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, 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.

**Further information**

The full report is available to download from www.nfer.ac.uk. For more information about this project contact Tami McCrone at t.maccrone@nfer.ac.uk.
This project was funded by the Local Government Education and Children’s Services Research Programme.