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# Formative evaluation of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework – Interim Findings

Research Summary

Social research

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The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) aims to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The framework has six component elements, designed to increase youth engagement and progression.

Local authorities (LAs) have been charged with providing strategic leadership of the implementation of the Framework, ensuring close working between LA services, Careers Wales, community and voluntary youth services, schools, training providers and other partners. The Framework has an initial two-year implementation phase.

This is a summary of the interim findings from the evaluation (being led by ICFI) of the first year of implementation of the YEPF and draws on research that took place in August /September 2014.

The research included: a documentary review of LA plans to implement the YEPF; interviews with 162 stakeholders & representatives in 22 LAs including 74 LA stakeholders; 19 in post-16 providers; 8 in schools; 24 with Careers Wales; 8 in Jobcentre Plus; and 8 in the voluntary and community sector. 19 interviews were also conducted with national stakeholders from the Welsh Government and partner organisations with an interest in the programme because of their involvement in its development or delivery.

## Key Findings:

- All LAs have made progress with implementing the YEPF since October 2013. Many interviewees praised the YEPF as the best guidance/strategy related to young people produced by the Welsh Government. Most interviewees believe that the YEPF has made a difference to collaboration, buy-in to reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET, and leadership engagement. As a consequence almost all LAs have made step changes in their implementation of components of the Framework.
- Generally there are good strategic management arrangements in place. All LAs have appointed a Senior Accountable Officer and most have established a strategic steering group for the YEPF. Membership of groups appears to be relatively comprehensive although some LAs have reported gaps in membership that they are trying to fill. Although the foundations are in place in most LAs, some have not yet put adequate steering arrangements in place and this should be a priority in the short term.
- Operational arrangements are developing. All LAs have appointed an Engagement and Progression Coordinator (EPC) to coordinate implementation. In general, EPCs are taking an active role although this is more difficult when operational responsibilities are being added to the strategic and coordinating roles they primarily have to fulfil to implement the Framework.
- LAs have developed action plans for development and implementation of the YEPF but these are of variable quality and a project management methodology is not always being used. This poses a risk to the implementation of the YEPF.

Dadansodi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

## Further Findings

### Strategic management arrangements

- Although it is too early to fully assess the effectiveness of steering arrangements, there is evidence that more established strategic groups are functioning well: attendance is good; there are examples of active leaderships from SAOs; partners are working well to oversee implementation; and there is improved sharing of data and information.
- A key barrier to establishing and maintaining robust strategic governance arrangements is ongoing re-organisation of LA services as a consequence of reductions in funding.

### Operational arrangements

- Many LAs have embedded the functions of the EPC across a few different roles in recognition of the wide ranging responsibilities of an EPC. In general, partners value the EPC role and believe it has brought a step change.
- In some LAs, arrangements to take forward and develop elements of the YEPF are clear. These LAs have expedited partnership working to arrive at practical solutions. In others, arrangements are less well developed. Very few appear to have arrangements for development which cover all elements which should be moving forward.
- Over half of LAs have Information Sharing Protocols (ISPs)<sup>1</sup> in place. In addition, around a third of LAs also have placement agreements with Careers Wales, which allows five tier data to be shared with a named contact. Partners in LAs with ISPs and placement agreements are very positive about being able to share information and consider it is supporting improved early identification and tracking.

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<sup>1</sup> Information Sharing Protocol's are agreements that permit the sharing of personal information between partner organisations to deliver the YEPF while meeting the standards of the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI)

## Early identification

- Although the early identification component of the YEPF has been a focus for most LAs and actions within this strand for young people below the age of 16 are relatively well developed, this component of the YEPF is behind schedule in many LAs. Around two thirds of LAs should be in a position to implement a pre-16 early identification system from September 2014 but for post-16 only around a half of LAs will be implementing strengthened systems from September 2014.
- Most LAs either have a pre-existing early identification system in place for young people at school that follows best practice guidance, or have developed a system since the launch of the YEPF, which they are now testing before rolling out. A few LAs are at an earlier stage of planning and development.
- LAs that have developed a new system appear to have adopted a robust development process, which includes consultation and feedback from a range of partners, including schools. Partners value the new system and perceive it to be helpful.
- The key challenge in relation to pre-16 early identification systems is to ensure all schools use the system consistently and provide the information required.
- In general, processes for identifying young people who are at risk of disengaging are less well-developed for the 16-18 age group than the pre-16s; some LAs have so far undertaken few actions in this area.
- Although there are examples of good practice in terms of post-16 providers' own internal systems for early identification, it is not clear if these are widespread. This can be examined further in the next stage of research.
- Receiving systematic notification from post-16 providers about young people disengaging from a course or formally withdrawing is a persisting challenge for many LAs and Careers Wales staff.

## Brokerage

- Development of plans and arrangements for lead working are in progress in many LAs but the milestone in the national implementation plan is unlikely to be achieved. Pre-16, around half of LAs are or will be implementing proposals for new/strengthened lead working from September 2014. In many other LAs, though, there were already relatively sound existing arrangements in place for young people pre-16 which will continue. For young people post-16, around a third of LAs will be implementing proposals for new/strengthened lead working from this date.
- For young people under 16, some LAs are adopting school-based panels as the forum for allocating a lead worker and reviewing progress. In the case of 16-18 year olds, many LAs are using LA level multiagency practitioner groups. In the main, training for lead workers has not yet taken place.
- There are a range of challenges for implementing lead working, including: delays in establishing ISPs, which prevents effective brokerage; difficulties in conveying the message that lead working is already taking place and is not a new approach; the end of European Social Fund (ESF) projects that currently provide resources for lead working; challenges in establishing and communicating a clear process for early identification and brokerage; and ensuring that all partners participate in operational groups to facilitate brokerage.

## Tracking

- In general, LAs that have a data-led early identification system in place for young people at school pre-16 have established processes for follow up and review on a termly basis at least.
- There are examples of efforts at a local level to strengthen tracking at transition. These include: using practitioner groups to improve sharing of information between pre- and post-16 providers; allocating tutors within colleges to act as the link with particular schools; using a pre-16 lead worker to continue providing support during the first term in post-16 provision.

- Generally, there are fewer post-16 ISPs in place and so LAs and partners have found tracking for the 16-18 age group more challenging. In general though LAs and partners were very positive about receiving monthly five tier data from Careers Wales, even where this is only available in an aggregate, anonymised format. This is seen as a major improvement.
- In some LAs where there are ISPs in place there are existing examples pre-dating the YEPF of monthly tracking of those aged over 16 for two years by multiagency practitioner groups, which appears to be working well to prevent disengagement and provide additional support where required.
- Most LAs have not prioritised improving the tracking of young people aged over 19 and their transition to other support from JCP.

## Provision

- All LAs have started the process of mapping provision against the five tier model according to guidance from the Welsh Government. In most cases the EPC is taking the lead in coordinating this activity and liaising with partners. In all LAs, a draft provision map has been produced.
- Although several LAs and partners are positive about the knowledge they have gained from the exercise, in some LAs there appears to have been confusion about the purpose of the provision map. Many LAs experienced challenges in obtaining accurate and timely information from providers.
- There are very few examples of LAs that have carried out the provision mapping exercise alongside an analysis of labour market information. There are also few examples of a systematic analysis of provision compared to the needs of young people.
- Several LAs reported they have identified gaps in provision through the provision mapping exercise. A common need identified across many LAs is a lack of Tier 2 provision, in some cases coupled with duplication of Tier 3 provision.
- There are emerging examples of YEPF strategic boards responding to provision

maps and operational groups' work to find provision and seeking to fill gaps. In most LAs, though, there do not appear to be any clear plans in place for how gaps in provision identified through the mapping will be addressed.

- In relation to the CAP<sup>2</sup> and Youth Guarantee,<sup>3</sup> the main barrier to implementation is securing the commitment of schools. Stakeholders reported that many schools do not perceive there to be value in the online application aspect of the CAP and the Youth Guarantee.

### Employability

- This strand of the YEPF has not so far been a focus for LAs and few actions have been taken since October 2013.
- Most LAs have included Jobs Growth Wales<sup>4</sup> and other employability provision in their provision map and intend to make sure that all lead workers are aware of progression opportunities available through these programmes.
- Many LAs include in their YEPF action plan an objective to increase the numbers of work placement opportunities, apprenticeships and other work based learning opportunities offered by public sector employers.

### Accountability

- In line with the national implementation plan, all LAs have participated in regular meetings with the Welsh Government to discuss progress in implementing their YEPF action plan. There has also been frequent and regular communication between meetings.

<sup>2</sup> Common Area Prospectus/ Application Process - is being implemented by the Welsh Government to ensure learners have full access to impartial and comprehensive course information to enable them to make informed choices about their next step in education or training.

<sup>3</sup> The offer, acceptance and commencement of a suitable place in education or training for any young person making the first time transition from compulsory education at age 16.

<sup>4</sup> provides unemployed young people with a job opportunity for a six month period paid at or above the National Minimum Wage for a minimum of 25 hours per week.

- All LAs have started to receive monthly data from Careers Wales on the numbers of young people aged 16-18 in each of the tiers of the five tier model. This data is analysed and submitted to strategic steering groups in an increasing number of LAs to facilitate monitoring of progress in increasing the proportion of 16-18 year olds in tiers 4 and 5.
- Most LAs have not yet consulted with young people on the YEPF. They consider that implementation needs to have progressed further before a meaningful consultation can take place.

### Next Steps

Further work is ongoing, including the development of suitable measures of impact data and the final report on the formative evaluation of the YEPF will be published in summer 2015. It will provide a full assessment of progress made in implementing the Framework, what has worked well and the main challenges.

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