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New Opportunities Fund Summer and Term-time Schemes, 2000 – 2003: An Evaluation of 69 Schemes in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

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1. Introduction

This report describes findings from a sample of 39 term-time schemes throughout the UK that had received funding from the New Opportunities Fund in the period 2000 to 2003 as part of the Fund's Out of School Hours Learning Programme (OSHL). An earlier report, submitted to the Fund in August 2003, was an evaluation of a sample of 30 summer school schemes throughout the UK in the period 2000 to 2002. This is an executive summary of both reports.

2. Background

Since 1999 the Fund has invested £180 million to term-time schemes and £25 million to summer school schemes under the OSHL programme. The stated objectives of the programme are:

- To set up, improve and develop OSHL activities encouraging innovation and diversity
- To provide learning activities that encourage and motivate young people and build their self-esteem
- To raise levels of achievement in school
- To benefit those who suffer from disadvantage and who would benefit most from help to raise achievement.

3. Methodology

The research on both term-time and summer school schemes was conducted through interviews with key providers, participants and others with an involvement in the schemes (e.g. parents, in-school scheme staff, Local Education Authority (LEA)/Education Authority (EA)/Education and Library Board (ELB) officers), and through observation of project activity. For term-time schemes, a researcher or researchers typically visited each project on three occasions during a school year, with the information gathered used in the writing of a case study report. For summer school schemes, each scheme was visited on two days, again with the research leading to a case study report. The set of case study reports formed the basis for the respective report. The amount of observation for all schemes was limited. As such, the content of the individual case studies and the two reports, including both sets of conclusions, are based on the views of providers, participants and others involved.

The sample of term-time schemes comprised 13 in England, nine in Scotland, nine in Northern Ireland and eight in Wales. Twenty-four term-time schemes were evaluated in their first year of operation, nine in their second year, and two in their third and final year, while four schemes were evaluated over their first and second years. The sample of summer school schemes comprised nine schemes in England, nine in Scotland, seven in Wales and five in Northern Ireland. Twenty-eight summer school schemes were evaluated in their first year of operation, while the other two were evaluated in their second year.

4. Scheme Aims

The aims of individual schemes, both term-time and summer school, were closely related to the particular circumstances of the schools involved and the identified needs of the young people participating in activity. Throughout the schemes, aims included: raising levels of achievement; providing enrichment/extension activities; improving young people's attitudes to learning; supporting transition from one phase of schooling to the next; providing cultural, identity and heritage experiences; and improving school and community links.

Providers used stated aims to guide their organisation, planning and delivery of the scheme. Good practice was evident in large schemes, both term-time and summer school, that had explicitly translated general aims for the scheme as a whole into specific aims for individual projects, and in term-time schemes, of all sizes, that had specified time-related aims and carefully considered the potential impact of their provision in conjunction with other initiatives (e.g. the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme in England).

5. Types of Project

There was a variety of types of term-time project in each of the four countries. Most common in the evaluation sample were homework clubs, literacy and numeracy focused projects, sports and physical education projects, performance arts (i.e. music, dance and drama) projects, arts and craft projects, and IT/ICT projects. Less common projects included breakfast clubs, family learning projects, and individual subject revision sessions.

A relatively common type of summer school scheme was that focused on core subjects or key skills (i.e. support for numeracy, literacy and ICT). Other schemes included transition summer schools, usually for pupils in their final year of primary school, which provided 'taster' activities adapted from the secondary school curriculum. Other summer schools provided enrichment/extension activity usually in performance arts or arts and craft areas.

Term-time and summer school schemes that had aims relating to supporting transition from primary to secondary school were particularly successful in reassuring young people about aspects of the secondary school that most would shortly be joining. Participants gained from having the opportunity to visit the secondary school, meet some of the teachers, experience 'taster' activities in new subject areas, and work alongside pupils from other schools.

Overall, both term-time and summer school schemes of all types met the needs of the young people involved. For example, term-time projects provided a suitable environment for homework completion after school or allowed for a concentrated

period of time on key aspects of numeracy, literacy or ICT. Summer school schemes provided young people with an opportunity to try out a sport or an outdoor pursuit that they would not have otherwise experienced, or gave them more time to engage with activity that they were particularly interested in, such as in performance arts.

Generally, much activity across both term-time and summer school schemes was innovative in offering new experiences to young people. This innovative approach related to such aspects as activity provided at non-school sites, the use of a greater range and higher quality of resources, teaching and learning styles that were more informal than that of the school day, the employment of non-teacher professionals, the opportunity to work with others from a wider age range or from other schools, and course content that matched and developed participants' skills and interests.

6. Partnerships

The majority of schemes, whether term-time or summer school, were either LEA/EA/ELB schemes or multiple school schemes. A common model of schools working together was of a single secondary school providing both activities for its own pupils and activities for pupils from its feeder primary schools in the case of term-time schemes, or solely for pupils from primary schools in the case of summer schools. Other models included consortia of primary schools and consortia of secondary schools. The partnership arrangements for schools working together were generally successful, although there was often a considerable amount of liaison necessary to ensure that the scheme ran smoothly.

Most schemes had input from one or more partners from the private, public or voluntary sectors. The involvement of partner organisations in schemes varied. Some were lead organisations, having prepared the bid and were then managing the scheme. Others provided a direct input into scheme activity through providing employees to work as main providers or mentors. Other partner organisations supplied resources or additional funding.

The involvement of partner organisations added to the quality of schemes in all four countries. For example, the involvement of the Youth Service in some schemes was

particularly successful in responding to the needs of disaffected young people or those who were becoming disengaged with learning.

Some projects were entirely school-based, which was appropriate for the type of provision (e.g. transition summer schools). Others were partly or entirely based at non-school sites, such as community libraries, community centres, sports centres, outdoor education centres and youth centres. Providers regarded the use of these venues as helpful in widening the horizons of young people, and providing them with learning activity outside the formal school-site context. Young people appeared to be particularly motivated by being able to use up-to-date facilities and resources provided at these venues. However, there were difficulties for some young people in accessing provision at some non-school sites concerning the ease of travel to the venues or because they were perceived to be in areas outside their 'territory'.

7. Scheme Providers

A wide range of people were involved in managing, delivering or supporting project activity. These include scheme coordinators, school coordinators, teachers, non-teacher providers, adult mentors, peer mentors (usually older pupils from participating schools) and parents.

All schemes had a scheme coordinator, who had responsibility for the strategic planning and direction of the scheme. The scheme coordinator was an LEA/EA/ELB officer with responsibility for Out of School hours learning or a related area, or a senior employee of a partner organisation, or a senior teacher of a school, depending on the type of scheme and partnership structure.

School coordinators were responsible for scheme activity within their own school. Typically, these were teachers, with their duties including: acquiring resources; liaising with teachers and other providers; reviewing progress; publicising activities; monitoring the impact on young people; and dealing with problems on a day-to-day basis.

Many schemes employed non-teacher professionals. These included classroom assistants, play workers, youth workers, sports coaches, artists, musicians, dancers and drama providers. It was evident that young people appreciated their input into project activity, and these professionals acted as positive role models for many young people.

A small number of schemes recruited volunteers from the workplace to act as mentors, while some projects employed young people from schools to work as peer mentors. Relatively few peer mentors were employed on term-time projects compared with summer school schemes. Very few parents had a direct involvement in any of the schemes, apart from those operating term-time family learning projects, at which parents worked alongside their children.

8. Targeting

Most term-time projects within the evaluation sample were entirely open access for young people from particular year groups or key stages. A minority of term-time projects targeted young people who they had identified as underachieving and/or in need of support. While many term-time projects at the school level were open access, there had been some targeting of disadvantage through the selection of schools, especially by a number of the LEA/EA/ELB schemes. A small number of term-time schemes that had initially planned to target particular groups, in practice did not do so, believing that members of the target group might feel stigmatised or, on reflection, concluding that all young people had an entitlement to the provision.

In contrast, a minority of summer schools in the evaluation sample were entirely open access for young people. Most summer schools had a clearly-defined target group within a particular year group or range of year groups. Across the summer school schemes, the criteria used for targeting included underachievement, poor attendance at school, a lack of confidence, poor behaviour/disaffection and special educational needs.

Successful targeting frequently relied on a great deal of work from teachers in discreetly approaching potential participants, or their parents in the case of primary

aged pupils, and explaining the benefits that were likely to accrue from attending provision. For a small number of schemes, others, such as youth workers, Education Welfare Officers and Family Link Officers, were involved in promoting and recruiting participants from the target group.

9. Attendance

All schemes recorded attendance by young people as a requirement for the completion of the annual monitoring form for the Fund. The majority of term-time projects regarded the level of attendance as generally good. Those projects that had the greatest fluctuations in attendance were homework clubs. There were a small number of instances of attendance at term-time projects being poor, typically related to provision at non-school sites involving awkward journeys. Several term-time projects had replaced poorly attended clubs and activities with others, recognising that they needed to be flexible and willing to make changes to keep attendance at a relatively high level and thus maintain cost-effectiveness.

For the majority of summer school schemes in all four countries, coordinators reported that attendance had been disappointing, especially on the first day. The reasons given for low attendance included the timing of the summer school, poor organisation, a lack of publicity, perceived unattractiveness of activities to potential participants, and location. It should be noted that 28 of the 30 summer school schemes in the evaluation sample were evaluated in their first year of operation, that is, at a stage when difficulties with attendance for many had not been anticipated.

Some term-time projects examined the difference in take-up of provision between boys and girls. While there were some significant differences within individual clubs or activities, the view taken by these projects was that this was unimportant provided there was an equal balance between boys and girls overall in accessing some type of provision.

Activity across schemes in all four countries was open to all, regardless of ethnicity or special educational needs, apart from a small number of schemes that had particular target groups in these areas. It appeared that young people from minority ethnic

groups and those with special educational needs were accessing the provision at the same level as other groups and were gaining equally.

Overall, it appeared that most young people attended and continued to attend projects, whether term-time or summer school, because they felt they were benefiting. For some, these benefits were mainly to do with developing particular skills, whereas for others, it was the opportunity for greater social interaction.

10. Internal Monitoring and Evaluation

All schemes used registers to record the attendance of young people. For a small number of schemes, attendance data formed the only measure of judging the level of success achieved, whereas in the majority of schemes it was one of several measures.

Some term-time projects with an explicit aim of raising levels of achievement analysed pupil performance in order to measure the impact of their provision. This was usually through an analysis of the young people's GCSE grades against their predicted grades. These projects were convinced that this showed that their provision was raising achievement levels. However, this conclusion should be treated with caution, mainly because their analysis was based on relatively few numbers of young people and difficulties were encountered with classifying participants according to the extent to which they accessed the provision.

Some summer schools that were focused on core subjects or key skills had initially identified their target group through pupil results on National Curriculum tests or on standardised tests. The intention of these projects was to measure the impact of the provision by analysing pupils' results on similar assessments at a future date.

Most term-time and summer school schemes devised and used participant evaluation forms to collect information on particular aspects of their provision. These forms would have collected more useful information if they had included a small number of questions about what participants felt they were gaining.

Other monitoring and evaluation methods employed by schemes included following the Quality in Study Support (QiSS) recognition scheme, holding regular project review meetings, sometimes with an input from participants, and the expert judgement by non-teacher professionals of the end-product of projects, such as a piece of pottery or a mural.

All term-time and summer school schemes reported notable successes or main benefits to participants as a result of the provision. These included improvements in homework completion and quality, the development of specific skills, and improvements in young people's attitudes to learning, self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

11. Sustainability

In the first year of provision by both term-time and summer school schemes, the majority of scheme coordinators reported that sustainability was not an issue for them at that time, as they were more concerned with getting activity set up and established. In the second year, the plans for sustainability for most schemes remained vague. A small number had identified possible sources for future funding, but there was little evidence of longer term planning.

At the time of the research (mainly in school years 2000/1 to 2002/3), the general view across both term-time and summer school schemes in all four countries regarding the likelihood of large-scale sustainability was relatively pessimistic. Some of the smaller schemes reported that they did not expect to be operating after the period of funding, or if they were then it would be in a greatly reduced form. A number of schemes thought that obtaining financial support from local companies was not possible, either because there were very few or no companies of a reasonable size to approach, or because where there were such companies they were already supporting other education initiatives.

12. Country Specific Element of OSHL

As an additional piece of research, discussions were held with representatives of the Fund in autumn 2003 on how in-country policy on OSHL had developed over the last two years, the future development of policy, and the provision made by country governments/assemblies to ensure the continued development of OSHL.

These discussions pointed up that the financial contribution of the Fund towards OSHL had made many positive contributions in each of the four countries. The financial commitment and policy provision committed by governments/assemblies demonstrated their political and financial support of OSHL activities. However, it appears that there is a degree of financial and political uncertainty and this will undoubtedly impact on future policy development. Specifically, in Northern Ireland and Wales, uncertainty remains in relation to specific OSHL policy development in the future. In England and Scotland however, funding has been allocated to support future OSHL activity, at least until 2006.

13. Recommendations

The NFER research team makes a number of recommendations for LEA/EA/ELBs, groups of schools and single schools who wish to set up or extend out-of-school-hours provision at a future date, whether funded through an organisation such as The Fund or other sponsors. These recommendations, as described in detail in Chapter 11 of this report, relate to planning schemes, the content of schemes, partnership working, scheme providers, participants, internal monitoring and evaluation, and other aspects of OSHL. These recommendations are for both term-time and summer school schemes, unless otherwise stated.

In addition to these recommendations, the research team points up several issues for The Fund, or any similar organisation, to consider should there be any future large-scale OSHL programme. The main issues are concerned with what were regarded by schemes as unnecessary delays in receiving the grant, the application process and subsequent annual monitoring process being unnecessarily bureaucratic, and a lack of

clarity and guidance about the criteria for scheme activity that qualified for staff payment.

14. Conclusions

The research evidence suggests that the level of success achieved by the Fund's Out of School Hours Learning Programme in meeting its stated objectives was mixed. On the positive side, there was much activity in evidence that was of value in meeting the needs of participants, leading to increased motivation and generally improved attitudes to learning. Also, it was largely through the involvement of partner organisations that many schemes addressed the stated objective concerning setting up and developing learning activities that encouraged innovation and diversity.

However, the extent to which substantial numbers of young people from the 'most disadvantaged' groups were involved was questionable. Furthermore, there was the issue of relatively low attendance at the majority of summer schools, which meant that these projects had less impact through operating well below capacity. The level of community participation in schemes was varied, but this appeared to be related to the amount of funding provided for each scheme. Some schemes made good linkage with local and/or national initiatives, but it was evident that many more had not.

With regard to the stated objective of raising levels of achievement, in an 'academic' sense (i.e. in relation to National Curriculum test scores or end-of-course examination results) there was no valid hard evidence to suggest that activity had led to this outcome in the lifetime of the schemes. It is possible though that changes in young people's attitudes to learning and increased motivation may well lead to raising levels of achievement in the longer-term. In a 'non-academic' sense (i.e. in relation to young people's skills in such areas as arts and craft and sports skills), many young people taking part in enrichment/extension activity had developed particular skills in these areas through their involvement in projects.

With regard to sustainability, it is doubtful whether much of the activity of the schemes in all four countries would be sustainable beyond the period of funding unless large-scale funding is earmarked for future OSHL by governments/assemblies.