

Developing your local 14–19 Prospectus

National Guidance

July 2006

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1. Introduction

The *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper* and the *14-19 Implementation Plan* outline the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) intention for all areas in England to develop and deliver Prospectuses. This guide aims to advise local authorities (LAs) and local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) on how to develop a searchable internet-based Prospectus of 14-19 learning opportunities.

The Prospectus needs to give young people a clear and impartial view of all the options open to them. It also needs to give them enough information, especially about the quality of what is on offer, for them to make an informed choice. It must be learner-centred, recognising for example the differing needs of 14-16 year olds and 16-19 year olds.

The Prospectus is more than an information, advice and guidance mechanism. It is the key means of ensuring that every young person will have access to all the new opportunities they are entitled to. So it is central to making local delivery arrangements work and to enabling local authorities, the LSC and schools fulfil their new statutory

entitlement.

Rationale for the 14-19 Prospectus

- It will widen choice for young learners by making the local learning market transparent and allowing young people to make informed choices about what is best for them.
- It will provide independent and impartial and high quality information on options to young people, their parents and advisers (which is also a key component of the Youth Matters agenda).
- It will provide an excellent means of updating, reviewing and progressively enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of the local offer to young people.
- It will show how partnerships of schools, colleges and training providers will deliver the new 14-19 entitlement to specialised Diplomas, proposed within the Education and Inspection Bill currently before parliament.
- It will help to encourage participation in education post-16.

The Prospectus will also be beneficial for:

- Monitoring the popularity of courses and providers (market analysis).
- Marketing providers and courses.

Timescale

The *14-19 Implementation Plan* gives the following timeline for the Prospectus:

- **From autumn 2006:** Local areas are encouraged to publish Prospectuses
- **By autumn 2007:** All local areas will have a Prospectus of courses, linked to a national website.

- Responsibility**
- It is the joint responsibility of the LA and LLSC to take the lead in drawing up a Prospectus for the area.
 - The LA and the LLSC must work with schools, colleges and training providers to map the curriculum. In the first instance this is information gathering, making sure the prospectus accurately reflects the offers made by all the providers in the area and identifying learning pathways.
 - Schools, colleges and training providers should set out what they propose to offer both individually and collaboratively, on what scale and to which students, and how this provision can be accessed by young people.
 - There is an expectation that, over time, young people will be making choices at the level of the course, not just the institution. The focus will shift to ensuring that schools, colleges and training providers are working together to ensure that every young person has access to the new 14-19 curriculum entitlement, including specialised Diplomas at all three levels.
 - The Prospectus should be founded on a clear local 14-19 strategy and on a strong 14-19 partnership.
 - There is obvious value in a number of neighbouring partnerships working

together (for instance, areas across London are considering working together to produce one coherent pan London Prospectus – see page 13 and Appendix A).

The audience for the Prospectus

Young people are the primary audience. It needs to give them a full picture of what is on offer so they can make informed choices.

Other people will also want to use the information to help young people to make sensible decisions. While you will need to think about the differing needs of Parents and professional advisers you should ensure that the design of the prospectus is still focused on making the information available to young people as clear as possible

How the Prospectus links to other Government policies

Every Child Matters: *Change for Children* is a cross-government programme to deliver changes to the whole system of children’s services – locally and nationally. It provides a national framework of

expectations and accountability in which 150 Local Authority-led change programmes will operate, each designed to identify and address local priorities for children, young people and families.

More information can be found at: [\[web link to Every Child Matters\]](#)

Youth Matters: DfES want to make sure that all young people are given the best chance in life to succeed – by improving their qualifications, getting better jobs and making positive contributions to their local communities. DfES is making changes to the way in which support for young people is organised locally – for example, by giving Local Authorities more flexibility in the way they use their resources to provide support and other services for young people. Proposals also recognise the importance of teenagers enjoying good emotional and physical health, which are inseparable from learning and achievement.

More information can be found at: [\[web link to Youth Matters\]](#)

September Guarantee: In future years, the aim will be to guarantee an offer of appropriate learning to every young person by the end of September after they complete Year 11. This ‘September Guarantee’ will be in place in most areas

in 2006 and across the Country in 2007.

Specialised Diplomas: The 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper, sets out the Government's proposals to improve secondary and further education. Key to these changes is the introduction of Specialised Diplomas. The 14-19 Implementation Plan provides details of how these proposals will be implemented.

Our vision is for a high quality learning route that provides access to skilled employment and higher education. We need to do this so that we meet the skills needs of the economy well into the future. We won't meet these needs unless we engage all our young people and encourage them to aspire to higher levels of achievement, whatever their starting point. Specialised Diplomas will enable us to do this.

More information can be found on the DfES 14-19 website

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/indexcfm?sid=3>

If you want further information about any aspect of the Specialised Diplomas and their development please send your email to diploma@qca.org.uk

What is meant by area?

It is for local partnerships to decide the geographical coverage of their area Prospectus. Some learners will inevitably travel across district and county boundaries to access suitable courses. It will be valuable and cost-effective for neighbouring partnerships to work together to develop coherent Prospectuses. For example, neighbouring partnerships should consider working together to develop a standard database and format for data collection, for learners to search for courses within reasonable travelling distance and to minimise the burden on providers who may have to supply data for a number of Prospectuses. A number of LLSCs are looking at the possibilities of sharing a platform across a region in order to provide more comprehensive information for learners to save on development costs.

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Other people will also want to use the information to help young people to make sensible decisions. While you will need to think about the differing needs of Parents and professional advisers you should

ensure that the design of the prospectus is still focused on making the information available to young people as clear as possible.

The guidance document

This guidance offers advice to those developing web-based Prospectuses. It is based on independent research involving 'good practice' examples of similar existing websites. The research involved website developers and target users in both consultation exercises and user reviews. A summary of the key findings is attached in Appendix C.

This guidance does not set out prescriptive guidelines on an approach that must be adopted – rather it provides useful information and advice about approaches which have proved successful.

2. Content and Coverage

This section offers guidance on what key stakeholders and target users consider as **essential** in relation to the **content and coverage** of a 14-19 Prospectus.

Using existing databases

If you do not want to produce your own databases of courses and providers, you could consider using an existing national database.

The UK Register of Learning Providers and Learn Direct

<http://www.ukrlp.co.uk>
www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk/findacourse

These are alternatives to developing your own database. Ufi/learn-direct can help by building a web interface onto the national database of courses, the Learning Directory. The Directory contains details of nearly one million courses from over 10,000 providers.

Interfaces are currently used by more than 80 partners including the BBC, LLSCs, and Sector Skills Councils. Interfaces can also be built to specify exactly what provision is searchable e.g. the local authority area and adjacent

postcode area. For information please contact the Learning Directory team on advice-resources@ufi.com.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) database

The **QCA database** of accredited qualifications and **Section 96** database of approved accredited courses for up to and including key stage 4
<http://www.openquals.org.uk>
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/section96/>

This will be extremely useful for providing consistent course information across providers.

Which providers should be included?

- All **providers** of 14-19 learning opportunities should be invited to contribute to the Prospectus.
- 'Providers' should include all secondary schools (including independent and special schools), sixth form/FE/tertiary and specialist colleges, academies, and approved

local and national training providers.

- **Collaboration** between institutions and with employers in providing courses should be made explicit to users.

Provider details

There is already a statutory requirement for schools' governing bodies to ensure an annual school prospectus is published for prospective parents. They must ensure that copies are available at the school for reference and made available, free of charge to existing and prospective parents on request. Local Authorities may publish prospectuses on behalf of their schools, but it is the responsibility of the individual school to provide the relevant information that the prospectus should contain.

New regulations in 2005 allowed for much more flexibility over what is included in a school prospectus. However, access to school information under the Freedom of Information Act, has introduced new expectations for information to be available and accessible.

We recommend the following information about providers is included in

prospectuses:

Type of institution e.g. school/college/academy
The name, address and telephone number
Age-range
Location/map (particularly in rural areas)
email address
Names of the head teacher/ chair of governors (secondary schools) and Principal (colleges)
Information about admissions
A statement of the school/college's ethos and values
Details of any affiliations with a particular religion or religious denomination, the religious education provided, parents' right to withdraw their child from religious education and collective worship, and the alternative provision for those pupils (secondary schools)
Information on the school's policy on providing for pupils with special educational needs and any changes to that policy (secondary schools)
The total number of registered pupils
Rates' of pupils authorised and unauthorised absence
Student destinations
Links to the Attainment and Achievement tables held on the DfES website
Link to institution's inspection report
Link to provider website

Which courses should be included?

- The Prospectus should include provision for **all** young people aged **14-19** i.e. **any accredited course**, of any type (including work-related learning and apprenticeships), at any level.
- Consider including examples of **informal learning** opportunities (for example, enrichment activities) offered at each provider.

Course information

The Prospectus needs to include sufficient detail on courses to provide a **comprehensive, impartial** picture to users. It is not sufficient to refer users to provider websites for details on courses; provider sites are not consistent and can be out-of-date and not necessarily impartial. It is particularly important to include information on the quality of provision (e.g. performance data and inspection reports)

Users must also be able to access information on the following:

- Course content (modules/topics)
- Course entry requirements

- Course timetable
- Course assessment details
- Course combinations (e.g. what courses can and can not be studied together)
- Support for students, including for those with SEN and disabilities
- Progression routes (e.g. the link between courses and potential careers)

Financial Support for Students

You should also include information on financial support for learners, especially Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) and support for transport costs. A link to the LSC booklet 'Financial Help for Young People' via www.lsc.gov.uk will provide comprehensive information on the types of support available and sources of further information.

Search options

It is important to include a search facility so that users can search for courses and providers. The Prospectus should be flexible enough for its intended users. For example it may be necessary for students aged 14-16 to choose their home

institution first before making a selection of the courses on offer. Students searching for post-16 options may wish to search the whole area. The following search options should be considered:

- **Advanced/sophisticated search** (e.g. for a specific course or provider)
- **Free text search** (e.g. careers/areas of interest rather than specific course titles)
- Search by **course title** (to avoid confusion, list all courses by their **accredited title** given by the awarding bodies, not names given by providers - the QCA qualifications framework, or the DfES Section 96 database are helpful – see Section 5)
- Search by **age range** (e.g. 14-16, 16-19)
- Search by **geographical location** (particularly in rural or large urban areas) and **post code**
- **Provider search** (e.g. institutions offering particular courses).

Additional content

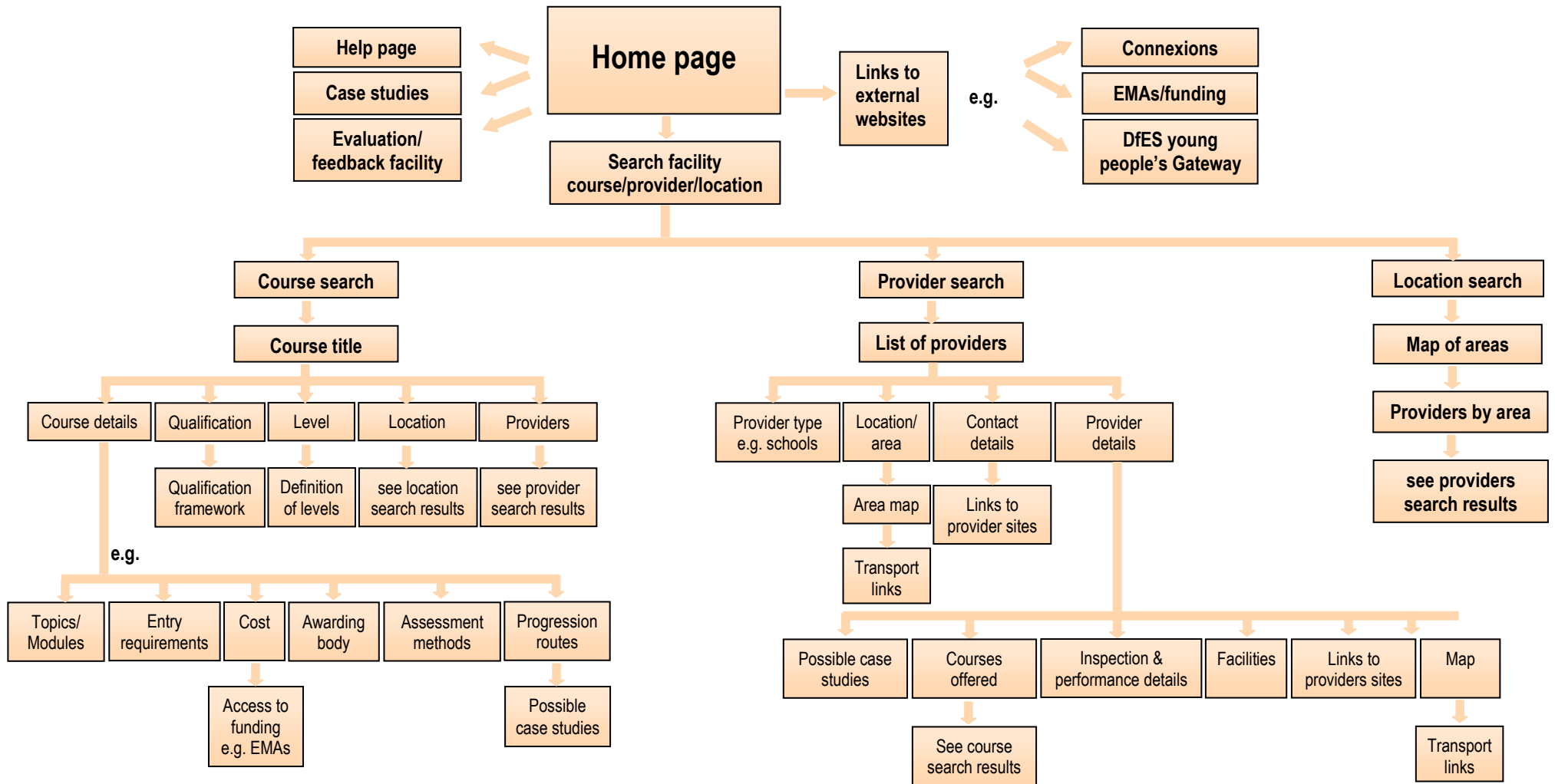
Consider including the following in your Prospectus:

- A **help page or function** (e.g. to assist the user in searching the site, but also to provide definitions of terms, such as qualifications/levels)
- A **feedback/evaluation form**, which allows users to comment on the usefulness of the site
- **Case studies** (e.g. of young people aged 14-19 who have recently made decisions about education) – try to avoid stereotypical case studies
'It would be good to have someone who has just gone from Year 11, so you are finding out their opinions rather than their teacher's opinions. It needs good honest and upfront opinions from someone who has been through it.' [Year 12 student]
- Online standard **application forms/details on admissions procedures**
- Information on progression to **higher education** options
- Information of **local relevance** (e.g. links to transport information/train timetables)
- Links to other relevant websites (see Appendix A for possible websites to include).

An example of a possible structure for a Prospectus site is given in the diagram on

the following page.

Example structure of a 14-19 Prospectus



3. Design and presentation: the design process

First Steps

- Refer to the aims/objectives and rationale for the Prospectus (section 1)
- Identify the key local stakeholders and agree how best to involve them
- Agree how best to handle the different requirements of 14-16 and 16-19 year old students, parents, and careers advisors.
- Consider equal opportunity and access issues, consulting local community leaders and disability organisations for advice

Summary of design process

First decide aims/specification of the Prospectus amongst core project team



Recruit website design organisation to be part of core team



Initial discussions amongst core team about design (including designers)



Initial consultation with key stakeholders and potential users



Design a basic structure



Develop a temporary site for testing
[Use temporary site as a 'live' example that potential users can access during testing/consultations]



On-going testing/consultation
[Involve potential users]

Recruiting website designers

One of the key factors in successful design of existing sites has been the involvement of an external website development organisation, who have provided expertise in relation to design and technical support. It is important that they are seen as an integral part of the core development team and are involved in all stages of the design process.

- A **basic design** (which may be in a paper version) should be drafted by

the core team, with initial consultation with stakeholders and users. Consider developing a **test site** which can be accessed and tested during a longer, broader consultation process.

Consult

- Providers of learning opportunities (special schools may be particularly helpful when considering accessibility issues)
- Career advisers (Connexions has a wealth of experience to draw on)
- Learners/young people (of different ages) (these may also provide case study material)
- All target audiences (e.g. parents and teachers).

Add an **evaluation/feedback facility** to the website, so that the development process is continuous. This will enable the project team to 'road test' the site on an on-going basis.

The Prospectus is a key support for collaboration so the design of the site should reflect a **partnership approach**. A 'family' of websites that pool resources

and share information yet retain a 'local' look should be considered.

A London e-Prospectus

The ICT sub group of the Pan London 14-19 Forum is developing a proposal for a pan London e-Prospectus. The e-Prospectus will integrate all local learner prospectuses into one system. See Appendix A for further information.

Look at examples (see Appendix A for more details):

www.future4me.org.uk

www.st19.net

www.futures4me.co.uk

www.area-prospectus.com

www.coventryshine.com

www.coventrynorthwent.co.uk

Initial design considerations

- You may not need to develop your own database; Section 3 gives details of alternatives.
- If you decide to develop your own database, consider whether the site will be designed to allow providers to upload and update data directly, or whether this will be managed centrally.

Importance of branding

- **Recognisable branding** (e.g. site name/logo) is important for marketing and reaching the target audience (See Section 6 on Marketing)
- Carefully consider the **name of the site** – it should appeal to users at the same time as reflecting the content of the Prospectus
- **Involve potential users**/young people in deciding the name of the site and the site **logo/branding** – some existing sites have held **competitions** to name their site.
- The **name of the site** should make it easy to find via **an internet search engine**.

Consider what is attractive to users

- An appealing homepage
- A well structured site (including case studies of young people like them)
- Pictures/photographs/graphics
- Being colourful (but not too contrasting)
- User interaction (including searches and links)

- Signposting (clear navigation)
- Clear links from homepage
- Not too much text/text broken in boxes/bullets.

Quotes from users of existing sites:

- *The text needs breaking up with a few pictures or icons*
- *It needs to look lively*
- *It needs colour*
- *It needs big pictures*
- *The links should stand out more clearly.*

Tip for breaking up text:

Break up text by including detailed information via links - have basic initial search results, but more detail accessible to users by clicking on icons (such as course or provider name) for further details if they require it.

Structuring the site

- Think carefully about how you will **structure and organise** the information on the site.
- Plan the structure of the site **visually** (see example structure diagram in Section 3) – this will help you to see **how information will piece together** and how it will be accessed by users.
- The structure of the site should be clear from the **homepage** e.g. **clear signposting and links**.
- Ensure information is structured in a way that makes the site **easy to navigate** (see accessibility issues below).
- Pages of the site should have **consistent layout** to avoid confusion.
- The visual structure can be **'tested'** during consultations with potential users.

Accessibility

The Prospectus is about offering transparent access to all young people and we need to build equality into all aspects of our work. The Prospectus website **must to be accessible to all users**, including those with special

educational needs and disabilities. It is important that students know who can help with them with navigation through the site, consider adding named contacts within schools or Connexions.

Consult users with SEN and disabilities about accessibility and test websites with different browsers to ensure full compatibility. You should design the site to ensure that users with old browsers can access them.

Appendix A contains a number of useful websites that will help with accessibility and equal opportunity issues.

Language

- Text should be concise and jargon free
- *'Make sure the words are understandable'* [student]. Terms should be defined (not all young people understood 'provider' or 'accreditation' for instance). Consider adding a glossary of terms
- Language should be young-person friendly, without being patronising
- *'Keep it simple, but keep it formal'* [Year 13 student]
- Consider making information available in different languages (consult local

community leaders about how best to support ethnic minority groups. Would parents find translated web pages useful?)

- Language needs careful thought if designing a free text search facility.

Navigation

- The structure of the site should be clear from the homepage
- Have a link to the homepage from each page
- Navigation links should be clear and upfront, and should appear in the same place on each page to avoid confusion
- The layout should be logical
- Consider navigation strategies (for example, having an A-Z menu on the homepage).

Readability

- Text should be broken up e.g. with pictures, text boxes, bullets or via web links
- *'Make sure there are pictures and cut down the words'* [student]
- The amount of text that appears on a

page can be limited by the use of hyperlinks to pages of further detail.
'Try and spread the whole website out so it's not all cluttered together'.
[teacher]

- The user should be able to change the text size (this is important for those with visual impairments)
- Do not use too many different fonts.

Colour/contrast

- There should be sufficient contrast between background and foreground text
- Consider background colours so text shows up clearly.

Other formats

- Remember that not all users have access to the internet
- Some users still prefer paper-based information so make your website print friendly.

4. Project planning and management

This section offers guidance on how LAs and LLSCs can plan and manage the development of area prospectuses.

The focus of the Prospectus

The first step is to develop a core project team and obtain their agreement on the **focus** and **rationale** of the Prospectus within the wider development of the 14-19 strategy across the local area. The evidence suggests that a successful Prospectus is more than a way of providing information to young people. It should be **embedded** in a broader 14-19 strategy, ensuring that the full entitlement of opportunities is available to young people.

Building a core project team

In addition to:

- the Local Authority
- the Local Learning and Skills Council
- providers of 14-19 opportunities and learners must clearly be involved (see Section 4).

Some areas have also involved:

- Connexions
- Aimhigher
- A website development company/technical consultant.

The research suggested that effective prospectus teams resulted from:

- a real **partnership**, and a shared **philosophy** founded on local 14-19 partnerships
- having a **project manager** to act as the key contact for the team and external stakeholders (it is helpful if the project manager has **technical knowledge**)
- **employing someone** initially (for instance, on a short-term contract) to

contact providers of learning opportunities and collect data

- the involvement of an **external website development organisation** which has an understanding of the education sector and of the project aims and who displays an awareness of the scope and scale of the project
- clear **roles** and **responsibilities** amongst the team.

Establishing contacts

It is recommended that **one key contact** is identified **within each provider** to facilitate project management and data collection. It is beneficial for the key contact to be someone who has the **authority, knowledge** and **time** to liaise with the project manager and provide key information.

Funding

The Department is providing some pump prime funding to help meet the costs of collaboration, although over time the costs of 14-19 provision will increasingly need to be met from mainstream funding. We have allocated £15m in 2006-07 and £14.5m in 2007-08 for local capacity building to Local Authorities to help meet these costs. It is expected that the cost of developing prospectuses is met from this funding.

Existing prospectuses have been produced using local development funds. Funds have also been pooled from budgets from the following sources:

- the local Learning and Skills Council
- Connexions
- Aimhigher
- Providers' marketing budgets.

5. Data collection and collaboration

This section offers advice and guidance on how to collaborate with providers in order to collect data for the Prospectus.

Consult widely prior to data collection so there is shared endorsement of the site.

Involve the following in consultation:

- The Prospectus project core development team
- Other members of the 14-19 Strategy team
- Other LA/LLSC representatives
- Providers (e.g. senior managers from schools, colleges and work-based learning training providers)
- Connexions Personal Advisers
- Aimhigher.

This initial consultation can help to reinforce the benefits of the Prospectus to providers (see Section 1) prior to data collection.

It can also help you to identify sources of potential case studies for inclusion on the site.

Tips for simplifying data collection

- Identify one **key contact** for each provider who has the authority, knowledge and time to provide data.
- Use a **standardised template** of course information so data is consistent across providers (it may be useful for neighbouring partnerships to work together to develop a standard template, in order to minimise the burden on providers who might have to supply data for a number of Prospectuses).
- Consider producing an **electronic template** for providers to complete and update, rather than having to collate written information in different formats.
- **Make use of existing data** in order to minimise the burden on providers (complete electronic templates with existing data where possible and then ask providers to check it and fill any gaps – electronically if possible).
- Use a standardised list of **accredited course titles, qualifications and accreditation numbers** for formal learning (see ‘using existing databases’ below) so information is consistent across providers.
- Import course/qualification titles/information (e.g. from the QCA qualifications framework) into your own database, so that providers can select **standard information** on the courses they provide, rather than having to write their own descriptions.
- **One member of the project team** should take responsibility for initiating and establishing the process of data collection (for instance, collecting existing data, liaising with providers about updating information, and chasing missing data).
- Successful existing sites have had an **initial drive** to load data on courses and providers on to a central database – but it needs to be **maintained and kept up-to-date** (see below).

Data collection should give the opportunity to map curriculum provision, identify gaps and surpluses and explore collaboration, to ensure that young people have access to the full entitlement of opportunities. However, data collection can often be dismissed as a routine operation. But it is vital to the success of the Prospectus. After all, one of the main purposes is to identify gaps and fill them. Senior Managers need to ensure the information

is kept up to date.

Updating the data

Successful practice in relation to updating databases of information has resulted primarily from an **online updating facility**. Resources or local circumstances may mean that the project team has to liaise with providers to revise the database centrally, however:

- Consider setting up the database so that it can be **accessed by providers** (possibly via the internet) so they can update their own information (using a standardised template of information). **Note:** this is likely to be easier for formal learning; if information on informal learning (such as enrichment activities) is included, this may need to be updated by a central administration team liaising with providers.
- Give each provider a **unique secure**

password and login identification number, so only they can access and amend their own data.

- Data can be **updated regularly** by providers as their courses and circumstances change. Data should be updated at least annually, but an online updating facility would enable the Prospectus to be a 'live' resource which could be updated whenever changes occur.

'An online updating facility reduces the ongoing administration costs – and the site is so much more current'.

[14-19 Strategy Manager].

'It empowers providers in terms of what they provide. They can use Word to edit the content...it will not involve using a complicated format or database, it can be done via the internet'. [Web developer].

Monitoring and maintenance

Even with an online updating system, some central control is required to ensure that the Prospectus database is kept up-to-date:

- **Automated emails** can act as **reminders** to providers to update their information, although such emails are sometimes subject to anti-spam systems. Some areas have used a newsfeed instead.
- A member of the project team needs to **take responsibility** to monitor how well data is being updated.
- The LA and LLSC need to ensure the prospectus continues to give an **accurate picture** of the offer to young people.

6. Marketing

In order to gain the maximum benefits of the 14-19 Prospectus it should be marketed to young people and other target audiences (including teachers, advisers and parents).

‘Obviously you need to get the message out to people that it’s there’
[14-19 Strategy Manager]

Branding

- Branding (including the **site name and logo**) can be useful for marketing. The site name, website address and logo could be advertised in other education promotion materials, such as those developed by Connexions.

Embed it in the curriculum/youth activities

- The 14-19 Prospectus should not be seen as a stand alone resource. It is recommended that the Prospectus is promoted as an **integral part of careers education and guidance** and

other youth support to ensure that the information is used effectively as a tool to aid decision making.

- Encourage teachers to demonstrate the site in careers education and guidance/personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons and at other times when choices are discussed in schools (e.g. during assemblies).
- Connexions Personal Advisers can play a key role in promoting the Prospectus and supporting its use.

Promotional materials

- Consider producing **paper-based promotional materials**, including posters, leaflets, stickers, postcards, and/or credit-card sized resources for young people (which users have suggested as effective) which advertise the Prospectus branding.
- Encourage Connexions Personal Advisers and teachers to **distribute** paper-based materials in schools. They could also be distributed via **school/local libraries, in the careers library and in the school reception**

area, for instance.

- Encourage schools to send paper-based promotional materials to **parents**.
- Include some case studies (avoiding stereo-types) in the promotional materials in order to attract young people to the site.
‘The most influential thing...is seeing a positive learning profile of someone who’d actually done it and their experience’. [Teacher]

Websites

- School and college websites should feature the Prospectus website and provide a link from their homepage.
- Encourage other relevant websites (such as local Connexions and provider sites) to provide a link to the Prospectus site.

Media

- Consider preparing a press release with quotes from local Connexions Personal Adviser or teachers highlighting the benefits of the service.
- Some local radio stations may be persuaded to publicise the website address.
- The Prospectus could be publicised in local newspapers.

7. Possible challenges and suggested solutions

This section summarises some of the main challenges faced by key stakeholders who have been involved in developing existing sites, and offers some guidance in relation to possible considerations or solutions to adopt. The development of a successful prospectus will demand effective leadership for the LA, LLSC and key stakeholders.

| Challenges Faced | Considerations |
|---|--|
| Project start-up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a project management team within the LA/LLSC and consider involving Connexions, Aimhigher and a web design consultant/organisation ■ Agree scope of the Prospectus in relation to content, coverage, and audience ■ Consider the most effective use of available funding ■ Consider using existing databases in the development of the Prospectus ■ Consider using an existing careers website and update it to meet the requirements of the Prospectus ■ Consult (e.g. providers and users) about scope, data collection and design ■ Consider employing someone on a short-term contract to initiate data collection (e.g. gather existing data and liaise with providers) |
| Funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Existing sites have been developed using local development funds ■ Pump prime funding provided by the Department to local authorities for capacity building (see page 7) ■ Funds have been obtained from LA, LSC, Connexions, Aimhigher and providers ■ Some funds have been provided by provider marketing budgets |
| Different names used by providers for the same courses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use a standard list and description of qualifications (see QCA and Section 96 databases of qualifications – see Section 3 for details) and import it into your own database |
| Resistance from providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Secure buy-in by relating the Prospectus to a broader 14-19 strategy (which includes an Entitlement statement and a common admissions procedure) ■ Reinforce the message about increased choice, transition and progression being |

| Challenges Faced | Considerations |
|---|--|
| | <p>important pre-16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Involve providers in initial consultation about data collection ■ The project team should reinforce the rationale and benefits of the Prospectus so there is shared endorsement ■ Make use of existing data on providers to minimise the burden on them – just ask them to check and fill gaps ■ Provide incentives to providers. For example, monitor the use of the site and use the information as market analysis, giving feedback on popular course searches ■ Neighbouring partnerships should consider working together to develop a joint standard data collection template, to ease the burden on providers who would need to supply data to a number of Prospectuses. |
| <p>Establishing and maintaining contact with providers</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ One person on the project team should act as the key contact for providers ■ It has proved difficult in some areas to establish contact with national training providers as there is a perception that they do not recognise the local importance of the Prospectus – contact between LA/LLSC and training provider senior managers can help to reinforce the value of the Prospectus ■ Establish senior management commitment from providers of learning opportunities (e.g. meet and consult with providers from an early stage of the development process to discuss the benefits of the Prospectus) ■ Key contact in the education and training institutions should be someone with authority, knowledge and time |
| <p>Management of data</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide a standard, electronic template of information (neighbouring partnerships may wish to work together to develop a consistent template) ■ Use standardised pre-defined qualification descriptions from which providers can select (i.e. WCA and Section 96 databases of qualifications – see Section 3 for details) and import it into your own database ■ Consider the difference between choices for students aged 14-16 and 16-19 (see Section |

| Challenges Faced | Considerations |
|--|--|
| | <p>3 'Search Options')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Spend time with providers discussing data collection. Provide training on how to use the standard template. ■ Provide an on-line updating facility for providers to update their own data so that it is a 'live' resource (give secure password and identification numbers) – on-line updating will limit the central admission time, although the updating needs to be monitored regularly ■ Identify someone on the project team to take responsibility for liaising with providers and overseeing the updating process ■ Data should be updated regularly and in agreement with all partners ■ The LA and LSC need to review accuracy at least annually. ■ Make links with neighbouring area prospectuses e.g. add web addresses. |
| Joint timetabling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider the distances between providers and transport issues when considering joint timetabling |
| Curriculum mapping and rationalisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider whether rationalisation should be done before or after the prospectus is published i.e. do institutions make an offer, and on the basis of the take-up decide on location and timing, or is a rationalised curriculum presented to learners? Consider how the Prospectus may raise students' hopes. |
| Making the site accessible to all users | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Refer to accessibility guidelines referred to in Appendix A. ■ Consult (e.g. special schools) ■ Offer paper-based or printable versions in addition to the electronic version. |

Appendix A Useful websites

The following websites may be helpful in assisting you in developing an effective Prospectus website. It should be noted that the appendix does not include an exhaustive list of all relevant websites; a number of examples have been identified as useful. Moreover, the research has not included an evaluation of the websites listed below, and thus it should be noted that the DfES does not necessarily endorse the sites included here.

Examples of existing Prospectuses

area-prospectus (Wolverhampton example)

<http://www.area-prospectus.com>

The site has separate pages for key stage 4, post-16 and enrichment. Users can browse for subjects, providers or 'what's new'. There is a more advanced search option which narrows a search by type of course, qualification and provider.

Manchester district prospectus (Manchester example)

<http://www.districtprospectus.manchester14-19.co.uk>

The site offers a course search covering Manchester districts, enabling users to search for courses by provider, district, learning area (for example, humanities) and keyword.

futures4me and 14-19pathways (Cumbria example)

<http://www.futures4me.co.uk>

<http://www.14-19pathways.co.uk>

The site offers a Cumbria-wide course search and progression mapping based on a common data source. The user is able to search by provider, qualification, location within Cumbria, age range (14-19, pre-16, and post-16) and using free text.

future4me.org.uk (Suffolk example)

<http://www.future4me.org.uk>

The site enables users to search for 14-19 learning opportunities by course title, provider, location (within Suffolk), progression routes, qualification type and level, awarding body and using free text. It also includes a help page which contains advice on how to search the site and information on qualifications. The site enables users to search for travel information and includes links to other relevant sites (including Aimhigher).

Examples of existing Prospectuses

St19 (South Tyneside example)

<http://www.st19.net>

The site includes a range of information to support young people's decision-making, including information on choices at 16 and 18, choosing a course, special needs, and finances. Some information is available on the site in languages other than English. There are links to other relevant websites. A user can search for courses by course title, provider, qualification and key word.

Also see:

<http://www.nclearn.co.uk> (a similar site for the Newcastle area)

<http://www.logicat16.co.uk> (a similar site for the Gateshead area)

SHINE (Coventry and Warwickshire examples)

<http://www.coventryshine.com> (Coventry NE example)

<http://www.coventrynorthwest.co.uk> (Coventry NW example)

<http://www.smartoptions.org.uk> (generic example)

SHINE is a flexible web-based prospectus system. This can be stand alone or integrated with the Centralised Application Process (CAP) that provides young people with a simple, user-friendly application process covering all 14-19 education and training. CAP offers many useful facilities, reports and alerts for schools, careers advisors, learning providers and strategic managers (e.g. Local Authorities, LSC, Connexions, 14-19 Steering Group Members etc). The real time reports from CAP provide reliable, up-to-date factual data on demand, to inform planning and enable timely management action on issues such as the 'September Guarantee', NEET group students, and shortages or duplication of provision. CAP and SHINE promotes collaboration and puts the learner at the heart of the system.

A London e-Prospectus

The e-Prospectus will integrate all local learner prospectuses into one system. It will be a powerful on line service for all young people, their parents and their advisors via the Pan London website.

The e-Prospectus will show:

- The 14+ curriculum offer for learners at local schools in each of the 33 local authority areas in London
- The pan London offer for learners at 16+ i.e. the full range of learning opportunities on offer across the capital, including courses in school sixth forms, FE and sixth form colleges, e-learning and work based learning

Users will be able to search the database to find:

- A particular course near to their home

Examples of existing Prospectuses

- A college that can provide support for specific needs
- A vocational pathway

The ICT sub group of the pan London 14-19 Forum are also exploring proposals for on-line applications and clearing house. Underpinning these ideas is the possibility that London might be a pilot for the learner registration service and the unique learner number (ULN).

All of this is very much early work in progress. It will be informed and improved by open consultations with all stakeholders. Comments and suggestions are welcomed. For more information please contact Lucy.Salaman@lsc.gov.uk

The UK Register of Learning Providers and Learn Direct

<http://www.ukrlp.co.uk>

<http://www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk/findacourse>

These are alternatives to developing your own database. Ufi/learn-direct can help by building a web interface onto the national database of courses, the Learning Directory. The Directory contains details of nearly one million courses from over 10,000 providers. Interfaces are currently used by more than 80 partners including the BBC, LLSCs, nextstep contractors and Sector Skills Councils. Interfaces can be built to specify exactly what provision is searchable. For example, it is possible to specify the local authority area and adjacent postcode area. For information please contact the Learning Directory team on advice-resources@ufi.com.

Hotcourses

<http://www.hotcourses.com> – Hotcourses includes details of FE, HE and adult education courses throughout the UK and searches can be limited by study mode, level or location. There is also a funding search which offers information on scholarships, bursaries etc which may potentially be available. Free registration is necessary to view details of specific courses or funding opportunities.

The QCA database qualifications and Section 96 database of approved accredited courses for up to and including key stage 4

<http://www.openquals.org.uk>

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/section96/>

Useful for providing consistent course information across providers.

Financial Support for Young People

Education Grants Advisory Service (EGAS)

<http://www.egas-online.org.uk>

Offers advice and guidance on funding for those studying in post-16 education in the UK.

Financial help for young people

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk>

Booklet published by the LSC in March 2006, gives information about the types of financial support 16-19 year olds may be able to access, including Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) and other help for young people in education or training. Gives help and advice on transport costs for school or college, information on assistance with childcare costs and other sources of financial help for learners. DfES webpage on EMAs www.dfes.gov.uk/financialhelp/ema also provides useful information.

16-19 Transport Support

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/financialhelp/16-19transport/index.cfm?fuseaction=home> - Links to local authorities' policies on financial assistance with student transport, and offers a series of frequently-asked questions and answers.

Student Finance Direct

<http://www.studentsupportdirect.co.uk> - This site provides information on the financial help available to students in higher education in England and Wales (and links to equivalent sites for students outside those nations). It is possible to calculate an estimate of the financial support to which one may be entitled, and to apply for support online. A glossary of relevant terminology and a page of links to alternative sources of awards and loans are also provided.

Directgov/Youngpeople

<http://www.directgov.gov.uk/Young People/Money/fs/en>

Provides a range of government information on financial support for learning. Managing money and benefits for young people.

Finance

Uniaid

<http://www.uniaid.org.uk> - Uniaid is an independent charity which aims to help young people overcome the financial hurdles to higher education by encouraging financial awareness and practical coping skills, broadening access to independent financial advice and offering direct support to individual students in hardship. An online student finance learning tool called "All About U" is intended to help 16-19 year olds prepare for the challenges of university life. A bursary scheme is operated (44 students were helped in 2005); applicants must be referred by universities and their partner organisations rather than applying direct.

Equal Opportunities

Disability Rights Commission <http://www.drc-gb.org/>

The DRC website includes links to the Duty to Promote Disability Equality: Statutory Code of Practice - England and Wales. This Duty affects all public bodies - The law says they must now actively promote disability equality.

Equal Opportunities Commission <http://www.eoc.org.uk/>

The Equal Opportunities Commission deals with sex discrimination. The Commission is an independent, non-departmental public body, funded primarily by the government. Its website has a wide range of expert advice, with up-to-the-minute practical guidance and legal information.

Commission for Racial Equality www.cre.gov.uk

The CRE is a publicly funded, independent organisation that exists to tackle racial discrimination and promote racial equality. Its website includes good practice information and outlines the general statutory duties of educational institutions.

Accessibility

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta)

<http://www.becta.org.uk>
Offers advice on accessibility

The European Web Accessibility Guidelines

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/policy/accessibility/web/index_en.htm - Provides the ten golden rules of website development.

Watchfire WebXACT

<http://www.webexact.watchfire.com>
WebXACT is a free online service that lets users test single pages of web content for quality, accessibility and privacy issues

Web Accessibility Initiative

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/> - W3C is a **Web Accessibility Initiative** which seeks to equalise access to the web by all, whether or not disabled. Guidelines are given to help people developing websites to ensure that disabled people are enabled to interact with the sites and advising on how to consult them.

Performance

DfES Performance Data

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/performancetables/> - This site gives access to the DfES School and College Achievement and Attainment Tables (formerly called Performance Tables) together with explanations of how to read the tables and, for parents, how to use the information when choosing their children's schools. An archive is available stretching back to 1994. [There is also a Pupil Achievement Tracker at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/performance/> as previously reported on; and a series of links from the Standards site, at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ts/informationcentre/links> - points to QCA and Ofsted data.]

Ofsted

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk> - Inspection reports on institutions providing for pupils of 11-16 and students aged 16+ can be accessed on the Ofsted site, which has a section of information for parents. From September 2005 Ofsted's inspection remit includes the undertaking of Joint Area

Performance

Reviews (JARs), which will encompass all local authority services, and other agencies' services, for children and young people. Each JAR will provide a comprehensive report on the situation in a local area, incorporating inspections of youth services, education and social services, Connexions and 14-19 provision.

Pupil Achievement Tracker

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/performance> - This software package, which includes national data from the DfES, allows schools and local authorities to import and analyse their own data and compare them with the national picture. Individual pupils' progress can be tracked and targets set for them.

Awarding bodies/ Qualifications

Awarding bodies

http://www.dfes.gov.uk/section96/awarding_bodies.shtml

A list of awarding bodies is accessible on the DfES Section 96 website (website addresses for individual awarding bodies are included on the site).

QCA

<http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/homepage/students-and-parents.htm> - This page groups together links to those areas of the QCA website which are judged especially useful to 14-19 students and their parents. These include information on making choices, the range of qualifications available, and how exams are set and marked.

These websites give additional support and advice to users and could be included as links on your Prospectus site

Aimhigher

<http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk> - Aimhigher is an initiative of the DfES, which has the objective of widening participation in UK higher education by students from non-traditional backgrounds, minority groups and disabled people. This portal provides information to enable decision-making by people contemplating entering HE, covering institutions and courses, financial advice and support, the applications process and student life.

The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth

<http://www.nagty.ac.uk> - The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth works with specialist providers, universities and business to provide wider schooling opportunities around the country including:

- 1) Summer schools
- 2) Experts in Action Events
- 3) Residential and Non-Residential Outreach Programmes
- 4) Online Study Groups and Online Short Courses

BBC Learning

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning> - The URL ...[bbc.co.uk/education/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/) redirects to this address, which is the BBC's "online learning, support and advice" site aimed at actual and potential adult returners to education. There are links to relevant sections of both BBC and external websites (examples of the former are BBC2's "Learning Zone" and the basic skills area, Skillswise). Subject-based quick links lead to suggested sources concerned with topics of academic, vocational and general interest. A course search enables users to locate courses in their local area.

BBC Schools

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools> - Sections of subject-related information pertaining to 11-16 year olds and 16+. For 11-16 the "Onion Street" area includes school advice and study skills; at 16+ there are Key Skills and Study Skills areas, the latter incorporating a link to the Radio 1 "One Life" site which looks at young people's options at 16+, 18+ and 21+. Topics include subjects, qualifications, government initiatives such as Aimhigher and Connexions, funding and access courses.

Careers Fair

<http://www.careersfair.com> - Links to a range of resources of use to people from school-age upwards who wish to start, progress or change careers. These include careers services, courses, information and advice sites, recruitment agencies and professional and regulatory bodies, in the UK and overseas. Sites that users give feedback as being of limited use are removed from the listings. Features include a chronological listing of upcoming careers fairs.

Careers Portal

<http://www.trotman.co.uk> – Operated by Trotman Publishing, this is an online careers service which links into the publisher's online bookshop. Without the need to purchase books, however, users can access screens of information on topics such as choosing GCSEs and A levels, exam survival, getting into and coping with university, gap years, finding jobs and career management.

These websites give additional support and advice to users and could be included as links on your Prospectus site

Connexions

<http://www.connexions-direct.com> - Sections on careers, learning, health, housing, free time, work, money, relationships, rights and travel; contains articles and links to the websites of organisations that can help in each of the fields. Includes a "Disability Content" section highlighting which of its articles are especially pertinent for people with disabilities. Links to the jobs4u careers database (<http://www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u/index.cfm>) which indicates the qualifications necessary for different jobs.

DfES, Young People's Gateway

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/youngpeople> - Areas cover topics including financial support, learning, tests and qualifications, students with special needs, voluntary work, going to university/college.

Directgov

<http://www.direct.gov.uk> - Education and Learning area, including sections on making choices at 14-19 - how to choose subjects and which courses/where to study; leaving school and finding work; funding information; gap years and volunteering.

Fast Tomato

<http://www.fasttomato.co.uk> - A subscription-based, interactive careers education and guidance site for young people aged 13+, with an Adviser Resource Centre for teachers and career advice professionals. Activities are available which link into initiatives such as work-related learning and key skills, and into citizenship and enterprise education. Advisers can customise their institution's account to enable monitoring of individual students' choices and learning plans.

Gapyear.com

<http://www.gapyear.com> - "Built by backpackers for backpackers," this site includes information on the range of gap year options open to young people (e.g. study options abroad, humanitarian work, teaching, expeditioning) and offers help in planning their arrangements. Advice on issues such as funding, budgeting and safety are also given, along with testimony from previous "gappers."

Learndirect

<http://www.learndirect.co.uk> - Advice on courses and job profiles. Courses may be purchased online. The site includes Futures, an online career and learning service (registration necessary).

Learning and Skills Council Youth Channel

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Youth> - Includes links to Financial Help for Students (DfES); an Apprenticeships site; and Directgov with study and career information. There are also links back to LLSCs.

Merlin Helps Students

<http://www.merlinhelpsstudents.com> - Describing itself as a "UK student information portal", this site is aimed at students aiming to study in further or higher education. At <http://www.merlinhelpsstudents.com/college/collegesintheuk.asp> is a "Colleges and Sixth Form

These websites give additional support and advice to users and could be included as links on your Prospectus site

Schools” page offering a clickable map linking to listings of institutions within a region. A “Before University” section gives guidance on choosing a university and using UCAS; options available “After University” are also addressed, as are banking and finance.

Need2Know

<http://www.need2know.co.uk> - Sections cover health, money, entertainment, travel, relationships, learning, work, law, housing and environment. Articles and links, as with Connexions.

New Deal

<http://www.newdeal.gov.uk/newdeal.asp?DealID=1824> – This page relates to the New Deal for Young People aged 18-24. New Deal is run by the Department for Work and Pensions and this page links to case studies, FAQs and an outline of how the scheme operates in relation to young people.

Prospects

<http://www.prospects.ac.uk> - The UK’s official graduate careers website gives information on the range of options available after taking a degree-level qualification, such as postgraduate study, training and entering a career. Suggestions are given as to how graduates can use their degree subject and the skills developed through studying it, and methods of entering a wide range of work fields are explained. Job vacancies, including graduate trainee schemes and internships, can be searched, and students can submit details of their skills and preferences to a Prospects Planner (registration required) to view suggestions of fields that might suit them.

Support 4 Learning

<http://www.support4learning.org.uk> - This site signposts resources to assist students and education and training advisers with choosing and financing education, training and career planning. The section on money covers bank accounts, grants and loans, awards and bursaries, and money management, including tips and links to organisations’ websites. Other sections include health information links, counselling services, educational opportunities, study skills and learning styles, and help with searching for jobs. The community section in particular highlights a number of organisations whose remit focuses on young people.

TheSite.org

<http://www.thesite.org.uk> - Owned and run by the charity YouthNet UK, this website aims to provide information for young people to make informed decisions and life choices. Areas covered include Work & Study; Home, Law & Money (including student funding information); Travel & Free Time; Drink & Drugs.

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

<http://www.ucas.com>

Central organisation which processes applications for full time under graduate courses at UK universities and colleges

SEN/disabilities

After 16

<http://www.after16.org.uk/index.html> - A site informing young disabled people about opportunities available to them at age 16+ and the services they should be able to receive. It explains the choices they will need to consider and suggests ways they can ensure their point of view is heard. Topics covered include money, learning, work, housing, transport and leisure, health, and the law.

Deaf and Creative

<http://www.deafandcreative.ac.uk> - This web site is aimed at young deaf people considering what to do after school or college, and at deaf university students and graduates. Information includes university and course choice, application procedures, obtaining funding and other support (e.g. working with a sign language interpreter or note-taker), employment (including the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act) and job vacancies.

My Future Choices

<http://www.myfuturechoices.org.uk> [website of the Transition Information Network] – The site provides general information for young people with disabilities about their future choices.

RNIB - The Student Site

<http://www.rnib.org.uk> - This site is aimed specifically at blind and partially sighted students, with information about studying and university, jobs and careers, and using technology to support study (along with information on sources of financial assistance to purchase technological aids).

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

<http://www.skill.org.uk> - Skill is a national charity promoting opportunities for young people and adults with any kind of disability in post-16 education, training and employment across the UK. A helpline is provided for the exclusive use of disabled learners, parents, personal assistants and key advisers. The website contains information of specific interest to people with disabilities, e.g. local authorities' evidence requirements for granting Disabled Students' Allowances. Case studies of students' experiences are included, along with a discussion forum (registration necessary).

The Association of National Specialist Colleges

<http://www.natspec.org.uk> - The NATSPEC website contains a searchable directory of colleges which cater for students with a wide range of disabilities and special needs. Students can compile a shortlist of those colleges which could meet their specific requirements, and contact details are provided for them then to request Prospectuses. NATSPEC also offers advice and guidance to individual learners, and their families, who are considering a placement at a specialist college.

Trans-active (MENCAP)

<http://www.trans-active.org.uk> – this MENCAP site is aimed at teenagers/young people with learning disabilities. The trans-active project is for young people with and without learning disabilities to work together, using multimedia to explore and communicate choices they will have when they leave school; it is about support, making plans, family and friends and having fun.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships

<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk> - The Young People area of the site (there are also areas for employers and partners) lists occupations in which apprenticeships are available, with links to LLSCs where applicable, and advises on application procedures and financial considerations.

Jobs/employment

Fish4

<http://www.fish4.co.uk> - The Jobs section of this service, developed by several large regional press groups, contains details of job vacancies throughout the UK and is updated daily. Users can browse by job sector or location. Training and education opportunities can also be searched by study mode and educational level. The site is not aimed specifically at young people.

Jobcentre Plus

<http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk> Leaving Education section includes advice on getting jobs, training for the future, and obtaining financial and practical help. A range of links is provided.

jobseekers-uk.com

<http://www.jobseekers-uk.com> - This website is provided by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation and aims to assist users to locate an appropriate recruitment agency best suited to their needs. A "Find A Consultancy" search function enables searchers to limit what they look for by location or industry type. Tips on interview technique and presenting CVs are also given. The site is not aimed specifically at young people.

Monster

<http://www.monster.co.uk> - Monster is a "global online careers and recruitment" resource, of which 23 websites around the world hold local content pertinent to participating countries. Users can access career advice and details of job opportunities for which they can apply online, and can also create "My Monster" accounts by which they can post their CVs, make them searchable by prospective employers, and elect to receive emails of appropriate new vacancies. There is a "Graduates" area but no specific section aimed at the 14-19 cohort.

Worktrain

<http://www.worktrain.gov.uk> - Jobs and careers information site, containing information from Jobcentre Plus. Users can search for jobs, training, careers, childcare and voluntary work information and there is also an area detailing support services from which people can obtain assistance, be it funding information, childcare, help for people with disabilities, etc. The site is not aimed specifically at young people.

Appendix B Technical Support

The Design Team

Successful existing sites have benefited from the involvement of **website development consultants** to provide technical support and take the lead on design. Existing project teams recommend that the recruitment of such consultants is given careful consideration and that they have some knowledge of the education sector. They should be seen as an integral part of the core team, and involved at all stages throughout the process.

Databases

You may not need to consider the following database issues if you have decided to link with learndirect or QCA (see Section 5). Otherwise:

- It is recommended that a **database-driven/dynamic website** is produced. This allows data/contents to be separated from the web pages and **simplifies the updating process as well as aiding searching**.
- The database is used as a 'backend'

of the website, storing all of the relevant information. Web pages are there to provide the interface to the database, as well as a search facility.

- **Choice of database software** will depend on the size of the website (content), the resources available and the technical knowledge of the development team.
- For a large scale, frequently accessed/searched site, it is recommended that either **Microsoft SQL server or MySQL** (which is free of charge) is used. Both would require ICT/website professionals to assist with installation.
- For a smaller site, **Microsoft Access** database should be adequate. The development process is relatively straightforward and the database can be exported to other formats at a later stage, if required. One benefit is easy portability of the database file.

Website pages

Actual website pages can be developed using any mainstream technologies, for example:

- **ASP**
- **ColdFusion**
- **PhP**

All of these are capable of connecting, displaying and searching the databases mentioned above. The choice of technology will depend on the developer, but consider using **Macromedia** with **Dreamweaver** (for visual development/design interface) and **Homesite** (for actual hand writing of the HTML code). Macromedia solutions are licensed and require purchasing.

Many users are likely to want paper copies of Prospectus pages. Consider a simple, single-column webpage design so it is **print-friendly**.

Monitoring Use

There are two ways of monitoring the use of the site:

1. A **server-based solution** which simply involves accessing designated website pages and navigating through a

number of diagrams and charts. After initial installation of these packages, no additional work is usually required to maintain the software.

A lot of detail can be provided by packages and summary pages can be customised if needed. Consider *Webtrends* or *Matrixstats*.

2. Monitor use by picking up the log files from the server and processing them using log-analyser software. Freeware (no cost) and shareware (nominal cost) for this type of software is available widely and can be chosen by a site administrator.

Licences

In order to use all software legally, an organisation must obtain a licence. There are three types of licence: free, shareware and commercial. A free licence means that no payment is required for the use of the software, but it will require compliance

with some terms and conditions (these should be read to make sure no unwanted software is downloaded). Shareware licences are usually low cost but again require the user to agree to terms and conditions. Shareware software is usually created by individuals or small groups and thus quality of support may be an issue. A commercial licence requires payment (sometimes substantial) to the software company and the user must agree to terms and conditions. Licences may include maintenance (for upgrades to software), although may well be an extra charge.

Exportability of Data

Data is easily exportable from one database to another, particularly if the datasets in question are from the same proprietor, for example *Microsoft*. Even if they are not, using interfaces such as the *Open Database Connectivity* (ODBC) will permit maximum interoperability. By using ODBC, files can be accessed in a number

of different databases including *Access*, *dBase*, *DB2*, and *Excel*.

Hidden Costs

Consider the following hidden costs which are likely to be associated with developing and maintaining your Prospectus website:

- Annual hosting charges (this charge will depend on a number of factors, such as the provider of the site and the software used).
- Licence costs (see above).
- Staff time to develop and maintain the site (the amount of time required will vary according to the data collection methods, although some time for central coordination and 'trouble-shooting' is inevitable).

Appendix C NFER Research Findings

Key Research Findings

This guidance document is based on the findings from an independent research project involving 'good practice' examples of existing websites. The research, carried out by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER), involved website developers and target users in both consultation exercises and user reviews. The key findings from the research are summarised below, which may be of use to partnerships developing Prospectuses in the future.

The aims of the Prospectus

- Stakeholders had agreed the purpose and scope of the Prospectus site amongst the core project team, and in consultation with providers, from the outset of the project.
- It was perceived that a Prospectus site should not be viewed as a stand alone entity; rather it should be embedded as a key element within the wider local 14-19 strategy (for example, in relation to curriculum planning and local teaching collaboration).

- It was felt that the Prospectus should not be used in isolation; rather its use should be embedded into careers education and the wider guidance given to young people.

Project Planning and Management

- Project teams were built on a real partnership approach, involving (for instance) LAs, LSCs, Connexions and Aimhigher.
- There was a perceived need to consider how the Prospectus site was maintained; some sites had paid for a number of days of staff time in order to maintain the site.
- Existing sites had been funded from a range of sources, including 14-19 Strategy funding, LA and LSC general budgets, as well as Connexions and Aimhigher money.

Content/coverage

- A course search, detailed course information and provider details were

considered essential in relation to the content of the Prospectus.

- Partnerships differed in preference for developing their own databases of courses and providers, or utilising existing databases.
- Hyperlinks to provider sites were considered important. However, there was concern about provider sites being inconsistent and out-of-date, and thus the preferred option was to include as much detail on the Prospectus site as possible.

Design and presentation

- Users had been consulted about the design and accessibility during the development and *ongoing use* of the Prospectus sites.
- Stakeholders felt that the involvement of web designers (hopefully with experience of working in the educational sector and/ or designing websites for young people) was crucial to the effective design of the site.
- The branding of the site (for example, the name and logo) was considered important.

- It was common for sites to have been designed visually (on paper) prior to testing and then for 'test' sites to be accessible on line during consultation.

This was considered to be a more cost-effective approach than information being updated centrally by the project team.

Data collection and collaboration

- Project teams highlighted the importance of securing senior manager commitment within all provider institutions in order to ensure that accurate information was provided.
- The data collection process had been made more efficient by identifying one key contact for each provider to ease communication; it was recommended that the contact should be someone with sufficient seniority and time.
- Stakeholders suggested using a standard template of course information so information from providers was consistent.
- Interviewees suggested using a standardised list of course title, qualifications and accreditation numbers to avoid confusion.
- Online updating facilities had proved successful where used – providers were given unique passwords and identification numbers so that they could access their information only.

Marketing

- There was a perceived need for a marketing strategy to raise the awareness of the Prospectus site to users and those providing guidance to users.
- Branding was considered useful for marketing.
- Paper-based promotional materials (such as posters, leaflets, stickers, postcards and credit-card sized resources) were considered effective.
- Links to the 'Prospectus' sites had been featured on other relevant sites, including Connexions sites.