

collaborative good practice between local authorities and the further education sector

Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme



LGAresearch report



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Executive summary

Background

In 2010 planning and funding responsibilities for 16–19 year olds will be transferred from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) back to the local authorities (LAs). LAs will have responsibility for commissioning and funding all education and training for young people up to the age of 19, making them the strategic lead for all children's services from 0 to 19. This will create a unified and coherent system for young people aged 14–19 (and 14–25 for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD)) at local, sub-regional and regional levels.

The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake research in order to provide evidence of good practice in terms of collaborative partnerships between LAs and FE colleges where formal and informal relationships were perceived to have contributed to positive outcomes for young people in terms of progression and engagement in education. This executive summary presents key findings from nine case-study areas. In total 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted (21 at LA level and 19 at provider level) between April and July 2009.

Key findings

Types of collaboration

Collaborative activity perceived to have impacted positively on young people can generally be grouped into three strands: comprehensive 14–19 provision, transition support and information, advice and guidance (IAG).

Impact

Effective collaboration between LAs and FE colleges was perceived to have contributed towards improved progression and engagement of young people in education and training. This was supported by a reduction in the 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) figures in all nine case-study areas over the past few years. Interviewees in some areas also reported an improvement in retention figures. In some instances, participation rates and attainment were also perceived to have improved; this, in particular, was considered to be attributable to the availability of alternative, largely vocational provision.

Collaborative working where all partners (including the LA and FE colleges) contributed to planning was reported to have enhanced the range and quality of provision available and improved transition support for learners. Furthermore, there was recognition that collaboration and a commitment to shared responsibility for the best interests of young people were perceived to have impacted positively on outcomes for young people.

Key elements of collaboration

Mutual trust, respect, openness, honesty, transparency and equality of standing between partners were reported to be crucial in order to instigate confidence between collaborators.

Other key features of collaboration viewed as necessary to secure a positive impact on young people in terms of transition, progression and engagement included: regular and robust formal and informal communication, strategic buy-in, a joined-up structure, shared vision, and a commitment to raising educational standards for young people.

Several college interviewees also believed that having a reputation as a high-quality provider and being proactive were key fundamentals to collaborative working with the LA.

Challenges

One of the main challenges reported by interviewees was the time needed to collaborate effectively both in terms of longevity, as the partnerships in these case-studies were initiated a number of years ago, and making time to communicate informally between more formal meetings. Ensuring resources and capacity were available, to underpin the time needed to build trust and relationships, was also identified as a challenge by some interviewees.

Case-study colleges reported they valued being involved in planning provision and the sense of equality in their partnership with the LAs. Some concern was expressed by college interviewees about how the transfer of funding from the LSC to the LAs might disrupt the balance of this relationship.

Conclusion and implications

The evidence from this research has indicated that the key elements of effective collaboration have influenced the range of educational and training provision, transition support and IAG which, in turn, have contributed to a positive impact on young people's outcomes. However, while this finding indicates successful collaboration has contributed to planning and enhancing the range and quality of provision and support for transition, there appeared to be less current emphasis on IAG at a time when comprehensive, independent, impartial guidance for young people might be viewed as essential due to the changes in 14–19 education and training provision.

Additionally, FE colleges in this research felt that, at present, they were regarded as equal partners to LAs in collaborative relationships. From Easter 2010, LAs will be responsible for commissioning provision from FE colleges and other post-16 providers in addition to pre-16 providers. In light of this change LAs, the LGA, FE colleges and other collaborative partners may wish to consider how they will maintain, and further develop, effective collaborative working. They will be operating in a more competitive context, and in a commissioner/provider relationship, yet will want to maintain equality of standing in terms of partnerships, and develop collaborative working to further enhance comprehensive provision, IAG and transition support.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Since 1993, when further education (FE) colleges left local authority (LA) control, FE colleges have had variable degrees of linkage with their LAs. Since 2001, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has undertaken the commissioning of learning provision for 16–19 year olds, but this will change in 2010 when planning and funding responsibilities for 16–19 year olds will be transferred from the LSC back to the LAs.

LAs have the lead in joining up 14–19 education, (from 2010 LAs will have responsibility for commissioning and funding all education and training for young people up to the age of 19, making them the strategic lead for all children's services from 0 to 19), and creating a unified and coherent system for young people aged 14–19 (and 14–25 for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD), at local, sub-regional and regional levels). The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) emphasised that:

It is strong local partnerships of providers that will deliver improved learning and support for all young people. Across the country, consortia, 14–19 partnerships and local authorities are already showing how increased collaboration is a vital component of this.¹

1.2 Aims and objectives

It is in this context that the Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake research to provide evidence of good practice in relationships between LAs and FE colleges.

The key aim of this research was to establish good practice in terms of collaborative partnerships between LAs and FE colleges where these formal and informal relationships were perceived to have contributed to

positive outcomes for young people in terms of progression and engagement.

1.3 Methodology

In order to explore and better understand the existing relationships between LAs and FE colleges, a qualitative methodology was adopted.

1.3.1 Sample

A sample frame of potential case-study areas of LAs and/or FE colleges was identified from two sources.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) identified LAs and FE colleges that exhibited elements of good practice in terms of collaboration.

The research team supplemented the AoC list in government office regions where there was no AoC data. The team selected LAs and FE colleges on the basis of Ofsted inspection grades. 'Enjoying and achieving' assessment grades '3' (good) and '4' (outstanding) from the most recent LA APA report, and 'achievement and standards' assessment grades '2' (good) and '1' (outstanding) from the college inspection reports acted **as a proxy for** 'outcomes and engagement and the way in which young people are enabled to more fully meet their learning potential' specified in the LGA project initiation document. Areas were only included where **both** LAs and colleges were achieving well. This ensured that we visited LAs and colleges where there was evidence that young people were achieving well. In addition, the research team asked telephone screening questions to establish the existence of perceived good working relationship between the LA and the college that may have contributed to improved outcomes (in terms of achievement – and by implication engagement). So, only in cases where there was evidence of high

¹ DCSF 2008 'Delivering 14–19 Reform: Next Steps'. London DCSF.

achievement from LA and FE viewpoints (as outlined above) **and** a reported working relationship, was a visit booked to explore further the extent to which there was good practice which was perceived to positively impact on young people.

A sample of nine case-study areas was drawn up from the sample frame, including at least one from each government office region apart from London. More details of the sample can be found in the Technical appendix.

1.3.2 Case-study visits

Case studies included interviews with key staff involved in collaboration between the LA and the FE college. In the majority, face-to-face interviews were conducted but in a few cases, to make it convenient for the interviewee, interviews were conducted over the telephone. Additional interviews, where appropriate, were conducted in other organisations such as Connexions (although formally part of the LA, they were often viewed to be separate entities), sixth form colleges and schools, if they were perceived to be significant to the collaborative relationship. Interviews

were conducted at strategic and operational levels. Full details of the sample and the interviewees can be found in the Technical appendix.

Visits to LAs and FE colleges, and supplementary telephone interviews, took place between April and July 2009.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 provides details of the nine case studies in terms of the background context, types of collaboration, impact on young people and future plans.

Chapter 3 considers interviewees' perceptions of lessons learnt with regard to collaborative working and advice they offered to other LAs and colleges in terms of the key features of effective collaboration.

Chapter 4 draws together the main findings and highlights the implications for further collaborative practice, particularly in light of the transfer of funding from the LSC to LAs.

2 Collaboration: case studies

2.1 Case study 1: year 11 case conferences, post-16 learning mentors, LA NEETs data research

2.1.1 Context

In terms of deprivation this borough is in the lowest third of LAs in England. There is a history of collaboration between the LA and FE college. For example, there is a local learning partnership within the LA that has been in place for ten years (and at which the FE college has representation).

The FE college also has a role within the Children's Trust and the local strategic partnership. Approximately once a term the director of children's services meets with the college principals at the 14–19 strategic partnership meeting. A progression and participation sub-group of the 14–19 partnership has recently been established to bring together funding streams, monitor outcomes, look at transition points and examine access to, and the quality and impartiality of IAG.

Additionally, college principals sit on the performance improvement board, and a curriculum group (which senior staff from the college also attend) steers curriculum development. There is also a local progression group which is presently analysing the drop out rates of young people at age 17.

The college is involved in the social cohesion agenda with the LA. One member of the college staff sits on the social cohesion board which is examining gun and knife crime. The LA chairs this group and involves schools, colleges, youth workers and the police on detailed monitoring of social cohesion. In the college there is a security team who are close to and well respected by students. The college also has a close relationship with community police. The police and security team help to create a calm environment in the college and a lot of students tell them things that are happening outside of the college. The FE student services manager says: 'We get a lot of unofficial intelligence.'

2.1.2 Types of collaboration

This case-study area revealed a real sense of an embedded collaborative culture linking the LA, Connexions, schools, a sixth form college and an FE college in a commitment to driving up educational standards for all young people. There are examples of how all organisations appeared to be proactively involved.

Year 11 pupil case conferences

The FE 14–19 manager holds case conferences with schools' year 11 heads to discuss individual pupils prior to starting college. Most of the supportive work carried out by the college to sustain successful transition from school to college was initially driven by the college as the FE college assistant principal says: 'We had to fight to get information on the most vulnerable of young people at 16 transition ... but it is getting better.' For example, some young people self-harmed before the college realised they were vulnerable and needed support. Previously it might take staff six weeks to realise there was an issue by which time the student might have already dropped out. Part of the current transition work is to establish information about applicants when they apply.

All year 11 pupils are interviewed by college staff, and in some cases the Connexions PA might be involved, to ensure they have selected the most appropriate, realistic and achievable course. The student services team works closely with Connexions and the schools. In relation to the most vulnerable and looked after children, the college has developed good links with social services. This year, for the first time, the FE college student services manager has met with social services and they have shared the names of students at the college who are looked after children. The manager maintains a discreet role, only contacting a student's after-care worker if concerned about their welfare.

Post-16 learning mentors

The FE college currently has seven post-16 learning mentors. The LA service director for learning described mentoring as 'one of the key platforms to building success'. They are attached to different schools and they ensure young people select the right course before they register at the college. As the student service manager explains: 'This is not about finding reasons not to take them, it is about finding out how best to keep them and support them.'

Once young people are enrolled at the college, the FE 14–19 manager explains the learning mentors provide 'bespoke personalised emotional support and coaching and mentoring for the young people – their aim is to understand the individual'. It is recognised, within the college, that the majority of young people have low self-esteem and low aspirations, and students cannot learn unless their social and emotional needs are catered for. This is the 'essence' of the college's ethos says the college assistant principal.

Young people most at risk of disengagement are recognised as needing more time to settle into college life and are, for example, invited to the college in the summer for a pre-induction, receive an enhanced induction package and meet their learning mentors. The mentors have a large part in enrolment day and they endeavour to work in ways that are accessible to young people. For example, they reported that phone texting students was a more effective means of communication than telephoning them.

All 16–19 year olds (have a mentor and some older students). The FE student services manager explains the mentors are 'like a critical friend really, they are there to support and challenge and to monitor retention and they have a very pastoral background'. Learning mentors were first appointed in 2000 with a funding contribution from the European Social Fund (ESF). The way in which they work has become more sophisticated as time has progressed.

LA NEETs' data research to prevent drop out at 16 and 17

The progression and participation group drives the collection and analysis of data largely to reduce drop-out rates. The college is involved in a LA-driven

research programme ('deep dive investigation') with the LSC and Connexions. The purpose of the research is to try and pinpoint in more detail at what point and why young people drop out. The aim is to having immediate actions in place to prevent future NEETs and also to examine participation of young people at age 17. Contributory factors to dropping out appear to be the level of course students are on, their socio-economic status, postcode area and the school they attended. The FE college assistant principal pointed out that there must be an obligation from secondary schools to ensure that young people go to somewhere, saying: 'There has to be some responsibility on both parts.'

Additionally, the LA has recently set up a working group to look at the transition of LLDD with a view to reducing NEETs in this group as the outcomes for LLDD have potential for improvement in terms of progression and engagement.

2.1.3 Impact

Benefits

There was a widespread perception by interviewees that there had been an increase in student retention at the colleges, and in the numbers of young people progressing to higher education (HE). There was also a reported lift in aspiration and motivation. The principal of the sixth form college commented on the positive impact the collaborative relationship has on progression: 'We have 800 applicants to HE and of those 600 are from deprived areas.' Analysis of 2008 Connexions data in regard to year 11 school leavers in the borough reveal that staying-on rates increased by approximately five per cent over the last year and the NEET rate for year 11 leavers has fallen by over 1.5 per cent since 2006.

In terms of quality of provision the colleges received an 'outstanding' grade in recent Ofsted reports. 'They commented on our collaborative 14–16 provision and our community cohesion,' says the FE 14–19 college manager. Recruitment for the FE college was reported to have risen by 50 per cent in the past four years. Additionally, the sixth form deputy principal believed that there was no conflict of interest with the LA: 'We have confidence in the LA and that feeling is reciprocal.'

Challenges

There was a general open acknowledgement of existing challenges, and a willingness by all partners to work together to overcome them. Key reported challenges included:

- ensuring the same collaborative vision was shared by all senior leaders
- maintaining honesty, transparency and respect in all relationships
- the provision of impartial and comprehensive IAG and support for each young person
- understanding and minimising the differences in teaching methodologies pre- and post-16
- preparing for the transfer of funding from the LSC to LAs
- establishing clarity with regard to decision-making in the LA.

Future plans

The LA service director for learning believed that the funding transfer could potentially cause more work at the LA since: 'All the telephone calls that people used to make to the LSC, they will now be making to the council.' Even so, she also believed that if relationships were to change, they would do so for the better as the LA currently works well in partnership with the LSC and the colleges. Additionally, there was the perception that as the staff from the LSC will transfer to the LA, they will bring the relevant skills set with them. However, the LA 14–19 strategy manager believed there was a capacity issue at the LA in terms of availability of appropriate staff.

Due to the local history of collaborative working, the deputy principal at the sixth form college felt: 'They were well-positioned to work alongside the LA through this change.' The FE assistant principal, on the other hand, believed that as well as the need for clarity in terms of the distribution of funding: 'It will be as much incumbent upon us that they [the LA] have a firm understanding about what it is that we are offering.' Moreover, she remarked that as well as the lack of

equality of funding for students (between schools and colleges), in terms of the Framework for Excellence, the LA 'needs to get to grips with' the quality of provision in colleges, 'I do not feel that schools have anything like the rigour that we have here.'

2.2 Case study 2: utilising college expertise, separate arms-length 14–19 LA organisation and local skills centre

2.2.1 Context

This unitary authority is ethnically and culturally diverse with a continually changing population profile. Deprivation was reported to be 'quite high' in the city. Achievement in terms of educational attainment is below the national average and there is a higher than average percentage of the working population with no qualifications. Almost half of learners in primary schools have English as an additional language. The case-study college is a large general FE college and received a rating of 'good' at its last Ofsted inspection (2006). The LA coordinates and chairs the City Partnership which is a 'lively group on which the local college is a significant player'. The City Partnership has strategic responsibility for 14–19 education and is responsible to the Children's Trust. Through the City Partnership, the 14–19 Plan is produced. Other boards on which the LA and college sit together are the education improvement partnership board, employment skills board, looked after children board and the teenage pregnancy board.

2.2.2 Types of collaboration

This case-study area presented a number of different collaborative activities linking the LA and the FE college.

Utilising college expertise

One of the ways in which the LA has prepared for the transfer of funding has been to utilise the expertise of those who have worked in the FE sector. For example, the vice principal of the college will retire at the end of this academic year. He has been recruited by the LA on

a part-time basis so that the LA can benefit from his expertise and experience. The LA believed it was important they gained someone who had strategic knowledge of the FE sector and how the current LSC procedures worked. In particular, the LA 14–19 strategy manager said, it was felt that this would ‘help with the credibility from the college principals viewpoint’.

Separate arms-length 14–19 LA organisation

The LA have set up a specific 14–19 agency charged with organising and brokering placements for learners at key stage 4. As an organisation, they currently have responsibility for placing learners from schools into colleges through the increased flexibilities programme. Although this agency is part of the LA, they were established as a separate body to obtain an element of independence, which has led to a better relationship between providers and the LA. It has also increased confidence in the system as the agency has its own quality assurance process and, therefore, the school headteachers have confidence that the courses they send their learners onto have been through an independent validation process.

The establishment of this agency has also improved the relationship between the college and the schools because it ensures impartiality with regard to the selection of learners for courses.

Local skills centre

Another way in which the LA and college have successfully collaborated was in the setting up and running of a vocational skills centre. The centre was established in a local community to address its specific needs and widen the curriculum offering available to learners. The aim was to build a centre that did not look like a school or college but reflected a place of work. In this way it could engage learners who had either already disengaged from learning or were at risk of disengagement. Young people who attend are expected to clock on and off as they would be expected to do in a work environment.

The centre was built on the campus of one of the local secondary schools and capital funding for the project

was provided by the LA, while the local college provided funding for equipment. The centre is managed by the LA, and the college is represented at vice principal level on the steering group, which meets twice a term. The college provides tuition for learners aged 14–18.

The development of the skills centre has improved the flexibility of delivery and this has contributed to a change in the mindset of providers who are now more willing to share provision and travel to other locations to teach courses. The learners attend the centre for one or two days a week but are still enrolled at the school.

2.2.3 Impact

Benefits

Collaborative activity was perceived to have had a positive impact on the progression and engagement of young people. A representative from the college felt this was because ‘*the LA gives a voice to the college*’. This had given the college the confidence to promote different agendas at LA level, such as individualised learning. This individualised learning was perceived to have led to an improvement in the provision available to young people, the success of which was seen in an increase in ‘attainment rates’ for FE college courses for 14–16 and 16–18 year olds.

Interviewees from both the college and the LA stated the NEET figures had fallen by approximately three per cent over the past five years. The college vice-principal believed this was, in part, a result of the collaborative work undertaken on the city-wide 14–16 engagement programme.

The ‘independent’ agency acts as an independent quality assurance agency systematically checking the quality of all 14–16 provision. It is also a broker of placements. One of the main benefits is having an independent arbiter in place. This can diffuse institutional self-interest and focus on the best interests of the learners.

A representative from the LA described the collaboration between the LA and the local college as ‘absolutely essential’, recognising the fact that no organisation alone could meet the needs of such a complex and diverse city. Collaboration ensured that no

organisation duplicated the work of others, rather they complemented each other.

Challenges

Three key challenges of collaborative working between the LA and FE colleges were identified by the interviewees as the:

- time-consuming and resource intensive nature of collaboration
- large amount of procurement red-tape and bureaucracy that accompanies working with LAs
- need to continue to build on any progress and not to regress to a system of placing the interests of institutions before the interests of learners.

Future plans

The FE vice principal believed that the funding transfer would eventually result in a much closer relationship with the LA. He recognised that it would be a difficult transition but, if they were eventually treated similarly to schools, this would be a positive move. However, another college representative was not as positive and felt that the relationship with the college would change over the next few years with the LA taking more of an 'interventionist' stance.

2.3 Case study 3: protocol for early leavers and multi-agency plan for LLDD transition

2.3.1 Context

The LA is in a predominately rural county. There is a long history of collaboration between the LA, FE colleges and schools. There are five local area partnership boards that are based on the travel-to-learn groupings from the LSC. These groups meet once every six weeks to plan and co-ordinate 14–19 activity. They are comprised of representatives from schools, FE institutions (there are three FE colleges and one sixth form college), special schools, work-based learning providers, LSC and the LA. The boards are facilitated by

the LA 14–19 development managers. Each partnership group has a strategic group, a deputies operational group and an IAG group. Additionally, the case-study college represents the FE sector on the Children's Trust executive board.

The college was awarded a 'good' grade in its most recent (2007) inspection by Ofsted, and has won a Beacon Award for its 14–16 and 16–19 collaborative work.

2.3.2 Types of collaboration

Interviewees gave a range of examples of partnership working taking place between the LA and FE colleges.

Protocol for early leavers

The LA and FE providers are currently developing a protocol to support early leavers, with a particular focus on young people who drop out of education in the first autumn term of transition from pre- to post-16 education. This involves mapping current practices by, for example, the way in which interviews are carried out with young people and examining the types of support that exist for transition in order to inform development of further support programmes. The project is steered by a strategic 14–19 partnership board comprising senior representatives from all colleges in the LA (usually a curriculum leader or manager) and the chairs from the local partnership boards. The board meets regularly to discuss developments such as starting courses at different times of the year so that young people who have left education have the opportunity to re-engage more quickly.

As part of the protocol for early leavers, partners have also produced a tool which helps to identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. Schools have a framework which uses a range of indicators to assess the vulnerability of learners including, for example, free school meals (FSM) and achievement. The intention is that the gathered information follows on with the learner post-16 to help aid the transition process and keep learners engaged in education. This tool was originally developed to assist secondary schools but has now been developed for post-16 providers.

Information such as attendance and a change of course are recorded within the first six weeks of the autumn term. If five or more indicators (out of a possible ten) are identified, learners are deemed to be particularly at risk of dropping out. A series of support measures are then put in place to prevent disengagement. The FE head of learning services highlighted that identifying students at risk of dropping out is a key contributor to success 'because retention is as much part of success as achievement is'. The LA monitors the success of these procedures through analysis of data, including retention rates.

Additionally, the LA and FE colleges have worked together to develop good practice guidelines on transition from key stage 4–5, as well as an alternative curriculum directory for young people at risk of becoming NEET to ensure that there are a range of appropriate level one courses available.

Multi-agency plan for LLDD transition

The college, singled out for this case study, was recently involved in a multi-agency transition process for students who have a statement. It, together with representatives from other agencies (including Connexions and schools), worked with a consultant to develop a transition process and a plan that identified the way in which each agency would proceed to support the general aims and objectives of transition for LLDD. This process enabled the LA to bid for government funding to help implement such developments. The college was also involved in developing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in collaboration with the LA.

The college works with the Children and Adolescents' Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who provide a member of staff at the college one day a week. The role includes a combination of referral and support for tutors which includes the provision of advice and appropriate training when needed. The college makes a payment towards the cost of the support worker.

All the FE colleges are involved in a key stage 4 engagement programme which provides support for vulnerable learners aged 14–16. One college has devised a personalised progression pathway system for young learners linked to the Foundation Learning Tier

(FLT), with a particular focus on LLDD. The role of the LA in this collaborative activity can vary from initiating and developing the programme to providing financial support.

In addition, the case-study college has integrated, where possible, a number of students from special schools onto increased flexibility programmes (IFP). This would not have been possible without the support and funding provided by the LA via the dedicated schools grant. As the FE executive director for business and learning explains: 'That for me is really a strong statement of intent to actually impact positively on young people's life chances.' This has helped to develop and strengthen links between the FE college and schools.

2.3.3 Impact

Benefits

Partnership working was perceived to have had a positive impact on attainment levels (including at level two and three) and retention rates. One LA 14–19 development manager commented:

I think it would be very difficult to achieve everything I have talked about if we didn't have the engagement of the colleges...it would be impossible, so I am sure it [collaboration] has contributed.

The college's involvement in preventative work, including offering more level one courses post-16 and NEET programmes, was also highlighted as a contributing factor in terms of keeping young people engaged in education. There has been a decrease in the LA NEET figure between 2006 and 2008 of approximately one per cent.

The partnership boards, both at a strategic and local level, have encouraged providers to work together across the whole age range. This has resulted in a real sense of shared responsibility for learners in the LA and recognition that support is available. 'We recognise that we are not on our own. We would never be able to afford the level of support and the level of expertise that is available to us through working with the...LA', says the FE head of learning services.

Challenges

While the responses from interviewees about collaboration were largely positive, there were, nonetheless, some challenges identified:

- the complexity of the funding streams pre- and post-16
- the LA's understanding of how FE colleges operate
- the time required to attend various meetings.

Future plans

There was a mixed response about how partnership arrangements would change as a result of the funding transfer. For example, the 14–19 development manager at the LA did not anticipate any change in relation to the way FE colleges are placed on boards, and their roles and responsibilities within them.

In contrast, the head of the vocational college was more concerned about the change: 'The worry with any sort of change like this is that there will be mistakes and things will be missed off and forgotten and suddenly... there is no budget left and we are left carrying the cost'. He also noted that the funding methodology for FE colleges is very different to that of schools, and that transfer would be a huge strain on the LA in terms of time and resources.

2.4 Case study 4: transition support for PRU leavers, independent IAG from multi-disciplinary teams, creation of skills centre

2.4.1 Context

The LA spans a largely rural county and comprises three partnership groups which are based on geographical location. The case-study area is part of a partnership including representatives from a FE college, three sixth form colleges, the LSC, Connexions and the LA. Strategic partnership meetings are held once every six weeks. There is also an operational sub-group, comprising mainly curriculum deputies from FE colleges and schools, that meets regularly as well as a

diploma development group. 'I think we are pretty well networked,' says the FE associate principal for learning and curriculum development. An LA officer has been employed on a full-time basis to support the partnership.

2.4.2 Types of collaboration

Interviewees identified a variety of ways in which the LA and FE colleges work in partnership.

Provision of transition support for PRU leavers

The LA undertakes a range of targeted activity with FE colleges to prevent young people from becoming disengaged from education. This includes, for example, a project which involves providing support for learners in pupil referral units (PRUs) through transition from pre- to post-16 education. The project was established because an increasing number of young people from PRUs were becoming NEET, particularly at the age 17. It was thought that this was due, in part, to the difference in support levels received: class sizes in PRUs are much smaller and learners receive more intensive support.

Connexions staff have been assigned to work with the PRUs to provide support to learners in order to better prepare them for the transition into FE colleges in this LA. This includes the provision of taster sessions at the case study college to enable learners to become more familiar and comfortable in such surroundings. In addition, strategies have been put in place so that information about learners, including any specific behavioural problems, is passed onto the college prior to transition. The LA monitors the success of such procedures through the analysis of retention data.

Currently, an officer from the LA is coordinating the transfer of provision from three PRUs to an FE college on behalf of local schools in the area. The case-study college will be offering pathfinder courses for year 10 and 11 learners. Provision, offered on a full time basis (four days a week), will include vocationally focused courses across a range of areas including engineering and mechanics. As a result of these developments, schools are liaising with colleges in order to investigate

further opportunities for learners where an FE environment is thought to be more appropriate.

The creation of multi-disciplinary teams to provide comprehensive independent IAG

In addition to Connexions Personal Advisors (PAs) being located at this case-study college, the LA has incorporated the Connexions function into multi-disciplinary locality teams. The LA service director of strategy and commissioning says these teams include Connexions PAs, parent support advisors and youth services:

[They have] helped us to make a much stronger child/young person focused approach to addressing needs. The Connexions providers are able to draw in other professionals to support a young person...and that would not have happened when Connexions was a single organisation.

The longstanding history of partnership working was also perceived to have helped to create, develop and strengthen the IAG process and applications for post-16. The vice principal for curriculum and learning believed that the college was allowed open access to schools because it is viewed by the LA 'as a trusted partner'. The college is also able to attend school open evenings to provide information to young people and their parents/carers. Importantly, 'in those conversations, it is not competitive, it is about getting the right students on to the right provision', says the FE assistant principal for learning and curriculum development.

In addition, the college provides taster sessions for approximately 400–500 key stage 4 learners each year so that they can experience the different courses on offer. In some instances, the college pays for transport so learners can attend these sessions. There is also an LA-driven event that is offered to all institutions each year. Learners receive information about careers, training and different FE opportunities in different skills sectors. The event takes place over three days and is attended by large numbers of learners.

The creation of an LA and college sponsored skills centre to stimulate economic regeneration

The LA and case study college contributed funds to develop a skills centre which was designed using state of the art environmental technology. The building is located in the grounds of the college and is used as a training base facility for supporting training development around sustainability and environmental measures with a view to developing expertise in the area.

The LA has supported the FE college in its plans to relocate onto a new campus. The college is located in a major priority area of the LA which has a low wage, agriculturally-based economy and is particularly vulnerable to the recession. The LA is hoping that a new high profile FE campus will provide a lift to the economy in the area in terms of better equipping young people, and acting as an economic regeneration stimulus. Plans for the move are, however, on hold due to the FE capital reassessment.

2.4.3 Impact

Benefits

Collaboration between the LA and FE colleges was perceived to have contributed towards increased attainment and retention rates. Targeted work through, for example, the PRU leavers' project was believed to have contributed to a significant improvement in staying on rates in this particular college. There was also the perception from some interviewees that the independent IAG offered to learners had made some contribution towards the high participation rates in the authority.

Effective partnership arrangements have helped to coordinate post-16 provision, reduce the risk of excessive competition between providers and ensure that there are no significant gaps in available provision. 'Through partnership, you focus on the quality of provision rather than competing with each other,' says an FE vice principal for learning and achievement. The breadth of provision on offer enables learners to get onto a course that suits them best. This is facilitated to some extent by positive relationships between FE colleges and schools; 'We don't have particular tensions between the two sectors,' says the LA service director of strategy and commissioning.

Challenges

Interviewees identified a range of different challenges due to collaborative working:

- funding – ‘Partnership working comes at a cost...it is not free and there is always an input that is needed to keep those things going’ (LA service director of strategy and commissioning)
- territory and competitiveness between FE colleges
- time – ‘It is immensely time consuming and nobody pays for that time’ (FE associate principal for learning and curriculum development).

Future plans

The LA service director for strategy and commissioning hoped that the transfer of funding would not result in any radical change in future relationships. He believed the LA has never really created much of a distance between itself as commissioner and the colleges as providers: ‘Keeping the two functions together gives you a much better sense of collective working and you are not creating a barrier between the sharing of expertise and intelligence.’ He also acknowledged that FE colleges are better placed than the LA to identify local needs and issues.

In contrast, the FE college’s vice principal for learning and curriculum felt that it was too early to comment on the impact of the transfer but did express the need for clarity in terms of how cross-border funding will reach the college under the new funding arrangements. There was, however, the perception that many staff in both the LA and FE colleges are concerned about the transfer process.

2.5 Case study 5: scheme to increase apprenticeships, Diploma champions and school improvement

2.5.1 Context

This large unitary authority is based in a prosperous city but contains areas of significant social and economic deprivation. Pupil attainment, measured by

percentage of learners achieving five A*–C grades at GCSE level is below the national average. The LA and the college have a history of collaboration and this relationship is reflected in the organisation of schools and colleges into a number of consortia, which predated the introduction of diplomas.

Communication is good across the LA, college and schools and this is coordinated through the 14–19 strategic partnership (of which the college is a member) via a city-wide planning group. The 14–19 strategic partnership, as well as planning provision, also produces the 14–19 strategic plan. The college vice principal attends the LA-led ‘into learning meetings’ which consider individual learners at the point of transition to ensure they receive appropriate provision. These meetings were originally set up to help the LA work towards the September Guarantee.

Another strategic forum which involves the college, LA, schools, work-based learning providers and academies is a curriculum development network. This group meets every six to eight weeks to discuss the 14–19 curriculum. The college vice principal also sits on the 14–19 work streaming group which is an LA, run board looking at 14–19 provision across the whole city.

The college interviewed for this research is large with approximately 40,000 learners. It provides both further and higher education courses for young people and adults. At their last Ofsted inspection, the college received a ‘good’ rating.

2.5.2 Types of collaboration

With a history of collaboration, the LA has set up a number of different avenues for communication between the college and the LA. This includes the introduction of consortia which allow the college to communicate directly with schools and where the LA takes on more of a coordinating role. There are examples of direct collaboration between the LA and the college.

Scheme to increase the number of apprenticeships

Due to the current economic climate and the potential reduction in businesses offering apprenticeships, the

LA and college have collaborated on an initiative to increase apprenticeship numbers. The college expects the recession to increase the numbers of young people attending college as job opportunities become scarce and concern was expressed that young people would not be able to access appropriate provision.

In recognition of the need for more apprenticeships, the LA and college have established a new working group and meet regularly, along with other interested organisations, with the aim of increasing apprenticeship numbers across the city by 100 in the short term. The LA has encouraged institutions, such as schools, to take on apprentices in departments such as information technology (IT) and will be providing a financial incentive to ensure placements. This scheme is promoted by the college with the help of the LA.

Diploma champions

In order to ensure the LA and schools are prepared for the introduction of diplomas, members of the college staff have been seconded to the LA for half a day a week. The college staff act as diploma champions and work with and support the staff in the LA and schools. The college tutors have become part of the LA's diploma team and regularly attend local schools to help them prepare for the introduction of diplomas. The diploma champions represent specific vocational areas and work with the LA to support the diploma line related to their specialism.

The college has also offered the opportunity for members of staff from the LA and local schools to undertake work-shadowing in the college so that they have a better understanding of different vocational areas and how learners will be taught.

Collaborative approach to school improvement

The college, a local higher educational institution (HEI) and the LA contribute to a trust partnership charged with improving the performance of two under-performing schools in the city. At regular meetings, the vice principal of the college, and the LA and HEI representatives discuss the 14–18 curriculum in the

schools and formulate improvement plans. Their joint expertise is drawn together for the benefit of these two schools.

2.5.3 Impact

Benefits

The collaborative activity between the college and the LA is perceived to have resulted in a number of positive outcomes for young people. For example, post-16 engagement and participation rates have improved by almost four per cent between 2006 and 2007. NEET figures have reduced by over two per cent from 2004 to 2007. The LA 14–19 strategy manager believed this improvement was due to the provision offer that is now in place across the city:

Through working together we have ensured that we have got the most appropriate provision for young people.... If they are going off on the wrong courses at the wrong level they are going to become disengaged and drop out.

Attainment at GCSE level has also increased over the past few years, with the proportion of learners achieving five or more A*–C grades rising by 12 per cent. It was felt that this improvement could have been a result of collaboration as the increase in vocational courses had given young people an alternative way to achieve. Furthermore, one of the trust schools that the college and LA are working with was reported to have seen a significant improvement in attainment.

The quality of provision was believed to have improved as a result of collaboration between the college and the LA by, for example, through the development of quality assurance systems. Additionally, the diploma champions seconded to the LA worked to ensure the diplomas are of a high quality. Overall, respondents felt collaboration was a key driver for quality of provision. The vice principal of the college stated:

Through working collaboratively, you can only drive up the quality because particularly if a young person is moving to access provision on another site of learning, the host provider has to ensure that the quality of provision is being offered.

Challenges

The LA and college, whilst both believing there were significant benefits to working collaboratively, also highlighted a small number of challenges.

Changes to key personnel in institutions could impact on collaborative working. It was felt that there needed to be a succession plan in place to prevent personnel changes from impacting negatively on the collaboration.

The college had found trying to improve the LA's understanding of the FE sector challenging. For example, the LA needs to understand that many of the courses run at FE colleges are made up of both pre- and post-18 learners and therefore they are unable to look at 16–18 learners in isolation.

Future plans

The college and LA both felt that the transfer of funding would alter the relationship between them. However, the LA 14–19 strategy manager hoped that they would be able to maintain effective working relationships.

The college were apprehensive about the LA's lack of understanding of the FE sector. The college vice principal anticipated working very closely with the LA: 'We will have to do a lot of explaining and helping them to understand.' This was complicated by the fact that the college was currently working with four different LAs.

2.6 Case study 6: AimHigher activities, LLDD youth club and transition planning

2.6.1 Context

The case-study area is a unitary LA which is ranked in the bottom third of LAs in England in terms of deprivation. It has a 14–19 strategic partnership group that meets approximately every three months. This group is chaired by the LA deputy director for education and young people, and includes representatives from the LA, post-16 providers, schools, Connexions, LSC and AimHigher. There are

also a number of working groups that the FE college is represented on including, for example, the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT). Representatives from schools, the sixth form college and work-based training providers also sit on this group. Informal communication also takes place regularly through various channels including email and telephone conversations. The FE assistant principal says: 'We do have a fairly good relationship.... We talk to each other on a regular basis.'

2.6.2 Types of collaboration

Provision of AimHigher activities for young people aged 11-19

Post-16 providers (both the FE college and sixth form college) are full partners of the AimHigher programme that aims to raise aspirations of learners to progress onto FE and HE. It also tries to reduce barriers to participation. Partners, including schools, Connexions and a university, are responsible for agreeing a programme of activities for young people aged 11–19, and the staffing structure to deliver it. Collaborative activities vary and can include running university visits (including the opportunity to participate in summer schools) and providing IAG in terms of selecting university courses, finance issues, employability and life-building skills. Previously, they have also worked with the FE college to provide mentoring for learners. This involved training FE students to go back into schools to help provide support with lessons and exam preparation.

In addition to these activities, AimHigher staff have worked with the college to develop a programme with primary schools based on the 'Professor Fluffy' theme. Essentially, the two-day programme involves learners carrying out a range of aspiration raising activities. Students also take part in a graduation ceremony which marks the end of the event. The AimHigher project worker is in constant dialogue with the FE college about the programme. She attends college meetings including student support meetings 'so that the work of AimHigher is embedded across the whole...support system'. Strategically, partners meet once a year to review the programme and set the agenda for the following year.

Funding for the programme is top-sliced from the areas of allocation and the remaining funding is devolved to institutions for their own work under the AimHigher banner. There is an agreement from all institutions involved in the programme that regardless of how much funding they receive, all learners are entitled to access a range of activities.

The establishment of a youth club for year 8 and 9 LLDD

The LA and FE college worked together to develop a youth club for year 8 and 9 LLDD. The stimulus for the development was that a significant number of parents and carers elected to send their children out of the county at 16 because they perceived a lack of appropriate facilities in the area. The youth club provides students and their parents and carers with the opportunity to start developing a rapport with the FE college prior to transition time. It is run by the college and some of the transport is provided by the LA. In addition, the LA and FE college have jointly facilitated a number of social enterprises for young people with LLDD which offer them the opportunity to gain paid work experience through, for example, a car valeting service and a catering scheme. A cycle hire facility for young people with a disability is currently under development.

Transition planning

An FE committee has been established to look at continuity and transition planning for young people in years 9, 10 and 11 to ensure they are able to access post-16 provision. The committee explores a range of issues including social, emotional and behavioural issues and LLDD. Additionally, there is a transition planning group (which the FE college is represented on) which discusses the needs of individual learners. FE providers have also attended planning courses to ensure provision is centred on individual learner needs and that the LA and institutions are communicating with young people and parents and carers in the same way to help facilitate participation and inclusion. Furthermore, the college has worked with the LA to develop transition materials including a DVD that provides information to parents and carers about the transition process and the types of opportunities available to learners.

The FE college has a partnership with a special school that was brokered by the LA which involves staff in both institutions, key workers and parents working together to aid the transition process. As a result of this close association, the LA is facilitating an arrangement that will enable learners to do vocational programmes at the college as an extension of the provision they receive at school. The LA director of learning says:

My officers...create opportunities for...partners to get around the table and support the transition of young people from a school place to a college place and they do this at 14 and 16.

2.6.3 Impact

Benefits

Collaborative activity between the LA and FE colleges was perceived to have contributed towards a three per cent decrease in the number of NEET young people aged 16–18 in the area between 2006 and 2008, as well as helping to fulfil a 100 per cent September Guarantee rate over the past two years. Level two and three achievement rates were reported by the LA 14–19 strategy manager to have also increased year on year: 'So we know that the work we are doing is having a positive impact on young people.' In addition, targeted activity through, for example, the development of the youth club has helped to reduce the number of out of county placements for LLDD. Aspiration raising activities through the AimHigher programme were also noted to have contributed to increased participation rates because, says the LA advisor of student achievement, 'They [the learners] know what they have to achieve in order to get to the goals they have set themselves.'

Partnership working has resulted in a shared responsibility for the outcomes of young people. The sharing of information was believed to aid progression because it gives partners the opportunity to plan and identify learners who might be at risk and to intervene at the earliest opportunity. It also means that learners have access to 'higher quality, clearly sign-posted progression pathways', says the LA 14–19 strategy manager.

Challenges

Interviewees were asked to identify the main challenges of collaborative working.

- There is a potential inequality in the way the LA commissions between institutions depending on the sub-regional group's decision in relation to models of delivery.
- Difficulties in ensuring information about learners is passed onto post-16 providers to aid transition or progression. This issue is currently being addressed through the transition planning group.
- A need to reduce competition between providers.

Future plans

There was a mixed response by the LA about how the transfer of funding would impact on future partnership arrangements. The LA director of learning believed relationships would need to become much more formalised, while the 14–19 strategy manager felt that there would be no change because LSC staff would simply transfer over to the LA and continue their previous roles. He also believed that communication would stay the same because the model that has been set up replicates the existing structure. 'We are happy with it, our partners including the colleges [FE and sixth form college] are happy with it.' In contrast, the FE chair of governors believed that the transfer of funding would inevitably impact on the relationship between the LA and the college:

Once they are holding the financial purse strings, the relationship will be different and it will be skewed. With the best will in the world, they will need to be at some of the time judging between us and others [providers] and being a good collaborative friend is difficult when you have to play the other role.

2.7 Case study 7: support to prevent disengagement and collaborative approach to IAG

2.7.1 Context

This unitary authority is one of the smallest in England. Decline of traditional industries have had an impact on the town and the LA is now the largest employer in the area. Unemployment is high compared to the national average and there are high levels of deprivation.

There is a history of collaboration between the local college and the LA, which all interviewees believe is aided by the small size of the borough. The college attends the strategic board meetings for 14–19 education in the LA, alongside headteachers of all the secondary schools, the LSC and work-based learning providers. The college and LA also attend the curriculum managers meetings. All school deputy headteachers and vice principals of colleges with responsibility for curriculum attend these meetings every two weeks. Other LA strategic groups that the college sits on are the diploma development group, the economic development group and the skills partnership which is chaired by the LSC. There is also a transition working group which focuses on individuals with specific learning difficulties. The operational group related to this discusses the actual logistics of the transitional arrangements for LLDD.

2.7.2 Types of collaboration

Within the LA there is significant evidence of collaborative working extending across many different areas such as LLDD, young people at risk of disengagement and IAG. The interviewees believed that the small size of the LA has aided collaboration in the sense that they have found it relatively easy to set up programmes and activities to try and improve outcomes for young people. These are examples of collaborative working that have had a positive impact on the outcomes for young people.

Young people at risk of disengagement

The LA and college collaborate closely on supporting young people at risk of disengagement and re-engaging young people back into education. At a pre-16 level, there is a town-wide re-engagement programme, which developed out of the curriculum deputies' group. The LA commissions and coordinates providers to offer a programme aimed at young people excluded, or at risk of exclusion, from school. At the college, the young people can study motor vehicle maintenance, construction, hair and beauty, and childcare. Young people are given an individual learning plan and, depending on their needs, courses are part time for either one or two years.

At the time of transition, the LA works closely with the inclusive learning manager at the college to ensure young people at risk of disengagement are supported as much as possible through the transition from pre- to post-16 learning.

To improve post-16 engagement rates, the LA and college have collaborated on a European Social Fund project aimed at re-engaging learners. The intervention focuses on encouraging and supporting disengaged young people to re-engage on appropriate learning routes. The funding has allowed the college to offer more flexible provision with more of a focus on personal development opportunities as opposed to accredited learning. This project is particularly targeted at 17 and 18 year olds as the LA has identified retention of post-16 students as an issue.

The college and Connexions work in partnership on the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme. A Connexions adviser attends the college for three days a week to support the E2E cohort. The adviser participates in the inductions of young people onto the course and carries out six- and 12-week reviews. The programme is personalised to the learner and its main components are vocational provision and IAG. This is soon to be replaced by the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT).

Collaboration between colleges, Connexions and the LA in the delivery of information, advice and guidance

The LA, Connexions and the college collaborate on a number of IAG activities. There is an IAG forum which

meets every six weeks and is attended by the college. The college is an active participant in road shows, employer engagement events and Connexions' choices events. All these activities are managed by the Connexions locality manager and the 14–19 team in the LA provide support. Furthermore, the LA asks schools to liaise with the college at parents' evenings and there are open evenings which the LA advertises. The college also supports Connexions in holding events in local secondary schools in relation to broadening young people's horizons, making them aware of their choices and different progression pathways.

The college organises visits for college staff to Connexions. This allows the Connexions staff to have a greater understanding of what courses and opportunities are available for young people says the Connexions service manager:

If staff here are going to provide accurate information, advice and guidance in relation to the college, they need to be fully aware of what the college offers so that when they are talking to the young people, they have that knowledge to hand.

The Connexions staff visit the college annually for a tour which contributes to their understanding of the institution and what is available for young people.

2.7.3 Impact

Benefits

Over the past two years, NEET figures have reduced by over two per cent. This was largely perceived to be attributed to collaborative activity between the LA, Connexions and the college. Additionally, this relationship allows Connexions to track easily the young people and be aware of where they can go if they disengage with their course. This has helped to identify quickly those learners who are not on the most appropriate learning route so that different provision can be put in place before they become disaffected. Sharing of information is also vital to this success. All the key agencies in the LA have agreed to provide information via a re-engagement form which identifies learners' needs.

Challenges

Due to the size of the LA, few challenges to collaborative working were identified.

- Keeping everyone informed and aware of progress could be an issue.
- Institutions' different objectives need to be overcome. For example, the college is focused on outcomes due to funding requirements but Connexions is focused on individual young people. Sometimes differences need to be overcome when trying to put together the best package for a young person.

Future plans

The LA believed that the relationship with the college would not change as a result of the funding transfer as they had already identified how the planning of funding would be undertaken. However, the vice principal of the college believed their relationship would change a lot: 'It will change massively because they [LA] are going to be responsible for the commissioning of our funding.' There was some concern about the practicalities of the new commissioning process.

2.8 Case study 8: key stage 4 engagement programme and accessible independent transport for LLDD

2.8.1 Context

The LA is a rural authority comprising 42 secondary schools, six FE colleges as well as a number of special schools and PRUs. The case-study college is large and received a 'good' grade in its most recent Ofsted inspection (2008). The LA has an over-arching 14–19 strategic partnership group that meets every three months and includes FE representation, with six underlying consortia that were formed by the LA three years ago. Each consortium has a similar structure comprising a strategy group, an operational group and an IAG group, and includes representatives from FE providers, schools and the LA. The strategy group meets about once every six weeks but the operational

groups, particularly whilst developing diplomas and writing bids, meet more often.

2.8.2 Types of collaboration

This case-study area presented a variety of collaborative activities currently undertaken between the LA and FE colleges.

Key stage 4 engagement programme

FE colleges are involved in a key stage 4 engagement programme aimed at those young people disengaged from the curriculum or at risk of exclusion. These young people can access up to two days a week in the workplace or work-based training alongside the core curriculum. The programme also involves developing a range of personal and social skills. The LA has employed a consultant who acts as a coordinator and liaises with institutions to ensure the programme is robust, placements have been organised and students are attending. The coordinator's role also includes monitoring and evaluating the programme.

A new aspect of the programme will be introduced in September 2009. The LA has commissioned a local celebrity chef to teach students about catering. Over a six-week period (one session per week) a group of ten disengaged or potentially disengaged students in each of the consortia will go into college and work on their catering skills and complete a basic hygiene certificate. At the end of the course, the learners will prepare and create a professional meal for stakeholders and their families. This will help to increase already 'well established links with the FE sector and it is also giving sixty students across the whole authority a window to what is going on in the college', says the LA 14–19 manager. It is hoped that this aspiration raising activity will encourage some of the young people to do hospitality or catering courses post-16.

Learners will also receive one-to-one mentoring as part of the programme. The celebrity chef has enlisted staff at a local catering company to act as mentors. All staff will receive appropriate training to carry out the role. He has also acquired a substantial amount of funding to facilitate the programme, therefore minimising costs for the LA.

Additionally, the case-study college is running a pre-16 re-integration programme for approximately 50 to 60 year 11 students who have been excluded from school and are being looked after by the LA re-integration service. These learners are enrolled in the college on a full time basis for one year and provided with a basic education with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy. They are also given the opportunity to try some vocational taster sessions. Learners are referred to the college by the LA but have to go through an interview process to ensure that they are suited to the course. The college will be piloting a two-year programme from September 2009 which will be offered to learners in year 10 with a view to offering a full GCSE programme.

A NEET partnership forum has been established to provide a place for discussion and decision-making about different approaches to reducing the number of NEET young people in the authority. The LA has arranged for each of the consortia to receive a presentation from Connexions and the LSC about NEET data to ensure information about learners and trends are consistent across all consortia. In addition, a common management information system is currently being developed which will enable more effective communication and data sharing between institutions.

Provision of accessible independent transport for LLDD

The LA works in partnership with an independent specialist college to deliver a programme which enables LLDD to access transport independently. The LA has appointed a 14–19 transport coordinator to oversee the programme. Travel mentors provide one-to-one training and support to learners so they have the confidence and skills to access travel safely. The courses are adapted to individual need and may, for example, involve talking through any concerns and developing strategies to overcome them. The programme offers three 10–12 week courses a year. Additional support and fast tracking is also available. Referrals come from a number of sources including the LA when learners apply for transport assistance, contacts within the college, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and Connexions.

2.8.4 Impact

Benefits

Collaborative activity was perceived by interviewees to have had a positive impact on young people's progression and engagement in education. For example, the FE vice principal for curriculum and quality said that progression rates of those young people involved in the NEET programme and re-integration programme were approximately 60–70 per cent. Intended destination data for year 11 school leavers, the LA 14–19 manager says, have also shown progression rates are higher than in the previous year: 'That suggests to me that we are doing the right thing and that the IAG is working and that the intervention is working.' Additionally, the LA NEET figure had decreased by about one per cent over the past three years (2006–2008).

Partnership working has resulted in more effective structures being put in place and the development of healthy, progressive relationships between stakeholders. The LA 14–10 manager says: 'It also means that...we are well placed to know what is going on in each institution'. She also said that better communication between institutions had contributed towards more streamlined transition for learners because information can be shared and intervention can be put in place at the earliest opportunity.

Challenges

Three key challenges of collaborative working between the LA and FE colleges were identified:

- Ensuring an effective and robust communication system is in place could be an issue. The FE vice principal for curriculum and quality says: 'It is about making sure that the representatives on the 14–19 strategic partnership actually feedback to everybody and that you have a chance to have your opinion heard.'
- There are competition and funding issues between schools and FE colleges because they are competing for the same learners.
- There could be problems facilitating opportunities for FE colleges to meet across the six consortia and ensuring they have a holistic view of information and developments in the LA.

Future plans

The FE vice principal for curriculum and quality felt that the funding transfer would result in a much closer relationship, largely due to the fact that representatives from institutions will have to invest time to discuss the commissioning process and the quality of provision with the LA. In contrast, the LA 14–19 manager felt it was difficult to comment on the impact of the transfer but ‘hoped’ it would result in greater transparency between the two funding streams (pre-16 and post-16).

2.9 Case study 9: coordination of strategic partnerships and pre-16 work-related learning programme

2.9.1 Context

The population of this metropolitan city council has a higher than average proportion of residents from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds and there are significant pockets of deprivation. Ofsted rated the LA’s children and young people’s service as ‘good’ at the time of their last inspection in 2006. There is a history of collaboration between the LA and the FE sector. The college in this case study has representation on the Children’s Trust and the 14–25 partnership board.

The schools and colleges in this LA are arranged into four federations. Federations were formed to enhance the post-16 curriculum and act as diploma consortia. The LA is responsible for overall coordination but each federation has its own governance. Formal meetings between the federation coordinators and the LA occur every six weeks but informal meetings are held weekly. In light of the funding transfer and in recognition that the LA does not just work with schools but with early years, the private sector, voluntary sector, childcare providers and colleges, the LA has changed the name of their school improvement service to The Learning and Achievement Service.

2.9.2 Types of collaboration

There was evidence of significant collaborative working within the LA which extends back over ten years. The principals and vice principals of the local colleges meet

regularly with those who have strategic responsibility for 14–19 learning in the LA. In particular, there are examples demonstrating the collaborative working currently happening within the LA which is believed to have had a positive impact on outcomes for young people.

The LA’s coordination of strategic partnerships

There is a long history of strategic collaboration between the LA and the local colleges. The 14–25 partnership evolved from the previous arrangement which was called the strategic forum. The partnership includes representatives from each of the federations, the three colleges, the LSC, the two universities, employers, the Chamber of Commerce, Connexions, the strategic and young people’s partnership, the children’s champion, the parents’ champion and the LA. The board is chaired by the 14–19 director from the LSC but is coordinated and supported by the LA’s 14–25 partnership manager. It is her responsibility to coordinate the partnership and liaise with all members to ensure that those who have taken responsibility for areas of the strategic plan coordinate and carry out their responsibilities. Therefore the partnership manager has regular communication with the college principals and vice principals both through formal partnership meetings and through informal individual meetings.

All partners of the 14–25 partnership agree to integrate the actions from the strategic plan into their own institution’s action plan. The federations, which include the colleges, incorporate the plan which then informs their action plan for the forthcoming year.

Pre-16 work-related learning programme

There is an extensive city-wide programme for pre-16 learners at risk of disengagement. The work-related learning (WRL) programme is perceived to be one of the main reasons the city has low NEET figures at age 16. It was developed six years ago, has a strong working relationship between the college and the LA and currently involves 800 key stage 4 learners. The learners on the programme undertake a vocational course, such as DJ’ing, construction and animation, at

either the local college or a training provider for up to two days a week. The LA 14–19 quality assurance manager believes that by offering such a wide range of courses they are ‘increasing the opportunities for the young people’.

This programme is coordinated by the LA which has developed protocols and procedures that all partners agree to follow by signing a partnership agreement. In addition to delivering courses, the colleges attend the steering group of the WRL programme. Quality assurance of the programme is managed by the LA’s quality assurance manager who regularly meets with the quality managers in the college to discuss teaching and learning. A new aspect of the quality assurance system will be LA and college joint-teaching observations. This will form part of an LA-wide 14–19 quality framework, which was currently being piloted with the colleges.

The LA is piloting a system called the ‘collaborative learning manager’ with the WRL programme. This is a software programme that allows schools and colleges to track and monitor learners online and, therefore, is useful for collaborative provision when a learner is enrolled at one provider but being taught at another. This city-wide programme will be rolled out and used in all diploma lines of learning from September with the aim of running it with all post-16 learners studying on multiple sites in the future.

2.9.3 Impact

Benefits

Progression across the LA has been high for a number of years and NEET figures are consistently below the national average. Over the last two years, NEET figures have fallen by two per cent. Much of this is perceived to be related to the extensive pre-16 provision available which the LA and college collaborate on. Many of the young people who were on a pre-16 programme at the college will continue with that

provision post-16. The federation structure is seen as having a positive impact on progression because it offers a wider range of courses and, therefore, more opportunities for young people.

Challenges

The college and the LA both identified challenges resulting from collaborative working.

It was felt that although the LA, through Connexions and the college, provided independent IAG to learners, schools were not providing this. As a result, learners were not aware of the scope of provision available to them. A representative from the LA felt that this may account for higher NEET figures at age 17, compared with 16, as learners may choose inappropriate courses.

As more systems become LA-wide, one challenge for the LA is ensuring all providers involved use the new city-wide systems, particularly where organisations have their own internal systems in place, such as quality assurance systems. Conversely the college was worried about how standards of such city-wide systems would be guaranteed and not duplicate their current systems.

Future plans

Both the college and the LA believed their relationship would be changing in the future due to the transfer of funding from the LSC to the LA. It was felt that the nature of the relationship would change as the LA would have to discuss and review performance with the college. The college felt that because of the transfer of funding, the LA would need a much higher level of understanding of the college compared to what is currently has. The college had reservations regarding how evenly the treatment of schools and colleges would be due to the different ways in which the two types of providers are funded.

3 Key features of effective collaboration

This chapter draws together the experiences of the LA and FE college interviewees and summarises the lessons they have learnt about collaboration and the advice they would offer to ensure collaboration between LAs and FE colleges has a secure positive impact on young people, especially in terms of transition, progression and engagement.

Mutual trust, respect, openness, honesty and transparency were reported by FE college and LA interviewees as crucial to partnership working. Furthermore, reciprocal confidence between the LA, schools and the colleges was perceived to be necessary. One FE 14–19 manager said: 'If there is a history of not getting on in an LA it is very difficult [to foster good collaborative working].' As LA 14–19 strategy manager in another case-study area concurred: 'You need trust.... It is very important that you have colleges on your side.... We are working together for the common aim.' Moreover evidence suggests that where collaboration was functioning well there was a widely shared understanding and a common belief that partnerships were part of the ethos of the way in which institutions interact and work together.

Regular and robust communication systems, and individual and face-to-face contact were seen as essential for effective collaboration. One LA 14–19 strategy manager explained:

A top priority would be to ensure the infrastructure is there across the LA ... to absolutely ensure that you are listening to ... college principals ... and demonstrating that you're listening and [that you're] also willing to share and distil messages.

He proceeded to point out that resources have to be made available for communication to be effective: 'You need a lot of people on the ground – it is demanding as it is about building relationships and you can't do that by shuffling papers in an office.'

The involvement of key senior, strategic leaders was perceived to be vital to secure high level support

necessary for effective collaboration. LA interviewees felt that it was essential to engage college principals in dialogue so, as one LA 14–19 development manager said, 'you can work jointly with colleges'. Securing college principal commitment also meant that other college staff would be released, said another LA 14–19 strategy manager, 'to take part in the long arduous meetings that it takes to develop partnerships. It is not something that happens overnight, it is an expensive business collaborating.' FE interviewees also believed this and one FE 14–19 strategy manager said that, in order for partnerships to work, 'you need to make a strategic decision that this is what you want to do'.

Establishing a shared vision, joined-up thinking with clear roles and responsibilities, and agreed systems and processes were viewed as important because the focus was then on how to achieve the vision and improve outcomes for young people rather than collaborative procedures. Furthermore, it was acknowledged, by a FE college principal, that more can be achieved through a common understanding: 'If we don't know where we are going together and why we are going along the road, we are all going to end up in different places.' The head of learning services in a college further illustrated this point and the additional benefit of combined effort: 'When we are working together, we can actually provide added value, which is significantly higher than any agency could add on its own.'

A shared commitment to driving up standards for young people was viewed as an essential prerequisite for collaboration, as articulated by one LA strategy manager: 'Overall there must be a passion for meeting the needs of every young person in the borough.' This core belief was also emphasised by an FE 14–19 strategy manager in another area: 'Think about the young person and what suits them best. That needs to be the driver of the partnership, and you need to keep coming back to that.'

In addition, several college interviewees, when given the opportunity to offer advice to another FE college

on how to develop effective collaborative working in order to improve outcomes for young people, believed that having a reputation as a high quality provider and being proactive were key fundamentals. One college principal advised:

'Keep your own house in order...as a college you feel less vulnerable if your provision is good.... You have a more credible voice.' She went on to recommend: 'Do not be afraid to take the lead, don't feel you have to leave it to the LA.'

4 Conclusions and implications

This research has focussed on providing evidence of effective practice in terms of collaboration between LAs and FE colleges where it has achieved a positive impact on young people. The definition of effective practice used by the research team was 'collaborative practice which contributes to a perceived or actual positive impact on young people in terms of easing transition, reducing disengagement and reducing NEET figures'.

In addition, it is advisable to be aware that it is not possible to say conclusively that certain collaborative activity has caused impact, as other variables, for example, the young person's intrinsic motivations, the type of school attended, or the context of the LA, might have influenced the process. However, there are indications, perceptions from interviewees and evidence from some statistics, that effective collaboration has contributed to improved outcomes for young people.

4.1 Conclusions

4.1.1 Types of collaboration

Table 4.1 presents a summary of the types of effective collaboration, grouped in three strands, identified by interviewees as having benefited young people. Three further examples inform the three strands more broadly: utilising college expertise at the LA (case-study area 2), a 14–25 strategic partnership (case-study area 9) and LA-driven research to analyse NEET data (case-study area 1).

4.1.2 Impact

Effective collaboration between the LA and FE colleges was perceived to have contributed to improved progression and engagement of young people in education and training.

Table 4.1 Types of collaboration between LAs and FE colleges perceived to have impacted on young people's outcomes

Provision (range and quality)	Transition support	Information, advice and guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local skills centre (case-study area 2) Multi-agency plan for LLDD transition (case-study area 3) The creation of a LA and college sponsored skills centre for economic regeneration (case-study area 4) Scheme to increase the number of apprenticeships (case-study area 5) Diploma champions who have been seconded to the LA for half a day a week to build on provision (case-study area 5) Provision of AimHigher activities for young people aged 11–19 (case-study area 6) The establishment of a youth club for year 8 and Year 9 LLDD (case-study area 6) Key stage 4 engagement programme (case-study area 8) Pre-16 work-related learning programme (case-study area 9) Collaborative approach to school improvement (case-study area 5). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year 11 pupil case conferences which provide support to individual learners through the transition process (case-study area 1) Post-16 learning mentors provided by the FE college (case-study area 1) Protocol for early leavers (case-study area 3) Provision of transition support for PRU leavers (case-study area 4) The creation of multi-disciplinary teams to help provide continued support to learners (case-study area 4) Provision of accessible independent transport for LLDD (case-study area 8) Re-engagement plans for pupils at risk of dropping out (case-study area 7). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Independent' LA 14–19 placement organisation which provides impartial advice and guidance (case-study area 2) The creation of multi-disciplinary teams to provide comprehensive independent IAG (case-study area 4) Collaboration between colleges, Connexions and the LA in delivering IAG (case-study area 7).

This was supported by a reduction in NEET figures in all nine case-study areas over the last few years. There was evidence that through the joined-up partnership approach, to transition and early intervention in particular, young people appeared to be more motivated to stay in education or training.

Furthermore, retention figures, in some case-study areas, would indicate that more young people have completed their post-16 courses in recent years. Some attainment was also perceived to have improved as alternative provision of largely vocational courses has encouraged young people to participate.

Findings from the research have also indicated that the collaborative way of working, where all partners (including the LA and FE colleges) have contributed to planning, has enhanced the range and quality of provision.

It was notable that collaboration appeared to minimise conflicts of interest between the LA and colleges, which may be a reflection of colleges' involvement in planning provision. The shift of focus from institutional self-interest to a commitment to a shared responsibility for the best interests of young people was another facet of collaboration that was reported to impact positively on outcomes for young people.

There was a recognition that progress has been made in terms of the range of provision available and support for transition has improved, but it was generally recognised that the provision of comprehensive IAG was now a priority.

4.1.3 Key elements of effective collaboration

The experiences of the LA and college interviewees indicated key features of collaboration viewed as necessary to secure positive impact on young people in terms of transition, progression and engagement.

- Mutual trust, respect, openness, honesty, transparency and equality of standing between partners were reported to be crucial in order to instigate confidence between collaborators.
- Regular and robust communication systems were viewed as vital, including informal email and face-to-face contact.

- Involving key senior, strategic leaders was perceived to be vital for securing high level support and credibility.
- Establishing a shared vision, joined-up thinking, and structures with clear roles and responsibilities and agreed systems and processes was reported as essential.
- There must be a shared commitment to driving up standards for young people.

In addition, several FE college interviewees believed that having a reputation as a high quality provider and being proactive were key fundamentals to collaborative working with the LA.

4.1.4 Challenges

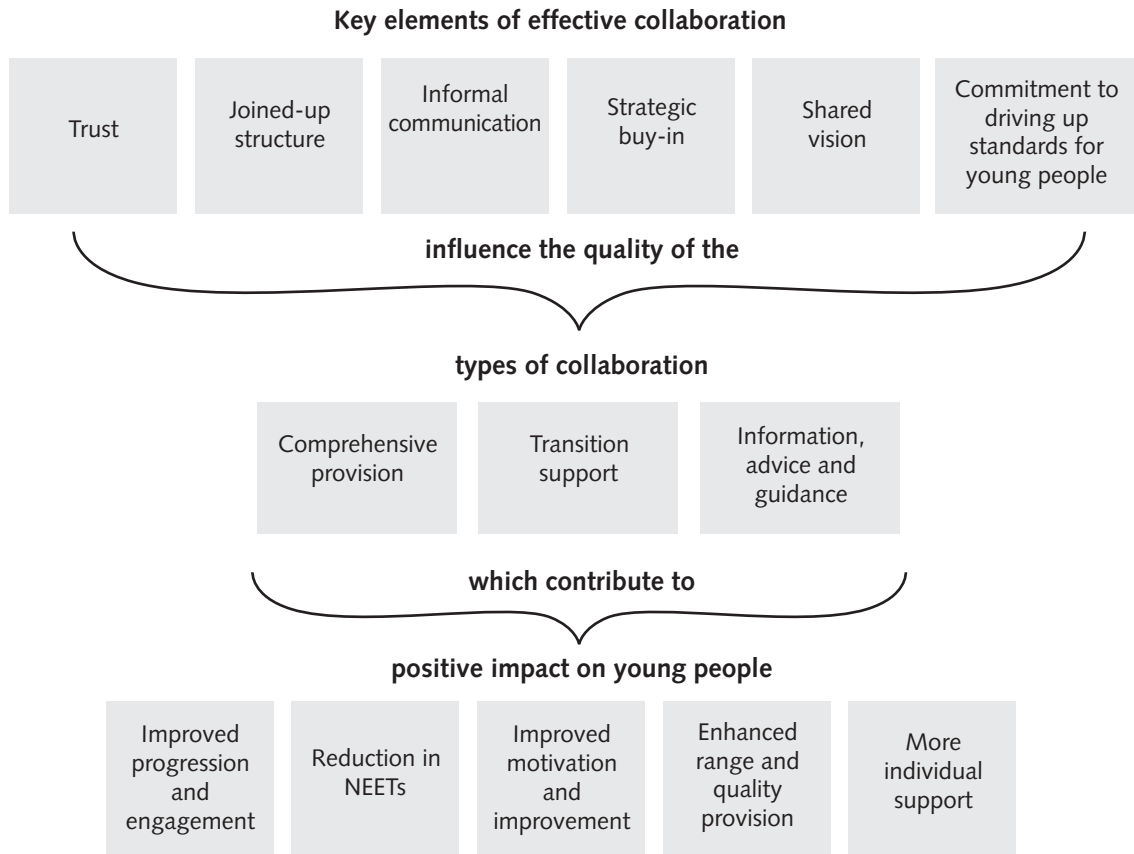
One of the main challenges that emerged from this research was the time needed to collaborate effectively both in terms of longevity, as there was evidence that all these partnerships were initiated a number of years ago, and in terms of making time to communicate informally between more formal meetings. Connected with this was the reported challenge of ensuring that resources and capacity were available to underpin the time needed, as building trust and relationships was perceived to be key to teamwork.

Always putting the interests of the learner above institutional self-interest was considered an essential ingredient of collaboratively improving outcomes for young people. At present the case-study FE colleges indicated they valued involvement in planning provision and the sense of equality in their partnership with the LAs. Concern was expressed about how the transfer of funding from the LSC to LAs might disrupt the balance of this relationship.

4.2 Implications

This research suggests that the key elements that contributed to partnership working between the LA and FE colleges enhanced the resultant types of collaboration, which in turn contributed to improved outcomes for young people, as displayed in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Perceived impact of effective collaboration on young people's outcomes



One of the key features of effective collaboration was perceived to be equality of standing in terms of partnerships. At present the FE colleges in this research felt they were regarded as equal partners to LAs in collaborative relationships.

From Easter 2010, LAs will be responsible for commissioning provision from FE colleges and other post-16 providers in addition to pre-16 providers. To what extent will the change instigated by the funding transfer disturb the equilibrium of balance between LAs and FE colleges? To what extent will these collaborative partnerships have to adapt to a more competitive 14–19 environment? And will FE colleges be regarded in a similar way to schools in terms of provision, bearing in mind the different relationship LAs have with schools and FE colleges?

LAs and colleges will have to work together to ensure a range of provision and providers to meet the needs of young people. While the findings from this research have indicated that collaboration has contributed to planning and enhancing the range and quality of provision and support for transition, there appeared to be less current emphasis on IAG at a time when comprehensive, independent and impartial guidance is essential.

LAs, the LGA, FE colleges and other collaborative partners may wish to consider how they will maintain, and develop further, effective collaborative working, in terms of comprehensive provision, IAG and transition support while operating in a more competitive context and in a commissioner/provider relationship.

5 Technical appendix

A sample of nine case-study areas was selected comprising different types of LAs. These included three metropolitan counties, four counties, one city and one unitary authority. All of the case-study colleges were general FE colleges. In terms of size, three medium and six large colleges were included in the sample. Interviews were also carried out in one LA with staff from one sixth form college and one secondary school.

In total 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 at LA level and 19 at provider level. Some interviewees were interviewed together.

LA level

- Eight 14–19 Strategy Managers/Advisors/Managers
- One Connexions Locality Manager
- One Chief Executive of Connexions
- One Service Director for Learning
- One Director of Learning
- One AimHigher coordinator
- One Advisor of Student Achievement
- One Transition Strategy Coordinator
- One 14–25 Partnership Manager
- One 14–19 Diploma and Applied Learning Coordinator
- One Quality Assurance Strategy Manager
- One 14–19 General Inspector
- Two 14–19 Development Managers

Provider level

- Two 14–19 Coordinators/Strategy Managers

FE colleges interviewees

- Four Deputy Principals/Vice Principals
- One Associate Principal
- Two Chair of Governors
- One Principal
- Two Vice Principals for Curriculum and Quality
- One Applied Learning Coordinator
- One Associate Principal for Learning and Curriculum Development
- One Executive Director for Business and Learning
- One Head of a Vocational College
- One Head of Learning Services

Sixth form college interviewee

- One Deputy Principal

Secondary school interviewee

- One Secondary Headteacher

What does collaboration between local authorities and further education colleges look like, and how does it benefit students? This report from NFER examines nine case studies of good practice, drawing out the key elements of collaboration that work to improve outcomes for young people.

The benefits of close working and joint planning for students included:

- improved progression, attainment and retention
- reduction in the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)
- enhanced range and quality of provision
- improved transition support for learners

Mutual trust, respect, openness, honesty, transparency and equality of standing between partners were found to be crucial for building confidence between local authorities and colleges. Other key features needed to secure a positive impact on young people in terms of transition, progression and engagement included:

- regular and robust formal and informal communication
- strategic buy-in
- a joined-up structure
- shared vision
- a commitment to raising standards for young people.

This report is important reading for local authority staff, further education managers and providers and all those interested in improving the outcomes for young people.