nottingham College. Dayncourt was keen to see additional work undertaken to improve the quality of systems for identifying potential participants on the programme.

Finally, the school has started to review the potential for developing an outreach facility in Cotgrave, which could be used as a base for teaching some of the disaffected youngsters from this village.

Elizabethan High model

The Elizabethan High model is called On Track. This was a new programme, launched in 2001, and developed by Pauline Baird at the Elizabethan High School. It was aimed at disaffected youngsters and those who were failing to make the grade at GCSE level.

The programme was included within the school's options brochure and open to all pupils. However, the parents of students for whom the programme was felt to be particularly suitable were contacted to introduce the programme.

Individuals opting to undertake the programme were interviewed by the tutor and their roles and responsibilities outlined. The pupils' parents were also interviewed. On commencing the course, pupils and parents signed a contract of commitment, which included clauses on attendance, etc, and was closely connected with the local Compact Link programme.

Pupils start on the programme in Year 10. At the time of the study, the programme catered for 15 students. These students were disapplied from technology and modern languages, to enable them to have one morning free a week to undertake other programmes.

When developing the course, Pauline had contacted a range of organisations with a view to making the programme as diverse as possible for the individual participants. As a result, the programme included a range of different vocational aspects. Environmental work was undertaken with Groundwork Trust at West Burton. This lasted for 6 weeks in the autumn term, and work undertaken was counted towards the completion of students' Youth Awards. Health and safety was studied at Dukeries Training to an accredited level. Pauline anticipated that basic food hygiene would be studied during the Easter term, with first aid also being studied at some point. Students would undertake an extended work experience placement during the summer.

Taster courses in a range of different vocational areas were offered by North Nottinghamshire College. Additional support for basic skills was provided where necessary. Typically, students would continue to study for between four and seven GCSEs while on the programme. As indicated above, they would also complete modules that contributed towards the achievement of the Youth Award. In Year 11, pupils were given the option of continuing with On Track or moving onto Work to Qualify, which included a full day a week on work placement.

Although still early days, the school had noticed a real improvement in the attitudes and attendance records of some of those individuals attending the programme.

The main partners in the project were Dukeries Training, North Nottinghamshire College, Groundwork Trust and the employers supporting the work placement aspect. Relations with all of these groups were good and there was felt to be no need for their improvement.

The programme was still in its infancy but the school felt that the scope of the options offered was an element that was particularly valuable to its success. The ability of individuals to participate on this programme and continue to study for GCSEs was another major selling point.

The school had a youth worker attached to this group and this individual's ability to support the students in a range of different areas had also been important in securing its success to date.

The programme was managed by the head of curriculum development, who had responsibility for timetabling, which meant that it could be effectively and easily integrated into the school's plans.

Finally, the programme had received strong support from the leadership team at the school.

16. Future developments

16.1. West Nottinghamshire College was expecting to work more closely with Groundwork Trust in the coming months. This was likely to involve the subcontracting of some of the work the college did in this area, with Groundwork providing support in arts and environmental projects. Bandwagon Recording Studio was another current partner that West Nottinghamshire was expecting to work with more frequently, principally through an extension of its involvement in vocational taster courses.

16.2. South Nottingham College had recently created a curriculum directorate and this is likely to see increased links with schools rise up the agenda internally.

16.3. Newark and Sherwood College was planning to extend its ACE Programme. It also anticipated that recent policy developments would see provision for 14–19 year olds increase in importance in the coming months per se. However, more details on the nature of this expansion were not available at the time of the interview.

16.4. South Nottingham College was also increasing the breadth of its offer, by increasing the range of subjects and methods of teaching available. Again more precise details were unavailable at the time of the research.

16.5. Under its bid to the Increased Flexibility Fund, People's College was looking to develop its provision in its specialist areas of science, engineering and information technology.

16.6. North Nottinghamshire College's widening participation bid included provision for increasing the scope of the taster courses it offered to Year 10 students. The college would like to see this area broadened to make it a universal offer to students locally. Similar efforts were being made to expand the scope and delivery of Work to Qualify.

16.7. People's College was looking to develop accredited vocational GCSEs, and an NVQ Level 1 in engineering, which was being piloted in February 2002. These options would be offered to Year 11 students and, at the time of the study, 16 schools had expressed interest in these initiatives.

16.8. West Nottinghamshire College was developing vocational GCSEs with Tibshelf comprehensive (located in north Derbyshire). These would be in health and social skills, and information technology.

16.9. North Nottinghamshire College was developing vocational GCSEs with schools in the Bassetlaw area.

16.10. Newark and Sherwood College was also involved in the development of vocational GCSEs with local schools, but no details as to the nature of these qualifications were available at the time of interview.

16.11. Vocational GCSEs were being developed in partnership by South Nottingham College. The college also planned to work more closely with two local schools to offer increased joint sixth form provision.

16.12. Neither of the area's LEAs indicated any real plans to develop this area of activity in the short term.

16.13. The training provider STS expressed an interest in working more closely with excluded pupils. STS felt that its real strength lay in providing quality work placements for young people and that many excluded pupils would benefit from these types of placements. STS noted that it had been approached by one of the pupil referral units in the county to work with an excluded child and saw this as a definite area of potential development. STS recognised that the specific issues many of these children faced meant that their own staff would require further training before they could fulfil a support role with such children effectively, however.

16.14. In the future, GuideLines anticipated that they would continue to support, rather than lead this type of initiative. It was also thought likely that its working relationship with EBP would become closer. GuideLines expected to work more closely with colleges and schools to encourage them to focus work-related programmes on skills shortage areas.

17. Conclusions

17.1. There is a wide range of non-school-based learning activity for 14–16 year olds being provided in Nottinghamshire. All of the colleges interviewed were heavily involved in this area. There was also clear evidence of a wide variety of individual initiatives and projects underway in the local schools. This work was growing strongly, assisted by the presence of many excellent college/school collaborations and the ongoing development of a range of practical projects, including vocational GCSEs.

17.2. Only through a comprehensive survey of all schools in the county could a fuller picture of these programmes be obtained.

17.3. While partnerships in this field were seen as broadly effective, there appeared to be a number of specific areas where improvements could be made. Three clear recommendations emerged during the course of interviews with colleges. The first of these was the that GuideLine Career Services should be more closely integrated into this area of activity, and in particular could make a major contribution in helping to assess the specific requirements of individuals referred to colleges for bespoke study programmes. Second, several colleges were very concerned over the poor flow of information concerning more seriously disaffected and vulnerable students. A lack of quality information at the time of referral (either from the school or the pupil referral unit), and poor ongoing information from social services, were two particular concerns that were seen as needing urgent addressing. Third, there was a lack of cohesion in the approaches to sharing experiences and good practice among the county's colleges in this area of provision. Some ad hoc arrangements existed, but these need to be developed further if all colleges are to have the opportunity to share and reflect on the relative merits of different approaches.

Leicestershire case study

1. Local strategy

1.1. There was a considerable range of activities for 14–16 year olds found to be underway in Leicestershire. Colleges were involved in the provision of this support, along with a range of training providers, coordinating agencies and support providers.

1.2. The development of a strategic approach varies across the participating organisations. The city LEA has a very clear strategy. At the time of the study both the city and the county LEAs were in the process of re-writing strategy documents for alternative provision in time for the forthcoming academic year. The careers guidance service has a very clear strategy and its current business plan remains in place till September 2002 when it moves over to Connexions. Schools were at varying stages regarding the issue of strategy for alternative provision. They all felt that strategies and policies had always been present in principle, but now, with growing demand, strategies were being formalised. The current strategies for each school involved in the study are summarised below.

1.3. **Beaumont Leys** – Until recently there was no strategic plan at Beaumont Leys. However, following the recent OFSTED inspection there now exists a formal policy and work scheme. Staff stated, 'it has always been there in an outline'. The issue is that the management request detailed lesson plans but this is not conducive to the type of provision or students on the programme as it changes from week to week depending on how the students are reacting, who turns up and what they want to do. Staff felt strongly that if you are going to have provision that is partially student-led then students must feel that they have at least partial ownership of the project.

1.4. **King Edward VII** – At King Edward's set procedures are laid down by a local college to deal with students at various levels of disaffection. Procedures are followed by all departments.

1.5. **St Paul's** – Provision at St Paul's is covered by the school's wider aims which state: 'We value all our students equally and we do our utmost to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to meet the needs of all our students as far as possible and recognise that individuals have individual needs. We are a truly comprehensive school, in so far as we have the most able and the least able'.

1.6. Strategies varied between the colleges. At Brooksby Melton, provision is based on an ad hoc approach. If the student is attending school, the school usually approaches the college. If the student is not attending school then the request usually comes via the LEA. At the time of the study a policy was 'being worked out' at Brooksby Melton following the college's recent merger. At Stephenson College the strategy is 'to work with schools and offer the student what the schools can not'. The overriding theme for the colleges was

to ensure they retained flexibility to enable them to meet the needs of the student.

1.7. There was no financial imperative for the colleges to offer alternative provision. Often the college ran provision at a loss. At Stephenson a fee was charged with the express aim of trying to cover costs; however, this did not always occur. On average it was estimated that the college lost £6–7 per hour. Returning students were seen as a possible financial benefit for the college in the future.

2. Nature of the provision for 14–16 year olds

2.1. Work with 14–16 year olds in Leicestershire fell into three broad areas.

- Provision provided by the colleges, such as link programmes, infill and discrete provision. Students on infill provision join existing courses while those on discrete provision are taught as a separate group. All options were highly vocational/practical in nature covering areas such as car mechanics or hairdressing. Students on link programmes were often seen as potentially 'at risk' of exclusion. Students on infill or discrete provision were either on amended timetables at school or excluded from school altogether. A summary showing the extent of infill and discrete provision in all three colleges can be found in Table 1.

- Programmes that were coordinated by outside agencies such as the Leicester City Cluster, the student support services and the careers guidance service. These include long-term work placements and specially designed team and basic skill-building courses.

- Programmes developed by the schools aimed at students identified as at risk. These were students who, for a variety of reasons, were not coping with the mainstream curriculum and were therefore in danger of exclusion. Programmes were viewed as preventative.

Table 1. A summary of the scale of discrete and infill provision at the sampled Leicestershire colleges

College	Programme description	Number of students
Leicester College	Discrete	15
Leicester College	Infill	24 (including 5 educated otherwise)
Brooksby Melton	Infill	6
Stephenson	Infill	10
Stephenson	Discrete Traveller Provision	5
Total		60

Source: Direct from the colleges.

2.2. At Brooksby Melton all provision was infill, with students attending as much as three half-days per week. The college runs a small number of link

programmes with the local King Edward VII School but there were no formal procedures in place. Students on link programmes usually attend one day per week. Infill provision is currently ad hoc delivered on a needs-led basis. A policy for dealing with 14–16 year olds is currently being drafted following the colleges' recent merger.

2.3. Stephenson College has a very strong link programme, which is open to all so-called low achievers. Students are sent to the college as one group from the feeder schools in Years 10 and 11 for half-day sessions. The college offers a general vocational programme at Level 1 to approximately 70 students in all. It also offers study at Level 1 to 45 sixth formers from around the area. Targeted students are the 'poor attenders, low achievers and disaffected'. The main feeder school is Rawlings School in Quorn but a number of other schools are also involved. These include:

- Burleigh Community College

- King Edward VII

- Hind Leys Community College

- Maplewell Hall Special School

- De Lisle Roman Catholic School.

Each week the college provides two further sessions specifically for groups of students from the King Edward VII School: brickwork on a Friday afternoon and motor vehicle maintenance on a Monday morning. The college covers a wide geographical area and demand for such provision has grown over the past 4 years. Students on alternative provision were found to be predominately male.

2.4. Stephenson College has several students from the traveller community. The college provides transport to enable the students to attend. It was felt that these students were bright but that they 'just don't fit the system'.

2.5. At Leicester College, there is a very large link programme covering all vocational areas. Currently over 2000 students from 16 local schools and several special schools participate annually. Both discrete and infill provision is also available for disaffected youngsters at the college. Courses cover a wide vocational area including hairdressing, motor vehicle maintenance and information technology and business.

2.6. The student support services have a range of options for disaffected students, which provide students with a continuum as they progress. They are involved with CLIC (Cluster Link Inclusion Cooperative), which is aimed at pre-exclusion and complements Excellence in Cities. START and RAVE are both run by the student support services.

2.7. START is aimed at Key stage 3 (KS3) students and involves withdrawing the young person from school one day a week to attend Millgate Lodge where they learn team-building but do not undertake any academic work. These youngsters are too young to take part in work-related placements. Currently there are 40 places on START.

2.8. RAVE is for students at KS4. Here students are prepared for progression either back into school or into the workplace. Again 40 places are available.

Currently under development is the Vocational Workshop initiative with the help of Children Fund Funding. The student support services hope to be able to offer 20 part-time places for 1–2 days a week at the workshop. Information on this project was sparse as it is still in its infancy.

2.9. The City Cluster is a local initiative, which aimed originally to provide city-wide coordination of 'curriculum enhancement opportunities for students' but has now been extended to incorporate county schools. There are three clusters in total, all working independently to meet the needs of young people locally. The smallest cluster is the JWB Work Experience Agency (formerly the South West Cluster) consisting of the Bosworth, John Cleveland and William Bradford schools. The Charnwood Cluster incorporates Burleigh Community College, De Lisle Catholic School, Rawlins Community College and Hind Leys Community College. This cluster has also worked with Loughborough College. The largest cluster is the Leicester City Cluster, which consists of 28 secondary schools and FE colleges from both the city and the county serving over 20,000 students. The Cluster's main work is organising short-term work experience placements for all Year 11 students within the Cluster. The Cluster also works in close partnership with Leicestershire VESA (Vocational Education Support Agency) and the Leicestershire Consortium for Education Business Links. There is no strategy document at present but one is planned for the near future.

2.10. The City Cluster is involved in the Future Pathways initiative, which is targeted at under-achieving and demotivated students. This programme is very structured. It is presented to schools before the Easter break, as a package that they can buy, and it is available for one academic year starting the following September.

2.11. The Cluster also helps organise taster sessions for Year 10 students at FE colleges and finds once-a-week placements at colleges, with trainers and employers. Several issues are raised when dealing with pre-16 in non-school environments, which the Cluster aims to address. These include:

- health and safety
- child protection
- data protection
- appropriate learning.

2.12. The Cluster visits employers before a placement and then every three weeks during the placement to discuss these and any other issues. Most of the funding comes from the schools and it is usually targeted at the colleges rather than employers. The positioning of funding is significant to where students are placed. A summary of the type of provision and the number of students involved can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Type of provision coordinated by the Leicester City Cluster for 2001/02

Type of provision	Student target group	Number of students
Future Pathways	Under-achievers/demotivated	140
Finding and checking placements	Students on the verge of exclusion	12
Extended work placements	Students still at school	50
Total		202

Source: Phone interview with City Cluster member.

2.13. The Cluster feels that having the flexibility to respond to immediate need is preferable. It does not have a 14–16 specialist.

2.14. All three schools involved with the study ran specific programmes involving a significant level of work-based learning. They tapped into the above programmes and integrated them into their own initiatives to suit the needs of their students. A full breakdown of these initiatives can be found under the section 'Good practice in schools'.

3. Partnerships

3.1. Schools and colleges were found to work in close partnership with each other particularly where there were strong link programmes. Both worked closely with a number of other partners. For colleges other partners included the Leicestershire LEA, the city council, the careers service, the probation service, educational welfare officers, school liaison officers and parents. At Brooksby Melton they also had close ties with Countrywide, a land-based project offering courses such as animal care and conservation.

3.2. Schools were found to have an extensive list of both academic and non-academic organisations that they worked closely with. This enabled schools to meet the needs of their students and to build as much flexibility as possible into their programmes. Partners included the careers service, the student support services, a range of local businesses whom the school relied on for the donation of materials, local training providers and a range of other external financial backers both local and national. A comprehensive breakdown of the partners used by each school can be found later in this case study under the respective school model.

3.3. Some colleges and schools made good use of the careers service while others did not mention them. At King Edward's the careers service was instrumental in helping to decide what course of action would be best suit the individual.

4. Careers guidance service's perspective

4.1. The local careers and guidance service was found to work closely with schools, mainly in the city, and particularly schools with students identified as being 'most at risk' (eg Riverside Community College, Babington and Beaumont Leys). The careers service estimated that 15 per cent of youngsters in Leicestershire have two or more barriers to learning and are therefore seen as 'most at risk' of exclusion. All schools have a link adviser and those with a high proportion of disaffected students have learning mentors. A 'differentiated' approach is used to ensure those who need the most help receive it. The careers service is involved in a variety of projects including:

- **The Real Game** – An initiative, which is used nationally in Canada, aimed at providing community and work-role opportunities for students at risk. It has been piloted here for Year 8 students and from the summer term it will be available to some Year 10 and Year 11 students.

- **Getting Connected** – A project which works through self-esteem issues and helps youngsters move onto career paths.

- **Moving on Up, Future Pathways and Firebreak** – All joint initiatives with the Leicester City Cluster.

5. Local education authorities' perspectives

5.1. The county LEA works with VESA, the City Cluster and the Educational Business Links Organisation. They have no access to funds for alternative provision and do not play a hands-on role, but assist on steering groups to direct strategy and planning.

5.2. The student support services at the city LEA was found to have strong links with many local organisations, schools (both mainstream and special), colleges, community projects and the City Cluster. Information on the number of disaffected students, excluded and at risk, is kept on a central database at the Keyway Centre so that they and other partners can readily access this information.

6. Good practice in schools

6.1. All three schools who took part in the study have very strong alternative curriculum provision. Each had developed its own approach to suit the needs of its students. A summary of each model is provided below.

Beaumont Leys model

The Beaumont Leys model is called the 'Team Programme' (formally known as 'Team Enterprise'). It is part of the national 'Young Enterprise' scheme and

is aimed at students who are having difficulties with the full-time curriculum. The scheme is run in conjunction with the Leicester Business Education Company (LBEC), and supported by the HSBC (who are the national sponsors for the scheme). The programme requires four members of staff in order to run effectively. The present team come from a variety of different backgrounds: one from business and information technology, one from manufacturing and careers, one with experience in special educational needs (SEN) and one who is the school SENCO and involved with the delivery of 'Skill Power'. Skill Power is a very low-level course of basic skills for which students are accredited.

Type of provision

The programme is offered to students in both Years 10 and 11. Most of the Year 11 students on the scheme were seen as disaffected in one way or another. Students had a variety of problems, including learning difficulties and emotional problems. For Year 10, targeting is aimed particularly at students who '…are not coping or those you can see are becoming disaffected with school in general'. There are 12 Year 11 students on the programme but only six or seven regularly attend class. In Year 10 there are 25 students involved in the programme. The programme is viewed as a preventative measure to try to stop those at risk from dropping out of the school system.

The students set up a company that is registered under the umbrella of 'Young Enterprise'. A registration fee of £73 is paid up front by opening an HSBC bank account. An overdraft is given to the exact amount of the registration fee and must be repaid by the end of the project.

This is achieved in one of two ways:

- by selling shares in the company

- by producing something that they can sell.

The idea is to make a profit by the end of the project. The duration of the project is 9 months (or one academic year).

At present, the students in Year 11 are manufacturing bird feeders and plant boxes. Year 10 students are producing cat scratchers. Materials are donated by local businesses. Students do a dummy run in Year 10. Because of their age they are not able to register with the HSBC at this stage so the programme is run in-house with students going on to the real thing in Year 11. The team felt that Year 10 students often work harder and better than the Year 11 students, feeling that students often become disenfranchised by Year 11.

The programme not only enables students to work in non-academic areas but also gives them a variety of life skills. Students have to find a customer base themselves and they are given the opportunity to sell their product at a specially held market in the centre of Leicester where they have to pay for the stall. Students are also required to make a short presentation in front of other schools who are participating in the scheme, explaining their project. This year they are making a short video with the help of students from the Gifted and

Talented cohort of the school. Finance, logistics, time management and teamwork are just some of the skills students learn on this programme.

The scheme covers the equivalent of two option choices amounting to approximately 5 hours per week. Year 11 students also spend half a day per week on work experience and a further half a day at college. Here the courses are mostly practical including motor vehicle maintenance, brickwork, carpentry and hairdressing. Students also take a City and Guilds certificate in key skills.

Staff felt that students understood the general aims of the project and that students were made aware 'not just of what *we* expect in terms of outcomes but what *they* should expect in terms of outcomes'. The emphasis was placed on what the student will do when they leave school and what employers and colleges are looking for in terms of attitude, skills and so on. Staff explained:

> *if they are on a half-day placement at college it is explained that if you do well on this placement you've got a very good chance of getting a place there next year. Likewise, with work experience. It does happen where they will take them on. We are trying to instil skills and attitude for what is happening after, when they move on. Preparing them for the world of work.*

Gender

There are more boys than girls in both years with roughly 75 per cent being males and only 25 per cent of disaffected students being females.

Funding

The issue of funding was particularly contentious for the Team Programme staff. The course was seen as expensive to run both in terms of staffing and resources needed. In 2001/02 local funding of £7000 was given to the school from two companies specifically to fund the programme. However, the money went to the general school pot and staff had to bid for it back. The staff on the programme felt that this was not satisfactory.

The school is also allocated a reasonable amount of external funding, which allows for activity days such as trips to the Market Bosworth Outward Bound Centre. At the centre students learn team-building and other valuable skills but staff admit that benefits don't tend to last long, 'They are full of it on the day and then you can see the effects of it wearing off quite quickly when they come back into the same situation as they were before'. However, it is still deemed a worthwhile activity as it can act as an incentive for struggling students or as a reward for regular attenders. Currently the school is applying for European funding, which they hope will fund similar activities in the future.

Partners

To enable the school to deliver the course they need to work closely with a wide range of partners for both practical and financial assistance. These include the organisers of Team Programme, LBEC, the sponsors (HSBC), the colleges who provide taster days, local businesses (who donate materials and additional funding), local work-based training providers (who provide students with work experience opportunities), and industrial mentors.

Effectiveness

This is only the second year of the programme. Staff are pleased with the programme's success so far. They admit that they 'still have a long way to go', and that they are 'still on a learning curve'. Sometimes students can be difficult to deal with and some students 'can not be in the same room at the same time'. The Year 10 programme is currently oversubscribed and many students who are not from the target group are asking why they cannot be involved. This is seen as an indication of the programme's success. Another indicator of its success is that this year all regular Year 11 students on the programme have secured places on either Modern Apprenticeship schemes or other appropriate courses, on leaving the school.

King Edward VII model

The King Edward VII Community College is located in Coalville, a town in the northwest of the county, and caters for students aged 14–18. The college has a total of 750 students, a substantial number of whom are classified as disaffected and who require alternative curriculum provision. Levels of disaffection range from approximately 25 severely disaffected students to 75 at risk students. The college currently has four SEN teachers who work with low-ability students. One member of staff has sole responsibility for alternative provision for disaffected students, acting as both coordinator and mentor. Clear procedures are in place for staff and students to follow when a problem occurs.

Type of provision

Initially students who are not coping in the classroom are identified and the department attempts to deal with the problem in-house. If this fails, then the 14–16 coordinator is involved. If this is not successful the student is referred to student support services and removed from the college. This usually occurs in the case of violent pupils, when the safety of others must take priority over keeping the disaffected student at the college. The student is consulted as much as possible during every stage of the process.

Career interviews were used early on to establish the interests of the student. The coordinator then considers all reports before interviewing the student to try to identify the problem from the student's perspective, which is '…usually totally different from anybody else's…'. There are then three possible options open to the student. All three stages of provision have funding implications.

Students with only one problem on their timetable, for example they dislike French, are offered alternatives on-site. Presently this is a limited choice but it is improving. Options available on-site include carpentry and gardening. Carpentry is a very flexible option as it is run by one of the college maintenance men who is a qualified carpenter. The student is able to miss just the one lesson that is causing a problem and then return for the rest of his/her normal timetable. It was felt that it was particularly helpful 'for students who learn in a different way'. Most staff members assist with learning support on a weekly basis and many offer gardening as an alternative to such students. The carpentry, particularly, has been very successful. The college

also has a hair salon, which has not been utilised this year, as they need a group of students to make it viable to run.

Students with more difficult problems are offered more help. This involves more time out of school and greater disruption of their timetable. The college enjoys strong links with Stephenson College, which provides courses such as motor vehicle maintenance and bricklaying Level 1. Currently, three girls are doing hairdressing courses at Stephenson College.

The 'real' disaffected are placed on an 'amended' timetable. This is mostly because of behaviour problems. This involves alternative activities such as long-term work placements with local training providers.

The college has an information pack available to the student along with a plan of action and a formal code of practice. All students on alternative provision sign contracts. Targets are set for students individually, which are linked directly to the contract. Progression is monitored by members of staff and attendance is monitored by both the school and the college.

Work placements

A student who is on long-term work placement has a pack that they must fill out daily. The pack consists of a pink folder and a notebook. Students make notes of what the have done and the skills they have learnt. Before a student leaves, the employer provides a reference, and often the student is offered a job or a training position with the company.

Partners

The college works with a variety of partners to ensure their provision is flexible and meets the needs of the student. These include:

- Stephenson College, which is the main FE link for the college

- student support services – 10–15 hours per week with one to one for students in most need.

- local businesses, whose goodwill is crucial in providing work placements for students and the donation of raw materials to on-site provision.

Gender breakdown

Of the severely disaffected students only one is female. The coordinator believes a similar pattern emerges 'across the board and that at Stephenson the gender balance of those disaffected is also predominately male'. The fact that most of the students on alternative provision are male does have an impact on the type of alternative provision on offer. The coordinator commented, 'We are not sexist. I offered motor vehicle maintenance to one of the girls, quite a sort of butch young lady. I asked her "don't you fancy motor vehicle maintenance?", "oh god I can't do that". I said "why not?". She said "girls don't do that".'

Funding

Funding is very disjointed and erratic. Forward-planning was reported to be very difficult due to the irregular nature of the funding process. An example of this was given by the coordinator, who reported that in March of this academic year £3230 was received for alternative provision but it needed to be spent by the end of the financial year. It was felt that in the past the college had missed out on grants that it needed to fund alternative provision because of the misconception that because the college is located in a rural area it had no 'need' to be met. However, despite its rural setting the college, and the town, exhibits many signs of a deprived inner city area. The college has now been reclassified as belonging to a deprived area and it is hoped that this will lead to an increase in its funding to tackle the issues, including alternative provision for the disaffected students.

St Paul's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School model

The St Paul's model centres around one course, the GNVQ Part One in Leisure and Tourism. This acts as an umbrella under which all alternative provision is carried out. In theory the course is open to all students but in practice certain students are directed onto the course. The more serious 'at risk' students are dealt with on the CLIC programme or referred to the student support services. Currently there are 20 students on each year of the programme. These students are the pool from which the school draws, enabling them to tailor provision to the individual. The GNVQ superseded the City and Guilds Diploma 3 years ago and accounts for 20 per cent of curriculum time. The programme allows room for flexibility to meet individual needs. Most of the students are working at entry level, but currently three year 11 students are working at intermediate level. The school does not discourage anyone who wants to participate on the course, believing that '…it is useful to have a balance in the group'.

How are the aims of the project explained to the students?

The course is published in the school's options booklet. The coordinator explained that the school looks to develop all students' individual potential and to enable them to gain practical skills to prepare them for the world of work. Ultimately the programme aims, 'to give them a better than even chance of being successful when they leave school. To prepare them with skills that they will find necessary and useful, and to give them a full understanding of what's involved'. The course has usually been found to be recommended by word of mouth via siblings or family friends who have been involved in the programme over a number of years. Students understand 'a fair bit about it' before they start and they are not afraid to question what they are doing and why. The coordinator provides them with a run-down at the beginning but a lot of students already have a very clear picture as to what they see as the good points about the provision.

Learning and teaching styles

The programme relies on teaching and learning styles that are different to the mainstream curriculum, being more relaxed and flexibility. The coordinator believes that this is a key factor in its success and further commented that 'we cut our own cloth to suit ourselves and to suit the needs of the students'.

Partnerships

The school works closely with several partners to enable the delivery of the programme. These partners include:

- the Leicester City Cluster
- Leicester College
- the student support service
- the local fire brigade
- the careers service
- local training providers.

St Paul's works particularly closely with the Leicester City Cluster and it is a part of the Learning Support Unit Cluster. Other schools in the cluster are English Martyrs, Beaumont Leys and New College, Leicester.

Opportunities under the GNVQ umbrella

Future Pathways

This is organised through the Leicester City Cluster. Currently eight students are involved from Year 10 and three from Year 11. Students have the opportunity to work on such initiatives as the Braunstone Motor Project. They attend college one day a week or work for local training providers in an area of interest to them. Vocational placements are very popular under this scheme, particularly the motor project.

RAVE and START

Students on these programmes start at the beginning of a term and the provision is then ongoing. The programme addresses anger management, communication and resolving conflict issues, as well as offering outward-bound experiences. This provision is viewed as successful, allowing students who are deemed not to be 'academic' a viable alternative. One student, who was not entered for any exams and who was exhibiting behavioural issues, was particularly successful under this programme. Through this programme it was noted that he had a particular aptitude for canoeing and he now has a permanent NVQ placement at an outward-bound centre, training to be an instructor.

Firebreak

Firebreak is also coordinated through the City Cluster in conjunction with the local fire brigade. Firebreak is a 12-week programme, which runs for one day a week. It is aimed at the potentially disaffected, particularly those who need to develop team-building skills and for whom behaviour and attendance is an issue. It has been running for 4 years and is seen as a model for both the LEA in Leicester City and other fire brigades in the country. This year nine students have gone through Firebreak in two terms. Over the last 4 years numbers have totalled around 35–40 students. The success rate is high with only one failure so far, but this student was successful in other areas. The provision is aimed at both boys and girls.

The school also runs a Personal Development Programme, aimed at Year 8 and Year 9 students, which is seen as a preventative measure. Students who are thought to be 'at risk' are carefully identified and offered a place on the programme, which runs one afternoon a week. This latest programme has been set up by the same person who runs the RAVE programme.

Gender breakdown

While an imbalance was found to exist it was not great. In Year 11 the breakdown was roughly 2:1 boys to girls. However, in Year 10 more girls appear than in previous years. The school feels that there are issues surrounding male-dominated groups, which are quite hard to resolve. For this reason, if possible, a balance of gender groups is preferred.

7. Problems encountered gaining the views of young people

7.1. Several issues were raised during this stage of the study.

- Gaining permission from schools and students at colleges.

- Students on college courses may be spread over several campuses; therefore getting together a reasonable number to form a discussion group proved very difficult.

- Students were on individual programmes; therefore finding common time when they were all available within the timescale of the study was challenging.

- Some students were unreliable. As one member of staff commented, 'it's the nature of the beast we are dealing with'. It was also felt by some staff that February/March was a difficult time of year to ensure student attendance. While attendance had usually been pretty good over the previous few weeks, for many it had slipped. At Stephenson College they found that, 'one of the problems these kids have is that they can't stick at anything. They have done about three or four months [at college] and they have been fine … it's as if everything has a sell-by date, and they have gone past it now'. An example was given concerning two students who usually came in 2 days a week but whose attendance over the past 3

weeks had been erratic: 'They are drifting. You get the feeling that that is it for these students'. Students still like the course but have trouble with routine and sustaining their efforts.

8. Future developments

8.1. Demand for provision is constantly and rapidly growing. Procedures are being tightened and formalised to enable colleges to deal with the growing demand. At Leicester College a 14–19 coordinator was recently appointed.

8.2. All staff involved in alternative provision would like to see programmes extended. However, at Beaumont Leys School the Team Programme staff felt that 'planning for the future becomes problematic in education [as] things change all the time'. At St Paul's the current coordinator has now left and at Beaumont Leys they have 'a new headteacher, new vocational courses and GCSEs'. While staff would like to retain the current programme, seeing it as an excellent alternative for many students who they feel would not cope with mainstream options, they were unsure how this would be achieved. They were also aware that 'none of these strategies work for everyone'.

8.3. The careers guidance service is going through a dramatic period of transition. It is currently in the process of being disbanded to make way for a new structure that will be able to implement the new Connexions initiative. It is hoped that Connexions will lead to more coherence for youngsters aged 13–19 and that all schools will have a link adviser. The careers representative was optimistic that new funding will be made available by the LSC. At present this funding is held by the City Cluster to assist colleges in the funding of vocational teaching. The careers representative would like to see the LSC recognise 'getting connected' as a qualification. They hope to gain funding from the LSC to develop more links and to be able to offer more work-based placements for 11–16 year olds.

8.4. From September 2002, the student support services located within the LEAs have a legal obligation to offer 100 per cent teaching to excluded pupils. Presently the city student support services feels that this is impossible as demand is constantly increasing and there is already a waiting list. The system was described to be at breaking point, 'like a balloon that has been blown up to its full capacity and if it is blown up any more it will burst'. Not only are exclusion rates very high, but re-integration into mainstream school is currently running at zero.

8.5. Schools generally viewed the new vocational GCSEs as a positive step forward for disaffected students, giving them a wider curriculum choice in a range of different learning styles. At St Paul's the coordinator was 'very pleased to see the government recognise that there isn't one strategy for education, that there is more than one way of skinning a cat. We've got away from didactic chalk and talk. We are offering a range of options. There is a place for that … but we've got away from seeing that as the be-all and end-all. It means that common sense is beginning to prevail again'.

8.6. At King Edward's they will be part of a local pilot scheme for the introduction of vocational GCSEs funded by government money. Sixty students will go to Stephenson College from six local feeder schools. Students will be selected in Year 9. Those working at Level 1 will go one day a week and those at intermediate level half a day a week. The funding is expected to be around £50,000. It is anticipated that 10–12 students from King Edward's will participate in the pilot scheme.

8.7. Brooksby Melton felt that the impact of both Connexions and the new vocational GCSEs would depend upon the local situation. It was unclear to them yet as to whether personal advisers would be allocated to individual colleges or if one would be allocated over several colleges and what their role would be.

9. Conclusions

9.1. In Leicestershire there exists a large number of non-school-based learning programmes. Schools in this study appear to have accessed these programmes successfully. In doing so they have been enabled to deliver a comprehensive, flexible and varied programme, which meets the needs of their particular students. From such a focused study it is difficult to say whether this is the case throughout the whole of the county. Only through further comprehensive research of all the schools in the county can a full picture of provision, good practice and partnerships be gained.

9.2. Each model exhibits many elements of good practice. It is recommended that a sharing of these good practices would be beneficial to other schools, particularly those who do not presently have a great deal of alternative provision but who are experiencing a growing need in this area. It is clear that no single model fits all and other schools could take what is relevant to them and adapt programmes accordingly.

9.3. The Leicester City Cluster is a key player, which, if used correctly by schools and colleges, will assist in ensuring that everyone knows what they are doing. It is recommended that all schools and colleges use their respective cluster to help them put together a programme that best fits their own requirements.

9.4. Partnerships are working well in theory, but in practice there are discrepancies. While organisations understand what they require of each other and how they fit in this does not always work.

9.5. The majority of disaffected students are male and this has an effect on the type of provision on offer. In the main students prefer to stay within the confines of traditionally defined gender career paths. As with conventional schooling, alternative provision does not work for all disaffected students, as some are unreliable, some become bored easily, and others have severe behavioural problems preventing their progression.

9.6. It is clear from talking to both students and staff that those on alternative programmes do have the capacity to progress but that they learn in a variety of different ways, none of which fit with traditional school, chalk and talk

methods. As John commented 'what is the point of learning Shakespeare from a desk, when you can use the school hall to act it out and read it out aloud rather than in your head. You learn better this way. Learning is not just desks'. Significant improvements can be made in the areas of retention and achievement for disaffected/at risk students by varying teaching and learning styles in the classroom and by giving the young person an opportunity to study areas that interest them. Young people must be able to see the relevance of what they study for it to be successful: that is why vocational courses are popular for these students. Achievement must carry a wider remit, and programmes should be seen as successful if the student gains the skills employers require rather than just academic recognition. Progression into work should be as valid as progression in education. The introduction of the new vocational GCSEs is welcomed and appears to fit the needs of such students. However, it brings with it uncertainty as to how it will be delivered and what the full impact of it will be.

Lincolnshire case study

It should be noted that this case study refers to Lincolnshire only as Rutland LEA declined the offer of involvement in the study, and therefore did not afford any of their schools the opportunity to present their experiences or perspectives on 14–16 provision.

1. Local strategy

1.1. There were a number of different modes of provision on offer for young people in Lincolnshire, though the provision in place largely depended upon the school or college provider and its location. The modes were:

- learning support unit at school

- discrete and infill provision at colleges, with and without work placement

- academic or vocational routes offered in school.

2. Learning support units

2.1. One school, in the north of Lincolnshire, had a small unit on the school site but away from the main building, comprising two study rooms with ICT access, a kitchen and toilet facilities. At present, Year 10 students attend the learning support unit for half of their week, the remainder being spent in the main school undertaking mainstream provision in core subjects. Some of the young people spent part of their support unit curriculum time with employers on work placement.

2.2. The framework for the courses undertaken at the learning support unit was the Lincolnshire Employability Graduation Award, and the ethos of the unit is to promote 'work-readiness'.

2.3. Young people were targeted for learning support unit provision for one or more of the following reasons:

- behaviour

- attendance

- ability to cope with the KS4 provision.

Interviews took place in Year 9, with young people and their parents if so desired, prior to a decision being made over participation.

2.4. The learning support unit presently serves seven students. In order to increase the numbers of young people who can be offered this provision, to up to 30 students, there were plans to develop the remaining two floors of the building. This would enable the school to consider working with other local schools to offer this mode of study for their students. Development will depend upon the availability of funding.

3. College provision

3.1. Most of the colleges in Lincolnshire provide some form of 14–16 provision, and all have some history of work of this kind. Courses for under 16s are offered in two ways:

- infill college provision

- discrete college provision.

3.2. **Infill college provision** – Young people attend courses at college alongside mainstream students, taking spare places that exist. This was offered over a range of subjects and courses, in response to demand.

3.3. **Discrete college provision** – Young people attend specially designed courses at college, solely for students who are 14–16 years of age. Young people attending from schools may mix with other young people from other schools or referral routes, or they may take part in a specific course provided for a designated group from a particular school. Most colleges offer a mixture of discrete and infill courses, and were flexible to meet the needs of schools and individual young people.

4. Academic/vocational routes in school

4.1. One of the schools visited offered two routes for young people at the end of Year 9. If young people did not achieve an average of Level 4 in their KS3 SATs they were offered an opportunity to undertake alternative KS4 provision, in what is termed the vocational band. Students achieving an average of Level 4 or above followed the academic band.

4.2. Vocational band courses were offered using the framework of the KS4 Employability Graduation Award. In addition, some young people took part in work placement or discrete college placement, as above, during their vocational curriculum time. For core lessons of mathematics and English, students were streamed according to ability, and thus students from both the academic and vocational bands worked together.

5. Perspectives on provision

5.1. The aims of the courses or programmes were usually explained by the individual or the organisation making the referral, and were followed up with information at induction events or interviews. In most cases interviews were conducted with young people and, in general, colleges used their usual regulations for accepting students, with flexibility over the achievement in academic qualifications.

5.2. Young people could not recall the ways that the aims had been explained to them, though they had made choices at the time. This could be a reflection on the many months that had elapsed between their induction and the

research discussions taking place. Documentation is generally unappealing, and serves a purpose but without being memorable or attractive to the eye. At all colleges, there was a marked difference in quality between marketing materials produced for 14–16s and for core business. This is thought to be a result of limited availability of resources. It is questionable how important written documents are to this target group. The young people did remember that letters had been sent to parents.

5.3. At one college, students on mainstream courses recently researched the needs and interests of the young people and redesigned their information pack for the 14–16-year-old students, for a key skill element of a vocational qualification project. This was an excellent project and resulted in very attractive, young people-friendly documents.

5.4. Generally, the young people understood what their course was about, but information provided was sometimes vague and provided at ad hoc times. Some young people stated that they did not know what courses involved.

5.5. Taster days may help young people to appreciate what the different modes of study involve, since they would give them an opportunity to gain some hands-on experience of college, and to decide whether it may suit them. Many of the colleges were planning taster days for the summer term 2002, in order to give just this opportunity to young people. However, events such as these are costly. Most young people said they had had an induction of some sort, and recognised the importance of induction: 'It was useful, so you knew where to go'.

5.6. Although young people who had experienced particular circumstances were offered the opportunity to undertake alternative provision, each college and school looked at individual young people, and their needs, on a case-by-case basis. All representatives had a deep understanding of the young people, their aspirations and experiences, and their needs, and knew individuals personally. There were many possible points of referral cited, and these were different in each case. Some of the common words/expressions used to describe the experiences of the young people who undertake 14–16 alternative provision were:

- poor attendance
- health problems
- young mums
- inability to cope with the mainstream KS4 curriculum
- those who have 'outgrown school'
- at risk
- literacy and numeracy needs
- low self-esteem
- behavioural problems
- school phobics
- school refusers

- fractured education up to 14

- truants

- disruptive young people

- young people who have experienced trauma of one kind or another.

Some young people were referred to the college or work-based provision through their school, but not every individual came through a school route. Where young people had been referred from school, the following staff were indicated:

- form tutor

- work-related learning coordinator

- careers tutor

- learning support teacher.

Where non-school referrals had taken place, the following were mentioned:

- parents/carers

- youth service

- Connexions targeted worker

- home tutor

- young people themselves.

5.7. There was evidence in the research of effective multi-agency work and communication between the varied members of a young person's support network, vital for the success of programmes.

5.8. While many of the staff and students were extremely positive about their involvement in the provision, and did not hold the vocational or work-related elements of their curriculum in any lower esteem, there were some issues raised in discussions over selection and involvement.

What is the choice? Many young people stated that the choice was between the alternative course or nothing, or that they had only been picked because they were seen as 'thick'.

Young people stated that they would on the whole recommend the courses and options to other young people; however, some noted that they were in difficulty, or at great risk of exclusion before they were offered something else:

I didn't deserve a second chance but I am glad I got one.

Many young people viewed this as a **last chance**; the alternative would involve them being out of the education system.

The following were highlighted as concerns of colleges when offering provision for 14–16 year olds.

- **College is an adult environment** where smoking and drinking alcohol is permitted. Indeed many colleges have bars on site. One college expressed concerns over the decline in behaviour of students in general; this may be exacerbated if younger students are around the campus. Also, the

attitudes and behaviours of some mainstream students may negatively affect impressionable 14–16 year olds.

- **Many and varied pre-existing personal problems** that previously hindered progress in school and require support from college, and the obligations of colleges to provide pastoral support that may require more resources than are currently available. College provision alone is not a panacea to all young people's problems.

- **Parents' lack of understanding of the system** leading to confused messages given to young people about the opportunities available and obligations of institutions to offer compulsory education up to the age of 16 years.

- **Lack of peer group identity and peer support**, which can be a particular issue if young people undertake infill provision.

- **Selection and interview**: many colleges stated that they would apply their usual entry criteria, not including academic qualifications; this may prohibit some young people from gaining access to college, based upon their previous school record, in terms of behaviour and attendance.

- **Learning styles** and preferences for 14 and 15 year olds may not necessarily be met by FE staff skilled and trained to work with young adults. Indeed, some of these members of teaching staff my have entered further education as they were specifically interested in adult education, and may need to be willing to undertake further training in order to work with the 14–16 groups.

- **Case histories** do not always include all relevant information passed on to college staff with regard to a young person's needs and experiences. Staff would benefit from more comprehensive notes on the young people.

6. Partnerships

6.1. The schools and colleges that were visited had strong links with the LEA and between themselves, with regard to alternative provision. Indeed, the Lincolnshire LEA is the lead partner for the pilot of the KS4 Employability Graduation Award. Strong networks were in place throughout the county to support the delivery of the award.

6.2. Most of the representatives interviewed had an understanding of the roles that other colleagues played across the county and were aware of one or two champions within their field who were frequently referred to as sources of good practice, experience and expertise.

6.3. Schools and colleges also had links with the many and varied organisations who support young people aged 14–16. These included:

- educational welfare service

- emotional and behavioural support team

- hospital schools

- youth service

- Connexions

- local education authority.

6.4. Most colleges had some well-established links with some of their local schools, but links were usually strongest between 11–16 schools and colleges, where historically there had been no competition between institutions for students on courses. Some colleges felt that genuine partnerships were difficult to set up and maintain with 11–18 schools, who feared they may lose their students to colleges. There is a call for funding bodies to plan carefully to reduce duplication of provision, which will, in turn, limit competition.

6.5. In some areas that operate an 11+ examination and a grammar school system, the intake at college was characterised as those young people who did not attend the grammar school, or for whom the grammar school did not meet their needs. One college described some of their students as the 'casualties of the grammar school system'. Young people who achieve academic success ought not to be excluded from the opportunity to gain some experience of vocational or work-related learning, and greater partnership working may support the variety offered for all students.

6.6. In some areas of Lincolnshire, links between schools and colleges were logistically problematic, with institutions spread across a wide geographic area.

6.7. One college explained a difficulty with the needs, requirements and occasionally demands of one of their partner schools. New developments and planned increases in participants will mean that all young people, regardless of their referral point, may participate in discrete provision, with young people from other schools. One partner school did not wish to belong to a partnership and was pressing the college to work on an individual basis with them. It will be important in the future for schools and colleges to have a realistic understanding of what each have to offer, in order to work effectively.

6.8. In general, if work placements were offered as part of alternative programmes, they were secured using established links with providers who were encouraged to consider taking young people on longer-term placements. There is no current strategy in place to target and support employers specifically for placements for 14–16 year olds.

6.9. Connexions were working closely with training providers to encourage them to take more a flexible approach to work placements, perhaps offering a placement for many weeks or months, for part or whole weeks. There is a clear need for specific training and support with regard to health and safety and also a need for monitoring if young people are to spend a large proportion of their week in the workplace.

7. Future developments

7.1. All of the colleges and schools consulted were in the process of planning provision for September 2002 at the time of the research, and most were awaiting notification on bids for Increased Flexibility funding. It was clear that the priorities for provision may change in light of the policy to offer a more varied curriculum to all young people who would benefit from it, as opposed to historically only being offered to young people who it was felt were not succeeding in school alone.

Some of the plans are listed below.

- **New partnerships** between colleges and schools. One college has begun to develop links with local schools that have not previously been involved in any joint provision.

- **Increase in provision** of vocational courses. All colleges are aiming to work with a greater number of 14–16 year olds than they have previously.

- **Greater diversity** of provision to meet the needs of learners with a range of abilities. For example, one college is planning to offer different levels of provision from Entry level to NVQ Level 2.

7.2. All organisations consulted were considering the ways in which their plans could support the proposed 14–19 strategy as set out in the Green Paper.

7.3. The LEA was intending to increase the numbers of young people undertaking the Employability Graduation Award, and have more schools involved in the delivery of the programme.

7.4. Colleges recognised the huge benefit to be gained from providing positive learning opportunities for 14–16 year olds, in terms of marketing not only to the young person involved, but also to other people in their lives, such as siblings, parents and friends.

7.5. One college considered it to be of great benefit to the young person that they could access professional adult support services, such as harassment and equal opportunities, sometimes not on offer to young people in all schools.

8. Conclusions

8.1. Schools and colleges consulted stated that while there was no hard evidence of improvements in attendance or behaviour, and attainment, they felt that it was the alternative provision that was keeping the young people in the education system. For young people who were disruptive in the classroom, offering them subjects that better met their needs enabled classroom teachers to get on with working with those students who are aiming towards attaining GCSEs.

8.2. There were numerous cited anecdotal examples of the benefits to young people from taking part in programmes, but none of the school or college

representatives were aware of any research having been conducted into the relationship between their participation in alternative programmes and their academic attainment.

8.3. While there was a general perception that the 14–19 strategy was in keeping with developments in the 14–16 area, there were a number of concerns expressed and queries raised as to the overall ethos of this provision.

- **Notion of achievement** – There needs to be a shift in attitude, from achievement versus failure, towards an appreciation of the different levels of success. All young people deserve a programme that will lead to success, with an emphasis on *curriculum appropriateness* for all individuals.

- **Recognition of vocational qualifications** – When league tables feature vocational subjects, will there be parity with academic subjects?

- **Delivery** – The broader curriculum, with 'space to allow students to pursue their talents and aspirations' as highlighted in the Green Paper, is difficult to deliver as there is not enough time to achieve all the objectives.

- **Policy changes** – It is sometimes difficult for practitioners to keep themselves and colleagues up to date with policy since it moves very quickly. It is important to put time aside to read documents and publications and to disseminate them to staff.

- **Financial support** – When a young person attends college provision, only the basic level financial support follows the student. Additional support for additional needs is not supplied. This makes it difficult for the college to provide other measures to support that young person.

- **Increased flexibility** – Will the new Increased Flexibility measures only meet the needs and interests of the high fliers? The new GCSEs in applied subjects may not be accessible to those young people with low levels of literacy and numeracy. There is still a market for other qualifications and courses that are assessed on a more practical basis.

- **Employer concerns** – In rural Lincolnshire, there are too few employers with the capacity to take on the numbers of young people who would benefit from work-based provision. While there is will, small and small to medium-sized enterprises need training and support to be able to assist with the delivery.

- **Funder concerns** – The LSC need to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the needs of this age group. Policy-makers are asked to 'get real' and gain an understanding and appreciation of the intensive level of support required by these young people.

- **Other modes of study** – The funding for Increased Flexibility is perceived to have been aimed only at supporting school and college collaborative partnerships. In areas where, geographically, college links are not viable, funding such as this needs to take into consideration other methods of delivery of curriculum flexibility.

8.4. There were a number of major concerns for schools and colleges, particularly in terms of the available finances, but also with the coordination, monitoring and support for young people involved in many and varied combinations of school, work-based and college-based learning. Who will take overall responsibility?

8.5. The young people who participated in the discussion groups were extremely enthusiastic about their experiences, and it was clear that for many of them their opportunities had 'turned them around', breaking a cycle of disaffection from the education system. However, there were a number of missing voices:

- those young people who were undertaking mainstream school provision

- parents and carers of young people

- young people who had not experienced success or enjoyment from alternative programmes, where are they now?