



Engaging the disengaged

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Introducing The NFER Research Programme

From Education to Employment

NFER has a worldwide reputation for excellence in research in education and children's services, built up over 65 years of working with a wide range of partners to produce independent evidence to inform change.

As a charity, the Foundation exists to improve the education and life chances of learners through the provision of independent evidence aimed at influencing policy, informing practice in the learning environment and directly impacting learners. To help achieve this, The NFER Research Programme was set up in 2011. Funded by the NFER and its partners, it is developing relationships with organisations and individuals who share our commitment to solving unanswered challenges young people face in education. The programme targets key areas of education, highlighting gaps in existing evidence and conducting new research to provide the evidence to fill the gaps. Current areas of focus are *From Education to Employment*, *Developing the Education Workforce* and *Innovation in Education*.

From Education to Employment examines approaches that could help the over one million young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) carve a route to meaningful and sustainable employment. It builds on NFER research carried out in 2009 which highlighted discrete groups within the NEET population likely to benefit from different forms of intervention.

The initial phase of the research was a suite of four reviews that identified existing evidence of strategies that appear to assist young people with the potential to disengage from education, employment or training to 'stay on track'.

We are now conducting two strands of research to provide new evidence where we have found there to be significant gaps. The first strand of work is testing out a number of possible 'indicators' that practitioners can use to help identify young people at risk of disengaging from education, before they have disengaged. The second strand of the research, of which this report is the first publication, is collecting evidence about what interventions really make an impact, and if it is possible, to identify different interventions that work with different 'at risk' groups.

Sarah Maughan
Research Director, NFER

Executive summary

Introduction

Over recent years, public awareness of the number of young people described as being not in education, employment or training (NEET) has grown. However, the NEET group is heterogeneous and young people falling into this group have a vast array of characteristics, needs, attributes and ambitions. Research by Spielhofer et al. (2009) presented a statistical segmentation of the NEET classification, and identified three broad subgroups: sustained; open to learning; and undecided NEETs. Over three-fifths of NEET young people fall into the 'open to learning' or 'undecided' categories yet, due to their lack of multiple complex barriers to engagement, these young people could be prevented from becoming NEET if targeted by the right intervention early on (Audit Commission, 2010). This would allow valuable post-16 resources to be targeted more specifically towards the much smaller sustained group of NEET young people.

However, despite this evidence, few studies identify interventions that are most effective with young people at risk of becoming open to learning or undecided NEET. NFER is attempting to address this gap through this project, and other related work in its From Education to Employment research activities.

This research project aims to build on the recent series of reviews undertaken through the From Education to Employment research programme¹ by examining the impact of interventions that are in place to support students aged 14-16 who are at risk of temporary disconnection from learning. The research is based on six case-study schools with different support programmes for Year 10 students. Schools were visited in the summer term of 2012. Interviews were undertaken with staff involved in the programme and focus groups were held with students. This is the first report in a longitudinal project that will track these students through to post-compulsory destinations.

Key Findings

Schools' support programmes included more than one approach to support students at risk of disengagement

The majority of the programmes integrated two or more approaches to preventing disengagement, such as employer involvement, alternative curricula and careers guidance. All programmes had an element of personalised careers information, advice and guidance.

Many of the programmes involved employers, but the level of employer engagement varied considerably. Approaches tended to have a relatively high staff to student ratio.

¹Please see: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-programme/from-education-to-employment.cfm>

Programmes were targeting those students showing characteristics associated with being at risk of temporary disconnection from learning

Schools had adopted a formalised approach to identifying students; however this often included a mix of 'hard' outcome measures and 'softer' behavioural or attitudinal measures. The majority of students selected for the extra support were either not achieving their potential academically or had mild behavioural issues, or a combination of these factors. This reflects the findings of previous research that young people at risk of temporary disconnection tend not to have complex needs and therefore may not be picked up by traditional Risk of NEET Indicators (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012).

Students generally had a positive view of school. However, they also recognised that they were not necessarily always well behaved. Students were positive about their future careers after completing their compulsory education or training and were particularly interested in progressing into work-based learning.

Both staff and students felt the support programmes were effective

Effective elements of programmes were perceived to be:

- relationships between learners and staff;
- one-to-one support;
- practical hands-on application;
- flexibility of the programme in meeting students' needs; and
- small class sizes with high adult to student ratio.

Students involved in work-based learning welcomed opportunities to prepare for the world of work and become job ready. Students involved in mentoring-related support valued the advice and guidance they had received about progression opportunities and the ability to keep track of their grades.

Students were showing signs of benefiting from the programmes in their first year of support

The support programmes resulted in a range of soft impacts including an improvement in students' attitudes towards learning; increased confidence, self esteem and motivation; raised aspirations and students feeling better informed about future career paths. Hard impacts for current students included improved attendance at school and increased achievement, including achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Staff reported that hard impacts for young people in previous years included progression into apprenticeships, employment or further study.

The evidence suggests that support programmes also impacted on staff in terms of knowledge and skills development and the opportunity to develop professionally.

Conclusions

Overall, in the first year of delivery with this cohort, staff and learners were positive about the support that had been provided and, in all cases, the support appeared to be having some level of the intended impact on the students.

The evidence shows that a range of different support programmes have been delivered to prevent students from disconnecting from education including mentoring schemes to improve engagement, extended work experience and alternative provision with a vocational focus. The content of the support varied, highlighting that a 'one size fits all' approach may not be appropriate for these students.

Despite this variation, it is apparent that some aspects of support work particularly well with these students including one-to-one support; personalised and flexible provision, practical or vocational elements and employer engagement.

The characteristics displayed by students involved in the support programmes are those associated with students who become temporarily NEET (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2009). Schools recognise that they cannot use just hard measures (such as attainment or attendance) to identify these particular young people as it is a combination of factors that puts them at risk of disengagement. Schools may, therefore, value a comprehensive list of indicators to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET, and the reasons why they are likely to disengage. Only by understanding the reasons why can the appropriate intervention be put into place (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012).

Next steps

Based on the evidence, the programmes of support do appear to be having a positive impact on learners in the short-term. In order to determine the longer-term success of these approaches, we will monitor their progress over the next two years as the young people move from compulsory education to post-compulsory destinations.

From September 2012, schools will have new responsibilities for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CE/IAG). This is likely to impact on the interventions that schools deliver. Therefore, in order to ascertain the impact, we will undertake a similar study starting in March 2013, with a focus on new initiatives, tracking students from 2013 to 2017.

Together with a parallel research study we are undertaking that is looking at producing a comprehensive list of NEET indicators which will help to identify not only the likelihood of becoming NEET but also the reasons why, the outputs of these projects will help schools to identify the type of young person at risk of NEET and the appropriate intervention for preventing this outcome.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Over recent years, public awareness of the number of young people described as being not in education, employment or training (NEET) has grown as the number of young people falling into this 'category' increases and as youth unemployment figures climb. Between April and June 2012, just over one in five young adults aged 16-24 (21.5 per cent) were unemployed (ONS, 2012). Similarly, recent statistics from the labour market survey indicated that 18.5 per cent of 19-24 year olds fall into this category (DfE, 2012). There is both public and political interest in identifying interventions that can help to tackle this persistent and growing societal problem.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has a track record in research exploring the characteristics of, and issues faced by, young people defined in official documentation as NEET. We know that the NEET umbrella masks a vast array of characteristics, needs, attributes and ambitions, and that young people who are placed together as NEET for administrative purposes are a heterogeneous group. Research by Spielhofer *et al.* (2009) presented a statistical segmentation of the NEET classification, and identified three broad subgroups within the overall category. These were described respectively as: sustained; open to learning; and undecided NEETs². Recent research conducted by NFER (Allen *et al.*, 2012) identified similar subgroups within the NEET cohort, confirming the heterogeneous nature of the NEET cohort.

Analysis of the Youth Cohort Study data indicated that, within the NEET group, over 60 per cent of young people fell into the open to learning or undecided categories (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2009). It could be hypothesised that young people in these groups will be easier to keep engaged than the sustained NEET group, which is made up of young people with multiple problems, such as teenage pregnancy, homelessness, family breakdown and youth offending. Indeed, the Audit Commission (2010) highlighted the need to focus preventative approaches on students who had the potential to fall into the sub-categories of 'open to learning' and 'undecided' NEETs post-16, in order that they remain engaged in education and training. This would allow valuable resources to be targeted more specifically towards the much smaller sustained group of NEET young people who are likely to need more high-cost tailored support. However, despite many existing research studies noting that NEET young people are not a homogeneous group and that strategies must be differentiated according to need, in practice, few of these studies identify interventions that are most effective with young people who show signs of falling into specific categories such as open

² The research found that more than two-fifths are generally positive about learning and are likely to participate in education and training in the short term (classified as 'open to learning'), a similar proportion face a lot of personal and structural barriers and are likely to remain NEET in the long term ('sustained'). A fifth were classified as 'undecided NEET', defined as not experiencing personal barriers to participating in education or training but dissatisfied with the available learning opportunities.

to learning and undecided. NFER is attempting to address this gap through this project, and other related work in its From Education to Employment research activities.

With this in mind, the From Education to Employment strand of NFER's programme of research³, has undertaken reviews to:

- identify the types of curriculum and qualification needs of students prone to disengagement (Bielby *et al.*, 2012). This evidence identified a range of approaches for consideration, including provision that is suited to the needs and learning styles of learners and offering a curriculum that is flexible and personalised;
- evaluate employer involvement in schools (Burge *et al.*, 2012). This highlighted the range of potential benefits of providing work experience or work related learning to students in terms of: raising their aspirations, increased confidence, skills development and improved engagement;
- establish current strategies shown to help to prevent young people becoming NEET (Nelson and O'Donnell, 2012);
- understand the role of careers professionals in re-engaging young people prone to disengagement (McCrone and Filmer-Sankey, 2012).

This research project aims to build on this work by examining the impact of interventions that are in place to support students aged 14-16 who are at risk of **temporary disconnection** from learning, i.e. those who do not face multiple and complex barriers to engagement in education, employment or training.

This project is a pilot of a larger study and will focus on interventions that are already running. The main research project will include new interventions that may have arisen from the new responsibility for careers education/information advice and guidance (CE/IAG) placed on schools in September 2012.

1.2 Aims of the study

This research aims to establish the types of interventions that have greatest impact in preventing students from disengaging from education and thus in turn, reduce the number of students vulnerable to becoming NEET. More specifically the objectives are to:

- Explore, over a period of three years, approaches used in schools to keep students engaged so they continue to participate in education, training or employment. These include careers- and employer-related programmes, as well as other approaches such as different qualifications and locations of study, and strategies to enhance self-esteem and mental resilience;
- Establish which interventions work by gathering teachers' and students' views and by analysing the destinations of students post-compulsory education over time.

³ For further information about the reports published as part of this strand, please see: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-programme/from-education-to-employment.cfm>

1.3 Methodology

In order to explore and better understand the interventions used in schools to engage students who might potentially disengage from learning, the following research design was used:

- Selection of a number of schools where an intervention is already in place and where there is evidence or a belief that this is having a positive impact on students;
- Case-study visits to these schools comprising interviews with a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) and with staff responsible for the implementation and/or delivery of the programme. In addition, up to two focus group discussions were held at each institution with students involved in the programmes to ascertain their views on the effectiveness of the interventions in terms of their levels of engagement with and/or knowledge of education, training and the world of work;
- A short two-page questionnaire administered to the students following the focus group discussion.

Six case studies were undertaken in the pilot to identify the types of interventions that are currently being used to target students at risk of temporary disconnection from learning. The emphasis of these case studies is to examine and track interventions that are already underway and are perceived to work effectively. The first visits to these case studies took place in the summer term of 2011/2012 when the students were in Year 10 and, in most cases, had been involved in the support programme for almost one academic year. Further visits to track these students and the support programmes as they progress will take place in early summer 2013 when the students are nearing the end of Year 11 and again in 2014 when the students are in Year 12.

Sample strategy

The sample of schools was identified through contacting NFER's Local Authority (LA) link officers in order to request contact details (name/email) of the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) contact in each Local Authority. An email was then sent to each contact requesting brief information about any secondary schools in their area which demonstrate good practice in current initiatives in any of the following areas:

- careers-related interventions;
- employer-related interventions;
- specific strategies targeting those at risk of disconnection (e.g. enhancing mental resilience);
- other curriculum based approaches, such as providing alternative locations of study.

RPA contacts were also asked to provide names and contact details of schools we could approach in order to seek their permission to be involved in the research. Where information provided was limited, some initial screening conversations were undertaken to explore further detail about the interventions taking place and to ensure that they met the following research criteria:

- the school identifies and targets students who are at risk of temporary disengagement (as opposed to those who have multiple barriers to learning);
- the intervention commences when students are in Year 9/10;
- the intervention is preferably of at least one academic year's duration.

1.4 Structure of the report

The report is set out under the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 (this chapter) provides the introduction.
- Chapter 2 discusses the nature of the support programmes being delivered to help engage students at risk of disconnecting from education.
- Chapter 3 explores the approaches that have been used to select or recruit students and the characteristics of students involved in the support programmes. Students' views on school and their future are also explored.
- Chapter 4 examines the perceptions of the support and its effectiveness.
- Chapter 5 discusses the perceived impact of the different programmes on the students.
- Chapter 6 details challenges faced and plans to improve or develop programmes in the future, including any support requirements.
- Chapter 7 summarises the key findings from the research.

2. Nature of the support programmes

Key Findings

- The majority of the programmes integrated two or more approaches to preventing disengagement, such as employer involvement, an alternative curriculum and careers guidance.
- There was variation across programmes in the level of employer involvement and access to vocational qualifications.
- Curriculum-based approaches tended to have a relatively high staff to student ratio.

This chapter gives an overview of the six interventions evaluated as part of the study. It describes the various programmes' aims and their implementation, including how, where and by whom they are delivered. More details of the individual case studies are given in the Appendix.

2.1 Aims of the programmes

The principal aim of the programmes was to keep students at risk of disengaging engaged, or to re-engage students who had disengaged, in education or training and thereby prevent them becoming NEET. Related aims and objectives included:

- practising inclusive education and providing each student with a suitable pathway;
- building resilience and readiness for progression into FE or further work-based training;
- providing a qualification that is recognised by FE colleges;
- boosting GCSE A*-C achievement;
- minimising the impact of students' poor behaviour on others.

This demonstrates that while preventing students becoming NEET was a key aim for schools, most were also considering wider aims such as increasing attainment or improving chances of successful progression after school as well as considering the needs of the wider school community.

2.2 Programme categories

The programmes offered by the schools tended to integrate activities across the different intervention categories mentioned in Chapter 1.3. For example, the curriculum-based approaches all had an element of employer involvement, for instance through extended work placements. One of the mentoring programmes was both a specific strategy targeting vulnerable students' self-esteem and an employer-related programme, as it exclusively used business contacts as mentors. In some cases, alternative curricula included courses which targeted personal characteristics that hindered engagement with formal education, such as lack of resilience, self confidence or social skills.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) was a feature of all the programmes, in the sense that the programmes encouraged transition to employment. IAG was delivered to students through different combinations of: discussions with experienced teaching staff, employers and/or careers coordinators; work experience; and visits to FE colleges. Previous research has indicated that these approaches, among others, can be successful in enabling students to make informed decisions about their futures, particularly when schools and outside agencies (such as employers) are collaborating effectively to provide CE/IAG (McCrone and Filmer-Sankey, 2012). The case-study schools also offered students a personalised approach at this key transition point, which is also characteristic of good CE/IAG (*ibid.*).

In most cases students were identified in Year 9 (or earlier) as needing additional support and/or an alternative programme of study, and guided towards these options. It is important to note this early identification of need is an important feature of preventative approaches to supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET, and that interventions should begin as soon as signs of difficulty emerge (Nelson and O'Donnell, 2012).

The following sections outline the programmes' features, focusing firstly on two mentoring programmes and secondly on the various curriculum-based approaches.

2.3 Mentoring targeting those at risk of disengagement

Two case-study schools had adapted or introduced mentoring schemes in order to improve engagement with education among students whose attendance, effort or attitude to school had begun to cause concern.

In one case-study school, mentoring was delivered by form tutors to three 'winnable' students in each of their forms in each term. Key features included:

- students had three 20-minute mentoring sessions per term. Approximately 30 students in Year 10 received mentoring over the 2011-12 academic year
- students' attendance at the mentoring session was mandatory
- form tutors decided the topics of discussion for each session, which were related to the students' 'commitment to learning' (attendance and effort) in Year 10 and to their attainment in Year 11

- mentors discussed students' performance data with the mentee and agreed action points related to specific areas such as behaviour or arriving at lessons prepared to learn
- mentors also discussed plans for post-16 learning and whether they were on target to achieve the grades they needed to realise their plans.

The second school took a different approach to mentoring. In this school mentors were not school employees, but were employees of local businesses who were individually paired with Year 10 students. The school identified students who had a negative attitude to education and invited them to voluntarily join the scheme. Furthermore, topics for discussion (such as study skills and career plans) were mutually agreed with the student and their mentor. Mentors met with the student for an hour per fortnight. In the pilot year of this scheme, nine students were mentored.

The schools' different approaches reflect the different aims of the programmes. For example, the first school aimed to improve the proportion of students achieving five A*-C GCSE grades while the second school aimed to provide positive encouragement and career guidance in order to boost students' self-esteem and raise their aspirations.

Both of these approaches, while different, reflect the best practice identified by Nelson and O'Donnell (2012) that preventative approaches should include one-to-one support for students tailored to their needs.

2.4 Curriculum-based approaches

Four case-study schools had developed alternative curriculum provision, most often in the form of a **substantial vocational offer with employer involvement**. In two schools, this provision was specifically for students of low academic ability (Foundation Level / Level 1 learners) who, it was felt, could not manage a full GCSE programme. The provision was intended to give students access to an appropriate programme of study to improve their chances of future employment. Students worked towards Functional Skills in literacy and numeracy and learned vocational skills. Students also had the opportunity to improve their personal and employability skills through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons and sessions where, for example, they practised writing applications and doing interviews.

In another two schools, vocational courses were made available to students who did not respond well to a full-time academic programme. The programmes additionally aimed to build resilience and readiness for progression into FE or further work-based training. These schools focused on progression to try and prevent students from disengaging and thereby becoming NEET.

Below is a summary of the common elements of the adapted curriculum approaches and how they were staffed.

The curriculum-based approaches offered different levels of **engagement with employers**, ranging from students spending three days per week learning their choice of vocational skill in the workplace, to students spending one day a week on work experience placements

assisting in local primary schools. The importance of employer involvement was highlighted in recent research which found that this contact can raise students' motivation to learn and achieve (Burge *et al.*, 2012). In light of this, it is interesting to note the variation in the amount of contact time students had with employers in these case-study examples.

Two of the four schools offering alternative curricula provision had arranged for students to **take vocational qualifications at local FE colleges** or other training providers. Courses included, for example, construction, media or beauty therapy. At one school, while FE college-based provision was viewed as prohibitively expensive, Year 11 students on a Personal and Social Development (PSD) course went on weekly supported visits to familiarise themselves with the college environment. The value of alternative locations of study to those at risk of disengagement was highlighted in a recent review of the literature on students' curriculum needs (Bielby *et al.*, 2012). Students may benefit from an alternative learning environment which offers opportunities to mix with more mature students and access specialist facilities.

In the schools offering alternative curricula provision, arrangements varied as to whether students joined mainstream lessons for some subjects, or were taught separately on a full-time basis. Separate tuition was sometimes favoured due to students' poor behaviour. Examples of students remaining in mainstream classes included students taking a vocational course but also taking up to eight GCSEs in mainstream classes. A second school offered the Personal and Social Development (PSD) course to small groups of students in place of one of their GCSE options. At the other end of the spectrum, one school provided a personalised programme of foundation level study for small groups of students, covering core subjects, basic and work-related skills, and PSHE, and therefore students were not in mainstream classes at all. The schools' approaches reflect their recognition of the importance of flexible, personalised approaches to combining academic and vocational qualifications and opportunities for personal development in preventing disengagement from learning. These factors are all indicative of good practice in preventative approaches as highlighted in a recent review (Nelson and O'Donnell, 2012).

Alternative curricula programmes were delivered and supported by a variety of teaching and non-teaching staff. In three of the four schools, the programmes had a much **higher staff to student ratio** than for students in mainstream education. This included core subject teachers, teaching and learning support assistants and careers advisors / work placement coordinators.

3 About the students

Key Findings

- Formalised systems for identifying students for support programmes generally included a mix of hard student outcomes data and more informal discussions with teachers.
- The majority of students selected for the extra support were either not achieving their potential academically or had low level behavioural issues, or a combination of these factors.
- Students generally had a positive view of school. However, they also recognised that they were not necessarily always well behaved.
- Students were also generally positive about their future careers after completing their compulsory education or training and were particularly interested in progressing into work-based learning.

This chapter explores the characteristics of the students as well as the students' views on school and their futures.

3.2 The selection of students

All of the six case-study schools had formalised systems for selecting students. This generally included a mix of approaches including using hard measures of attainment such as Average Points Scores (APS), qualitative measures such as attitudinal data collected on students and discussions with staff members, most commonly the students' form tutors. This mixed approach to identifying students at risk of temporary disengagement was consistent with earlier research (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012) which suggests that in order to identify these students, schools should consider combining harder measurable indicators with students' characteristics such as family circumstances and attitudes to school.

This mixed approach reflects the fact that the students being targeted were not necessarily the students facing multiple complex barriers to engagement that the school viewed as likely to become 'sustained NEETs', instead they were more likely to be students at risk of becoming temporarily NEET. As discussed in previous research, students at risk of temporary disconnection may not necessarily be identified through 'hard' measures that are used to identify the more sustained NEETs through, for example, Risk of NEET Indicators (RONIs) (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012) and as such a mixed and more personalised approach to identification may be appropriate.

3.2 The characteristics of the students

As noted above, the majority of students selected for the extra support did not have complex multiple barriers to engagement. Instead the majority either had low levels of achievement or perhaps were lacking commitment or had mild behavioural issues; or a combination of these

factors. While different case-study schools used different criteria for selection, there does appear to be a pattern in terms of the types of students involved. This is described below.

Two schools offering alternative curriculum programmes selected students based on low academic performance. The students involved did not necessarily have any behavioural or attendance issues. In another school, which was running an employer engagement support programme, students were chosen based on either low attainment or behavioural issues but not both. This is explained by the school:

It [selection for the programme] needs to be students with good attendance, who are under-achieving and have low self-esteem, or high achievers who are disengaging. The school identifies the students who would be likely to benefit and they take part voluntarily.

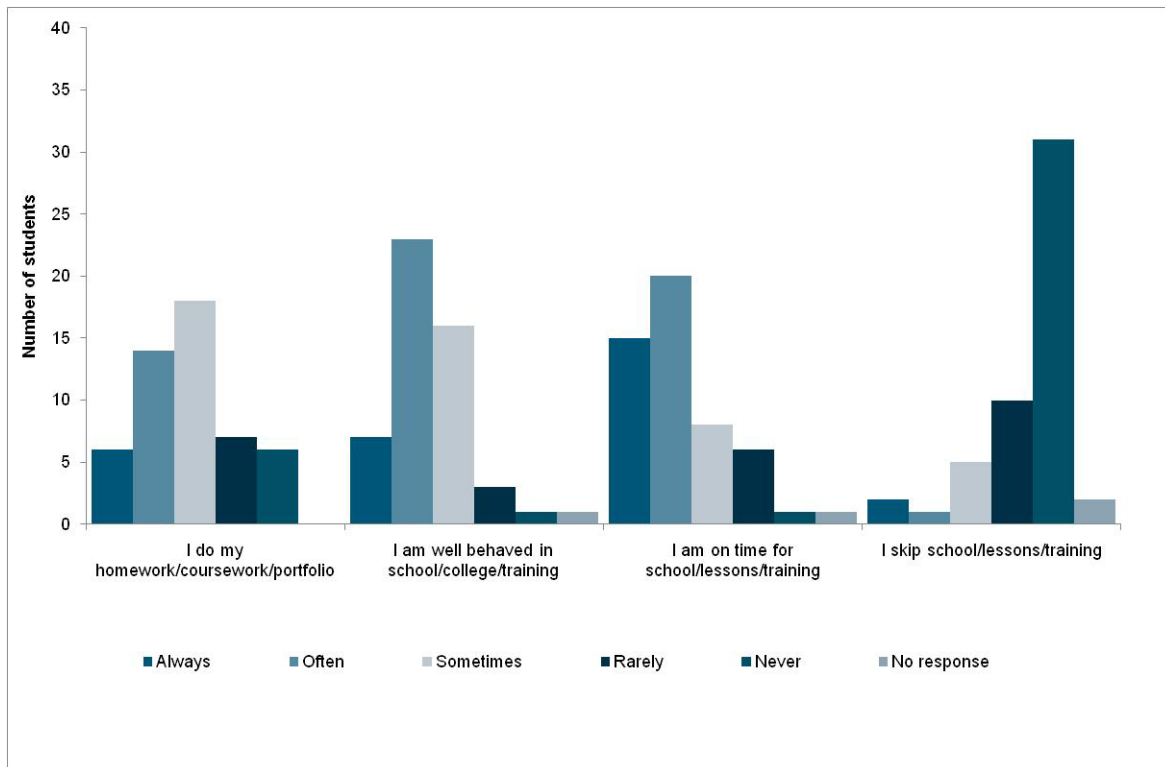
In three case-study schools the focus was on students with lower attainment and mild behavioural issues. Generally these were not the most underperforming students nor the ones with significant behavioural issues, as one staff member commented: *'They're not the best in class but they're not the acute attendance cases'*. Similarly, another school also targeted students with a combination of factors:

It tends to be students with low level behaviour problems, at the lower end academically, and some may have had issues out of school. Some don't have parental support and some have been temporarily excluded.

Generally it appears that students with a combination of mild behavioural issues and lower achievement are being targeted by schools for these support programmes. Previous research into the heterogeneity of the NEET group identified these characteristics as being associated with those students who are more likely to be temporarily NEET (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2009).

Students' perceptions of their own behaviour at school reflected the findings above. Figure 3.1 shows that students thought that they were not necessarily always well behaved at school, with 23 stating that they often behaved well and 16 said that they sometimes behaved well.

Figure 3.1 Students' perceptions of their behaviour



Base: 51 students

The figure also indicates that these students generally felt that they did not always do their homework but that they did not skip school to any great extent. This reflects the targeting work of the schools, in that these students are not those with acute barriers to engagement but instead those with some low level behavioural issues. This suggests these schools were generally targeting students who could potentially fall into the 'open to learning' or 'undecided' NEET groups, if they did not intervene.

The section below explores students' views of school.

3.3 Students' views of school

Students were generally positive about school. Over half (28 of 51) agreed that most of the time they enjoyed coming to school. In contrast 12 students disagreed with this statement indicating they did not have a positive view of school.

From the focus groups it is clear that the students particularly enjoyed the social aspect of school such as meeting friends, as they were almost unanimous that this was a positive aspect of coming to school. Some students mentioned particular classes or courses that they enjoyed. These courses were generally more vocational in nature, such as catering, or practical in nature, such as resistant materials or physical education. A small number of students across all groups explained that there were particular teachers that they liked.

When asked what students did not like about school, responses often related to some lessons being '*boring*'. Students felt that their lessons had recently become more serious and were focused on examinations, reflecting their move into Year 10 and Key Stage 4. Lessons were therefore less enjoyable. One student commented: '*Most of the time this year, [we've] been expecting exams or revision lessons, [I am] not really learning anything*'. Other things students did not enjoy about school included certain teachers, a lack of sports facilities and having to wake up early to get to school.

3.4 Students' views on their future

Overall students appeared to be positive about their futures and about the role of their education in helping them to plan for this. Over half of the students (28 of 51) believed that what they were learning was important for their future, while nearly half (21 of 51) felt that they had enough information to plan their future.

Looking towards their future, the majority of students (37 of 51) were planning to carry on with education or training. A similar proportion (35 of 51) said that they would prefer to be at school than unemployed.

At the point of these interviews when students were in Year 10, the largest proportion (19 of the 51 survey respondents) were planning to move into work-based learning when they completed Year 11. A further 16 students were planning to stay in full-time education. From the focus groups it was clear that most students were planning to move into vocational training such as apprenticeships. Students were particularly keen on apprenticeships in the building, hairdressing or motor vehicle industries. A notable number of students were concerned that their grades may stop them getting onto their preferred course.

Students were also generally positive about their future careers after completing their compulsory education or training. Over half (29 of 51) agreed that they felt confident they could get to where they want to be in life. The majority of students involved in the focus groups had an idea of what they wanted to do for a career. The types of jobs students were interested in reflected the apprenticeship or work-based learning areas they wanted to go into, such as mechanics or the construction industry.

It is worth noting that several students were also planning on moving into careers that either their parents were currently involved with or their parents were encouraging them to do. For example, one student commented '[I would like to be a] *chef because my mum's a chef...yeah I'm doing catering*'. However the students did not always view this as the right choice for them, as noted by one student who commented: '*My parents want me to do something medical but I don't know, because I'm not very good at science*'. This highlights the importance of careers guidance, not only for students but also for their parents.

4. Perceived effectiveness of the support programmes

Key findings

- Support programmes were perceived to be effective by staff and students.
- Aspects of support programmes considered effective included relationships between learners and staff; one-to-one support; practical hands-on application; flexibility of the programme in meeting needs of the students and small class size.
- Students involved in work-based learning welcomed opportunities to prepare for the world of work and become job ready.
- Students who had support from mentors valued the advice and guidance they received about progression opportunities and the ability to keep track of their grades.

This chapter examines staff and students' perceptions of the support programme. It explores the effectiveness of the support programmes, including aspects that have worked particularly well.

4.1 Institution perceptions

Staff felt that participating students across the different support programmes enjoyed and responded well to the support. For example, one Learning Support Assistant observed that students interacted more confidently in their support sessions compared with other lessons where stronger, more confident personalities often dominated.

Views across the wider school population were generally considered to be positive. Interviewees reported that teaching staff who were not directly involved in the programme were supportive of the work taking place. For example, one tutor observed: *'many teachers have acknowledged that not all kids are academically minded and [academic] qualifications aren't the be-all'*. The tutor further reflected on their own experience of delivering provision, noting that they enjoyed teaching and building relationships with the students receiving the support.

In two case-study areas, staff were more reticent in their response, reporting a lack of support for the alternative curricula from some mainstream class teachers or reluctance among staff during the first year of the programme. For example, one senior leader remarked: *'in the first year, [the students] were nicknamed "the naughty forty". We had to do a lot of work to sell [the intervention] to staff'*. Staff perceptions have since changed because they are able to see the impact that it has had and the progress made.

In two case-study schools, where parent perceptions were discussed, the general view was that they were positive and appreciated that their child was receiving additional support.

The wider student population was not always aware of the additional support programmes. For example, in two case-study schools, interviewees reported a general lack of awareness among those students not engaged with the support. However, where students were aware, their view was not necessarily positive. For example, in one instance, it was suggested that there was some 'stigma' attached to involvement in the programme, with some students making negative comments towards those leaving the classroom to attend sessions. Further to this, the more academic students in one institution were perceived to lack interest in the intervention but were grateful that their disruptive peers did not attend their lessons. Others however, were reported to have wanted to be involved and were upset that they were not offered the opportunity to be involved in alternative provision.

Staff identified a range of different aspects of the intervention that had worked particularly well. The main areas that staff believed were the most effective were:

- **the relationships** developed between the learners and staff, described by one interviewee as *'hugely important'*. One employer, for example, spoke about the passion that he and a few of his staff have to educate the students and their ability to relate to some of them in the workplace. As noted in Bielby *et al.* (2012) having a good relationship with just one adult can impact on student engagement with learning and how 'at risk' they are at school
- **one-to-one support**. In one institution, this approach was supported by providing 'reward trips' and assemblies where prizes were given to students showing outstanding/good commitment to learning as well as high attendance rates (96 per cent or more)
- **practical hands-on application**. For example, one interviewee commented: *'it's completely different from everything else [learners] do, [it's] very practical'*
- the **flexibility of the programme** in meeting the needs of the students and allowing extra elements to be added as appropriate; a finding which is supported by research (Bielby *et al.*, 2012) which highlights the importance of flexibility in terms of content and delivery, ensuring that it is relevant to the young person
- the **small size of the support group/class** was perceived to match the learning style of the students engaged in the support programmes.

4.2 Student perceptions

Learners involved in work-based programmes across two institutions reported that they found the practical elements of the course most useful. Comments related to the opportunity to prepare them for the world of work and become 'job ready'. Some learners perceived themselves to be more cooperative and punctual in the workplace than in the school environment and that they *'worked hard all day'*.

Previous research evidence highlights the importance of employer involvement in providing work-related learning and work experience in terms of helping to raise students' aspirations, develop their skills and increase confidence (Burge *et al.*, 2012). In this research, there was some indication to suggest that the learners also welcomed the opportunity to learn in a different environment, in smaller groups and to be able to meet new people.

Students who had support from mentors felt the most useful aspects were the advice and guidance they had received about progression opportunities, the opportunity to keep track of their grades and discuss any issues that had arisen, and the relationships they had developed with the staff. One student remarked: 'my mentoring person, she's really good [because] she's got a son in the same year as us and she understands as well and puts her points of view across as a mum not as a teacher'. The importance of positive and supportive relationships with teachers and other mentors was also highlighted in previous research (Bielby et al., 2012).

Overall, the support programmes were perceived to be effective by staff and students. This finding will be further scrutinised in the later stages of this research.

5. Impact of the support programmes

Key findings

- The support programmes resulted in a range of soft impacts including an improvement in students' attitudes towards learning; increased confidence, self esteem and motivation; raised aspirations and students feeling better informed about future career paths.
- Hard impacts for current students included improved attendance at school and increased achievement including literacy and numeracy.
- Hard impacts on students from previous years included increased progression into apprenticeships or further study.
- The support programmes impacted on staff in terms of knowledge, skills, and professional development .

This chapter identifies the ways in which schools are monitoring the impact of their support programme. It also highlights the impact of the support programmes on the students and the school to date.

5.1 Monitoring the impact of the support programme

Institutions generally appeared to be undertaking some level of monitoring to explore the impact of the intervention on participants, as illustrated below:

- analysis of statistics and data such as Fisher Family Trust and academic data tracking;
- reviewing feedback forms and 'student voice' surveys;
- skills tests, including baseline and follow-up to track progress;
- verbal feedback, for example, weekly meetings between heads of house and form tutors to share feedback and highlight any concerns or verbal reports from employers.

In a few cases, interviewees indicated that tracking should be more formalised, consistent and shared more widely among other staff.

The majority of schools at this stage appeared not to have designed or implemented a system to assess the impact of the interventions *longer term*. However, in one case-study school with an established programme, impact was being monitored through GCSE achievement. At this school, in 2011, 58 per cent of students achieved GCSE grades A* to C grade, including English and maths. This compares with 35 per cent in 2008.

5.2 Institution perspective

Despite current learners being in their first year of receiving support, staff across all case-study schools were able to identify at least early signs of impact on this cohort. There was some evidence across the case-study schools that the support programmes had resulted in 'hard' impact. These included:

- increased attendance at school
- increases in literacy and numeracy achievement
- an increase in the number of invitations to attend a reward trip among those students achieving outstanding, good or satisfactory grades in commitment to learning (as discussed in section 4.2).

For more established programmes, staff reported that in previous years, students had made successful progression into apprenticeships, employment or further study.

In two case-study areas, there was the perception among staff that students' **attitudes towards learning** in school or the workplace had improved. One interviewee spoke about the increased engagement of learners stimulated through employer involvement or one-to-one support, which in turn, had a positive impact on their attitude to work. Learners were felt to understand better the relevance of literacy and numeracy when applied to the workplace. In this instance, the employer involved in the programme also felt that he benefited from students' involvement in terms of his growing workforce. Learners who continued to demonstrate a commitment in the workplace were going to be offered an apprenticeship when they reached the age of 16. Here again, this highlights the potential impact that employer involvement can have (as discussed by Bielby *et al.*, 2012; Burge *et al.*, 2012).

Examples of other reported 'soft' impacts included increased confidence, self-esteem, motivation, raised aspirations and students feeling better informed about future career paths. The following comment from a senior leader provides an illustration of the range of different ways in which the support programmes had impacted on the students:

Behaviour in school is generally better, aspirations are raised, confidence increased and it helps them focus on why they need to get on in school. It gives some hope in difficult times.

The evidence also indicates that the support programmes have had an impact on staff in terms of knowledge, skills and professional development.

In some cases, evidence of the intervention working was identified through informal feedback from colleagues and observed changes in behaviour, as one mentor illustrated: *'there's not any real hard evidence, but you do see a difference in them [the learners], they do respect you more for talking to them'*.

5.3 Learner perspective

On the whole, students were largely positive about the support they had received at school. For example, the survey revealed that around three-quarters of respondents (37 students) felt that the support helped them to feel *more confident* about what they can do. Similarly, over three-fifths were in agreement that the support had helped them consider their options (32 students) or feel more positive about learning (31 students).

Students involved in the focus group discussions identified a range of benefits as a result of participating in the support programmes. This included the opportunity to learn in a different environment or undertake more practical work (among those involved in alternative and work based provision). This supports earlier research conducted by Bielby *et al.* (2012) which found that students value the opportunity to learn in FE colleges or the workplace. Students also valued the number of GCSE equivalences that they gained by undertaking an alternative course and the opportunity to consider their future options. For example, one young person commented: *'it's helped me to work out what I can do in the future about art courses'*.

When asked to reflect back to before they started the support programme, perceptions among some learners indicated that they felt they *had* changed. Comments related to perceived improvements in soft skills development, such as increased confidence and improved social skills. There was also some indication to suggest that learners felt they had become more mature, with comments such as feeling 'more adult-like' and 'grown up a bit' being made.

6. Challenges and future developments

Key Findings

- The case-study schools all wanted to maintain their programmes. Some would ideally like to expand the variety and capacity of their vocational offer.
- Challenges in implementing and delivering programmes included communication in partnership working; matching students to courses; and monitoring students' behaviour and progress.
- The main challenges in maintaining and expanding programmes were:
 1. funding for external provision, teaching staff and materials
 2. pressures on staff time in supporting students
 3. external pressure to steer students towards GCSEs rather than vocational subjects, to boost league table performance.

This section describes the challenges faced by providers and students in relation to the support programmes. It also briefly outlines providers' intentions for their programmes over the next few years, and challenges they face or anticipate in sustaining or developing their programmes.

6.1 Challenges experienced

Partnership working was considered a challenge by a few institutions. For example, one school had planned to work in partnership to deliver the programme but reluctance within the partner school to complete the funding paperwork meant that this did not happen. In another instance, communication between partners was perceived as a challenge, as illustrated by the following comment – *'sometimes a student is not in school and the message doesn't get through'*.

Across a few case-study schools, staff spoke about the challenges associated with ensuring that the right students were placed on the right courses or work placements. Other staff-related challenges included a lack of certainty regarding moderation of students' non-academic work and the extent to which this work was meeting requirements, a lack of time to track students effectively, changing timetables, and difficulties around engaging the 'hard to reach' students and employers.

The evidence indicated that resources were a particular challenge for one institution; this related to the cost of the alternative curriculum and the ability to source equipment and materials. However, a number of students met the European Social Fund (ESF) criteria and therefore became eligible for funding which helped to overcome this challenge to some extent.

Staff sometimes faced challenges when working with the students, related to their behaviour, which in one instance was felt to create a chaotic environment, or their refusal to undertake tasks because they experienced barriers along the way.

Students themselves had encountered a number of challenges. For example, where learners had the opportunity to learn outside of their institution, students highlighted travel issues such as being picked up late, length of the journey and the extension to the normal school day as being particularly challenging. Examples of other comments expressed by learners included:

- concerns about keeping up-to-date with school work alongside their work placement
- the amount of written work required
- lack of action taken by staff following their mentoring session, as illustrated by the following comment: *'...you tell them stuff - what's wrong - but they don't really do anything about it afterwards...'*

6.2 Future plans and challenges in sustaining delivery

All schools were planning to continue to run the support programmes in the future. However, four of the six schools identified some challenges in the sustained delivery of their programmes. Most often the potential effect of these challenges was to limit the vocational offer and number of students who could benefit, rather than posing a threat to their continuation in any form.

The two key challenges faced by schools in delivering their support programmes were: funding for a higher than average staff-to-pupil ratio and/or external provision; and pressures to improve schools' performance in the league tables. These are discussed in more detail below.

Funding will continue to be a limiting factor to schools' vocational offer and capacity to teach foundation level learners in small groups. For example, one school was struggling to fund sufficient core subject teachers for non-mainstream students. At another school, there was increasing demand from students for the vocational route and hence increasing pressure on funding.

Senior leaders at three schools referred to the ongoing issue of **demonstrating educational value** in reference to the continued pressure to improve the school's league table performance (i.e. attainment of five A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent, including English and maths, and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate), and the challenge this posed to tailored foundation learning provision. This is related to the 'downgrading' of many vocational qualifications in the Wolf report and the consequent reduction in the variety and number of vocational courses offered by schools and colleges (Wolf, 2011). Schools may decide to switch their focus for low ability students away from tailored courses such as Step Up and back to GCSEs, particularly in English and maths, despite their predictions that these students would only be capable of achieving D-G grades.

For the school offering learning mentoring by form tutors, the dedicated time slot for tutors to mentor students could not be guaranteed indefinitely due to **pressures on staff time**.

6.3 Suggested improvements to the programmes

The school staff members interviewed were asked if they would like to make any improvements to their programmes. If funding was not a constraint, staff would like to make the following improvements:

- developing course content to be more engaging and flexible; for instance to be able to do more activities off-site but to still have those recognised by qualifications awarding bodies;
- expanding the range of college courses students could access;
- having access to better facilities and opportunities, including for example ICT facilities, workshops, recreational space, going on more trips out;
- more enterprise-type programmes;
- more staff capacity, for small group teaching and to supervise and support students attending off-timetable provision.

The research design adopted in this study enables us to monitor the development of the various programmes and note the effect of any changes in provision on students' response and outcomes.

7 Conclusions and next steps

While students were only in the first year of receiving support, the early indications are that re-engagement programmes are having a positive impact on their behaviour, engagement, motivation and aspirations.

The evidence shows that a range of different support programmes have been delivered to prevent students from disconnecting from education, including mentoring schemes to improve engagement and alternative provision with a vocational focus. The content of the support is varied, highlighting that schools believe a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate for these students. In subsequent years of the project it should be possible to refine our understanding of the most appropriate intervention for young people demonstrating different reasons for disengaging from learning.

Regardless of the type of intervention, even at this early point in delivery, there do appear to be some aspects of support that are particularly effective with these students. These are:

- providing one-to-one support;
- offering personalised, flexible provision;
- developing strong relationships between students and staff;
- ensuring there is flexibility in the programme to meet individual needs.

These factors have been highlighted as good practice in our recent review of approaches to supporting young people not in education, employment or training (Nelson and O'Donnell, 2012). However, the review found little evidence of good practice with reference to young people at risk of *temporary* disengagement from learning and who do not face multiple and complex barriers.

Students particularly valued the practical or vocational elements of their courses because it helps them prepare for the world of work. Similarly, through working with employers, students are provided with a link between theory and the world of work. These findings further highlight the importance of employer involvement, identified in our recent review on employer involvement in schools (Burge *et al.*, 2012).

The characteristics displayed by students involved in the support programmes suggested that they are those associated with students who become temporarily NEET rather than the characteristics of the sustained NEET group (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2009). Schools recognise that they cannot use hard measures alone (such as attainment or attendance) to identify these particular young people as it is a combination of factors that puts them at risk. Currently, the evidence suggests that schools are not able to use identifying tools to distinguish between the different types of NEET sub-groups (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone, 2012). As suggested in this previous research, schools would value a comprehensive list of indicators to identify

young people at risk of becoming NEET who do not face multiple barriers, and the reasons why they are at risk of disengaging.

Challenges to the delivery of the support programmes included limited funding to sustain the provision and pressures to improve league table performance (and therefore to move away from some vocational qualifications). In light of the Wolf Review (2011), which called for the devaluation of certain non-academic courses, and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, our research will explore the sustainability of these alternative provision approaches over the longer term.

Overall, in the first year of delivery, staff and learners were positive about the support they had received and, in all cases, the support appeared to be having some level of positive impact on the students.

Next steps

Based on the evidence, the programmes of support do appear to be having a positive impact on learners in the short-term. In order to determine the success of these approaches in preventing these young people from becoming NEET, we will monitor their progress over the next few years as they move from compulsory education to post-compulsory destinations. From spring 2013, this pilot study will be built on with a larger group of case-study schools over the next few years.

From September 2012, schools have new responsibilities for CE/IAG. This is likely to impact on the interventions that schools deliver. Therefore, in order to ascertain the impact, we will undertake a similar study, including new initiatives, tracking students from 2013 to 2017.

This longitudinal study complements our parallel research study looking at producing a comprehensive list of NEET indicators. Taken together, the outputs from these two studies will help schools to identify the type of young person at risk of becoming NEET, the reasons why they are at risk, and the appropriate intervention for preventing this outcome.

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Appendix: Case-study summaries

Case-study school 1

School location: South West

School type: State-funded, boys 11-16

School context: The school intake is from a generally settled community with a low percentage of FSM eligible pupils and ESL pupils. Although most leavers go on to FE, the senior leader described local provision as 'inadequate' in terms of facilities and capacity (options are a grammar school 6th form, academy 6th form, and FE college). Many school leavers will travel 35 miles by bus to another FE college as it is better regarded. Jobs for school leavers are often in retail.

Programme category: Learning mentoring

Year groups involved in support programme: Years 7-11

Year established: 2010, in its current form

Description of programme: Students' performance data is reviewed at the start of each term and each form tutor selects three students who are perceived to be 'winnable' for up to three 20-minute mentoring sessions over the course of the term. Mentoring in Years 7-10 focuses on 'commitment to learning' (grades for attendance and effort), while in year 11 it focuses on attainment, targeting students who are not on course for 5 A*-C grades. At the sessions, students' performance data is discussed with them and action points are agreed. Tutors may select different students the following term, but may also continue with one or more of the same students, working with on average eight Year 10 students each over the course of a year. They are likely to continue to monitor previous mentees informally to ensure changed behaviour is sustained: it is a small school and tutors are likely to see individuals regularly in their own subject lessons as well as in form time. Individual practice among tutors varies, but they may share targets with other teaching staff, particularly when it relates to concerns about a specific subject, and are likely to seek others' views of a student's progress in advance of subsequent mentoring sessions: *'you're getting the tutors taking the holistic view, looking at all the grades along with the head of House, and the departments looking at it from another angle...so hopefully it's a fairly tight net that boys cannot get through...because we're looking at the data so regularly.'* [School senior leader].

Programme aims: The mentoring aims to improve commitment to learning (attendance and effort) among a minority of less well engaged students, provide a boost to students on a C-D grade borderline, and increase the proportion of students achieving five A*-C grades. As the school no longer has access to a Connexions personal adviser to support its students, mentoring is viewed as even more important provision. Focusing on a small number of students, rather than offering regular one to ones for all students, means it is more manageable for form tutors. The rationale was described as *'the boy who's on track with his grades and has 100% attendance doesn't need a fortnightly chat; the boy who's struggling with attendance or engagement needs more than a fortnightly chat'* [School senior leader].

Case-study school 2

School location: South East

School type: Specialist Status school, academy converters, mixed 11-18

School context: The school is in an affluent area with plenty of post-16 opportunities locally including an FE college, an agricultural college and university. The school has low proportions of FSM and EAL students. There are many local employers and it is within commuting distance of London. Leavers do face competition for jobs from the numerous other secondary schools in the area, but the NEET rate is low.

Programme category: Employer mentoring

Year groups involved in support programme: Year 10 (current mentees will continue to be mentored in Year 11)

Year established: March 2012

Description of programme: This is one of a consortium of schools in the local area which has recently engaged with a charitable organisation which brokers business mentoring. The scheme is funded by the 11-19 Partnership. Students who have been identified by the school as disengaged/de-motivated, with some analysis of the Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS) product, have been targeted for the support. As of March 2012, nine Year 10 students at the school had been matched to volunteer mentors by the broker using student and mentor questionnaire information to find a 'best match'. They arrange informal one hour meetings every two weeks to discuss targets set relating to their studies, work skills, and the future. The head of Year 10 acts as a point of liaison with the broker and is informed of meeting arrangements.

Programme aims: The programme aims to encourage better engagement with education by providing positive role models, particularly to those who are starting to disengage or need a boost to their self confidence.

Case-study school 3

School location: North West

School type: State-funded, mixed 11-18

School context: The NEET rate is low locally, for school leavers it is 5%. Few students have EAL. However, 28% of students get FSM and a senior leader described a culture among some families of low aspirations and worklessness.

Year groups involved in support programme: Year 10 and 11

Year established: developed over several years

Description of programme: Students who are identified in KS3 as not coping with mainstream school for five days a week are offered alternative off-site provision at college or with an employer to do vocational qualifications for one or two days a week. In 2011-12, thirteen Year 10 students were enrolled on college based courses and three on work-based courses (for instance with local plumbers and electricians). These students get additional one to one support from the school's Curriculum Support Manager.

Programme aims: The vocational offer aims to ensure that all students can follow a programme that suits their abilities, and provides them with an appropriate level of support to engage them in learning. *'The aim is to find the best pathway for each child... we need to engage them in learning and ensure they are not excluded... some of the more vulnerable students are best suited to a work-based programme with a small trader, where they get wrap-around care'* [School senior leader].

Case-study school 4

School location: North West

School type: State-funded, mixed 11-16

School context: The school is in a socially very deprived area and a high proportion of students (40%) have SEN. It is also very multicultural, with students speaking a total of 26 languages at home. There is some conflict between different ethnic groups and some students appear unused to formal education. The NEET rate of leavers has reduced from 12% seven years ago to 2% currently, but unemployment among the general population in the area is high. Students have a choice of three colleges locally; one offers mainly A-levels while the other two offer primarily vocational courses.

Year groups involved in support programme: Year 10 in the 2011-12 pilot year; will include Year 10 and 11 in future years

Year established: 2011

Description of programme: The school offers a 'vocational and community baccalaureate' alternative to the more academic qualifications at KS4. This is a full-time programme for foundation level/level 1 learners who are: at risk of becoming NEET; in need of support to build capability and resilience in literacy, numeracy, PSHE and work-related skills (covered in Step Up modules); and, often, need to develop their self-esteem and social skills. In Step Up, students discuss and work on topics in small groups of 6-8, working on each topic for six weeks. Students also meet with a Connexions advisor as part of the work-related skills element of the course. The vocational courses in construction, beauty etc. are delivered off-site by external providers.

Programme aims: The qualification aims to accelerate students' acquisition of basic skills, and build resilience and readiness for progression into FE or further work-based training. In turn, this aims to prevent students becoming NEET. The programme is also intended to inspire FE colleges' confidence in the students' skills.

Case-study school 5

School location: South East

School type: State-funded, mixed 11-18

School context: The school is in a socially deprived area with many workless families and teenage parents and its catchment area includes large areas of social housing. The local education system is selective, but this school has a high proportion of low ability students. Some students have very poor behaviour and anger management issues. There is a lack of employment opportunities locally, and students often do not access leisure activities which build aspirations and social skills, therefore staff find it challenging to raise students' aspirations beyond going into the same employment as their parents.

Year groups involved in support programme: Years 10 and 11

Year established: 2011

Description of programme: The school offers a range of adapted curriculum provision, to which students are steered according to their behaviour, abilities and needs. The case-study focused on the Personal and Social Development (PSD) course, which replaced the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) qualification in the school from 2011-12. This is a modular, non-examined course for students of low ability but with no significant behaviour issues. It fits into one option block in the students' timetable and covers topics such as: managing social relationships, preparation for work, and healthy living. It is taught in small groups (maximum eight students) in the on-site purpose-built centre and garden, by a teaching assistant and a learning support assistant with input from other staff including the head of the alternative curriculum. There is also support for PSD students from a family liaison officer and a Connexions Intensive Personal Advisor. Year 10 PSD students do extended work placements, often in primary schools. In Year 11 they attend a local college one morning a week to familiarise themselves with the environment, in preparation for further vocational study there.

Programme aims: At the school level, the alternative curriculum as a whole aims to practice inclusive education, prevent students becoming NEET and, in severe cases, avoid permanent exclusions where possible. By teaching in small groups it enables staff to go at the students' own pace and track vulnerable students more easily. Offering practical activities is also used as an incentive for good behaviour in core subject lessons. At a community level, the senior leaders aim to break the cycle of worklessness and deprivation locally: *'That's the mentality of the alternative curriculum - serving the community and families.'* [School senior leader].

Case-study school 6

School location: West Midlands

School type: State-funded, mixed 11-18

School context: This is a very large 11-18 school, located in a densely populated housing estate but with a catchment drawn from a wide area of 'aspirational working class'. The community comprises approximately one third minority ethnic population. The proportion of students claiming FSM has risen significantly in last two years - one third of Year 7 students 2011-12 received FSM.

Year groups involved in support programme: Years 10 and 11

Year established: developed over several years

Description of programme: Extended work experience and exposure to employers is offered to young people who are showing signs of disengagement. Students spend three days per week working with employers in the workplace (for example, in a school PE department or on a construction site) and two days per week studying core and work-related subjects. There is a high staff to student ratio: teaching staff are supported by a full time work-related learning manager who builds and maintains relationships with employers, a work placement coordinator, and a careers coordinator.

Programme aims: The school aims to identify disengaged students and provide secure, personalised alternative provision on a full-time basis, giving them the opportunity to access FE and/or a skilled trade. Separating the students from mainstream classes is also intended to minimise the impact of these students' behaviour on others. Ultimately the strategy aims to prevent students becoming NEET. As external training provision was expensive and didn't fully meet these students needs, the FLT programme has '*evolved and developed*' [School senior leader] within the school, drawing on the expertise of external partners where appropriate.

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