

**Activity and Learning  
Agreements Pilot**

**Process Evaluation**

**Year One Report**

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*Activity and Learning Agreements Pilot*

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# Executive Summary

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The Activity and Learning Agreements Pilots were launched in 12 areas of England in April 2006. Activity Agreements are designed for young people (aged 16–17) not in employment, education or training (NEET) and operate in eight of the 12 areas. Young people have to be NEET for 20 weeks to be eligible. They receive an allowance (three variants of which are being tested in different pilot areas) and in return receive continuous support and agree to take part in tailored activities designed to help them progress towards an employment or education and training outcome. Learning Agreements are aimed at 16–17 year olds in jobs without training (JWT) and also operate in eight of the 12 pilots areas (i.e. both pilots operate in four areas and they each operate separately in four others). Under a Learning Agreement, young people take part in agreed activities, which must include undertaking a designated course. If successful, young people may receive a monetary bonus (in two areas their employers receive wage compensation).

## The evaluation

The evaluation has three main strands:

- **a quantitative element** – using surveys of young people to measure the impact of the pilots in comparison to a number of control areas
- **a programme theory element** – focusing on testing some key aspects of the policy to identify what works or not and why
- **a process evaluation** – examining how the pilots have been set up and delivered and the main implementation issues.

## This report

The report summarised below covers the first full year of the process evaluation including two waves of fieldwork in the pilot areas. Evidence was collected from



interviews conducted with 246 respondents during two fieldwork visits to each pilot area. Respondents included project managers, operational staff from Connexions and local LSCs, as well as representatives from education and training providers.

## Key findings

The Activity and Learning Agreement pilots (AAP) are generally functioning well. Project managers played a crucial role in the management and local implementation of both initiatives. Young people are flowing onto the programmes, although take-up rates were significantly lower than anticipated, particularly on the Learning Agreement pilots (LAP).

### **The Activity Agreement Pilots (AAPs)**

- The piloting of AAP provided the opportunity for Connexions staff to develop further their existing strategies to support their work with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- Young people on AAP were offered totally flexible packages of learning which, in the vast majority of cases, were designed to meet individual needs and were not outcome-driven in terms of qualification attainment.
- Within AAP, Connexions staff were required to work more closely with staff from Jobcentre Plus, so that benefits check arrangements could be conducted. This had strengthened links between the two agencies.
- The process of staff recruitment was quicker and more successful within the AAP, which was largely attributed to AAP Personal Advisers' (PAs) skills being similar to those required by mainstream Connexions PAs.
- With regard to the procurement and management of AAP provision, there were many examples of innovative practice. Wider sharing of good practice between pilot areas on the development and procurement of individual/group programmes of learning should be further developed and encouraged.
- Success outcomes were being achieved within AAP. Young people tended to leave the programme early (usually between 12–15 weeks) and in most areas around 50 per cent immediately progressed into some form of education, employment or training (EET).

### **The Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP)**

- LAP was welcomed as an opportunity to engage with the young people in jobs without training (JWT) and their employers.

- Within LAP, young people were able to participate in the initiative within the framework of an agreed set of qualifications and the learner-led agenda became difficult to implement for a number of reasons.
- The focus of responsibility for local LSCs was to fund learning and training provision and to promote the initiative among employers. Connexions staff had concentrated to a much greater extent on identifying and contacting eligible young people.
- There was increasing recognition that LAP advisers needed to focus far more heavily on the selling and promotion of the initiative, which demanded the ability to work effectively with both young people and employers.
- Take-up rates were highest in areas where provision was dominated by key skills, basic skills and Technical Certificate programmes – that is where young people were largely recruited to provision that had been set up before their entry to the programme.

## Perceptions about the initiatives

Although in some areas there were already initiatives designed to engage the NEET group, the AAP was universally welcomed by stakeholders and those involved in their delivery as a valued addition. The allowance paid to young people was felt to be a useful ‘hook’ to initially attract young people to the programme, although where it was paid, the value of the allowance to parents was felt to be less clear. The combination of the intensive support package provided by PAs, together with the ability to offer young people bespoke provision was thought to play a key role in sustaining participation in the programme.

While the implementation of LAP had been challenging, the initiative was generally welcomed, since it provided much needed attention for a group of young people that had been out of policy focus for some time. In addition, it was perceived to be crucial for the effective delivery of Government plans to have all under-18s participate in some form of structured education or training. However, most pilots had difficulties estimating the size of the group and accurately locating young people in jobs without training in their areas, mainly because they had not been a priority in the past and records were inaccurate. Therefore, plans to extend the length of the pilot were generally welcomed.

## Management and delivery

AAP is managed locally by Connexions Partnerships. Connexions and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) have joint delivery responsibility for LAP.

The organisational structure of pilots varied partly by whether they were delivering only one or both of the initiatives, by the nature of their geographical area and crucially by the number and organisation of local authorities in the area. The greater the number and extent of the involvement of local authorities in the operation of the pilots, the more complex were their management and organisational structures. Two models of implementation were in evidence, which were largely determined by the scale of the management task facing project managers. In large pilot areas, project managers had a strategic role in overseeing the delivery of the pilot by operating through a network of local managers (Local Area Autonomy). In pilot areas which comprised a small number of LA areas (Central Management), project managers had the capacity to retain responsibility for operational staffing and a standardised approach to the delivery of AAP was more in evidence.

Any national roll-out of the initiative should take account of the number of Children's Trusts which are overseen by one regional or strategic manager, since consistency in terms of management and delivery was more difficult to achieve in pilot areas that comprised multiple local authority areas.

## Staffing structures

Most pilots recruited staff as dedicated Personal Advisers (PAs) (or some other job title) to work with young people. Within AAP, they often came from a Connexions/advisor background, since the role required broadly similar skills.

LAP Advisers needed a different skill set, compared with mainstream PAs and AA PAs. As well as being able to work with young people, LAP advisers needed to be able to 'sell' the concept of the initiative to young people and employers. They also needed an understanding of the available learning opportunities. Some new and redeployed Connexions staff found that working with employers and with young people to identify their training needs required new skills and/or challenged their existing skills. Difficulties were reported in recruiting and retaining staff who could work effectively with both young people and employers.

The recruitment of AA PAs/LAP Advisers within Connexions was slower in areas where staffing was managed by local authority personnel departments, due to the time taken to have vacancies and recruitment authorisation approved. This impeded the development of the initiatives in some pilot areas.

## Links between key stakeholders

The initiatives were introduced at a time of major change for Connexions, local Learning and Skills Councils and JobCentre Plus.

Within AAP, good relations appear to have been established between Connexions and JobCentre Plus, facilitated in some instances by personnel exchanges where restructuring allowed. Indeed, through developing an understanding of each other's different administrative systems, processes and ways of working, relationships between the two agencies were generally reported to have been enhanced by their involvement in the initiative.

Within LAP, Connexions and local LSC, staff had to establish close working relationships, with sharing of working arrangements and staff being introduced in some areas. The LSC generally took responsibility for securing and funding learning provision, promoting the pilot to employers and making links with other agencies, eg those involved in delivering Train to Gain. Connexions concentrated on identifying and working with eligible young people, although they were becoming increasingly involved with employers.

Organisational change in the LSC, as it moved to a more regional structure, had meant that in some areas sufficient staff had not been in post to manage and deliver LAP effectively at the early stages of the pilot. One effect had been that most areas had seen a delay in identifying and contracting with providers.

## Eligibility and application processes

The first step in the process of attracting young people to AAP was to identify those who were approaching 20 weeks NEET on the Connexions database. While there was evidence of a wide range of marketing and publicity activity, it was the one-to-one engagement between AA PAs and young people and increasing evidence of young people's awareness through 'word of mouth' which appeared to be the most effective strategies for entry into the initiative. Any future planning for the potential roll-out of the initiative may wish to review the added value of incurring large costs on marketing and publicity strategies and materials on likely take-up rates.

In most cases, AAP failed to engage with some of the 'hardest to reach', in particular young people who were estranged from their parents and living independently. This was because of the conflict of interest that existed between their benefit receipt and their ability to take up the AAP offer. In addition, the requirement for young people to have been NEET on a continuous basis for 20+ weeks in order to qualify for eligibility significantly reduced the eligible population in all areas and should be reviewed in order to expand take-up rates.

Connexions advisors were responsible for identifying potentially eligible young people for LAP. Attempts to contact young people directly were supplemented by a wide range of publicity and promotional activity including briefing materials, working with local stakeholders and intermediaries and establishing close links with providers.

In a majority of LAP areas, initial attempts to recruit employers were based on telephone and/or mail canvassing. During the course of the pilot, areas had increasingly developed a range of more sophisticated and/or direct approaches to employers, such as organising a range of promotional events, tele-marketing activities sometimes focused on specific sectors, and establishing closer working relationships with Train to Gain brokers. However, many felt that more could be done to develop a co-ordinated approach to employers and to raise awareness to the levels needed.

## Different offers

The implementation of AAP and LAP had delivered very different 'offers' to young people, despite assumptions being made about the similarities that existed between the two groups. Young people on AAP were offered totally flexible packages of learning, which, in the vast majority of cases, were designed to meet individual needs and were not outcome-driven in terms of qualification attainment.

In contrast, within LAP, young people were able to participate in the initiative within the framework of an agreed set of qualifications and the learner-led agenda became difficult to implement for the following reasons:

- Attempting to meet the needs of young people and their employers at the same time proved, in some cases, to be a complex arrangement to deliver.
- There co-existed a range of other government training programmes, most notably Apprenticeships, which could potentially have been displaced or undermined by offering young people (and their employers) total flexibility over their learning agendas.
- There was confusion among many delivery staff about the constitution of LAP, which made it a difficult concept to sell to young people and their employers.

## Take-up lower than expected

Recruitment onto AAP was slower than expected at the initial stages of the pilots. This was largely due to the time it had taken to get the pilot up and running, in particular with regard to staffing. During second round visits, take-up rates had improved and respondents were confident that the second year of the pilot would be easier to deliver.

Take-up rates within LAP remained a challenge, even with modified delivery targets. Reasons for low take-up include:

- the short lead-in time to deliver a policy targeted at a group of young people and a segment of the labour market, which had not been a policy priority for some time (section 6.1)

- delays in staff recruitment within Connexions and local LSCs (section 5.3)
- on-going changes to LAP regulations, which created confusion about the product, in particular among operational staff who were responsible for its promotion (section 6.1)
- organisational change which had occurred, notably at local LSC level (section 5.2.5)
- difficulties in identifying and tracking young people in the JWT group, due to inaccuracies in MI data (sections 5.3 and 6.2)
- apprehension about wider publicity of LAP because of the delays by local LSCs in procuring relevant education and training provision (section 6.3);
- operational staff in some Connexions Services lacked experience and confidence in working directly with employers (section 5.3)
- a lack of flexibility in the content and delivery of provision (section 6.3).

Take-up rates were highest in areas where provision was dominated by key skills, basic skills and Technical Certificate programmes, that is where young people were largely recruited to provision that had been set up before their entry to the programme. In areas where provision had been identified and procured on an 'individual needs' basis, they had encountered difficulties in both finding bespoke programmes and establishing roll-on roll-off admissions.

## Positive outcomes

It was reported that many young people (up to 50 per cent) left the programme before the end of the 20 weeks to positive outcomes, mainly to enter some form of employment, education or training (EET). This suggests that a significant proportion of young people are able to progress to some form of EET after relatively short periods of support and intervention provided through AAP.

It was too early to report on outcomes from LAP.

## Involvement of employers

The findings are based on interviews conducted with 33 employers. Most of the sample were small family-oriented businesses. In many cases, employers had recruited young people that were previously known to them (eg they were the owner's son or daughter). Few employers had been involved in government supported training in the past and most adopted a fairly informal approach to training.

Employers became involved for two main reasons:

- social responsibility – ie it was thought to be a ‘good thing to do’, either for the particular young person involved or for the community in general
- resourcing needs – ie the employer saw it as a way of filling particular recruitment or training gaps.

In most cases, the initiative had come either from the young person themselves or from Connexions advisers contacting the employer. However, a few employers had initiated their own involvement in LAP.

Employers thought they gained from participation in LAP in a number of ways, including: acquiring a more skilled employee, with a more independent and mature approach to work; and reputational benefits, both internally and externally, derived through being recognised as a ‘good employer’.

## Implications for national roll-out

While it is too early to draw conclusive findings from the three strands of the evaluation at the end of the first year, there are some emerging issues and recommendations from the first two visits to the pilot areas which were conducted as part of the process evaluation.

### AAP

- The AAP is an asset to practitioners working with young people who are NEET. Take-up rates would be further increased if greater flexibility was applied to the eligibility criteria.
- Connexions staff successfully managed the procurement and operation of provision. There were many examples of innovative provision and ways of working, which should be shared more widely between pilot areas and evidenced as good practice for any national roll-out.
- A significant proportion of young people moved into positive outcomes before completing their 20 weeks on AAP, which highlighted the effectiveness of a short period of financial and intensive support on a young person’s propensity to leave NEET group status.

### LAP

- While the implementation of LAP in its first year was surrounded by a number of delivery issues, the initiative has provided a valuable opportunity to appraise the requirements for working effectively with young people in JWT and with their employers.
- The introduction of LAP had enabled Connexions and local LSCs to work together to develop strategy to support the needs of young people in the JWT category. The

extent to which this relationship is supported and encouraged when Connexions provision is managed within Children's Trusts needs further monitoring within the evaluation of the ALA pilots.

- In terms of national roll-out, further guidance and evidence is required on whether the needs of young people and their employers can be successfully met within one initiative.





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# 1 Introduction

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Just under ten per cent of 16 and 17 year olds in England – around 100,000 young people – do not participate in any form of education, training or employment. A further 85,000, around six per cent of the cohort, are in jobs but do not receive any form of accredited training. The problem is repeated throughout the UK and the nation has one of the lowest rates of participation in full-time education, especially at age 17, in Europe.

The 2005 Budget announced the piloting of two new initiatives aimed at extending participation in education and training among young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and young people who are in jobs without training (JWT). Sixty million pounds was allocated over two years to Activity Agreements and an Activity Allowance Pilot (AAP) to support and encourage disengaged 16–17 year olds back into learning. In addition, £80m over two years was allocated to Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP) for 16–17 year olds in work with no training to increase access to training options for this group. Activity Agreements and Learning Agreements are being piloted in 12 areas of England from April 2006 for a two-year period. Young people (and in some areas, parents) are being offered a weekly allowance in return for agreeing to a plan and completing activities to integrate them back into learning. In addition, in some pilot areas, young people receive bonus payments in recognition of their achievements, and financial incentives are paid to employers in some LA pilot areas. A number of variants of AAP and LAs are being piloted, with a view to identifying the most successful models. Table 1.1 sets out the pilot areas and the variants which are being piloted.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), formerly the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), has commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), the Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to undertake the evaluation of the Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots. The evaluation comprises three strands:

- **a summative evaluation**, which involves the collection of quantitative data in pilot areas and a number of control areas, in order to measure the effectiveness of the pilots
- **a process evaluation**, which will explore the local implementation and delivery of the pilots in each area
- **a programme theory evaluation**, which aims to identify and test the key theories which underpin the policy development. Essentially, this strand looks at what works or does not work, and why or in what circumstances that is the case.

Table 1.1: Pilot areas for the Activity and Learning Agreement evaluation

AA area	AA variant	LA area	LA variant
Cornwall and Devon	Variant 2 £30 per week to YP	Cornwall and Devon	Bonus payment only
Greater Manchester	Variant 3 £20 per week to YP and £30 per week to family	Greater Manchester	Bonus payment and wage compensation
London East	Variant 3 £20 per week to YP and £30 per week to family	London East	Bonus payment and wage compensation
West Yorkshire	Variant 1 £20 per week to YP	West Yorkshire	Agreement only
Greater Merseyside	Variant 2 £30 per week to YP	Lancashire	Bonus payment only
Tyne and Wear	Variant 1 £20 per week to YP	South Yorkshire	Bonus payment only
Central London	Variant 2 £30 per week to YP	Black Country	Agreement only
Kent and Medway	Variant 1 £20 per week to YP	Essex, Southend and Thurrock	Agreement only

Source: IES/CEI Research Team

## 1.1 Activity Agreement Pilot (AAP)

The Activity Allowance is payable for a period of up to 20 weeks to 16 and 17 year olds who have been continuously NEET for 20 weeks or more. Recipients are required to demonstrate progress towards learning in order to continue to qualify for weekly support.

In addition to the allowance, a personally negotiated contract (the Agreement) which outlines specific steps the young person should take to move into education, training or employment in return for access to financial support, is developed between a Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) and the young person. Young people receive continuous support from their Connexions PA throughout the process. As part of the Activity Agreement, a flexible programme of personally tailored activities for the

young person is agreed between the PA and the young person. These activities may be part-time or bite-sized courses, part of mainstream provision or commissioned through the Connexions Partnership, and could include basic skills provision, vocational taster courses or personal development courses, as well as bespoke activities.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 Learning Agreement Pilot (LAP)

The Learning Agreement pilot is a joint initiative between Connexions and the local Learning and Skills Council in each pilot area. The initiative is targeted at young people aged 16–17 who are working but not engaged in any accredited training. A Learning Agreement, which outlines the accredited training that the young person will undertake, is drawn up between a Connexions Personal Adviser, the young person and their employer. The Learning Agreement is aligned to the following principles, outlined in the Learning Agreement Delivery Specification (December 2005).

- **Personalised:** agreed activities are tailored to the individual and take account of personal needs and abilities, determined by the profiling and assessment process undertaken by the young person with the Personal Adviser.
- **Participation:** focusing on encouraging and supporting the young person to participate in accredited training.
- **Flexibility:** ensuring, where possible, that learning provision is responsive and flexible to meet the needs of the young person and, where applicable, their employer.
- **Progression:** support and learning provision that provides appropriate progression routes for the young person to achieve higher-level qualifications if appropriate.

The eligible learning provision comprises all qualifications listed which are included under Section 96 of LSC's Learning Aims Database. This includes qualifications accredited at Level 2 or above but does not include standalone NVQs. It can include:

- Apprenticeships
- Advanced Apprenticeships
- BTEC and similar FE courses
- GCSEs
- A-levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Activity Agreement Pilot Guidance, November 2005.

The provision may be that which supports progression to Level 2, as long as the learning plan also addresses basic and/or key skills; including:

- NVQ 1
- Technical Certificates
- Basic Skills (literacy and numeracy)
- Short courses over ten guided learning hours (and on section 96).

Standalone Key Skills qualifications, including wider skills and those which support the LSC's Skills for Life Target, are also eligible.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3 The report

This report focuses on the presentation of interim findings from the first and second stages of the process evaluation. The implementation and administrative mechanisms through which the pilots were introduced were examined, with particular emphasis on the perceptions of those responsible for the pilots' local management. The views of those involved in the delivery of the pilots about their perceived relevance and early impact and how they have been received in each locality, were also collected. In addition, the first round of interviews was completed with a sample of employers in six pilot areas.

The next section of this report describes the methodology for the process evaluation. This is followed by two chapters that consider the management and delivery of the Activity Agreement Pilots. Chapter 5 then looks at the management of the Learning Agreement pilots. Chapter 6 focuses on the delivery of the Learning Agreement pilots, followed by the findings from our interviews with employers in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 presents the conclusions and recommendations emerging from Year 1 of the evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: Learning Agreement Pilot Delivery Specification, December 2005. Learning Agreement Pilots Local/Regional Guidance May 2006. Learning Agreement Pilot Guidance, February 2007.

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## 2 Methodology

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The aim of the process evaluation is to understand the local implementation of the pilots, map the context in which the initiatives are being piloted and highlight good practice. The process evaluation has three strands:

- data collection on the local implementation and delivery of the pilots
- the collation of contextual information
- employer research.

### 2.1 Data collection on the local implementation and delivery of the pilots

Data collection for the process evaluation primarily involves visiting the pilot areas three times during the course of evaluation. Findings from the first and second round visits are presented in this report.

#### 2.1.1 Initial visits

Initial visits were made to all pilot areas in May/June 2006 and interviews were conducted with local project managers. Early visits to the pilot areas enabled evidence to be collected on the initial implementation of the initiative(s), take-up rates and any reported 'teething problems'. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with project managers and other key staff. A total of thirty face-to-face interviews were conducted. The majority of interviews were tape recorded with the permission of respondents and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. This report contains an analysis of the data generated from initial discussions with project managers. Individual area profiles were drafted in consultation with local project managers and updated at the end of second round visits. Additional information was gained from most areas

through receiving copies of local delivery plans, as well as publicity and administrative materials.

### 2.1.2 Second round visits

A second round of visits to the pilot areas to interview project managers and a range of other local stakeholders took place during the latter part of 2006 and early in 2007. In all pilot areas, a roundtable discussion with project managers and local delivery staff and a maximum of eight face-to-face interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders including education and training providers and representatives from Jobcentre Plus, and the Local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In order to provide a better understanding of local implementation models, the number of interviews with representatives from key organisations was extended in six pilot areas. Most notably, there was an emphasis on expanding fieldwork in pilot areas that encompass large geographical areas, those that cover a number of local authority areas, those which are delivering both pilots, and those where separate management and delivery arrangements are in place to implement each policy initiative. Pilot areas where fieldwork was extended included:

- Greater Manchester, which includes ten local authority (LA) areas and is delivering both the Activity Agreement Pilot (AAP) and the Learning Agreement Pilot (LAP).
- West Yorkshire, which includes five LAs and is delivering both the AAP and the LAP.
- London East, which is a large urban area (ten LAs) and is delivering both the AAP and the LAP.
- Cornwall and Devon, which is a large rural area and is delivering both the AAP and the LAP.
- Greater Merseyside, which is a large urban area (six LAs) and is delivering the AAP.
- Kent and Medway, which is an urban/rural area and has 11 access points to AAP across the area.

A range of data-gathering techniques were used, and these were tailored to the particular requirements of each pilot area. These techniques included:

- In-depth face-to-face interviews (maximum of three)/telephone interviews (maximum six) with representatives from key organisations, such as, Jobcentre Plus, the voluntary and community sector, education and training providers, the Youth Offending Service (YOS), employer organisations and local authorities.
- Scrutiny and analysis of reports and documents (eg publicity material, Learning Agreements).

- When appropriate, observation of procedures and practices, for example, meetings between Personal Advisers (PAs) and young people to discuss Learning Agreements, payment issues, etc.

An additional nine interviews were conducted in each of the six pilot areas, which have been identified as requiring additional fieldwork. During the second round visits to the pilot areas a total of 216 respondents were interviewed.

Roundtable discussions, and face-to-face interviews with project managers and other key staff were tape recorded (with respondents' permission), and were either transcribed verbatim or written up by the interviewer for subsequent analysis. This report contains an analysis of the data generated from group discussions, face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews that were conducted during the second round visits to the pilot areas.

A final round of interviews with project managers and the second phase of the extended programme of fieldwork in six pilot areas are timetabled for the end of 2007/early 2008.

### 2.1.3 Employer research

A sample of employers were also interviewed to examine their experience of, and views on, their involvement in the Learning Agreement Pilots. We planned to interview 48 employers involved in the pilots and 24 employers who were not involved in six pilot areas, however, we had some difficulty securing interviews in some areas where LAP take-up had been slow. It proved particularly difficult to conduct successful interviews with employers who were not involved in the pilot. Ultimately we achieved:

- twenty-eight interviews with involved employers in five pilots areas (in one area it was not possible to organise employer interviews at this stage of the evaluation)
- five interviews with employers not involved in the pilots.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via the telephone.

Most of the employers that were interviewed for this element of the process evaluation were fairly small businesses, often family-run, with little or no experience of formal training or government supported training, from a wide range of sectors. In many cases, the businesses consisted of just two family members (usually father and son) with over two-thirds of all employers interviewed employing 25 or less people. Only four employers had more than 50 employees.



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## 3 Management of the Activity Agreement Pilots (AAP)

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This section sets out the management of the Activity Agreements Pilots (AAPs), including management delivery models, staffing structures and recruitment, links with local stakeholders and management information requirements.

### 3.1 Management delivery models

There was universal agreement among the respondents that they welcomed the opportunity to manage one or both of the pilots in their areas. The piloting of AAPs provided the opportunity for Connexions Partnerships/Services to help to further develop their strategies to support their work with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), who had been an organisational priority for some time. In addition to extending staffing resources, funding provided through their involvement in the AAPs had enabled Connexions personnel, often for the first time, to become directly involved in both designing and commissioning provision to meet the needs of their target group.

Project managers had overall responsibility for the implementation of AAP, following targets that had been agreed within delivery plans (3.1.1). There were two types of management structure, which had largely been determined through the make-up of the pilot areas and which were responding to differing needs.

**Type A – Local Area Autonomy.** In the majority of cases, pilot areas were large and comprised a number of Local Authority areas. In order to work across Local Authority areas, project managers liaised with a manager in each local area, who in turn had responsibility for local delivery (including staffing, local marketing and recruitment etc). While project managers maintained strategic direction for the pilot, local areas usually had a great deal of autonomy over the implementation of AAP.

**Type B – Central Management.** In areas where the pilot area comprised one Connexions Partnership and a small number of local authority areas, project managers had the capacity to maintain strategic responsibility as well as to have a ‘hands-on’ role within the implementation of the pilot. In this model, project managers retained responsibility for delivery staff and were better able to standardise procedures across the pilot area.

### 3.1.1 Delivery plans

In all pilot areas, delivery plans that set out proposals in terms of the design and implementation of the pilot(s) had been devised at senior management level. In most areas, delivery plans were drafted for the AAPs by Connexions senior management staff. Each pilot then appointed a project manager with responsibility for developing the initiatives across the pilot area. In some instances, project managers had amended the targets and projections which had been written within local delivery plans, in consultation with DCSF. In the majority of cases, in areas where both initiatives are being delivered, two project managers are now in post and the pilots are being managed independently of each other.

### 3.1.2 The role of local project managers

The role of AAP project managers within Connexions Partnerships is to take strategic responsibility for the local implementation and delivery of the initiatives, including the development and management of systems relating to IT and MI, as well as budgeting, marketing and staffing. In two (of the four) pilot areas testing both initiatives, one manager is responsible for the delivery of both the AAP and the LAP. The complexity of the task facing project managers in implementing either one or both of the initiatives varies between pilot areas. In some pilot areas, the establishment of complex management and contractual systems can largely be attributed to the network of local authority areas which co-exist in one locality. For example, in one pilot area, which is operating both initiatives, one local authority is managing the pilots on behalf of ten authorities in the area. Two project managers within the Connexions Partnership oversee the delivery of the initiatives on behalf of the lead local authority. Each of the ten areas is responsible for its own staff appointments, with some guidance over recruitment being received from project managers.

In another pilot area, one local authority is managing the contract to deliver the pilots on behalf of five authorities within the area. Within the Connexions Partnership, there is a project manager who has strategic responsibility for the delivery of the initiatives in each of the five areas. An agreement has been drawn up between the Connexions Partnership and each local authority area outlining their responsibilities, including the recruitment and deployment of staff. Senior Keyworkers have responsibility for day-to-day operational management and report to a Lead Officer who has been nominated

by the local authority for that area. While this is a complex model, involving both Connexions and local authorities in the strategic management of the pilot, it has effectively initiated the embedding of responsibility for AAP within Children's Trusts, which will assume control for Connexions Services from 2008. However, where local authorities are leading the operation of the pilots, their involvement appears to have hampered the early stages of the development of the pilots, in particular with regard to staff appointments.

*'... One of the things that has slowed us down is the fact that the Local Authorities have had to agree all the job specifications ... we made sure that the Local Authorities have been in all the recruitment and selection panels and that's slowed some of it up. They're not used to recruiting 40 staff in a block, so the recruitment side has been slower than we'd anticipated.'*

Project manager

The initial implementation of the pilots was less complex in areas where the contract is being managed centrally by the Connexions Partnership and where project managers have been working directly with local Connexions Services/offices. Project leaders tended to have had more of a 'hands-on' role in local delivery, in particular in relation to staff appointments. However, in all pilot areas, project managers had established a pattern of regular meetings (usually once per month) with local managers. In addition, in some areas, project managers had set up working groups comprising representatives from local operational staff to assist with the development of marketing and recruitment strategies.

In all pilot areas, local steering groups or pilot boards, usually meeting either quarterly or on a monthly basis, were established. They comprised representatives from local stakeholder groups, including education and training providers, sector skills councils, regional and local government offices, employer and voluntary groups and, in some cases, young people. AAP project managers met with their local area managers/team leaders on a monthly basis. In most cases, area managers were responsible for the delivery of the AA in a specific area or local authority area. In one pilot area, each team leader managed the delivery of the pilot across three local authority areas. There was only one pilot area where Personal Advisers (PAs) reported directly to the AAP project manager.

## 3.2 Staffing structures and recruitment

Following the appointment of Project Managers to oversee the local implementation and delivery of the AAP, the major task facing senior managers in Connexions Partnerships was to oversee the selection and recruitment of large numbers of operational staff, in accordance with the staffing levels that had been agreed at national level. The number of posts available to assist with the delivery of each pilot at local level had been broadly estimated on the size of the NEET population in each

locality. Within each pilot area, staff were allocated between different localities by project managers in proportion to the size of the NEET population.

In most areas, within Connexions Partnership areas, staff recruitment began in April 2006. The process of recruitment appears have been quicker and more successful for the AA pilots. This can be largely attributed to Personal Adviser (PA) posts being generally perceived as being similar to mainstream Connexions advisers in terms of their generic skills, with a focus on identifying and meeting the needs of young people who were NEET. As a result, in many pilot areas, AA operational staff were recruited through internal appointments. The appointment of staff through internal appointments also meant that delays were avoided, since CRB checks had been completed.

Staff recruitment that was managed by some local authority departments was subject to delays. For example, in one local authority, where recruitment of AA/PAs was managed by the Youth Service, the appointment process did not start until Autumn 2006.

Operational staff appointed to deliver AAs have been given the job title of Personal Adviser, Key Worker or Project Worker. While in most pilot areas designated AAP staff have been appointed, there are two pilot areas where two models of operation co-exist. In some parts of the pilot area, designated AAP PAs are in post, while in other areas, responsibility for the delivery of AA is combined within the generic caseload of all PAs. It was reported in these two areas, that the 'AAP adviser model' was easier to manage, since responsibility for the delivery of the pilot rested with a smaller number of people. On the other hand, the flexibility of opening up the delivery of the AA to all PAs, was helping at times when caseloads of specialist staff were reaching full capacity.

Staff retention has been a greater issue in areas where AA PAs have been appointed on temporary contracts. Where staff turnover has occurred amongst PAs, most posts have been re-filled very quickly. However, it was reported that some sub-areas are reporting staff shortages. In one local authority area, the funding provided to support staffing for the operation of the AA was match funded by the Connexions Service and four additional PA posts were created to support the delivery of the pilot.

Second visits made to the pilot areas identified that some project managers had initiated additional appointments to support the work of PAs. This included the appointment of specialist staff who were responsible for setting up and monitoring AA provision, either within sub-areas or across the whole pilot area. This enabled PAs to concentrate their efforts on engaging and supporting young people, while the time-consuming task of identifying provision and maintaining contact with a range of education and training providers was centrally managed. Concentrating the task of overseeing the procurement and monitoring of provision within a specialist role avoids duplication in relation to the number of contacts made to providers and enables PAs to access the whole range of contacts and provision that has been set up across the area.

In another pilot area, specialist AA PAs were based in a range of premises, such as voluntary organisations and partner organisations which have agreed to act as hosts in each of the local authority areas. This approach was reported to have enhanced networking opportunities with a range of agencies and, in doing so, had resulted in a wider system of referrals being established. In all other pilot areas, AA delivery staff are located within Connexions local offices.

The training offered to operational staff varied enormously between pilot areas. While in some areas training comprised an induction programme, in other areas training programmes had been developed and delivered by project managers. In one area a training needs analysis was conducted for each new member of staff, and an individual training programme was drawn up and delivered to meet their needs.

### 3.3 Links with local stakeholders

The management and implementation of the AAPs are dependent on the establishment of close working links between a number of key stakeholders, namely DCSF, local authorities, Connexions Partnerships and services, and local Jobcentre Plus offices. Respondents were asked to comment on the guidance and support that they had received at a national level from DCSF in setting up the initiative. Guidance notes issued by DCSF to assist with local design and delivery of the pilots were well received. In addition, respondents felt confident about contacting representatives of DCSF with queries. They felt that the advice and support that they had received was prompt, considered and supportive. The use of teleconferencing at the early stages of the implementation of the pilots was reported to have been an effective tool in dealing with 'teething issues' and subsequent monthly teleconferencing arrangements were valued.

#### 3.3.1 Organisational change

The piloting of Activity Agreements has come at a time of major change for Connexions Partnerships and Jobcentre Plus. While Connexions Partnerships in all pilot areas had established their intended approaches and management structures within their delivery plans, the implementation of the initiatives has coincided with a programme of structural re-organisation within Connexions Partnerships. Connexions Partnerships/services are facing structural change over a two-year period. This involves Connexions working with Local Authorities (LAs) in devolving Connexions through the delivery of services by local Children and Young People's Partnerships. In parts of some pilot areas this process has already taken place, while in other areas Connexions Partnerships are planning to disband by 2008, when all services are scheduled to have moved within local authority control. This process of change has complicated the delivery of the pilot. For example, in one pilot area, which covered ten local authorities, local agreements have been drawn up with five LAs who now manage local Connexions Services, while five separate agreements had to be drawn

up with independent local Connexions services which remain under the auspices of the Government Regional Office. In addition, among Connexions services, which had yet to be subsumed within LA control, there was widespread uncertainty expressed by managers and operational staff about the future funding of their posts and anxiety about the future structure and profile of guidance and support services within local arrangements. In terms of the implications of organisational change on the potential national roll-out of AAP, it will be important to establish service-level agreements and ring-fenced funding with LAs, in order to guarantee consistency in relation to the quality and quantity of staffing and support afforded to the delivery of AAP.

### 3.3.2 Strengthening links with Jobcentre Plus

Through the delivery of the pilot, Connexions staff have been encouraged to strengthen their links with local Jobcentre Plus offices so that eligibility checks can be carried out for young people by Jobcentre Plus staff and recruitment of young people to AAs could be actively encouraged between the two agencies. Indeed, some local delivery plans set out proposals to second or recruit local Jobcentre Plus staff into Connexions offices. These plans have been implemented to a much greater extent in some pilot areas than in others.

While in most areas arrangements have been made to second Jobcentre Plus advisers to Connexions Partnerships, in one pilot area a Jobcentre Plus manager has been seconded to the post of Lead Coordinator for the AA pilot. Working at management level has enabled service-level agreements between Connexions and Jobcentre Plus districts to be set up and delivered. The key role of the manager is to ensure that these agreements are implemented, and it was reported to have been successful due to negotiations being concluded at management level between a highly experienced Jobcentre Plus manager working on behalf of Connexions and her counterparts within Jobcentre Plus. Understanding the differences between administrative systems within the two organisations, and building on existing network groups between Connexions PAs and Jobcentre Plus advisers to establish effective communication, has facilitated and enhanced partnership working between the two agencies.

*'We have a joint working arrangement document with Connexions anyway, and that's fine having that agreement, but its getting it to work at ground level ... There was a bit of 'well, Connexions aren't telling us to do a job', because I went in and told them about the pilot instead of Connexions going in and saying 'this is DfES-led and Connexions have got the lead for it and we have to have it done like this, this and this' – it's worked much, much better.'*

Jobcentre Plus Secondee

Network meetings were set up between Connexions AA/PAs and Under 18s Advisers from Jobcentre Plus in each local area, so that named contacts could be set up between local offices and a shared understanding could be established about expectations in

relation to the delivery of the pilot. Agreements were reached about ways in which benefit checks could be effectively completed on a monthly basis. For example, Jobcentre Plus staff identify customers through National Insurance numbers, while Connexions staff use a young person's date of birth to identify them. It was also agreed that benefit check lists would be organised by postcode, to avoid each Jobcentre Plus office receiving a list of young people which covered the entire region.

Plans to locate or second Jobcentre Plus staff to Connexions Partnerships were delayed or impeded by the restructuring and reorganisation which was taking place within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) during the early months of the pilot. In addition, staff shortages in some areas resulted in some Job Centre districts being unable to release staff for secondment. In areas where Jobcentre Plus advisers have joined Connexions services to assist with the pilot, they are working as AA PAs with either a full or reduced caseload. In one pilot area, Jobcentre Plus secondees identify suitable work placements for young people on AAP, which builds on their experience of the Job Trials programme operated by Jobcentre Plus. Respondents reported that Connexions Partnerships have strengthened their relationships with staff from Jobcentre Plus offices as a result of implementing the AAP.

### 3.4 Management information requirements

PAs/keyworkers within Connexions are collecting management information (MI) and recording it onto their databases. The type of information collected includes the number of young people contacted, the number who had been offered a place, the number signed up, the number of refusals and reasons for non-participation. As part of staff recruitment in most pilot areas, posts that include the responsibility for the collation and management of MI requirements have been created. The collection of MI data at the local level is heavily driven by the need to meet the data requirements of DCSF.

On the whole, pilot areas reported no great difficulties in collating MI data. It was asserted by some respondents that the level of detail required by DCSF, in terms of meeting MI data requirements, was greater for the AAP than for the LAP. In one pilot area, the range of data systems across Connexions offices was raised as an area of concern.

### 3.5 Conclusion

- While the AAP was welcomed in the pilot areas, the task of managing the initiative was affected by the size of some of the pilot areas, which often comprised large numbers of LA areas.
- Two models of implementation were in evidence, which were largely determined by the scale of the management task facing project managers. In large pilot areas,

project managers had a strategic role in overseeing the delivery of the pilot by operating through a network of local managers (Local Area Autonomy). In pilot areas that comprised a small number of LA areas (Central Management), project managers had the capacity to retain responsibility for operational staffing and a standardised approach to the delivery of AAP was more in evidence.

- The process of staff recruitment was quicker and more successful within the AAP, which was largely attributed to AAP PA skills being similar to those required by mainstream Connexions PAs. Staff recruitment that was managed by Local Authority personnel departments slowed down the implementation of the pilot, because of the time taken to have job descriptions approved and staff appointed.
- The next stage of the evaluation will need to take particular account of the process of change which Connexions Services are currently undergoing. In particular, it will be important to note any impact on the delivery of the pilot (in terms of management and staffing levels as well as the quality of guidance and support given to young people) that can be observed from Connexions Services operating within the auspices of Children's Services.



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## 4 Delivery of the Activity Agreement Pilots (AAP)

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This section highlights the issues that emerged during the evaluation team's initial and second visits to the pilot areas, in relation to the delivery of AAP. In particular, it focuses on the appropriateness of the pilot in meeting the needs of young people who are long-term NEET, the strategies used to identify and engage the eligible population, and the delivery mechanisms which have been developed to support AA participants.

### 4.1 Perceptions of the aims of AAP and desired outcomes

Respondents were asked their views about the AAP and, in particular, the capacity of the policy to encourage young people who are long-term NEET back into learning. The three component parts of the policy – ie the financial incentive, the intensive support and individualised packages of learning – were explored with respondents in order to elicit views about which part(s) of the policy had the greatest 'pull'. It was widely acknowledged that the AAP was an innovative policy initiative and was welcomed in all pilot areas as an additional tool to engage young people who were long-term NEET. Although working with young people who were NEET had been a strategic priority for Connexions Partnerships for some time, and local initiatives to reduce the NEET population – such as the E2E (Entry into Employment), Positive Activities for Young People Programme (PAYP) and ESF (European Social Fund) supported activities – were in place, the AAP was a welcome addition.

*'... I was a bit sceptical (about the AAP) but the more I've got involved in it as time's gone on, the more I feel it's telling us an awful lot about young people and what they need to move them forward. What I think has been very valuable, it's highlighted how the mainstream LSC funded provision falls quite a bit short of meeting young people's needs, due to its lack of flexibility in terms of meeting them at least half way and to try to accommodate those needs and for some young people AA has proved a lifeline in our area and a new lease of life.'*

Personal Adviser

#### 4.1.1 The role of the incentive

The financial incentive of £20 or £30 payable to the young person was the 'hook' that initially attracted young people to the programme<sup>1</sup>. The added perceived benefit of the AA allowance was that, unlike EMA, it was not means tested, so it avoided the need for young people to provide details about their household's income and it did not affect their parents' entitlement to state benefits. In addition, it was not only the weekly payment that offered financial assistance to young people. The Discretionary Fund enables Connexions staff to purchase clothes and equipment for young people and to offer financial support to meet transport costs where this is needed. This was particularly helpful in enabling young people to take part in activities (eg providing transport in rural areas) and thereby secure their engagement with the programme.

Views about making AA payments to parents differed. It was asserted by some respondents that young people were confused about why their parents should receive payments when it was the young person who was signing up to participate in the AAP. In some areas it was reported that parental payments were being given by parents to their son or daughter, so that the young person received £50 per week for participating in AA. In areas where parental payments were made, some AA/PAs felt that the parental payment motivated parents to encourage young people to keep appointments with PAs and to attend activities.

*'I mean, the bit about the AA we have not touched on yet is the payment to the parents, and that has had an impact I think – whether it was parents motivating them at first, getting them out of bed, so they get their £30, or whether it was just the parents motivating the young person more by saying 'well, I don't need my £30, so you'll get £50 for doing it, I'll give it you'. But whatever way it's worked out that has made a difference as well.'*

Personal Adviser

One respondent commented that in the area where she worked, families had quickly become aware that the £50 entitlement to the family available under the AAP, was more than the allowance payable to young people who were claiming Hardship Allowance or lower level JSA. However, there was no evidence that young people were giving up their benefit entitlements to join AAP for financial reasons. There was limited reporting of some young people who had left JSA to join AAP because of the range of activities that were on offer.

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<sup>1</sup> The effect of the allowance as a financial incentive is explored in detail in the first of the focused studies carried out under the programme theory element of the evaluation.

## The 'Carrot' Study: the role of the incentive in getting young people to sign up to Activity Agreements

One of the Programme Theory focused studies tested the hypothesis that 'if the net additional value of the incentive was sufficiently appealing, certain young people would sign up to the Activity Agreement (AA), or at least attend an initial discussion where the wider benefits of the AA could be promoted', through a series of in-depth interviews with young people on Activity Agreements.

Although some young people said they would have taken part in the Activity Agreement without the incentive, more said they would not have done. The allowance was important in various ways, all of which underpinned the 'carrot' theory to a greater or lesser extent:

- As an **attention-grabber**. Some young people just needed the money, particularly those who were 'disconnected' from the informal labour market or could not rely on their parents to support them financially. Others did not need the money but it still helped to grab their interest at the outset.
- As **recognition** for the young person's commitment to doing the AA. The £20 per week gave a basic value to the young person's time spent doing the AA and signified that doing the AA was worth something. The net additional value of the incentive was not particularly important as long as the young person felt that the time they spent doing the activities was worthwhile and they could see the longer-term benefits.
- As an **enabler**, underpinning or replacing some income from parents or doing odd jobs. Some young people were prepared to give some of this up in order to have an element of more independent income and be more self-sustaining. Here again it was not so much the net additional value of the incentive that was important, because many young people ended up with the same amount of income - a few, slightly less. In this scenario the value of 'passported' incentives that accompanied the Activity Agreement, such as being told the value of a course, or having equipment or driving lessons paid for, was also critical because it allowed the young person to see beyond the value of the £20 per week.
- As a **way to help out** parents more directly by contributing to the family budget or by easing family tensions over money. This was particularly the case among young people who had no or very little income from their parents or from informal work. In this case the net value of the incentive was less than £20 per week, so understanding the value of doing the activities and/or seeing accompanying material incentives - such as being bought a place on a course - were both important ways that the young person remained engaged.

The study concluded that the hypothesis appeared to be valid although it was variable in its effectiveness across a range of young people, according to the (subjective) value of the incentive to the young person, and other factors such as the young person's education or labour market context, their access to other financial resources, and their spending patterns.

#### 4.1.2 The role of support and provision

While the financial incentive offered to young people to participate in AAP acted as the engagement tool, it was the combination of the intensive support package provided by PAs, together with the ability to offer young people bespoke provision, that sustained participation in the programme. The ability of PAs to spend concentrated amounts of time with young people assessing their needs, together with having the funding available to offer flexible, customised provision to respond directly to individual needs, were reported to be the unique characteristics of the AAP. The AAP had enabled AA/PAs to have significantly reduced caseloads, so that intensive support and follow-up could be established and sustained with young people throughout their participation in the programme.

In addition, the AAP was the first initiative that had allowed service deliverers to work with young people to determine their own learning and training needs. This was perceived to be a major breakthrough in helping young people to engage.

*'I think the AA's the first thing that's come along, in many years where they are actually allowing the service deliverers to decide, you know, to identify, and we're of course doing that in conjunction with the young people. That's the first time that has genuinely happened, that I can see.'*

Personal Adviser

*(PAs have got) ... a key role in finding young people, engaging them, developing that rapport and understanding, then incentivising the programme and then building the programme by consent.'*

Voluntary sector provider

Exit interviews with AAP completers conducted by AA/PAs in one area found evidence that some young people would have completed the programme without a financial incentive. This was attributed to the length of time that some young people had been disengaged, to the value that they had attached to having regular contact with their PA, and to the range of activities which had been available to them.

*'One of the questions (in the exit interview) is about the allowance ... what made the decision for you? And they've all said no, I would have done it without the allowance. Because I think a lot of them have got to the point where yeah, they haven't been doing anything for a while and they've almost hit rock bottom and they are actually just wanting to do something – 'just give me anything to do to get me back on track' – somehow.'*

Personal Adviser

However the young people were talking in hindsight after a positive experience with the programme and the financial incentive might have been important to getting them involved initially.

### 4.1.3 Interaction of the AAP with other local and national initiatives

The interaction of the AAP with other local and national initiatives targeted at young people who are NEET was raised by some respondents. In areas where young people could be receiving a maximum of £50 per week (ie where young people were receiving both their weekly payment and their parents' payment) some providers felt that this may be displacing some young people from local pre E2E and E2E provision since the AAP package was more attractive. In contrast to the AAP, where all eligible young people are entitled to a weekly payment, intensive support and flexible hours of participation in activities, E2E participants receive a means tested weekly payment of £30 and are required to attend for a minimum of 16 hours each week. However, E2E providers who had expressed concern about the impact of the AAP on E2E entry also had a greater propensity to report that they had not received the expected volume of young people on AAP. This could be attributed to the type and/or flexibility of the 'AA offer' made by some providers, which may not be attractive to some young people who had been given a greater choice.

Some local areas have used their ESF budget to enable young people who are NEET and ineligible for the AAP, to participate in activities.

*' ... the good thing about AA is we've been able to couple it with ESF so what we can do is offer the activities to anybody and it doesn't matter if you're AA eligible or not, but the AA eligible receive the allowance, whereas on the ESF you don't, but you can access the opportunities through whichever funding. So that's been a good selling point in terms of working with personal advisers ....'*

Connexions manager

In order to reduce the costs of setting up courses, and to share scheduled activities, some areas have developed joint funding through PAYP and AAP resources.

*' ... because we've got PAYP and we've shared our activities with PAYP... we're looking in the future at possibly joint funding some activities to make the respective budgets go further and to be able to offer more of what young people want – so that seems to be the way to go really.'*

Connexions manager

There was no clear evidence to support the view that AAP was replicating or displacing other local or national initiatives, which were targeted at reducing the NEET population. In areas where AAP payments were being paid to parents, there was 'hearsay' evidence that this money was being transferred to some young people, which made E2E provision less attractive. The impact of replacing the minimum training allowance with EMA payments to E2E participants was having far greater consequences on E2E take-up rates. Significant numbers of young people were reported to be income ineligible for E2E provision and, in other instances, parents were refusing to be means tested for eligibility for government supported training provision.

## 4.2 Awareness raising and marketing activity

Connexions Partnerships/services have taken the lead on the marketing and publicity of the AAP, since they were the main budget holders for this area of implementation. Pilot areas had been very active in terms of identifying the target population and raising awareness and informing potential applicants about the existence of the provision. Young people who were eligible for AAP (ie young people who were at least 20 weeks NEET or who were approaching that) included a large proportion of young people who had failed to engage positively with Connexions Services in the past and, for a variety of reasons, were not involved in any recognised form of education, employment or training. There were good examples of innovative practice in the way that Connexions staff identified and established links with young people and their parents in order to raise awareness of the AAP.

### 4.2.1 Identifying the target population

In all pilot areas, Connexions MI data was extensively and effectively used to identify the eligible population. At the early stages of the pilot this involved identifying all young people who were 20 weeks NEET or approaching entitlement to AAP. In addition, it entailed setting up systems which identified young people at 15+ weeks NEET, in order that they could be briefed about the provision. In one area, the data was analysed in order to identify the characteristics of young people who were 20+ weeks NEET, in terms of their backgrounds, gender, ethnicity, educational qualifications and their post-16 education and training profiles. This information was subsequently used to target marketing activities more effectively at the eligible population for AAP. While work with NEET young people had been a priority area of work for Connexions for some time, and many respondents were more confident about the accuracy of local data on the NEET population, tracking eligible young people remained a challenge.

*'So we have a validity problem with the databases ... what that gives us is it slows down the process of contacting the young person and that doesn't mean that we are not picking up people who might be suitable for the AA project or for other projects or other Connexions work, but they're not always where we think they are and they're not always in the same category and there will be young people with undoubted needs and into jobs without training that we haven't picked up yet ...'*

Connexions manager

It was reported that initial estimates of the target population, which had been developed centrally to assist pilot areas in drawing up their local delivery plans, had proved to be inaccurate. The size of the NEET populations had been over-estimated, since the figures included young people who were in receipt of JSA, Hardship Allowances and other benefits. Some respondents felt that the AAP had assisted local Connexions MI data to become more accurate, since young people who were in the

NEET category were being followed up and the status checked on a more regular basis.

#### 4.2.2 Importance of direct contact

The most widely used method of raising awareness about the pilot was through PAs contacting young people or their parents by telephone and letter/postcard using local data on the estimated population. This was followed up by a request for the young person to visit their local office to discuss the initiative in more detail with their AA/PA. If young people declined, they were usually followed up every eight weeks. One area reported that the use of 'drop-in' sessions was a more effective way of 'selling' the pilot. However, some young people lacked confidence in relation to visiting local officers and speaking to an adviser. One pilot manager reported that cases of agoraphobia, bullying, pregnancy or having a young baby had made some young people reluctant to visit local offices. In some areas, home visits had been arranged to support young people in these circumstances and to encourage their engagement, sometimes in collaboration with other local support services.

#### 4.2.3 Marketing materials

Direct contact with young people made by Personal Advisers was supported by a vast array of marketing and publicity materials and strategies. For example, in some cases, the work was undertaken by Connexions marketing managers/staff, while in other areas marketing consultants and agencies were employed to devise a local 'branding' for the pilot. Project managers in some areas designed local marketing and publicity materials and allowed local services to add their own logos etc. Promotional materials cover the range of activities included on the programme, as well as the financial incentive that is available.

*'Our materials cover both, they cover the £30 quite prominently, but then they say you have a menu of activities as well and it usually makes it plain as well that they must do something for their £30 – it's not something for nothing.'*

Connexions manager

In one area a marketing co-ordinator has been appointed to promote both pilots (AAP and LAP), and in another pilot area marketing and publicity is managed by a central team. The views of young people on publicity design and materials were obtained in some areas, from the engagement of focus groups, youth champions and Youth Boards.

#### 4.2.4 Awareness raising activities

A range of methods had been implemented in pilot areas for creating awareness and informing staff, local partners and potential applicants about the pilot, including:

- briefing sessions for local Connexions staff and management committees
- briefing sessions/visits to local stakeholders, including youth workers and voluntary groups
- poster campaigns (including buses and bus shelters)
- flyers
- PA visits to drop-in centres
- DVDs
- mailshots (mainly postcards) to young people and parents
- drop-in sessions/open evenings arranged for eligible young people
- telephone/text message contact with young people
- information sheets/leaflets for young people
- branded 'goody bags' for AA participants which include programme information, pens, a USB drive and an alarm clock
- media coverage including television and radio
- an e-learning briefing document
- publicity on the Connexions website.

#### Spreading the word

During second visits to pilot areas, it was reported on a regular basis that information about the AAP was being made more widely known through 'word of mouth', most notably through young people and their parents. This suggests that the initiative was becoming embedded and more widely understood by young people, their parents and professional staff. Indeed, this method was so effective in one pilot area that there was a waiting list for young people to join the AA pilot.

*'... yeah, I do agree the (MI) reports are good. But the other way I think really helps recruitment on to Activity Agreement is word of mouth. And their peers telling them about it, 'I'm on this programme doing this, you can get thirty quid a week, if you go to Connexions ...' it's much better than anything we do.'*

Personal Adviser



'Success stories' about young people who had successfully completed the AAP were being used at a local level to promote the initiative. This included press and radio coverage, including young people speaking about their experiences and the range of activities and opportunities available on the programme. One pilot area had organised a 'celebration event' for AAP graduates, involving a formal dinner and the presentation of a certificate of achievement to each young person. Fifty six young people and their guests attended the event. It was promoted extensively in order to recognise the achievements of young people who had successfully completed the programme, as well as to raise awareness about the initiative amongst other groups of young people. Promotion of the event included coverage in the local media, the Connexions website and the internet site 'YouTube'.

There were mixed views about the effectiveness of open days/evenings to promote the AAP. Some events that were organised at local Connexions offices were reported to have attracted few young people either attending the event or committing to the programme. However, one pilot area had organised a launch event for young people in a central restaurant/ bar; over 200 young people attended and between 40 and 50 young people signed up to join AAP. In addition, the event attracted both newspaper and radio publicity.

In the majority of cases, young people continue to join AAP as a direct result of AA/PAs contacting them to raise awareness of the initiative using supporting promotional materials, or from referrals from other Connexions staff. In one local authority area, contact lists of eligible young people have been largely abandoned since AAP forms part of the local authority's strategy on the NEET group. This involves all agencies working together at the local level and sharing information and expertise. As a consequence, all referrals made to AAP come from a host of sources, including local authority services as well as local community and voluntary organisations. In this area, take-up rates of AAP are relatively high, which is coupled with a low volume of suspensions from the programme.

It was recognised by some programme managers and AA/PAs, that there was a need to update and extend awareness about the pilot among education and training providers in the second year of the pilot. Indeed, many providers who were interviewed as part of the evaluation reported little awareness of promotional and marketing materials. One respondent claimed that the information that he had seen about the AAP was 'ambiguous'. In July 2007, one pilot area had planned to launch a DVD at an event targeted at providers. The DVD included case studies about young people who had completed the programme and outlined the purposes of the initiative.

## 4.3 Eligibility and application processes

Evidence was collected from respondents about eligibility issues surrounding the AAP, in particular the 20-week threshold, the interaction of AAP entitlement with other benefits available to specific groups of young people and the attractiveness of the pilot among 'hard to reach' groups of young people.

### The 20-week threshold

Eligibility for the AAP requires young people who are 16–17 years of age to have been NEET for 20 weeks or more. There was a consensus among respondents that this requirement, although being applied, did create a number of difficulties since many young people had spent brief periods of time in education, employment or training, and that this element of the eligibility criteria should be reconsidered for any potential roll-out of the policy. Considerable effort was made by AA PAs, using Connexions databases, to contact young people who were classified as being long-term NEET, only to find that a significant proportion were ineligible because of the 'continuous NEET' requirement. This sometimes raised expectations among young people who had been contacted, and some found it difficult to understand why they should be excluded from participation in the AAP, since they had spent long periods NEET. It also hampered marketing and promotional activity, because the eligibility requirements were not easily understood by many young people and parents. Suggestions included lowering the requirement from 20 weeks to 15 weeks or less and preventing brief spells of time spent in education, employment or training from debarring young people's access to the programme.

The 20-week eligibility criterion was particularly difficult to apply among young people who were known not have been in formal learning for several months or years before compulsory leaving age, and were expected to wait a further 20 weeks to reach the eligibility threshold for the AAP. It was recommended that some adjustment to the eligibility criteria should be made for this group of young people, if the initiative is to be rolled out nationally.

### Hard-to-reach benefit recipients excluded

One major issue surrounding the eligibility criteria was the exclusion from the programme of young people who were in receipt of Hardship Benefit, JSA and/or Housing Benefit. The AAP was largely targeted at young people who lived at home and were supported by parents and largely excluded the most 'hard to reach' and excluded groups of young people because of the negative impact of the AAP allowance on benefit receipt and associated passported benefits.

*'... because they're in severe hardship so therefore they don't make any money, they don't get any money in their pocket, it pays for the rent and that's it, because their rent's getting*

*paid because they can't live at home, they're not eligible for this pilot. I struggle with that. I think that's something that needs consideration when we look to roll out.'*

Personal Adviser

Contradictions also currently exist with regard to entry onto the AAP for different groups of young people claiming other benefits. For example, young people who live in homeless hostels or live independently were unable to receive the AAP allowance because they were in receipt of JSA/Housing Benefit and would lose these benefits if they participated. It was reported that young people who lived in households in receipt of a family care package also failed to participate since it would affect their benefit entitlement. In contrast, care leavers and teenage parents who were in receipt of other allowances were able to receive the £20 allowance each week from the AAP without disrupting their benefit claims.

#### 4.3.1 Heterogeneous population

Young people who were eligible to join the AAP were not a homogeneous group. The group included:

- young people who had failed to attend school regularly and who had previously had little contact with support services such as Connexions
- young people with special needs
- young offenders
- care leavers
- teenage parents.

While many young people who were eligible to take part in the AAP had acute needs, the cohort also included groups of young people who were living at home and wanted to participate in some form of learning, but usually lacked the self-confidence to do so. They required a minimum level of intervention and support to access further learning and training.

*'I mean, I can give you an example where we've had one young person ... she just lacked confidence – we'd done some confidence building with her. She's now working as a veterinary nurse and she's employed by the vet, so she's going to move on now onto a LAP programme. And I think sometimes when we talk of NEET we lose sight that there are an awful lot of young people who just need that little bit of help. Sometimes you don't have to have a massive amount of expenditure, it's just about making sure that you tailor the programme for the individual young person.'*

Personal Adviser

## Welcome opportunity for young offenders

With regard to young offenders, the AAP offered an exit strategy for some young people who were leaving prison, with time spent in custody being counted towards the 20-week minimum NEET criteria for entry onto the AAP. It was reported in some areas that the availability of the AAP had strengthened links between the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and the Connexions Service. It was suggested that young people who are undertaking Intensive Support and Surveillance Programmes (ISSPs) in the community should be entitled to participate in the AAP at the same time. They are currently prevented from doing so, since they are serving a community sentence of 25 hours each week. However, participation in the AAP would enable young people to gain additional support and the acquisition of skills, which may enhance their employability or their transition into further learning.

### 4.3.2 Application processes

Regarding the nature of the application process by which young people sign up, some AA areas were using forms which had been issued nationally whilst other areas had adopted a more informal approach. The requirements for both the young person and the AA PA were set out in an Agreement. As part of the application procedure for both AAs, an assessment of the young person's needs often includes the use of the standard Assessment Performance Implementation Review (APIR) system.

Before young people can sign up to join the AAP, a benefit check must be undertaken to ascertain that the young person is not in receipt of other benefits. The process of checking eligibility has been better managed in areas where there were established links between the two agencies and where there was shared understanding about expectations.

Staff from Jobcentre Plus would have welcomed more guidance at national level about their role in the pilot. While the task of undertaking benefit checks was described as being fairly straightforward, it was perceived by Job Centre staff as 'another task do, within a prescribed timescale'. While Jobcentre Plus was receiving a small administrative resource for undertaking this task, young people under the age of 18 were not a priority group for the agency. However, there was evidence of innovative practice in two pilot areas, where Connexions PAs and Job Centre Under 18 Advisers were jointly interviewing young people in Job Centre/Benefit offices when they were either making a claim for benefits or declaring themselves available for work in order to receive their ongoing benefits. It was hoped that joint working would prevent some young people from making claims for Hardship Benefit, if they could be alerted to the availability of opportunities that were available to young people under 18 within education, employment or training, including the AAP.

A weakness in the current system surrounds the checking of benefit claims only being undertaken on entry to the AAP. Since some young people may reach the age of 18

during their 20 weeks on AAP, and will therefore become able to make a claim for JSA, there is no ongoing formal system in place to check whether this has happened. Any national roll-out of the AAP will need to incorporate systems and guidance to deal with this issue.

The initial stages of most AA activity for many young people have focused on development activities, such as ensuring that the young person has set up a bank account and has established regular contact with their PA. Some pilot areas reported delays caused by young people experiencing local difficulties in opening bank accounts, whilst in other areas there were no reported problems. Some areas reported that they had experienced other delays in making payments to young people which were attributed to factors such as the requirement for the young person to have sufficient identification, usually in the form of a birth certificate or a passport. Where young people had experienced problems setting up bank accounts, interim cash/cheque payment systems had been put in place.

#### 4.3.3 Caseload sizes

The task of identifying eligible young people and supporting them through the application process should not be understated. This is followed by a requirement, on the part of AA PAs, to identify suitable activities for each young person and to monitor their progress on a weekly basis. Due to the intensive support that is required to be given to young people on the AAP, most AA PAs have a maximum caseload of between ten and 15 young people, although in some areas this was reported to be higher. In areas where the delivery of the AAP is combined within the work undertaken by generic PAs, the AAP caseload was reported to be on average between three and six young people.

*'...Because there is a tipping point I think between caseload size and diminishing returns of outcomes for me....ask me where I think that is and I'm not sure of the answer to that, but I think that's definitely the case...I think 18 is getting to the top end of what is manageable. Because one of the crucial things about this programme is that the PA has to be there for emergencies and 16-year-old young people who are in this situation have a lot of emergencies.'*

AAP Project manager

## 4.4 Identifying and procuring provision

During the first evaluation visits to the pilot areas, Connexions personnel had spoken positively about their management of AA provision. While PAs were often encouraged to explore the suitability of existing provision, to meet young people's needs, the AAP has put Connexions in the 'driving seat', in terms of procuring provision that meets the needs of the young person. In some pilot areas setting up

'bespoke' provision with some training providers in the area was being met with some uncertainty and reticence. Learning and training packages have traditionally been negotiated on the basis of volume and with fixed timetables, as opposed to being designed to meet an individual young person's needs.

*'But then when we go back it's a case of how many young people have you got, we said it's not that type of programme. We don't want it to be like the young people come and do six weeks in a block with one provider, it's very flexible. We don't want it to be roll-on, roll-off. And a lot of the providers couldn't actually deal with that in terms of the issues they were raising with me ... they need to know numbers, how many people they'd get on ... how many people they'd need for a particular course, therefore, how many staff they'd need to have available, really to organise that. They were struggling a bit with that concept in the early days.'*

Connexions Programme manager

Second round visits to pilot areas found evidence of a vast array of provision which had been brokered with training providers, including organisations from the voluntary sector, colleges and private training providers. Provision was commissioned promptly, in most cases, in order to respond to the individual needs of young people. In two pilot areas, provision was managed centrally and in all other pilot areas, it is organised at the local level. In some cases, the authorisation of the project manager was required before specific activities/ courses were purchased.

Young people typically met their PA on a weekly basis and, after completing the initial stages of the programme, they agreed a programme of activities, which may or may not include sharing training or learning with other young people on AAP. Commitment in terms of time spent on various tailored activities usually progressively increased as the young person moved through their programme. However, the number of hours a young person spent on AAP was determined on an 'individual needs' basis. In one pilot area, the AAP was delivered to young people in one of two ways: In parts of the pilot area, young people started an individual programme of learning as soon as they signed their learning agreement (as happened in the other pilot areas). In other parts of the pilot, recruitment followed a cohort pattern, in which groups of young people started the programme at a fixed point and moved through a prescribed programme of group activities and some individual learning packages.

Many AA PAs described feeling apprehensive about the responsibility of identifying and managing provision at the initial stages of the pilot. However, they had largely welcomed the opportunity to identify training and to work directly with training providers to secure bespoke options for young people. It also enabled PAs to explore a wider range of training and providers than that which existed within other areas of government supported training provision. There was widespread agreement that setting up provision and managing contracts with learning and training providers was a time-consuming task. It also created a large administrative responsibility. In

some areas this has resulted in the creation, by AAP project managers, of specialist posts which have the specific remit of co-ordinating provision either across a pilot area or within specific local authority areas.

#### 4.4.1 Types of provision

The pilots had identified, or in some cases created, an impressively wide range of different forms of provision, all generally with the aim of improving young people's confidence, motivation and ability to progress from their current position of economic inactivity. There was, on the whole, no 'typical' AAP package of learning. However, the activities tended to fall into one of three broad types and over the course of the 20-week programme a young person could undertake activities which could be seen as:

- developing their personal skills
- giving them experiences and an understanding of the workplace and how to behave safely in the workplace
- helping them gain vocational and other skills that may enhance their ability to get a job.

Often PAs would try to strike a balance between engagement-type activities (sporting or outward bound type activities) and more purposeful skill-related activities.

#### Personal development activities

Many of the young people involved in the pilots had personal issues, either as a result of, or which had led them into, the position in which they had found themselves. Many lacked confidence in themselves and in the support agencies that could help them, and AA PAs often reported that an initial task was to redress this balance. In some cases the activity agreement process provided the young person with the motivation to start engaging in constructive activities that in turn helped them build their confidence. In other cases the young person needed more specific confidence building support. Other personal development activities provided included:

- personal hygiene and fitness
- anger management
- James Cook experience
- outward-bound-type activities
- presentation skills
- communications skills

- team building
- healthy living.

#### Personal development

After finishing their AAP, two young people went on to take part in a further project (not related to AAP). The project lasted 26-weeks, during which time trainees took part in a variety of outdoor, educational and training activities which leads to an expedition. From an initial group of 13 young people, six completed the two-week expedition (including the two young people who had finished their AAP). Through the use of activities such as hill-walking, skiing, fitness, first aid, safety procedures and nationally recognised qualifications, positive self-image and self-confidence is developed and nurtured. A logbook records their achievements. A presentation event took place at the end of the programme and the AAP graduates, their parents, friends and AA PAs were invited to attend. Involvement in the AAP had helped prepare the two young people for the challenge and get them to a position where they had the confidence to take part.

#### Work-related experiences

A number of activities revolved around giving the young person either a taste of what it was like to do a particular job/occupation, to experience a work environment or to provide them with the basic health and safety or other knowledge they would need at work.

Work experience placements were available as part of many young people's AAP packages. In some cases, placements were sourced and vetted by AA PAs, while in other pilot areas the responsibility for managing work experience placements was outsourced to a third party. For example, in one pilot area, a Volunteer Bureau managed work experience placements for young people on AAP. The cost of outsourcing was reported to have been prohibitive in one pilot area, where a local Education Business Partnership had quoted £750 per person, to offer a six week work experience placement. It was reported in one pilot area that young people on AAP were given work experience through the LAP. Some employers of young people on LAP were offering work placements to young people on AAP, during periods of time when young people on the LAP were receiving their off-the-job training provision. Employers who were interviewed as part of the evaluation were motivated to offer work experience, in order to support the development of young people on AAP as well as their own business needs.

*'When I was young I had a couple of doors shut in my face. One gent did take me on and gave me the opportunity. Gawd knows where I would be now without Maurice. It's important that young people get a chance. It is giving back but they also offer us that extra bit of help. So it's a two-way thing.'*

Employer



At the early stages of the pilot, there was concern expressed by representatives from some voluntary organisations about young people undertaking volunteering activity as part of AAP, since they were in receipt of a weekly payment as part of the programme.

*' ... a lot of CVs who we work with had a major issue with this because it was going against the ethos of volunteering, paying people to do voluntary work.'*

Manager, voluntary sector

The issue was resolved through the receipt of a letter from the National Volunteering Organisation which stated that work undertaken by young people as part of AAP should be classified as 'volunteering opportunities' rather than 'volunteering', in order to make a distinction between paid and unpaid activities.

Other work-related experience activities included:

- work taster courses
- work experience
- health and safety courses
- armed forces residential courses
- first aid
- manual handling
- customer services course
- setting up your own business
- script writing courses
- youth work training courses.

### Vocational/Work Taster Programme

A local FE college was approached by Connexions to offer a taster programme to young people on AAP. Despite some reservations from some Heads of Departments about the viability of the programme and some misconceptions from staff about the challenges of working with young people classified as 'NEET', an Assistant Principal devised a programme of vocational learning which started in January 2007. It comprised nine hours of vocational learning and six hours of tutorial support each week, over a six-week period. Young people attended college three days each week. The programme included young people on AAP, as well as young people who were funded through E2E. There were five vocational options, which in turn offered three vocational areas of learning. The construction taster programme was heavily over-subscribed. Young people could stay to complete further six-week courses, if they wished to do so. Attrition rates were very low, and this was attributed to the close working links between Connexions and college staff to support young people. Group sizes were small, with approximately 12 students per class. This enabled young people to receive intensive support and guidance both on entry to the college and throughout their course. Accreditation was being sought from examination boards, which offer units of qualifications, which can be completed within a six-week taster programme. Young people who completed their programmes were encouraged to apply for entry to full-time course provision.

### Skill development opportunities

Finally, the third type of activity was more vocationally oriented, often with the aim of developing the young person's skill set and ability to get a job.

There was widespread demand for basic skills provision and in some areas it was difficult to find suitable venues or providers who would meet individual needs. In one pilot area, the Connexions Partnership had staff available to carry out basic skills assessments for AAP entrants. Young people are usually referred by their AA PA after they have been on AAP for about three to four weeks, which provides sufficient time for the AA PA to identify the young person's needs and for the young person to have developed some self-confidence as a result of working with their AA PA for a short time. An interactive IT package is used to test the young person's level and aptitude and a PA sits alongside the young person to dispel the notion of 'testing'. However, while this had proved to be a highly effective strategy for identifying young people's needs in terms of literacy and numeracy support, there was a lack of suitable provision. Young people's reluctance to attend college courses was largely attributable to negative school experiences, and it had proved difficult to find provision that offered young people one-to-one support or small group teaching within community settings. In addition, while there was a ready supply of basic skills/Skills for Life provision in the area, it was targeted at young people in full-time learning or on government supported training provision, or at young people over the age of 18, so young people who were

NEET were 'slipping through the net'. In order to address this shortfall, Connexions staff were awaiting approval from City and Guilds, so that they could deliver Level 1 and 2 Literacy and Numeracy courses.

There was also a lot of demand for construction skills training from young people but an acute shortage of provision. This was attributed to cost and to the fact that providers of construction skills in many pilot areas were colleges, which were inflexible when it came to offering short roll-on roll-off courses. In some cases, this was resolved through AA PAs working across local authority areas to purchase shared provision. Discretionary funds were used to buy young people clothes and equipment and to buy Site Safety Cards, so that health and safety requirements could be fulfilled.

Set out below are examples of provision that had been commissioned across pilot areas as part of the AAP, with an illustration of a programme of learning within each of the three categories: personal development opportunities, work related experience, and developing employability skills.

Other examples of vocational skill development included:

- construction skills training
- motor vehicle technology
- driving test theory
- music technology
- dog training
- nail art
- fork lift truck driving instruction
- foreign languages
- swimming coaching/life guard training
- football coaching
- job seeking skills.

### Basic skills

In response to a demand for assistance with the development of literacy and numeracy skills from young people on AAP and a lack of outreach provision, a basic skills programme was delivered in local Connexions offices in one local authority area. Local college staff manage and run the programme and teach young people in pairs. The programme enabled young people to access provision in their immediate area which helped them feel less intimidated about learning.

*'... say if they were going to E2E where they're in a group or a college, it's a step too far because they're often starting with low self-esteem and very low confidence levels, so they won't - it's too big a gamble for them to go into a bigger group and also it reminds them of school where they probably didn't have a very positive experience ...I think the provision and the tutors are also geared up to working with disaffected young people ...it's been an unexpected success story.'*

Connexions Area Manager

Ten-week courses are offered on a roll-on roll-off basis. Young people were able to start the programme at any point of the ten week cycle, thus offering complete flexibility to respond to young people's assessed needs. Most of the programme is about developing self-confidence, since most young people were working towards Level 1 or Level 2 literacy standards, as opposed to Entry Level qualifications. A celebration event was planned on college premises to recognise the achievements of young people who had completed basic skills courses and to provide the opportunity for young people to visit the college environment, supported by tutors in whom they had developed confidence.

#### 4.4.2 Types of providers

While AA PAs may deliver job-readiness provision (such as preparation on CVs and job-seeking courses) either on a one-to-one basis or with groups of young people, the majority of provision was 'bought in' from a wide range of providers. The length of individual course provision also varied widely, from one day courses to residential courses and work experience placements which may have lasted several days or be completed over several weeks and programmes of learning, and which required a young person to attend one day each week over block periods of time. In some cases, places for young people on AAP were purchased on existing training programmes, in particular E2E and pre E2E courses.

Provision was purchased from a wide range of private, voluntary and public sector agencies. There were many examples where AA PAs had researched and negotiated individual programmes of learning for young people. In other cases, AA PAs had worked together, sometimes between local authority areas, to start courses for groups of young people where a shared need for a specific course had been identified and because group provision was needed in order to make the programme of learning

viable ie construction skills. However, there were difficulties in terms of securing provision for some young people who lived in rural areas, due to their unwillingness to leave their immediate area because of transport difficulties and/or confidence issues.

One pilot area had looked at patterns of attendance and the number of referrals onto all activities including pre-existing and directly purchased courses, as part of their local evaluation strategy. There was evidence that there were substantial differences in attendance rates between the two types of provision, with individually tailored courses attracting much higher rates of participation.

*'The direct purchase, because it was needs led, there was a higher initial referral and higher attendance because the young people said they wanted to do it ... so we got value for money, if you like, per head for young people attending.'*

Connexions AAP Activities Co-ordinator

## 4.5 Payment systems

The allowance paid to young people as part of the pilot had been generally welcomed. Although many pilot areas reported that they had initial concerns over setting up payment systems, these seemed to be working well. Payment systems designed to deposit the allowance into young people's bank accounts had been established. Some areas had piloted their systems before rolling them out across the locality. In some pilot areas Connexions had systems in place to manage payments, whereas in other areas payments to young people had been transferred to a local authority BACs system within the area.

*'The concerns about the payment systems have been addressed by the fact that we've shown that the payment systems can work.'*

Project manager, Connexions

Part of the AA PA's role was to instigate the weekly payments and, if terms and conditions in the agreement had not been met, they also had the authority to withhold payment. At the outset of the pilot there were concerns expressed about the ways in which this responsibility may adversely affect a PA's relationship with young people. The traditional role of a PA is essentially to act as an advocate for the young person, and having the power to withdraw payments could have threatened this role. However, AA PAs had successfully executed this responsibility without reporting any adverse effects on their relationships with young people. In one pilot area, it was reported that this task had proved easier to manage for AA PAs, who had specialist and sole responsibility for the programme. In contrast, generic PAs, who managed a small number of young people on the AAP, were more embedded in practice where deciding upon and making payments to young people was not the norm.

The responsibility for making or withdrawing payments was successfully managed through effective communication between AA PAs and AA recipients. At the early stages of the programme, when an activity agreement is signed, young people are made aware of their rights and responsibilities within the programme. These are reinforced on an ongoing basis because of the weekly contact that the young person had with their AA PA. Connexions staff felt that there was a need for clarity and consistency in the ways in which AA payments were made, to ensure that their relationship with young people and that the programme retained credibility.

The three-week suspension rule, which allows young people some flexibility in terms of re-entering the programme if they fail to keep to their programme over a short period of time, was widely welcomed. It was particularly useful for young people who were facing multiple social and economic problems, or who faced a sudden crisis.

*'... there was case with a young lady who's a care leaver and got lots and lots of issues and we were desperate – the PA was desperate and so was her aftercare worker, to keep her on board because she was doing so well on her activity and there was scope for it to develop maybe to carry on as a PDO after her AA had finished. So I did agree – although we couldn't pay her when she wasn't attending, there was a bit of flexibility not to automatically terminate her from AA.'*

Connexions area manager

## 4.6 The importance of the Personal Adviser

The intensive support that young people received from AA PAs was the key to managing their commitment and responsibility to the programme. Most AA PAs had been actively involved in setting up specific provision to meet young people's needs and were acutely aware of the efforts and costs involved. It was argued that there needed to be mutual understanding and responsibility between the AA PA and the young person in order for the programme to work. First, AA PAs needed to assess and understand the young person's abilities and requirements so that placements onto activities and timetables that were beyond the young person's reach could be avoided. Second, if this was achieved, a young person was expected to be responsive – ie to turn up, and to recognise that if they failed to do so, they were denying an opportunity to another young person and were wasting time and money that had been expended on them. In addition, if a young person felt that the expectations in their activity agreement had proved to be too onerous, or that they were not enjoying certain activities, there was the flexibility to review the agreement and make changes to it.

## 4.7 Take-up rates and early outcomes

Recruitment of young people onto the AAP was slower than had been anticipated at the initial stages of the pilot. This was largely attributed to the time it had taken to get the pilot 'up and running', in particular with regard to staff recruitment and making contact with the eligible population. It was reported during second round visits to the pilot areas that take-up rates had improved and most respondents were confident that the second year of the pilot would be easier to deliver. This was due to staffing levels being stabilised and pilot areas having a much better understanding of the requirements of the pilot, both in terms of identifying the eligible population and procuring and managing education and training provision.

Reasons for non-take-up among young people were reported to include:

- benefit receipt
- caring responsibilities
- pregnancy
- an unwillingness or inability to leave the immediate area, in particular in rural areas
- casual employment
- the unattractiveness of the AAP financial offer, in particular in the London area.

In three pilot areas, it was reported that care leavers were difficult to attract to the AAP. This was attributed either to the range of other benefits that were available to care leavers (including the levels of intensive support) or to the stringent targets which exist for professional staff to place care leavers as quickly as possible into some form of education, employment or training – which made the 20-week eligibility criteria for AAP a largely unattractive offer.

Young people tended to leave the programme early (usually between 12-15 weeks), and in most areas around 50 per cent immediately progressed into some form of EET. A small proportion of young people were entering the LAP, which was a significant development and showed some emerging inter-relationship between the two pilots. Drop-out rates to NEET destinations were low and included a significant proportion of young people who had exceeded their suspension period. However, within pilot areas, there were also reported to be substantial differences in the proportion of EET outcomes and drop-outs from the AAP between different local authority areas. This may reflect variations in the range of social issues facing groups of young people, as well as differences in the structure of opportunities that exist for young people between localities. The introduction of the 13-week tracking rule had been welcomed, since it enabled positive outcomes to be recorded among AAP graduates up to three months after the completion of the programme. This was perceived to be particularly

relevant to young people who had completed the AAP and were waiting to start full-time college courses or apprenticeships.

Young people who completed 20 weeks on the AAP tended to have the greatest support needs and were less likely to record an immediate transition into EET. However, many respondents asserted that the success of the programme should not be measured solely in terms of EET outcomes and that the acquisition of 'soft' outcomes, such as the development of self-confidence and other social skills, as well as young people's re-engagement with support services, such as Connexions, should also warrant some attention. In addition, any potential roll-out of AAP should take account of a need for greater flexibility in determining young people's length of stay on the programme, since some young people required a longer period than 20 weeks.

*'For some of the young people, a few weeks is enough, but for some of them it takes a long time to get to trust you. In their eyes, rightly or wrongly, they feel that they've been ... no one's listened to them. Quite a lot of them have difficult home backgrounds, and no one's listened to them at home. And now all of a sudden they've got one person who's listening to them and talking to them and making them feel important, and trying to help them.'*

Basic Skills manager

It was reported by a project manager in one pilot area, that the AAP was a more successful programme for young people who had been NEET, since it appeared to sustain their participation in EET destinations.

*'... we've actually noticed our 17 drop-out has improved since we've been running this pilot and although some of that won't be directly attributable, I think there is one correlation in there because the 18 year old drop-out, for which this pilot doesn't cover, that's increased. So drop-out at 17's decreased and 18's increased so I think we've got to kind of draw some comparisons there and try and think that this has had an impact with 17 year olds, which is a very positive thing.'*

Project manager

While the emphasis at the initial stages of the pilot had been on contacting eligible young people and meeting their needs through the setting up of suitable individualised learning packages, greater attention was being focused on establishing exit strategies and tracking mechanisms for young people who complete the AAP. This had included setting up Job Clubs and transition procedures between AA PAs and tracking teams or generic PAs.

#### 4.7.1 Activity Agreement Start-Ups

By the end of March 2007, ie after a year of operation, over 5,200 young people had started an Activity Agreement (Table 4.1). A quarter of the agreements were started in Greater Manchester and another 22 per cent in Merseyside.



The absolute number of starts does not take into account the size of the eligible (NEET for 20 weeks) populations in these areas (which is difficult to define accurately). One measure that can be used to evaluate the progress in each area is a comparison of the total number of start-ups against the target or profiled number of start-ups, which take into account the potential population size. The profiles have been changed during the course of the pilots, and the latest profiles are included in the accompanying tables. In 2006/07 the pilots on average achieved 87 per cent of their planned (profiled) starts. Greater Merseyside was the only area to exceed its target (112 per cent), while Devon and Cornwall achieved 91 per cent of its target and Tyne and Wear achieved around 70 per cent.

Table 4.1: Activity Agreement Starts 2006/07

Pilot area		2006/07
Devon & Cornwall	Re-profiled Starts	430
	Sign-ups	391
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>90.9</i>
Greater Manchester	Re-profiled Starts	1,553
	Sign-ups	1,295
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>83.4</i>
London East	Re-profiled Starts	889
	Sign-ups	751
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>84.5</i>
West Yorkshire	Re-profiled Starts	593
	Sign-ups	442
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>74.5</i>
Central London	Re-profiled Starts	612
	Sign-ups	525
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>85.8</i>
Greater Merseyside	Re-profiled Starts	1,050
	Sign-ups	1,177
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>112.1</i>
Tyne & Wear	Re-profiled Starts	642
	Sign-ups	449
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>69.9</i>
Kent & Medway	Re-profiled Starts	262
	Sign-ups	231
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>88.2</i>
Totals	Re-profiled Starts	6,031
	Sign-ups	5,261
	<i>Sign-ups / Starts (%)</i>	<i>87.2</i>

Source: AA Management Information, DCSF, 2007

## 4.8 Conclusion

- The three core elements of AAP, namely financial support, intensive support and individualised activities for young people, all had a significant role to play in engaging and retaining young people within the programme. While the offer of weekly payments acted as the initial 'hook' to engage young people, the intensive support offered by AA PAs together with the opportunity for young people to determine and negotiate their learning needs sustained their participation.
- While there was evidence of a wide range of marketing and publicity activity, it was the one-to-one engagement between AA PAs and young people, and increasing evidence of young people's awareness through 'word of mouth', that appeared to be the most effective strategies for entry into the initiative. Any future planning for the potential roll-out of the initiative may wish to review the added value of incurring large costs on marketing and publicity strategies and materials on likely take-up rates.
- The twenty-week eligibility criteria and the inter-relationship between AAP and other benefit entitlements for young people may need to be re-examined in order to explore the potential of extending the benefits of AAP to a wider cohort of young people, in particular among groups of young people who are estranged from their families.
- With regard to the procurement and management of AAP provision, there were many examples of innovative practice. Finding basic skills provision for young people outside of mainstream EET was a widespread issue. Wider sharing of good practice between pilot areas on the development and procurement of individual/group programmes of learning should be further developed and encouraged.
- A significant proportion of young people moved into positive outcomes before completing their 20 weeks on AAP, which highlighted the effectiveness of a short period of financial and intensive support on a young person's propensity to leave NEET group status. The final round of visits to the pilot areas as part of the process evaluation will examine progression routes from AAP, in particular the extent to which participation in AAP terminates re-entry into the NEET group, as well as the any growth in progression between AAP and LAP.

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## 5 Management of the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP)

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This section sets out the context in which the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAPs) were being delivered, as well as establishing the ways in which the pilot areas set about managing the initiative. It also explores the extent to which partnership working has assisted local management of the pilots.

### 5.1 Background

The Learning Agreement Pilots (LAPs) were perceived to be offering Connexions Partnerships/services the incentive to become more involved with young people who had entered jobs without training (JWT) and who, in recent years, had not been a strategic priority. In addition, joint delivery responsibility for the LAP demanded that Connexions and local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) staff work together to manage the implementation of the initiative. In some cases, this was a new venture.

Most of the pilot areas cover large geographical areas where there are pockets of economic prosperity as well as areas where there are high levels of social deprivation, including youth unemployment and a concentration of low skilled/low paid work. Encouraging young people to seek opportunities beyond their immediate locality is a challenge in most areas. The availability of seasonal work is prevalent in some pilot areas. Some respondents commented on the influx of migrant labour from Eastern Europe in certain localities and the impact this has had on the volume of unskilled work available to school leavers, often resulting in a 'knock-on' effect of increasing the proportion of young people entering the NEET group. It was widely acknowledged that considerable movement or 'churning' takes place among young people in the NEET and JWT groups. This was largely attributed to the nature and content of the employment available to young people in JWT and to the low level of aspirations often found among young people in the NEET group.

## 5.2 Approaches to design and delivery

This section explores the approaches to design and delivery of the LAP, in particular the joint delivery of the initiative by Connexions and local LSC management.

### 5.2.1 Delivery plans

LAP delivery plans were drawn up jointly by Connexions and LSC senior management staff. They included proposals to deliver the pilot based on estimated population sizes, which had been calculated at national level. In consultation with national LSC and DCSF, substantial changes had been made to delivery plans. It was widely asserted that population sizes had been over-estimated and that delivery targets had to be more closely aligned to local estimates of the number of young people in JWT, which, in all cases, was significantly lower than national calculations. Staffing figures had also been re-profiled downwards in response to reduced population sizes and to lower than anticipated take-up of LAP.

### 5.2.2 The role of local project managers

Project managers had been appointed to develop the initiatives in all pilot areas. In two pilot areas, one project manager oversaw the development of both the LAP and the AAP. The role of project managers within Connexions Partnerships was similar to that outlined for project managers of the AAP, which was to take strategic responsibility for the local implementation and delivery of the initiatives, including the development and management of systems relating to IT and MI, as well as budgeting, marketing and staffing. In addition, LAP project managers had responsibility for establishing and maintaining co-management roles with their counterparts within the local LSC.

The complexity of the task facing project managers in implementing the initiative varied between pilot areas. In some pilot areas, the establishment of complex management and contractual systems was directly linked to the network of local authority areas which co-existed in the locality. In many cases, pilot areas comprised a large number of local authority areas, each of which had separate procedures in place with regard to the Connexions management and delivery (see section 3.1.2). If LAP is to be rolled out nationally, it will be important to establish contractual arrangements, which ensure that a consistent level of support is secured across all Local Authority (LA) areas, ie Children's Trusts. There was evidence to suggest that this was sometimes difficult to achieve within pilot areas where some Connexions Services were under LA control, while other Connexions services, in the same pilot area, had not completed their integration into local authorities. Also, the delivery of LAP rested primarily on partnership working agreements. In addition, in some pilot areas, project managers were overseeing the delivery of the LAP across multiple Local Authority

areas, which made the implementation of the initiative more complex in terms of achieving consistency in terms of delivery arrangements.

*'... because it's a partnership agreement, it's not really a contractual agreement, I think Connexions are finding it very difficult to exert any pressure, shall I say on Local Authorities.'*

Jobcentre Plus manager

In all pilot areas, local steering groups or pilot boards had been established and were, in most cases, meeting on a regular basis. They comprised representatives from local stakeholder groups, including education and training providers, sector skills councils, regional and local government offices, employer and voluntary groups and, in some cases, young people. In addition, project managers had regular meetings with local delivery managers and operational staff. In one pilot area, there was a joint steering group for LAP and AAP.

### 5.2.3 Joint delivery of LAP

Joint ownership over the design and implementation of the initiative had required closer working links between local LSC and Connexions staff. In a small number of cases, collaborative links were already well established between the two organisations and therefore the delivery of the LAP built on existing good working relationships. In some areas, posts have been co-funded by the LSC and Connexions to encourage closer ties, and presentations and publicity about LAP had been planned and delivered jointly by Connexions and LSC staff. In other pilot areas, more formal links have been established to facilitate shared working between LSC and Connexions staff, including drawing up protocols that set out individual roles and responsibilities.

In all LAP areas, the focus of responsibility for local LSCs was to fund learning and training provision, to promote the initiative among local employers and to develop links between Train to Gain and LAP delivery. Connexions staff had concentrated on identifying and contacting eligible young people for LAP provision and, to a lesser extent, they worked with employers to raise awareness about the initiative. However, second visits to the pilot areas found evidence of increased employer contact from Connexions staff as they sought to increase participation.

### 5.2.4 Strategic support

The management and implementation of the Activity and Learning Agreement pilots was dependent on close working links between a number of key stakeholders, namely DCSF, national LSC, Connexions Partnerships and services, and local Jobcentre Plus offices. Respondents were asked to comment on the guidance and support that they had received at a national level from DCSF and LSC staff in setting up the initiatives. There was widespread criticism of the many changes to, and versions of, Guidance

Notes that had been issued at national level. It was widely asserted that information received from national offices, at the early stages of the pilot, had been inconsistent. This had created confusion about the LAP offer at the local level, with regard to young people's qualification entitlement within the programme and its relationship to other government supported training provision, most notably apprenticeships. The lack of definitive guidance was reported, by local management and operational staff, to have hampered the development of the pilot.<sup>1</sup>

While many respondents were critical of the lack of consistency in formal guidance at national level, they were confident about contacting representatives of the DCSF and national LSC with queries, and generally welcomed the level of support that they had received.

### 5.2.5 Organisational change and local implementation

The piloting of Activity and Learning Agreements came at a time of major change for many of the key partners. While Connexions Partnerships and local LSCs in all pilot areas had established their intended approaches and management structures within their delivery plans, the implementation of the initiatives had coincided with a programme of structural re-organisation for national and local LSCs and within Connexions Partnerships. Local LSC structures had shifted towards a regional agenda, which had resulted in staff levels, roles and responsibilities being changed. The impact of local LSC re-organisation on the delivery of the LAP had been that insufficient numbers of staff in some LSC areas were in post to manage and deliver the initiative at the early stages of the pilot, and the staff who were in post were often over-stretched. At the first round evaluation visits it was reported that some Connexions staff were uncertain about who was leading LAP at the local LSC level and, where dedicated staff were in place, they were often managing a number of competing priorities.

*'We've obviously had to deal with the complexity over the fact that both the LSC and Connexions are changing as organisations significantly during this time and that has not helped the situation. For example, in the LSC at the moment we have six posts for the Learning Agreement pilot and only one of those is filled at the moment. When I moved onto my new responsibilities as ..... the Learning Agreement forms one tiny element of that, whereas in my previous role it was forming 30 per cent of the role. So therefore there are staffing issues and some of them have been staffing issues with Connexions, in terms of first of all getting the go-ahead to actually recruit staff ... or once staff were in place we then had to obviously ensure that they were trained appropriately.'*

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<sup>1</sup> Learning Agreement Pilots Local/Regional Guidance was issued in May 2006. National guidance was discussed at a LAP conference in December 2006 and re-issued in February 2007 to help clarify LAP regulations.

Connexions Partnerships/services were also facing structural change over a two-year period. In each local authority, Children's Trusts are currently being set up and the funding that goes directly to 47 Connexions Partnerships will, by April 2008, go directly to all 150 local authority areas. In parts of some pilot areas, this process had already taken place, while in other areas, Connexions Partnerships plan to disband by 2008, when all services are scheduled to have moved within local authority control. Therefore, the implementation and delivery of both the Activity and Learning Agreements Pilots coincides with the process of change and reorganisation which is currently facing guidance and support services available to young people.

### 5.3 Staffing structures and recruitment

Project managers had teams of local managers who line managed operational staff. There were two types of management structure in place. In pilot areas which comprised a small number of local authority areas, project managers tended to have had a direct involvement in staff recruitment and operated centralised control over the delivery of the pilot. In this model, while local managers were responsible for the day-to-day management of operational staff, there was centralised management and standardised delivery of the initiative across the pilot area. In pilot areas which were made up of a greater number of local authorities, a devolved management structure was in place. While local managers reported to their project manager, they held responsibility for the recruitment of operational staff, and significant variation existed between local areas in the ways in which the pilot was being delivered.

Operational staff had been given a number of job titles, including that of Training Adviser, Learning Adviser, Brokers, Personal Adviser, Learning Development Adviser, Learning and Skills Broker, Keyworker and Training Pays Adviser. In some pilot areas, different job titles existed between local authority areas. All areas reported that there had been a shortfall in operational staff recruitment. This was attributed to a reduction in staffing needs which, in turn, was linked to the re-profiling of the eligible population and, in many cases, to acute problems associated with staff recruitment and retention.

Significant delays with staff recruitment were reported in many pilot areas. In areas where recruitment was managed within local authority areas, delays were caused when job specifications and staff recruitment had to be routed through centralised personnel departments, as opposed to being undertaken directly by Connexions Partnerships/Services.

### 5.3.1 Advisers' skill sets

The role of 'LAP adviser' was reported by many respondents to be very different to that of the generic Personal Adviser (PA) operating within mainstream Connexions Services. PAs focused on working with young people and had received generic training to recognise and empathise with their personal needs. However, delivery of LAP, required a different set of skills, which included 'selling' the concept of LAP to both young people and employers, and many areas had struggled to recruit staff who could effectively work with both client groups.

*'I have to say of that, I take responsibility as someone who led the pilot from the Connexions point of view, there was a naivety about how much of the job was a selling job.'*

Project manager

As a consequence, in some areas where LAP staff were employed or redeployed from existing Connexions personnel, problems were reported in relation to their ability and confidence in working with employers and, to a lesser extent, in having the diagnostic skills to identify the learning and training needs of young people in the labour market. In one area this issue was being tackled through a staff training programme. They were using a consultant who offered training in selling LAP to young people, engaging with employers and understanding the learner offer.

Staff recruitment had been more successful and sustained in areas where managers had employed staff from a wider range of backgrounds – in particular, staff with backgrounds in training and development and/or who had experience of promoting employment and training initiatives to employers and young people. In one pilot area, staff seconded from Jobcentre Plus were effective in using their customer care and employer engagement skills in promoting LAP. The need for a different skill set among LAP advisers, ie 'selling' skills and the ability to work effectively with both employers and young people, is a key lesson learnt from the delivery of the pilot and will need to be acted upon in a national delivery model if the pilot is rolled out nationally.

### 5.3.2 Workload

Staff morale had been adversely affected when it had become apparent in the early stages of delivery that the target population had been over-estimated and that the main tool used to access young people, ie the Connexions Client Information System (CCIS), stored outdated information on the JWT group. Operational staff expended large amounts of time trying to make contact with eligible young people. Frustration was caused by significant volumes of inaccurate data being stored (since young people in JWT had not previously been a priority group) as well as by the amount of time it had taken to make contact with young people. There was also some uncertainty among staff about what the 'LAP offer' actually entailed. In some cases,



staff felt under enormous pressure, due to unrealistic target setting in terms of the number of 'sign-ups' they had to obtain over specified periods of time. While many project and local managers had established caseload numbers, these had been reappraised in the light of difficulties in establishing contact with the eligible population and securing LAP take-up. Therefore, caseload sizes, in many pilot areas, had been difficult to define.

*'I think when we were sort of performance managing, we were sort of coming to them in October and saying 'we would have expected you to have 30 by now'. And because they only had 20, and then next month that 30 would become 35. It's quite de-motivating to have that constant under-performance. So we're much more realistic now, and they are moving on from the starting point that they're at.'*

Project manager

### 5.3.3 Location

The majority of LAP advisers were located in Connexions Offices. In some cases, LAP teams were quite separate from mainstream staff and their responsibilities were organised either on a geographical basis or in terms of responsibility for young people working in specified occupational groupings. Some LAP advisers work with both young people and employers, while in other areas, two separate teams of LAP advisers co-exist. In two pilot areas there were staff responsible for the delivery of LAP located in a range of education and training providers' premises. In one pilot area, responsibility for LAP recruitment had been subcontracted to a range of education and training providers, with the aim of encouraging greater take-up of LAP using their employer links and their contact with young people leaving education and training provision. In this model, delivery staff responsible for LAP recruitment were employed by education and training providers. In addition, there were three Learning Development Advisers (LDAs) who were jointly funded by the local LSC and Connexions. In another pilot area, LAP and AA advisers, who are employed by local authorities and managed by Connexions Services, were based in a range of premises, such as voluntary organisations and partnership organisations who had agreed to act as host sites in each of the local authority areas. This was reported to have aided networking opportunities with other agencies and has resulted in a system of referrals being established. In other pilot areas, LAP advisers were placed in providers' premises for one or two days each week. The extent to which multi-site placements of LAP advisers results in improved take-up rates of LAP will be monitored in the next round of evaluation visits, in order to determine whether this would be effective practice for national roll-out.

## 5.4 Links with training providers

Local LSCs had set about contracting with local training providers in a number of different ways. In some areas, an invitation to tender for LAP provision had been issued to all learning and training providers. In other areas, there had been a focus on contracting provision within specific skills sectors where there was a concentration of young people in jobs without training and/or in allocated 'travel to learn' areas. There were delays in the procurement of LAP provision in all pilot areas, and these were attributed to the restructuring which was occurring within LSC nationally and locally, as this had impacted on staffing and, consequently, on the release of invitation to tender and contracts with local training providers. This had a severe impact on the ability of LAP advisers to meet the training requirements of young people who had been recruited to the pilot.

### 5.4.1 Provider consortia

In four pilot areas, provision was contracted through consortia arrangements, in which the local LSC devolved responsibility for the management and delivery of LAP provision to a group of training providers. For example, in one pilot area the tender specification for LAP provision stipulated that, within each local authority, a consortia bid was required which included representation from three out of the four key provider types, ie a college, a local authority, a voluntary/community organisation and a private training provider. In addition, it was a requirement that at least one member of the consortium had some experience of delivering E2E provision. Each consortium had a partnership lead organisation. While, it was hoped that this approach would ensure a breadth of experience to deliver flexible provision to meet the needs of young people who are in jobs without training, consortia arrangements had further protracted contracting arrangements because of the time it had taken for some education and training providers to form partnerships. Delays were also attributed to the LSC's move towards a competitive procurement process. In one pilot area it had taken 11 months from the start of the pilot to operationalise a consortium approach to the supply of LAP provision. In addition, some LAP advisers felt constrained by consortia arrangements, in particular when provision needs could not be fulfilled within the consortium.

*'I think the other thing with the consortia is that you're bringing groups, individuals and kinds of organisations together that ordinarily wouldn't be put together on that kind of scale, and you've got different agendas, you've got different working practices, and what you're trying to do is to standardise the way each organisation works for the benefit of the pilot, and that's very, very difficult to do, and that takes time, or may never happen.'*

Connexions local manager

From the providers' perspective, frustration was expressed at the lack of referrals that had materialised through LAP. Many respondents, in particular among

representatives from consortia-lead organisations, felt that an enormous amount of time had been spent preparing bids and setting up consortia, which had, in the majority of cases, resulted in marginal delivery of LAP provision.

*'Again it took a long time for them (the consortia) to get themselves properly aligned, it took a long time for them to understand what they could actually offer and how they could offer it. So although we started the process in April, I think it was August before contracts were actually signed. So really there were no real starts until September really and then it grew fairly slowly from that point.'*

LSC manager

## 5.5 Conclusion

- The introduction of LAP had enabled Connexions and local LSCs to work together to develop strategy to support the needs of young people in the JWT category.
- The task facing project managers was more complex in pilot areas which comprised large numbers of local authority areas and required the need to set up multiple sets of contractual and management areas. In addition, achieving consistency in terms of management and delivery arrangements was more difficult to achieve in large pilot areas. This is a key message, which should be reviewed in the event of national roll-out of the ALA pilots and the piloting of future initiatives.
- The implementation of the initiative was also hampered by organisational change, which was occurring within both Connexions and local LSCs and which adversely affected staff recruitment and retention to the pilot.
- Connexions LAP advisers required a different 'skill set' from mainstream operational staff, which included the ability to work effectively with both employers and young people and the confidence to 'sell' the package to both client groups. The effectiveness of placing LAP advisers in multi-sites will continue to be monitored in the third evaluation visits to the pilot areas.
- Provider consortia arrangements had taken a long time to establish and made the setting up and delivery of provision cumbersome and over-bureaucratic. From the providers' perspective, they had spent large amounts of time setting up consortia which had resulted in lower than expected volumes of business.

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## 6 Delivery of the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP)

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This chapter draws together findings from first and second round evaluation visits to pilot areas, in relation to the delivery of LAP. It explores the relationship between the perceived aims and desired outcomes of the initiative and issues that have emerged during the first year of implementation of the policy. In addition, it examines local policy making and delivery, with regard to publicity and marketing strategies, application processes, the procurement of provision and monitoring and payment systems.

### 6.1 Perceptions of the aims of LAP and desired outcomes

The principle of working with young people in JWT and offering accredited packages of training to meet their needs was applauded by respondents. It was acknowledged that the opportunity to work with and to develop a greater understanding of the motivations and needs of young people in JWT was timely and welcomed, in particular with regard to proposals to extend the age at which young people can leave compulsory learning.

*'It made us consider a client group that we wouldn't really have been thinking about...we would by the time they were adults, but we wouldn't at this point, so you are talking about an early intervention strategy.'*

Provider

There was evidence to suggest that the pilot had been launched too quickly and that considerably more time should have been spent on:

- developing systems which provided up-to-date destination data on young people, including those in the JWT group
- training Connexions staff to develop their capacity to work with employers

- developing intelligence on local employers who employ young people in JWT
- introducing strategies to strengthen partnership delivery arrangements for LAP between Connexions and local LSCs
- working with providers to ensure that provision needs were accurately assessed and widely available.

At its inception, the principles underpinning LAP were that the pilot would focus on encouraging young people who were working but not engaged in any accredited training, to do so. This was to be achieved through offering young people personalised, flexible learning packages that included progression (if appropriate) and individual support to encourage their participation and retention in learning.<sup>1</sup> Many respondents from Connexions, local LSCs and providers felt that these objectives had been largely displaced from a 'learner led' agenda towards an increasing focus on driving qualification attainment within LAP, which included learning that either directly equated to, or contributed towards a full Level 2 entitlement, ie an Apprenticeship outcome (see section 6.1.1). LAP was described as being less creative and more prescriptive than was originally envisaged. In addition, by attempting to meet the needs of young people and their employers at the same time, it was a complex arrangement to deliver.

*'We have now been bound up by some prescriptive rules that govern qualifications. I would like to see us be more creative. I think we have lost sight of who the candidates are.'*

Provider

*'Yes, if you want to do an apprenticeship, do your key skills with the Learning Agreement, and that's how they are getting the numbers, That's where you're seeing bigger numbers ... they might not necessarily do what the young person wanted to do.'*

Provider

### 6.1.1 Interaction of LAP with other local and national initiatives

While there had been little policy intervention in recent years targeted directly at the JWT group, there co-exist labour market interventions aimed at offering training programmes to young people and boosting qualification attainment among the workforce, most notably government support for Apprenticeships, and the national qualification framework and targets. In some pilot areas, in particular those where wage compensation was being offered and paid to employers, there was concern expressed by respondents from local LSCs and providers that LAP had risked displacing young people from Apprenticeships. Local LSCs and providers had established contracts to deliver Apprenticeship training targets and made

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<sup>1</sup> Learning Agreement Pilot Delivery Specification, December 2005.

considerable effort at local area level to harness the commitment of employers to contribute towards the cost of training. In areas where wage compensation and bonus payments were being offered to employers through LAP, it was felt that efforts to encourage employers to assume responsibility for training costs under Apprenticeship agreements were being undermined. In addition, it was asserted that some employers who had previously refused to engage in government supported training activity, yet participated in LAP, were being given additional financial incentives, over and above the level of support given to employers who had participated in training young people for many years.

At the outset, the qualification entitlement within LAP also appeared to jeopardise Apprenticeship contracts. Confusion about what could, and what could not be offered within LAP had resulted in some Agreements being offered which included standalone NVQ qualifications at Level 2. Apprenticeships comprise Level 2 qualifications, as well as key skills and a Technical Certificate, ie a full framework agreement. There was anxiety that standalone NVQs at Level 2 would undermine the credibility of the Apprenticeship offer, despite it being widely reported that they were highly sought after by young people in JWT and their employers. Subsequent changes to the national guidance on the delivery of LAP had clearly set out the boundaries of the qualifications that can be offered. The eligible learning provision comprises all qualifications listed which are included under Section 96 of LSC's Learning Aims Database. This includes qualifications accredited at Level 2 or above but does not include standalone NVQs. It can include Apprenticeships, Advanced apprenticeships, BTEC and similar FE courses, GCSEs and A-levels. It can be provision which supports progression to Level 2 as long as the learning plan also addresses basic and/or key skills, including NVQ 1, Technical Certificates, Basic Skills (literacy and numeracy) and short courses over ten guided learning hours (and on section 96). In addition, standalone Key Skills qualifications, including wider skills and those which support the LSC's Skills for Life Target, are also eligible.<sup>1</sup>

Connexions staff were concerned that aligning LAP more closely with the qualification attainment specification within the Apprenticeship framework had made LAP less attractive to some young people and their employers. Some young people in the JWT had refused the Apprenticeship 'offer' in the past, and it was argued that greater flexibility and innovation was needed within LAP in order to widen participation in learning and training. The inability to offer standalone NVQs was widely reported to have adversely affected LAP take-up. In addition, changes to guidance in LAP delivery had blurred the boundaries between the two programmes, in that Apprenticeships now form part of LAP delivery, as well as including employers who already participate in Apprenticeship delivery. In some instances, this could lead to 'double counting', since both employers newly recruited through LAP

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<sup>1</sup> Learning Agreement Pilot Guidance, February 2007.

and employers who offered existing, as well as additional Apprenticeship training places, could now qualify for LAP funding.

In one pilot area, which offers LAP with an agreement and bonus payments, a local initiative funded through ESF was providing a competing offer to young people who enter the JWT group. Targeted at young people who leave E2E and enter the labour market, the programme offered a wage subsidy to employers and training which would accommodate the delivery of standalone NVQ Level 2 qualifications.

## 6.2 Awareness raising, marketing activity and take-up rates

Marketing and publicity of LAP targeted at young people was largely driven by Connexions, since they were the main budget holders for this area of implementation. Pilot areas had been very active in terms of identifying target populations and raising awareness and informing potential applicants about the existence of the provision. The main tool used to identify the target population of young people during the first year of the pilot was the CCIS database, which stored destinations data on young people. Tracking of all 16-year olds occurred during the first three months following the completion of their compulsory schooling, when telephone follow-up was conducted by Connexions. For the first cohort of young people eligible for LAP, destinations data was collected at least six months prior to the beginning of the pilot and since there were delays at the beginning of the pilots in relation to staff recruitment, the data stored on the JWT group was reported to be inaccurate. Furthermore, attention focused on contacting young people who had been defined as in JWT at the time the destination survey was conducted and took no account of young people who had entered other destinations, such as full-time education or work with training, unless they had been informed by young people themselves or other PAs, that they had subsequently entered the JWT group. Connexions personnel reported that the exercise in tracking young people in the JWT group had alerted them to the need for ongoing rather than one-off follow-up for all groups of young people, not only those who were defined as NEET. Concern was expressed about the level of frustration felt by LAP advisers with regard to the slow progress that had been made in identifying the eligible population and in encouraging young people, as well their employer, to sign up to LAP.

*'So you actually need that throughput to actually keep you, to keep the edge and keep the excitement. If you're only getting two or three it becomes difficult. That has had a demotivating effect on the workforce.'*

Connexions area manager

LAP advisers often made multiple telephone calls to young people before some contact could be established and evening working was required in order to maximise the chances of young people being available. It was found that a substantial number of young people who were reported to have been eligible for LAP had either changed

their destination status, most frequently by becoming NEET, or were unable to be contacted. In some areas, LAP advisers visited employers' premises, while in other areas, Training Providers assumed responsibility for negotiating LAP provision with employers.

In some pilot areas, marketing and publicity groups had been set up to develop promotional events and materials. LAP promotional events and materials developed within pilot areas included:

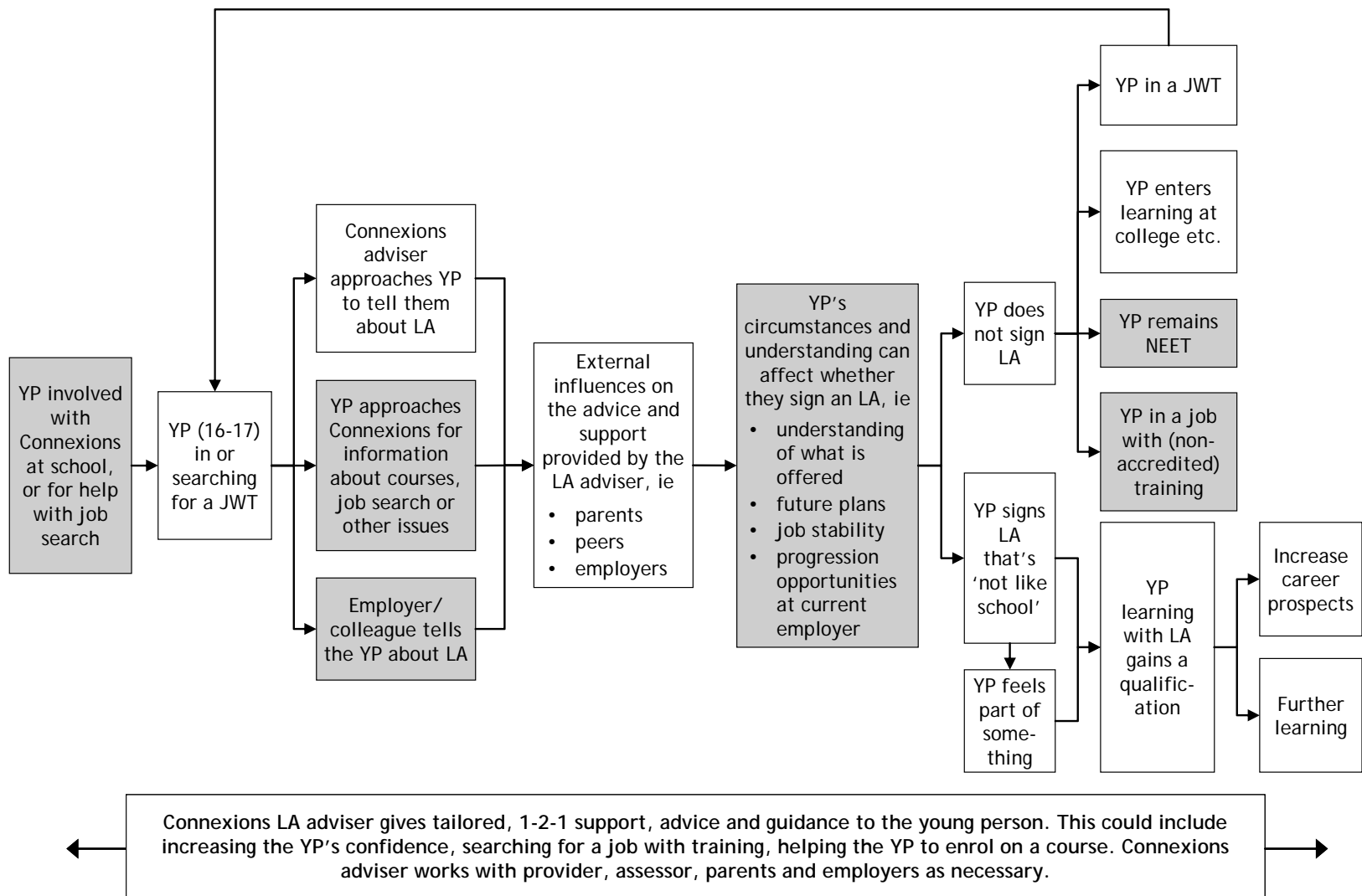
- circulating briefing sheets about the LAP to Connexions PAs
- briefing sessions for local Connexions staff and management committees
- briefing sessions/visits to local stakeholders, including Chambers of Commerce, training providers and other brokerage groups
- the production of information folders for young people and employers
- media coverage, including television and radio
- mailshots to employers, including use of e-mail
- publication of case studies
- purchase of the Thompsons Employer Database
- locating LAP advisers (who promote LAP) in providers' premises
- establishing a weblink from the Connexions website about LAP
- targeting specific sectors of employment where there are known to be a number of young people in jobs without training, eg hospitality and catering, manufacturing and construction.

In one pilot area, headline details about the LAP offer were outlined on the back of envelopes, which were addressed and sent to eligible young people. This approach was reported to have been both a cost-effective and successful tool for engaging young people, since it had yielded a 50 per cent response rate and highlights an example of good practice. Targeting young people in school at the end of Year 11 was also being tested. School based PAs identified young people who intended to leave school and move into the JWT category, and these were subsequently visited and sent information about the initiative from LAP advisers. This approach should be monitored in future visits to the pilot area, to test its effectiveness at increasing take-up rates of LAP.

One of the focused studies conducted so far for the programme theory element of the evaluation looked at the role of the adviser in areas without a financial incentive. The report presented a model of the way young people were engaged in the pilot (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1: Model of engaging young people



## 6.2.1 Employers and brokerage

The delivery of LAP is dependent upon effective partnership arrangements between local Connexions and LSC staff. In some pilot areas, links were still developing in terms of sharing expertise in relation to working with young people and employers and in working together. Train to Gain brokerage was regarded as 'the way ahead' for delivering the message about LAP within local labour markets but the brokerage service had delivered relatively few leads to date. In one pilot area, Connexions had sub-contracted with Train to Gain to provide referrals to LAP, resulting in 20 referrals being made. In a limited number of cases LAP advisers and Train to Gain Brokers were attempting to make joint visits to employers and to share labour market intelligence.

*'But actually I cannot, no one can tell me the structure and volume of Train to Gain. No one can tell me how they are organised ... And they are currently going through things themselves, so they're in a little disarray. It's not an unwillingness on our part to broaden involvement in the project. It's just that it's like herding cats, you can't quite grasp.*

Connexions manager

On the whole, during first round evaluation visits, pilot areas had been working on the premise that Connexions would focus on promoting LAP to young people and that LSCs, largely through Train to Gain brokerage, would lead the way on marketing the initiative among employers (as well as procuring the provision). However, there were some exceptions to the rule. In some areas dedicated posts which were designed to strengthen links with employers through the marketing of LAP had been established with Connexions. In one pilot area dedicated PA posts had been established within Connexions to promote the initiative among local employment agencies, as well as offering training support to individuals in order to sustain them in employment. A joint Connexions/LSC launch of the LA pilot had taken place in one pilot area. A DVD which was designed to show the benefits of LAP to young people, as well as demonstrating how the brokerage system will work for both employers and training providers, had been produced.

### Connexions getting more directly involved with employers

Second evaluation visits showed that further shifts had occurred, with increasing evidence that LAP advisers and managers had developed strategies to work more closely with employers and other organisations in order to secure other referral routes into LAP. This included:

- LAP advisers 'cold calling' employers to raise awareness of the initiative.

- A promotional event being organised in one area for local providers to raise their awareness of LAP. There had been an increased number of referrals to the initiative from this route, in particular from E2E providers.
- In another pilot area, a telemarketing agency was employed by Connexions to undertake a telephone recruitment exercise with local employers in areas where take-up rates were slowest.
- A celebration event was also planned to take place in one pilot area, to recognise the achievements of young people on LAP. Employers and LAP advisers were also to receive awards, in recognition of the support they had given to young people.

These examples highlight some innovative practice which could be adopted if the initiative is to be rolled out nationally.

A blanket marketing approach, which involved a mail shot to seven thousand employers in one pilot area, delivered limited returns. As a consequence, a more co-ordinated approach, which entailed direct mailing to 200 employers each month and was rotated between the four key geographical areas of the region, was adopted. Employers who received a mail shot were subsequently followed up by a group of LAP advisers, who had specific responsibility for employer engagement.

*'We started off the project by going via the employers, going down the employer route. And then that really didn't turn up much success. So then we went the young person route, and that did prove to be much more successful. But now we've got to the point that we've exhausted the young person route, so now we're looking again at what we do more down the employer route but in a much more structured way. So we're looking at targeting some of the larger employers. Going out and doing more formal presentations. Going along with Train to Gain. Attending a lot more business networking events.'*

Connexions area manager

In one pilot area Connexions staff had secured LAP training for eight young people who were working for a large national retailer. They had been unable to secure Apprenticeships with the firm due to the sometimes temporary and part-time nature of their employment. The attraction of undertaking further learning had motivated young people to stay with the firm and, if the programme of learning proved to be successful, it was planned to roll out the offer to young people working for the company in other locations across the country.

However, in some pilot areas, concern was expressed about the lack of co-ordination with regard to contacting and working with employers. In some cases, LAP advisers, Train to Gain Brokers, LSC staff and representatives from LAP training providers retained some responsibility for local employer liaison. There was a risk that duplication of effort was occurring and that some employers, in particular small firms, were receiving multiple visits/calls, which may contribute towards negative outcomes. In a number of pilot areas, despite the efforts made to raise awareness

about LAP, it was felt that a lack of awareness, understanding and credibility still surrounded the initiative amongst many employers.

### 6.2.2 Impact of the State Aid rules

Respondents were asked about the perceived impact of the De Minimus rule/State Aid on employer take-up of LAs. The De Minimus rule allows companies to receive up to £62,000 of aid from a public body over a three-year rolling period. In order to comply with these regulations, companies which receive bonus payments and wage compensation as part of LAP, will be required to complete a declaration confirming how much aid they have received. Project managers were aware of the regulations and of the need to raise awareness among employers about the De Minimus rule/State Aid. There was a perception among project managers that the existence of the regulations would not impact on take-up of LAP, although they were sensitive to the need to explain the regulations carefully to small firms which may be deterred by the added 'bureaucracy' surrounding the De Minimus rule/State Aid. In addition, there was a sense among some respondents that the importance attached to the regulations had been excessive, since take-up rates were generally much lower than expected.

*'Well, I don't believe it's an issue at all. The Connexions have been making a massive song and dance about it, getting themselves all worried about going out and having discussions with employers about it. And, you know, the guidance is very clear. We've done, we've got an ESF expert here ... who's ready to do a lot of training for them .....And to be honest, the only sort of, with big companies, your Top Man, your Dixons, your big retails, they're not going to be bothered to receive the employer contributions at all. It's only a backstreet garage who's going to receive anything anyway. So, therefore, it's a non-problem as far as I'm concerned.'*

LSC respondent

### 6.2.3 Take-up rates

It was widely acknowledged that LAP had been slow to get off the ground and that take-up rates, even with modified delivery targets, remained a challenge. Delays in policy implementation and low take-up were attributed to the following reasons:

- The short lead-in time to deliver a policy targeted at a group of young people and a segment of the labour market, which had not been a policy priority for some time (section 6.1).
- Delays in staff recruitment within Connexions and local LSCs (section 5.3).
- On-going changes to LAP regulations, which created confusion about the product, in particular among operational staff who were responsible for its promotion (section 6.1).

- Organisational change which had occurred, notably at local LSC level (section 5.2.5).
- Difficulties in identifying and tracking young people in the JWT group, due to inaccuracies in MI data (section 5.3 and 6.2).
- Apprehension about wider publicity of LAP because of the delays by local LSCs in procuring relevant education and training provision (section 6.3).
- Operational staff in some Connexions Services lacked experience and confidence in working directly with employers (section 5.3).
- A lack of flexibility in the content and delivery of provision (see below and section 6.3).

Furthermore, some pilot areas experienced difficulties engaging young people in LAP, especially where they worked for large firms which operated their own in-house training programmes. There was some initial reluctance from representatives from large companies to recognise the need or relevance for signing up to a national qualification framework. Examples were found of ongoing negotiations between Connexion/LSC staff and large companies about the ways in which in-house training programmes may be made compatible with national accreditation.

There were significant variations, both between pilot areas and within pilot areas, with regard to levels of take-up. Take-up rates were highest in pilot areas which comprised a small number of local authority areas and where the pilot was centrally managed. This appeared to have facilitated a clearer understanding of expectations from all parties, since communication strategies were in place between much smaller numbers of key players. In addition, pilot areas which had higher levels of take-up had avoided commissioning provision through a consortia approach (see section 5.4), which had added to delays in implementation in other pilot areas.

Another key difference between pilot areas and within pilot areas with regard to take-up rates was the type of provision that was being offered to young people. Take-up rates were highest when provision was dominated by key skills, basic skills and Technical Certificate programmes and where young people were largely recruited to provision that had been procured before their entry to the programme. In contrast, in areas where provision had been identified and procured to a much greater extent, on an 'individual needs' basis, they had encountered difficulties in both finding bespoke provision and establishing roll-on roll-off admissions. There were many examples where young people's training needs were hampered by inflexibilities in the system, such as having to wait for September start dates at colleges, or where there were insufficient numbers of young people interested in a vocational field, which had made the commissioning of provision economically unviable. This had caused frustration among both LAP advisers and providers.

*'Although we have a range of courses that are potentially on offer for them ... They (the LAP advisers) don't seem to understand that you can't force providers to offer courses. If you have one learner who wants to do plastering, and it is not currently offered, they (the LAP adviser) have to realise that you can't put on that course for one learner.'*

LAP Provider

*'... but obviously they are being forced into say picking options, or young people sectors that are easier, than picking up any young person, and seeing how they can make it work for them.'*

LAP provider

### A starter or a learner?

Confusion also existed over what constituted LAP start-up rates. Among Connexions personnel, a young person was classified as having started LAP, when the Learning Agreement had been signed by all parties. However, signing a Learning Agreement did not signify that a young person had started their accredited training programme and therefore local and national LSC relied on an ILR (Individual Learning Record) being activated by the provider, which established that a young person's training had started. Providers reported difficulties uploading ILR data onto LSC systems, and this impacted on accurate data being recorded on LAP take-up rates and, in some instances, on payments being made to providers. In one pilot area, a 'buddy system' was introduced to help providers support one another with ILR/LAP data submission.

### **The Kickstart study - the role of the adviser in getting young people back into learning**

One of the programme theory studies explored the hypothesis that: the support, advice and guidance provided by Connexions are enough to induce the young person to sign up to a Learning Agreement and/or 'kickstart' their interest in learning.

All the young people interviewed in the course of the study had an active interest in learning or were open to it. What seemed to affect their likelihood of signing up to the LA was:

- their circumstances
- the depth of their prior career planning or direction
- whether they had the confidence and motivation to approach Connexions.

The role of the adviser differed between acting as a 'kickstarter', as the theory suggested, encouraging and supporting the young person to develop their interest in learning and playing the role of 'door-opener', directing young people to learning opportunities and channelling their existing interest in learning, rather than kickstarting it. In such cases the support provided by the adviser kickstarts the learning itself rather than the interest in learning.

Those young people who require 'kickstarter' help are likely to require more time and support from the Connexions adviser than those learners who require help with 'door-opening'. In some cases, in particular among non-signers, Connexions advisers were not able to open that door (ie by finding an Apprenticeship, or job with a Learning Agreement attached). Other non-signers already have learning opportunities or progression available to them within their existing work and so turn the Learning Agreement down. Alternatively non-signers might be 'killing-time', waiting for the start of a course, or working in a job until they reach a certain age and can work in their preferred sector and therefore do not take up a Learning Agreement.

There were some non-signers (and indeed some signers) who did not fully understand the Learning Agreement offer, and clearly this will have an impact on sign-up. The offer needs to be presented as simply and clearly as possible so that young people are able to grasp it quite quickly and easily.

Some non-signers appeared to lack direction and were undecided about a career path, which was probably a factor in them not committing to a Learning Agreement. Young people in this situation many need more information, advice and guidance before they can make a decision about learning and commit to a course.

### **Reasons for not taking part**

Respondents were asked to provide feedback on reasons why young people in the JWT group had refused to take part in LAP. Reasons for refusal included:

- participation in casual and/or informal working
- an unwillingness to provide employers' details

- lack of parental support
- lack of support from employer
- the lack of assistance with transport costs within LAP to access training provision
- participation in temporary work and waiting to join the Armed Services
- a demand for standalone NVQs and/or qualifications which fell outside the LAP qualification specifications
- pregnancy or caring responsibilities.

In addition, it was asserted that some recent school leavers associated participation in training activity with negative school experiences and rejected the LAP offer on that basis. Crucially, some young people in the JWT group were already in receipt of on-the-job and company training provision, which they valued over and above the accredited provision available within LAP.



Table 6.1: Learning Agreements Number of Starts 2006/07 and 2007/08

Pilot area		2006/07	2007/08	Total
Devon & Cornwall	Re-profiled Starts	678	200	878
	Sign-ups	440	349	789
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	64.9	174.5	89.9
Lancashire	Re-profiled Starts	1,134	305	1,439
	Sign-ups	1,078	391	1,469
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	95.1	128.2	102.1
South Yorkshire	Re-profiled Starts	361	197	558
	Sign-ups	278	171	449
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	77.0	86.8	80.5
Greater Manchester	Re-profiled Starts	334	751	1,085
	Sign-ups	312	496	808
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	93.4	66.0	74.5
London East	Re-profiled Starts	137	162	299
	Sign-ups	89	117	206
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	65.0	72.2	68.9
Black Country	Re-profiled Starts	140	105	245
	Sign-ups	103	29	132
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	73.6	27.6	53.9
Essex	Re-profiled Starts	585	475	1,060
	Sign-ups	433	369	802
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	74.0	77.7	75.7
West Yorkshire	Re-profiled Starts	190	330	520
	Sign-ups	199	134	333
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	104.7	40.6	64.0
Totals	Re-profiled Starts	3,559	2,525	6,084
	Sign-ups	2,932	2,056	4,988
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	82.4	81.4	82.0

Source: LA Management Information, DCSF, 2007

Concern was expressed by respondents in a number of pilot areas about the lack of inclusion of 18-year olds in the LAP initiative. Since Train to Gain targeted adults over the age of 19 years, it was felt that 18-year olds were falling through the 'policy net', in terms of being able to access support with their training needs if they happened to fall outside the parameters of the Apprenticeship training programme.

*'They are neither fish nor fowl. If the young person is 18-and-a-half they have to wait for six months to become eligible (for Train to Gain)... There's a need for a seamless approach ... If Learning Agreements could cover 18-year olds that would be very good.'*

Drop-out rates from LAP were low, although a number of young people were reported to have left the programme before their ILR was signed. This was attributed to the long timescales involved in securing and starting relevant provision which had resulted in some young people either having lost interest in the initiative or having lost or moved jobs in the meantime.

Table 6.2: Starts to Learning Agreement by variant

		2006/07	2007/08	Total
Total Variant 1	Re-profiled Starts	2,173	702	2,875
	Sign-ups	1,796	911	2,707
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	82.7	129.8	94.2
Total Variant 2	Re-profiled Starts	471	913	1,384
	Sign-ups	401	613	1,014
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	85.1	67.1	73.3
Total Variant 3	Re-profiled Starts	915	910	1,825
	Sign-ups	735	532	1,267
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	80.3	58.5	69.4
Totals	Re-profiled Starts	3,559	2,525	6,084
	Sign-ups	2,932	2,056	4,988
	Sign-ups / Starts (%)	82.4	81.4	82.0

Source: LA Management Information, DCSF, 2007

### 6.3 Identifying and procuring provision

Within LAP, the responsibility for the procurement of provision rests with the local LSC. Local LSCs had either set about contracting with a range of providers or had set up consortia arrangements (see section 5.4). The challenge facing them in the implementation of LAP was to establish systems and a range of provision which was flexible, responsive and 'learner led' within an existing training system where training needs were determined by local LSCs and providers. While many providers had set about trying to be more responsive to individual need and to offer bespoke provision, this had not proved cost-effective or practical in many instances. In addition, the low numbers entering the pilot meant that many providers which had shown great enthusiasm towards the initiative when it was first launched, were reluctant to invest large amounts of time and effort to develop tailored packages of learning for young people and, in some cases, to change their patterns of working when they had other large contracts to deliver – most notably Apprenticeships and Train to Gain. In essence, there was concern about the mismatch between how and where the pilot required learning to be delivered and the capacity of learning providers to meet those needs:

*'The bottom line is you can't introduce a flexible, on demand system into a hierarchical structure or contract structure that we've got at the moment.'*

Connexions manager

Some providers complained that the systems which had been put in place to procure LAP provision were over-bureaucratic. Contracting arrangements between providers and local LSCs varied, with some providers being contracted to deliver a certain value of learning rather than specific courses, while in other areas contracts were of nominal value and were topped up according to the demand for provision. Some respondents felt that throughput would have been increased if the policy could have been relaxed to meet the demands from particular sectors, ie retail, where large volumes of in-house training existed, although there was a lack of formal accreditation.

While there were examples of provision which had an individualised approach to learning, the bulk of learning provision within LAP consisted of key skills, basic skills and Technical Certificate programmes, where there was an emphasis on establishing contracts and courses with providers prior to the recruitment of young people. There were mixed views about the value of this approach. On the one hand, focusing on personal transferable skills equipped young people with the foundations to progress into Apprenticeship training, by enabling them to receive bite-sized chunks of a full framework agreement. It also brought throughput to LAP, in terms of numbers and completions and was fairly straightforward to deliver. On the other hand, there was concern about the extent to which this approach was really learner-led, as opposed to provider-led, and whether these programmes were what young people really wanted and would offer routes back into learning.

*'It's a way of engaging the young people and indeed their employers, in some of the, what the providers complain to be the harder aspects of an apprenticeship programme to deliver. Things like the technical certificate and key skills and then we are encouraging them to move them on to an apprenticeship to deliver that as part of the learning agreement pilot funding for the learning.'*

LSC manager

*'... because, to a certain extent, there's been some delays and implementation issues, it's an easy format to put in place, provision for key skills, rather than some areas in terms of NVQs.'*

Provider

Frustration was felt by Connexions staff when they could not access a suitable programme of learning, despite having successfully recruited young people and their employers to the programme and having identified their training/learning needs. This was either because specific courses were unavailable in the area, they were unavailable at the time they were needed and/or they could not be offered on an individual basis. Specific difficulties centred around September start dates for courses

delivered by FE colleges and the lack of flexibility surrounding the delivery of courses which were in high demand, such as construction skills programmes.

*'We've actually got a meeting this afternoon. Where it looks like the college is stockpiling the young people till they've got enough to put on a course, but they're not starting them, so they've said they can't start until September. Well, they'll lose all those young people by then. They'll not wait till then...'*

LSC manager

One pilot area had introduced an 'Issues Log', which enabled LAP advisers to report delivery issues, such as access to provision, which highlighted good practice. An acute shortage of local construction training was identified through this method and resulted in construction provision being commissioned outside the county. Most pilot areas reported shortages in the availability of provision, particularly in construction training courses. There were reported to be significant numbers of young people working in the construction industry, with many of them being self-employed due to the widespread use of sub-contracted labour. This created specific issues for young people who were eligible for LAP, since they lost income if they signed up to the initiative, especially if they lived in areas where wage compensation was not available. Demands for training, which could not be delivered within LAP, included taster courses, short courses, food hygiene and carpet fitting courses.

Another tension surrounding the implementation of LAP was reconciling young people's demands for learning/training with those of their employers. It was reported that in the overwhelming majority of cases, employers supported young people's choice of learning whether it was vocationally relevant to their work or not. It was often stated by respondents that the financial incentives on offer within LAP did not largely determine employers' willingness to participate in the initiative. In contrast, it was the employer's commitment to support the young person that made the difference.

The implementation of LAP highlighted different needs from employers in the JWT sector. Respondents reported that many employers who had engaged with the LAP offer, were small firms which had recruited young people who were family members. They often sought units of qualifications or stand-alone qualifications, which they felt better supported their business needs and could be delivered in the workplace.

## 6.4 Application processes, monitoring and payment systems

Applications from young people for entry to LAP are managed by Connexions. When a young person has expressed a willingness to join the pilot, either as a result of telephone canvassing or by referral from another organisation, a LAP adviser will arrange to meet them to discuss the programme in more detail. In some areas, an APIR is conducted. This is followed up by a visit to their employer, either by the LAP

adviser or by a training provider (in some areas, joint visits were made). The first stage of the application process is completed when a Learning Agreement is signed by the young person, their employer and the LAP adviser. In all areas, the number of Learning Agreement completions was significantly higher than the number of activated ILRs, due to the time taken to trigger training activity and complete MI procedures. If training provision was readily available, it was reported that the average length of time taken to complete the application process was approximately four weeks.

LAP Advisers were spending significant amounts of time tracking eligible young people and conducting regular follow-ups of those who had expressed indifference or uncertainty about the pilot at the first point of contact. The number of sign-ups to LAP often failed to reflect the effort that had been made to track and engage eligible young people and their employers. Some respondents felt that, among young people who had engaged with the pilot, it was the financial incentive that initially attracted them or 'hooked them in' (in areas where incentives were offered). However, it was the ongoing support that young people and their employer received from LAP advisers and, in some cases, training providers that sustained their participation.

*'So I think the additional support you can offer young people in terms of motivation and keeping them stitched into learning, is undoubtedly invaluable. I think that is a valuable factor within the pilot.'*

Connexions manager

#### 6.4.1 Monitoring

Both LAP advisers and training providers were responsible for monitoring the progress of young people on LAP. LAP advisers either visited young people (usually while they were undertaking their off-the-job training) or conducted telephone/text message follow-up. The frequency of follow-up contact varied between monthly and three-monthly. Training providers were responsible for submitting young people's attendance data and progress reports to Connexions and, in some areas, standardised systems were being developed to facilitate this process.

Completion rates were limited and many respondents felt that it was too early to report on progression from LAP, although small numbers of young people had moved on to Apprenticeships.

#### 6.4.2 Payments

Monitoring activity preceded payments to young people and employers. Bonus payments to young people were made at different milestones, such as when the Learning Agreement had been signed or when training activity had started. Some respondents felt that more guidance should have been issued regarding the payment

of bonuses, so that greater levels of consistency could be achieved both within and between pilot areas. There was no evidence of payments having been withdrawn from either young people or their employers.

## 6.5 Conclusion

- LAP provided the opportunity to work with young people in JWT, who had not been a policy priority for some time. However, due to the lack of large-scale engagement with the JWT group, the delivery of LAP was impeded by the lack of accurate assessments about the size, nature and the needs of the JWT group and their employers.
- There was confusion among delivery staff in the early stages of the pilot about the LAP 'product', in particular its interaction with, and relationship to, the Apprenticeship offer.
- A greater lead-in time was needed prior to the launch of the pilot for staff development and to establish provision.
- Take-up rates were lower than expected due to delays in staff recruitment, organisational change (most notably at local LSC level), difficulties in identifying and recruiting young people and their employers, uncertainty and confusion among operational staff about the LAP 'offer', the lack of experience among some Connexions staff in working with employers, and a lack of flexibility in the availability of some provision/providers.
- Take-up rates were highest in pilot areas where provision was established prior to young people's entry to LAP, in particular with regard to the delivery of key skills and Technical Certificate programmes. However, the extent to which this model of delivery is 'learner-led', which was one of the principle aims of the programme, will be explored in future evaluation visits to the pilot areas.

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## 7 Employers and the Learning Agreement

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In this chapter, we look at the role employers have played in the Learning Agreement. This chapter is based on 33 employer interviews (section 2.1.1) and also the views of Connexions and LSC staff involved in delivering the Learning Agreement Pilots<sup>1</sup>.

Most employers who took part in the process level interviews had very poor awareness of government supported training programmes for young people. Less than one in three employers had any experience or understanding of apprenticeships, or similar formal training programmes, or any detailed knowledge of NVQs. Of course, the interviews with employers may not be representative of all companies that are engaged with Learning Agreements but it does illustrate how the LAP has drawn in a number of employers who are new to government supported training and who otherwise would have remained outside of the net.

### 7.1 Approaches to training

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the low uptake of and knowledge about government supported training in the past, most employers who were interviewed about Learning Agreements did not have formal work-related training programmes in place for their employees, and particularly for young people working in their establishments. In many cases, there was no personnel or human resource function within the company, because there were so few employees, and thus training was unstructured, unplanned and in a lot of cases, not a priority.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the number of interviews achieved at this stage in the research was lower than planned, the data provide a clear indication of employer views of the LAP. The next stage of the Process Evaluation will pick up more employer interviews to explore these issues in greater depth. The views reported here are not necessarily representative of all employers engaged with the LAP, given that the research is qualitative in nature, however some clear trends are emerging and are reported here.

*'We're a bit head in the sand sort of company really. All we worry about is getting the orders, getting the business.'*

Participating employer

The most common way in which new staff, and young people, learned how to do their jobs was by 'sitting with Nellie'. For some companies, this was a deliberate strategy:

*'We can teach the lads better than anywhere else to be honest with you'*

Non-participating employer

*'We have the way we do it, and we think that's right so we'll stick to it'*

Participating employer

For other companies, this approach seemed to be the default position. A lack of planning with regards to training was often entrenched:

*'We should have done [training] years ago and we're a very sort of hands on company and we're slow to move into technology. I'm useless on those things so you might be able to train me, you never know. I'm not computer minded or computer literate, that's the word, which I really ought to be. And I think it may be that because I'm not, we've not worried too much about anybody else.'*

Participating employer

A few companies however, did have training programmes and plans in place for new recruits which covered health and safety, customer service and basic food or manual handling, for example. Although these were probably NVQ equivalent programmes, they were usually designed and provided in-house, without formal recognition. Indeed, one employer commented that they did have training in place already but that the Learning Agreement had been used to accredit it.

## 7.2 Rationale for participation in the Learning Agreement

It seems that employers have taken part in the Learning Agreement for two main reasons:

- because it was thought to be a 'good thing to do' either for the particular young person involved or for the community in general
- because the employer saw it as a way of filling particular recruitment or training gaps.



### 7.2.1 Social responsibility

In this instance, employer participation is driven largely to fall in with the wishes of the young person, ie because *'the young person wanted to do it'*. One employer commented:

*'I don't think she particularly liked school from what I understand, but she wants to learn more. I think she's bright enough to and she certainly is willing to.'*

Participating employer

Many employers said repeatedly that their young employees had not enjoyed school and had often left without qualifications. The Learning Agreement provided a way for young people to gain some recognition for their skills and learning, often for the first time, and employers wanted to support this.

Several employers reported that young employees had been approached by Connexions in the first instance and had become interested in taking part in the Learning Agreement and then approached the employer for approval to participate. Given the nature of the sample of employers interviewed, many of these employees were family members (usually sons) which arguably made it more difficult for employers to say no. One employer reported:

*'As he's my son it, you know, as long as he gets a better education out of it and everything else, I'm happy to do that, it wouldn't bother me that much that I wasn't getting paid for it but that's only because he's my stepson I suppose. If he was just a normal lad that I'd employed I wouldn't be so keen to let him go for a day when I need him, if you know what I mean.'*

Participating employer

Another employer said a similar thing:

*As a business, not much [from the Learning Agreement] for ourselves, it were more for [employee/son]. I feel myself it was to get him on the first rung of the ladder, because his qualifications weren't the greatest which I can't say anything about, because mine weren't. It was a matter of him getting on the ladder and then getting his basic, key skills up and then heading towards an NVQ. Which if he can do it that way, I think it's only beneficial to him.'*

Participating employer

It is fair to question whether this employer would have been so keen to participate in the Learning Agreement if the employee had not been a family member.

One employer stated that he agreed to the Learning Agreement because of the effect that it might have on the young person:

*'It may get [trainee] motivated, it helped [trainee] a lot. For us that, we're happy that [trainee is] motivated, more than getting the money. The money coming into here wasn't a big issue'.*

Participating employer

Motivated and happy employees will no doubt have an impact in work and possibly bring about business benefits but few employers stated specifically that they had agreed to participate in the Learning Agreement to bring about any business gains.

### 7.2.2 Business

Having said this, a small number of employers reported that they had taken part in the Learning Agreement for business-related reasons, often tied in with recruitment and the development of staff. One employer reported that they wanted to recruit a young person and had contacted Connexions to do so. Connexions had explained the Learning Agreement and the employer then recruited someone who went on to take part in an agreement. This employer explained that she had actually found her first job through Connexions and thus went on to use them to recruit in the future. She also valued training and was therefore encouraged to find out about the Learning Agreement. Clearly this may not always be the case. There is some evidence from the employer interviews to suggest that a number of young people were recruited into companies with the Learning Agreement specifically in mind – almost like a package – or at least started the Learning Agreement very quickly thereafter.

Employers have also used the Learning Agreement to meet gaps in their own training provision. One employer reported that the need for training was identified during their annual appraisal round. This employer contacted a training provider who then told them about the Learning Agreement. Connexions came in as the third party to sign everyone up, although the 'deal' was essentially brokered by the training provider in response to a need identified by the employer.

In these examples, Connexions and training providers have responded well to requests for assistance from employers looking to recruit or train young people and have successfully marketed the Learning Agreement to them.

The way in which the Learning Agreement is delivered has also attracted some employers to participate. Several companies reported that the main reason for taking part was that a training provider came to the site and that they did not have to lose the employee for lengthy periods of time. Some employers also thought that this way of learning was beneficial for their staff who had often not enjoyed the more formal school learning environment:

*'It is user-friendly and the process is relaxed and is not scary for staff. They are not having to approach a formal environment or to meet new people. Its one-to-one and it is personal*

*and direct. For someone like my daughter [who has learning difficulties] also the fact that she doesn't have to go out on her own or travel around.'*

Participating employer

### 7.3 Getting involved

Generally, the employers interviewed reported that they played a largely hands-off role with regards to the Learning Agreement and were happy for the provider and young person to determine the content of the training. This confirmed the views expressed by pilot personnel who reported that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, employers supported young people's choice of learning, irrespective of whether or not it was vocationally relevant to their work.

In relation to the service provided by Connexions, employers seem generally very happy with their approach and did not find it burdensome.

*'He [Connexions adviser] was there about an hour, he explained everything in great detail, how the company would be compensated for the day this young person had off. He explained everything in great detail to this young man, and he just explained the course depending on this young man, can be anything from six weeks to a lot more than that, depending on his own achievements. And he just explained that the company wouldn't suffer. He was very good actually, it's a while ago now, but he was there about a good hour.'*

Participating employer

*'But overall I think it's run very, very well. There's been a lot of information available and it's been very professionally sorted out to be honest with you.'*

Participating employer with no history of taking part in training/GST

Only a couple of employers complained about the initial form filling, with one stating that there had been some duplication, but these complaints were very much in the minority.

Some of the interviews with employers and managers suggested that they do not seem to fully understand exactly what the young person is doing or what qualification they may be working towards, which fits with their altruistic approach to taking part in the Learning Agreement. Some employers were not particularly concerned about what the young person was learning, they were just going along with it because the young person wanted to participate in an Agreement. For other employers, particularly those who initiated contact with Connexions or a training provider, there was a much greater degree of involvement and a much greater understanding of what the young person was doing and what they were getting from their learning experience. Interestingly, although many employers were not

particularly involved in shaping the content of the Learning Agreement, or indeed in its delivery, they were gaining from the young person's participation.

## 7.4 Benefits of participation in a Learning Agreement

Employers have reported many benefits from taking part in Learning Agreements, many of which were unintended or unexpected. These benefits include:

- improved attitude and approach to work – young employees are becoming more independent, thinking about what they are doing and why
- gaining vocational and work-related skills
- better company reputation as an investor in people.

Many employers reported that the attitudes of their young employees had come on as a result of taking part in a Learning Agreement, often over a very short period of time. Managers notice that young staff seemed more committed to their jobs and were thinking more for themselves. Young trainees are questioning things more and are putting into practice what they have learned.

Vocational and job-specific skills were clearly in evidence:

*'I think [the benefits are] anything that can help us improve the service, because it's customer service she's gone for. So anything that can help her improve that skill and this course ... courses ... do that. That's better for us, because she's learning things quicker, so she can progress more. Yes, so anything that can help her get to where we want her to be quicker, that's got to be good.'*

Participating employer

*'As far as I can see it can only be beneficial either to our [employee/son], or any other youngster. Then eventually to a company, such as ourselves, if you get somebody who's trained up. It's good for them and I think eventually, if they're learning things right, it's beneficial to us.'*

Participating employer

Employers were also benefiting from a better reputation amongst staff and reported that other employees perceived the company to be one that invested and trained its staff. One manager thought that the Learning Agreement was not only helping the particular trainee to develop but that it had also encouraged other members of staff to request and take up learning opportunities. Other staff have seen how the Agreement had benefited the young person and not interfered with her work or her spare time, and that this had acted as a great motivator.

Some employers thought it was too soon to say what business benefits would derive from participating in the Learning Agreement. However, a number of employers felt

that they were much better informed about what help was available for training, and many thought that they would start to do more formal training in the future.

*'I know there's things out there now, you know, if you find somebody who's worth sending off to college because you know that they're actually going to be quite dedicated, yes, I think it's quite a good thing.'*

Participating employer

## 7.5 Bonus payments and wage compensation

In two pilot areas employers receive wage compensation for the time their employees spend in training and the employee receives a monetary bonus (of £250) for successful completion of their training. In three areas learners just receive the bonus and there is no wage compensation to employers and in the final three LAP areas neither employers nor learners receive any compensation or bonus.

These different models have been introduced in order to assess the impact of the financial compensation on employers' willingness to take part. The interviews we have carried out with employers cannot address this question to any statistically-reliable degree given that the interviews are not necessarily representative of all employers taking part in Learning Agreements. It is also very difficult to measure the counterfactual and to show whether employers would have in fact participated without financial inducement. Some of the other evidence coming from other elements of this evaluation may throw more light on this issue. However, the interviews with employers have uncovered some disparity between employers with regard to the wage compensation, and a fair degree of inertia.

Those involved in delivering the pilots generally felt that wage compensation was not a significant factor in getting employers involved. However, a number of non-employer interviewees argued that small firms often felt under pressure when releasing a young person to undertake off-the-job training provision, because of the impact it had on the running of their business.

*'It's not so much the money for these employers but the disruption it causes to the business, especially if they have two or three members of staff ... some employers would prefer to spend £400 on a one-off day-long course for one of their staff than to pay nothing but to allow an employee to go out for one day a week for a whole year.'*

Training provider

Many of the employers interviewed reported that they had not been particularly influenced by the inducement and several did not discuss it as a notable feature of the Agreement (even though it formed part of the LA package in their area). Whilst employers have not said no to the compensation, many maintain that they would have participated in the Learning Agreement without it, supporting the prevailing

view among pilot personnel that it was their commitment to supporting the young person that was key. Several employers, when asked if the compensation was attractive, replied in the affirmative but then went on to say that it *'wasn't the main concern'*.

Having said this, wage compensation was a fair driver for some employers as illustrated in the following examples:

*'They were asking for a day release and they did say for the inconvenience..... they would compensate me where he had to have a day off work and I was short and I had to get somebody else in, they would cover expenses so it was like a win win situation, it seemed to me. He's going to get qualifications and he can put in for a few courses and it's not going to cost me anything. If I do lose then they're going to compensate me for it, so I didn't see any, you know, a bit of a no-brainer really.'*

Participating employer

*'I think it's good that the government are helping out, especially smaller businesses. I mean bigger business can, say like it's a housing firm who do £10 million pound a year profit or, they can afford to send young lads [to training], it's not like a day to day.... Mine's a service industry, we need to make that money per day. So, I think it's handy for, I don't, I mean fair play if they offer it to them as well, but we do need something like that to .....*

Participating employer

In areas where wage compensation and bonuses were not paid, pilot personnel felt that while employers were willing to support young people's learning activity, there appeared to be a greater propensity for young people to undertake their learning outside of working hours.

Bonus payments also seemed not to make much difference to employers and many reported that they would be handing over the payment to their head office, or to the trainee themselves. One employer was able to illustrate eloquently the relative importance of the financial inducement for employers. In this example, the young person was thrilled that she was going to have some training:

*'She would have done it without any money, but that was just the icing on the cake for her... The bonus payment to employers was not an incentive we would have done it anyway, it was neither here nor there, although it was very nice to have...it is more important that [trainee/daughter] gets the input and that she gets the support she needs.'*

Participating employer

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## 8 Conclusions

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In this final section, we set out our conclusions at this stage in the evaluation. The evidence base is still limited. Although we are able to draw on an extensive round of interviews with all those involved in delivering the pilots, the other elements of the evaluation are still in relatively early stages. The quantitative side, based on the surveys of young people, will not report until 2008 and the first two focused studies from the programme theory evaluation have still to be finalised.

However, we are able to draw out some preliminary findings and highlight issues to which we can return and examine in more depth at a later stage in the evaluation.

### 8.1 The pilots are up and running

The first point to make is that both sets of pilots are now up and running and, at least in process terms, are generally functioning well. Staff and management systems are in place. Project managers were found to play a crucial role in the management and local implementation of both initiatives. The additional resources which the pilots brought to local areas (through offering additional posts to Connexions and local LSCs) as well as the incentive payments being offered to young people and employers (in LAP) in most areas, were an essential asset to support local implementation.

The relevant stakeholders are engaged. Young people are flowing onto both sets of programmes, although take-up rates were significantly lower than anticipated particularly on the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP). These key facts reflect well on the hard and dedicated work of all those involved. However, there have been considerable delays, particularly in setting up the LAP.

The piloting of AAP provided the opportunity for Connexions staff to develop further their existing strategies to support their work with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The opportunity to manage and deliver AAP was welcomed. In addition to extending staffing resources and building up existing skill bases, funding provided through AAP had enabled Connexions personnel, often for

the first time, to become directly involved in both designing and commissioning provision to meet the needs of their target group. There were many examples of innovative practice in relation to procurement of AAP provision. The AAP complemented existing initiatives, which were targeted at reducing the NEET population.

In relation to the implementation of LAP, the initiative was welcomed as an opportunity to engage with the JWT group and their employers. However, more preliminary work could have been done prior to the launch of the pilot, to gain a better understanding of the nature and needs of the eligible populations (both young people and employers). Organisational change within the Learning and Skills Councils meant that they found it difficult to play a full role at the outset of LAP. Contractual arrangements with providers (which were affected in some cases by the decision to set up consortia of providers, thereby introducing another round of delays) took time to be agreed.

Due to the lack of previous engagement with the JWT group, the delivery of LAP had, in the majority of cases, exposed problems in developing accurate assessments about the size, nature and needs of the JWT group and their employers, and this in turn undermined the implementation of the pilot. Delivery issues were compounded by the ongoing changes that were made to LAP guidance and regulations and, in some cases, by local difficulties in recruiting operational staff with the necessary skills to be able to work effectively with both young people and employers. There was little evidence to suggest that strong links had been established between the local implementation of LAP and Train to Gain.

## 8.2 Two different pilots

At their inception, the AAP and LAP were each designed to offer young people who were long-term NEET (AAP) and in the JWT group (LAP) the opportunity to participate in learner-led activities to encourage their sustained participation in education and training. Having examined all 12 pilots, including the four operating both Activity and Learning Agreements, it is clear that they are different in a number of ways.

### 8.2.1 Different target groups

While previous research has clearly demonstrated that the NEET group is not a homogeneous group and comprises groups of young people with varying needs and abilities, the implementation of LAP lends weight to the argument that the JWT category is also segmented and does not simply comprise a group of young people who drift between dead-end jobs and NEET group status.



In most cases, AAP failed to engage with some of the 'hardest to reach', in particular young people who were estranged from their parents and living independently. This was because of the conflict of interest that existed between their benefit receipt and their ability to take up the AAP offer. In addition, the requirement for young people to have been NEET on a continuous basis for 20+ weeks in order to qualify for eligibility was significantly reducing the eligible population in all areas, and should be reviewed in order to expand take-up rates.

### 8.2.2 Different offers

In addition, the implementation of AAP and LAP had delivered very different 'offers' to young people, despite assumptions being made about the similarities that existed between the two groups. Young people on AAP were offered totally flexible packages of learning which, in the vast majority of cases, were designed to meet individual needs and were not outcome-driven in terms of qualification attainment.

In contrast, within LAP, young people were able to participate in the initiative within the framework of an agreed set of qualifications and the learner-led agenda became difficult to implement for a number of reasons:

- Firstly, attempting to meet the needs of young people and their employers at the same time proved, in some cases, to be a complex arrangement to deliver.
- Secondly, there co-existed a range of other government training programmes, most notably Apprenticeships, which could potentially have been displaced or undermined by offering young people (and their employers) total flexibility over their learning agendas.
- Finally, through the amendments that were made to the LAP regulations, there was confusion among many delivery staff about the constitution of LAP, which made it a difficult concept to sell to young people and their employers.

### 8.2.3 Different ways of working

- While AAP was centrally managed by Connexions, LAP was jointly overseen and delivered by Connexions and local LSCs. Although in a small number of cases collaborative links were already well established between the two organisations, in other cases links had to be established and protocols were set up for the first time. In addition, LAP project managers had responsibility for maintaining co-management roles with their counterparts within the local LSC.
- In all LAP areas the focus of responsibility for local LSCs was to fund learning and training provision and to promote the initiative among employers. Connexions staff had concentrated to a much greater extent on identifying and contacting eligible young people. Within AAP, the need for Connexions staff to work more

closely with staff from Jobcentre Plus, so that benefits check arrangements could be conducted, had strengthened links between the two agencies.

- The complexity of the task facing project managers in implementing either one or both of the initiatives varied between pilot areas. In pilot areas comprising a small number of local authority areas, project managers tended to have a more direct involvement in staff recruitment and operated centralised control over the delivery of the pilots. The task facing project managers was more complex in pilot areas which comprised large numbers of local authority areas and required the need to set up multiple sets of contractual and management areas.
- Achieving consistency in local implementation was difficult to achieve in large pilot areas and, with regard to strategic management, the size of areas should be reviewed in the event of national roll-out of the ALA pilots and the piloting of future initiatives.

#### 8.2.4 Different skills sets

The two pilots needed different skills sets from operational staff within Connexions. While AAP PAs shared the same skills as mainstream PAs, in particular those engaged in community and outreach work who specialise in working with 'hard to reach' groups of young people, there was increasing recognition that LAP advisers needed to focus far more heavily on the selling and promotion of the initiative, which demanded the ability to work effectively with both young people and employers.

### 8.3 Slower than expected take-up

Recruitment onto AAP was slower than expected at the initial stages of the pilots. This was largely due to the time it had taken to get the pilot up and running, in particular with regard to staffing. During second round visits, take-up rates had improved and respondents were confident that the second year of the pilot would be easier to deliver.

Take-up rates within LAP remained a challenge, even with modified delivery targets. Reasons for low take-up include:

- the short lead-in time to deliver a policy targeted at a group of young people and a segment of the labour market, which had not been a policy priority for some time (section 6.1)
- delays in staff recruitment within Connexions and local LSCs (section 5.3)
- ongoing changes to LAP regulations, which created confusion about the product, in particular among operational staff who were responsible for its promotion (section 6.1)

- organisational change which had occurred, notably at local LSC level (section 5.2.5)
- difficulties in identifying and tracking young people in the JWT group, due to inaccuracies in MI data (sections 5.3 and 6.2)
- apprehension about wider publicity of LAP because of the delays by local LSCs in procuring relevant education and training provision (section 6.3)
- operational staff in some Connexions Services lacked experience and confidence in working directly with employers (section 5.3)
- a lack of flexibility in the content and delivery of provision (section 6.3).

Take-up rates were highest in areas where provision was dominated by key skills, basic skills and Technical Certificate programmes, that is where young people were largely recruited to provision that had been set up before their entry to the programme. In areas where provision had been identified and procured on an 'individual needs' basis, they had encountered difficulties in both finding bespoke programmes and establishing roll-on roll-off admissions.

## 8.4 Outcomes

Success outcomes were being achieved within AAP. Young people tended to leave the programme early (usually between 12-15 weeks) and in most areas around 50 per cent immediately progressed into some form of EET. Drop-out rates to NEET destinations were low and included a significant proportion of young people who had exceeded their suspension period. There was some demand for greater flexibility in determining young people's length of stay on the programme, since some young people required a longer period than 20 weeks to address their needs. There was evidence emerging of progression between AAP and LAP.

It was too early to report on outcomes from LAP.

## 8.5 Employers and LAP

Employers chose to engage with LAP for one of two reasons: either because they wished to support a young person's decision to participate in the programme, or because they saw it as a way of filling particular recruitment or training gaps. Those involved in delivering the pilots generally felt that wage compensation (where it was paid) was not a significant factor in getting employers involved.

## 8.6 Implications for national roll-out

While it is too early to draw conclusive findings from the three strands of the evaluation at the end of the first year, there are some emerging issues and recommendations from the first two visits to the pilot areas as part of the process evaluation.

### AAP

- The AAP is an asset to practitioners working with young people who are NEET. The ALA is unique in that it offers a financial incentive, intensive support and individualised learning, all of which have a role to play in successfully engaging young people. Take-up rates would be increased if greater flexibility was applied to the eligibility criteria.
- The process of staff recruitment was quicker and more successful within the AAP, and this was largely attributed to AAP PA skills being similar to those required by mainstream Connexions PAs. Staff recruitment that was managed by Local Authority personnel departments slowed down the implementation of the pilot, because of the time taken to have job descriptions approved and staff appointed. This could be an important issue for national roll-out because, by 2008, all Connexions provision will be under the auspices of local government control.
- Connexions staff successfully managed the procurement and operation of provision. There were many examples of innovative provision and ways of working which should be shared more widely between pilot areas and evidenced as good practice for any national roll-out.
- It was the one-to-one engagement between AA PAs and young people and evidence of young people's awareness being increased through 'word of mouth', which appeared to be the most effective strategies for engaging young people. The added value of extensive marketing and publicity campaigns may need to be reviewed if the initiative is rolled out nationally.
- A significant proportion of young people moved into positive outcomes before completing their 20 weeks on AAP, which highlighted the effectiveness of a short period of financial and intensive support on a young person's propensity to leave NEET group status.

### LAP

- While the implementation of LAP in its first year was surrounded by a number of delivery issues, the initiative has provided a valuable opportunity to appraise the requirements for working effectively with young people in JWT and their employers. This is of great significance not only with regard to the delivery of LAP in its second year and any subsequent roll-out of the initiative, but also to plans to extend the age to which young people leave learning to 18.

- The introduction of LAP had enabled Connexions and local LSCs to work together to develop strategy to support the needs of young people in the JWT category. The extent to which this relationship is supported and encouraged when Connexions provision is managed within Children's Trusts needs further monitoring within the evaluation of the ALA pilots.
- The relationship between LAP and other government supported training initiatives needs further monitoring, in particular the extent to which the wage compensation variant of LAP displaces young people from Apprenticeships.
- In terms of national roll-out, further guidance and evidence is required on whether the needs of young people and employers can be successfully met within one initiative.
- Examples of good practice with regard to the appointment, training and development of Connexions staff should be shared more widely between pilot areas and evidenced for potential national roll-out.
- Take-up rates were highest in pilot areas where provision was established prior to young people's entry to LAP, in particular with regard to the delivery of key skills and Technical Certificate programmes. However, if this strategy forms part of a national delivery model, the extent to which LAP is a 'learner-led' initiative will need to be re-appraised.

## 8.7 Future considerations

The first and second round visits to the pilot areas and the interviews with employers as part of the evaluation of LAP form part of the first year process evaluation report of the ALA pilots. The data also present illuminating evidence about the NEET and JWT groups which should assist policy makers in their deliberations over proposals to extend the age at which young people continue to participate in education and training to the age of 18.

There will be a further round of visits to the pilot areas as the final part of the process evaluation. Issues that need continuing consideration in subsequent work include, to:

- further monitor take-up rates to AAP and LAP, as well as explanations for drop-out and completion rates within both initiatives
- consider progression routes from AAP and LAP and how these are defined
- evaluate the impact of ongoing organisational change on the delivery of the ALA pilots, in particular the movement of all Connexions provision into Children's Trusts
- obtain feedback on the extent to which the pilots have become embedded

- monitor the extent to which partnership working between key players is further developed
- identify examples of innovative practice with regard to the procurement and management of provision
- examine whether AAP and LAP provision is responsive in terms of meeting the needs of young people and employers in their localities
- continue to monitor the relationship and interaction between AAP and LAP with other local and national initiatives
- obtain perceptions about further developments between the local implementation of LAP and Train to Gain
- examine the extent to which multi-site working in LAP increases take-up
- evaluate consistencies between pilot areas in relation to their monitoring and exit strategy arrangements for young people engaged on the programmes
- monitor the perceived effectiveness of marketing and publicity strategies on take-up rates
- assess the extent to which LAP further develops closer working links between Connexions and local employers.

We also intend to carry out a more detailed study of the management information and other data available about the two groups of young people involved in the pilots.

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