



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

**Determined to Succeed and Young
People at Risk of Becoming
NEET (Not in Education,
Employment or Training)**



determined to succeed



social
research

**DETERMINED TO SUCCEED AND YOUNG PEOPLE
AT RISK OF BECOMING NEET (NOT IN EDUCATION,
EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING)**

February – October 2005

Part of the National Evaluation of Determined to Succeed – Phase 1

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Scottish Executive Social Research
The Department of Enterprise, Transport and
Lifelong Learning
2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH CONTEXT

1. Determined to Succeed is a £86 million long-term Scottish Executive strategy, which aims to prepare young people for the world of work through enterprising and entrepreneurial learning, work-based vocational learning and appropriately focused career education. There are teams in place throughout all 32 Scottish local authorities to ensure delivery from 2003 – 2008. Following the recommendations of the Review of Education for Work and Enterprise set up in September 2001 the Scottish Executive set out its Determined to Succeed (DtS): Enterprise in Education (EinE) strategy. The results reported here are key findings from a small-scale qualitative study carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) between February 2005 and October 2005 which examined the potential contribution of DtS to improving the outcomes of young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) in both mainstream and non-mainstream settings. This research constitutes an additional element of phase 1 of the national evaluation of DtS, which is published separately.¹

2. The DtS strategy sets out the key changes that are considered to be needed to encourage a more enterprising culture – a “can do, will do” attitude – among all schoolchildren in Scotland. It enables all Local Authority (LA) Education Departments in Scotland to work together with schools, business organisations, businesses, and other parts of the community to design and implement their own delivery plans setting out their targets and time-tables for action. Within these plans, LAs are required to address the recommendations of the Review of Education for Work and Enterprise in the context of local needs.

3. The overall aim of this additional element of phase 1 of the national evaluation of DtS was to identify the range of activities taking place in local authorities as a result of DtS, which may impact on young people at risk of becoming NEET. It also aimed to examine the context within which such activities were taking place, including their links with other relevant policies or initiatives and to examine the extent to which activities were developed by individual schools or within school clusters. In addition, it aimed to explore activities delivered through the mainstream curriculum as well as those outside the core timescale through external partners.

4. Interviews were conducted across eight local authorities (LAs) with six Directors of Education (or their Deputies) and eleven Local Authority staff with responsibility for overseeing and developing strategies relevant to young people at risk of becoming NEET. In addition, case study visits were carried out to ten projects or programmes providing activities for the “at risk” group across six purposefully selected LAs. Case study interviews were conducted with eighteen provider staff involved in delivering educational alternatives to the target group and twenty-four young people participating in such projects or programmes.

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/27152939/0>

5. The NFER research team also drew on evidence from the phase 1 evaluation of DtS, including interviews with DtS co-ordinators in all 32 Local Authorities and 61 school staff across 18 schools.

6. The study also involved a focused review of key documents in order to draw out key messages relating to good practice in the delivery of activities aimed at disaffected young people/those at risk of becoming NEET.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5. The key findings from the research are presented below:

Findings from the literature

- Disaffected young people need to be offered activities which are meaningful and relevant to them and in which they can participate on a voluntary basis.
- Projects are more likely to keep disaffected young people engaged which give them ownership, provide an alternative learning environment from school, and address the needs of the individuals in a holistic way.
- Previous evaluations have shown that projects are more likely to achieve and sustain successful outcomes which set clear targets, offer opportunities of recognising young people's achievements, work together with other agencies and support participants in their transitions into other education, training or employment options.
- The skills and qualities of project staff are key to re-engaging, motivating and helping disaffected young people to progress. To this end, they need appropriate support and training to achieve maximum impact.

The Local Authority perspective (February – October 2005)

- Three of the eight authorities contacted as part of this study had specific targets relating to the "at risk" group, while three others had no targets but had implemented some activities aimed at disaffected young people
- Authorities which reported higher levels of young people at risk of becoming NEET were more likely to have implemented targets or activities aimed at the target group in response to DtS
- Responsibility for monitoring and addressing the needs of the target group were shared by a variety of organisations and agencies across the eight LAs and half of them appeared to have established "joined up" approaches to addressing the issues of the "at risk" group
- Interviewees in three of the eight authorities contacted were aware of formal LA-wide systems for identifying and monitoring young people deemed to be at risk of becoming NEET
- Six of the eight LAs reported that they had implemented at least some new activities aimed at the "at risk" group in response to DtS. Most of these were aimed at expanding vocational learning opportunities.

Case study findings – Provider and young people’s perspectives (February – October 2005)

- Although awareness of the details of the DtS strategy was relatively low among provider staff (providing educational alternatives for young people at risk of becoming NEET), many thought that it had impacted directly on their provision for the “at risk” group
- About half of the projects visited were specifically targeted and designed for young people in the “at risk” group. The remaining projects were not intended to be solely targeted at these young people, although it was perceived that these particular pupils would benefit most from the provision. Young people were generally recruited onto projects through schools
- The case study providers were offering a range of types of provision, including alternative curriculum projects, vocational education programmes and pupil support programmes
- A range of outcomes for young people were identified by both the provider staff and the participants interviewed, including the achievement of qualifications, personal development, the development of skills and impacts on future choices
- Factors, such as learning in a different environment, receiving one-to-one support and having the opportunity to build positive relationships with adults were perceived to facilitate successful outcomes for young people
- Main barriers for young people to the achievement of successful outcomes were home backgrounds and personal circumstances
- All of the providers implemented some form of individual-level monitoring of participants’ attendance and behaviour although formal evaluation and review of their provision were less common
- Most of the providers had established links with other organisations, most commonly to help with the delivery of their provision, to provide additional support to young people, and to help with the recruitment of participants
- Providers were generally satisfied with the support they received from their Local Authorities, although a few interviewees reported that they would like more recognition, and further promotion of their work
- Providers identified a range of challenges that they had encountered in setting up and running provision for young people in the “at risk” group. These included problems in securing adequate funding, a lack of facilities and resources and difficulties gaining credibility with other organisations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. This study has confirmed many of the findings of previous research relating to good practice in the delivery of projects and activities for young people at risk of becoming NEET. It has also shown that the “at risk” group is not homogeneous and that it includes young people with a variety of, and at times complex, support needs which have to be addressed in different ways.

7. This means that provision aimed at the “at risk” group needs to be both flexible and diverse. It cannot rely on one type of provider alone, but should involve a variety of organisations and agencies which have the skills and expertise to address young people’s needs in a professional way. Schools, providers and other agencies should work closely together to provide a continuous and consistent service to this vulnerable group of young people.

8. The study has shown that even though the DtS strategy did not contain any specific recommendation relating to the “at risk” group, it had enabled some authorities to expand, and in some cases initiate new, provision. However, this was not the case in all LAs. This appeared to be linked with various factors. Some authorities were still at an early implementation stage and had focused most of their resources on building up DtS strategic and operational structures. There was evidence that some of these LAs were planning to put more emphasis on addressing the needs of young people at risk of becoming NEET in subsequent years. In other areas, this lack of focus was linked with a view that DtS activities should be offered to all pupils and not just to the disaffected ones. However, some of these authorities contended that even though not targeted at them, many of the DtS-funded activities or curricular changes were particularly suitable or beneficial for the “at risk” group.

9. The Scottish Executive needs to consider the extent to which all local authorities should be required to develop DtS targets aimed at reducing the number of young people who become NEET and to implement specific provision aimed at this group. It may also consider putting in place additional support structures for those local authorities with less experience or expertise in this area.

10. The Scottish Executive may also wish to consider working with local authorities to establish more joined-up approaches and strategies for monitoring and addressing the needs of the “at risk” group before and after leaving school.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

1.1 Young people who are, or are at risk of being, not in education, employment or training (NEET) and at risk of becoming socially excluded are a high priority for the Scottish Executive. Headline figures from the Scottish Labour Force Survey² indicate that there are some 35,000 young people in Scotland who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). A reduction in the proportion of 16-19 year olds who are NEET is one of the high-level indicators being used to assess progress in implementing the Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2003). Being NEET can have long-term consequences for individuals who, if they do not participate in education, employment and training for prolonged periods, “*are most likely to encounter consistent problems in later life*” (Eddy Adams – see comment p.41, 2005, p.2). In *Closing the Opportunity Gap*, the Scottish Executive (2002) stressed the pivotal role of education in maximising individuals’ achievement and attainment and providing a basis for learning for life. The document set out several targets aimed at closing the opportunity gap, including increasing support to 16-19 year olds from low income families to stay on at school and/or FE college, and reducing the proportion of 16-19 year olds who are NEET.

1.2 The NEET issue presents policy makers with considerable challenges owing to the diversity of the circumstances and characteristics of the young people and their flows into and out of this group. Young people at any age in secondary school can be at risk of becoming NEET if they are not engaged by the curriculum and become disaffected. The challenge of preventing young people becoming NEET and helping those who are in this group touches on a range of economic, social and educational policy areas. Significantly, the recent NEET workstream report acknowledged that: “*Targeting policy effectively requires understanding of the different needs of the many different sub-groups which make up 35,000 NEET and determining which require government intervention*” (Eddy Adams, 2005, p.4). The policy-making context of interventions designed to encourage and support young people to achieve and help them leave or avoid joining the NEET group is provided below.

1.3 Providing opportunities for all young people to succeed and reach their potential is central to Scotland’s vision for increasing economic growth and ensuring social justice and inclusion. The Scottish Executive (2001) stated that a “*shared understanding between the education system and the wider economy of the needs of young people, and the skills, attitudes and expectations they will require to develop*” (p.5) was an important factor in realising this vision which “*is for a Smart, Successful Scotland where creating, learning and connecting faster is the basis for sustained productivity growth, competitiveness and prosperity*” (p.7).

1.4 In setting out the strategic direction for developing a more enterprising Scotland, the Scottish Executive (2004) prioritised skills and learning as one of the major contributors to achieving the goal of a Smart, Successful Scotland: “*All young people need to be equipped with the skills, advice and support needed to allow them to contribute to, and benefit from, economic growth and to underpin lifelong learning*” (p.19). The Scottish Executive’s *Determined to Succeed: Enterprise in Education* strategy was identified as an important lever

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/07/2891541/15419>

for developing enterprising attitudes and an understanding of the world of work which are required to create and sustain an innovative and dynamic Scotland. The Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2003) noted that DtS “*can also help provide a more varied school experience focused on the needs and interests of each individual young person*” (p.22). The nature of NEET is such that there is no one policy initiative which will be the primary means of addressing the issue. However, like many other policies, Determined to Succeed – through the behaviours it aims to promote and its aspiration to embed enterprising teaching and learning practice throughout the curriculum – has the potential to make a positive contribution to reducing NEET. Although the recommendations of the Review of Education for Work and Enterprise (Scottish Executive, 2002) did not specifically target those at risk of becoming NEET, DtS is an inclusive strategy aimed at all pupils.

1.5 A major thrust of the educational response to the NEET issue is to attempt to engage young people more effectively in learning. This was highlighted in key publications such as *Flexibility in the Secondary School Curriculum* by Learning and Teaching Scotland (2003) which pointed out that increasing flexibility included designing a customised curriculum which “*meets the needs and expectations of all learners*” and “*encourages increased achievement and commitment to learning*” (p.1). It concluded that there was “*an increasing recognition that curriculum flexibility and innovation may contribute to improving the quality of the educational experience for all young people*” (p.5).

1.6 The importance of designing a curriculum which motivates and engages young people was also emphasised in the report of the Discipline Task Group, *Better Behaviour, Better Learning* (Scottish Executive, 2001). This outlined how some schools were promoting a more inclusive approach to education through appropriate curriculum management such as reducing the number of subjects and topics studied for a small number of children who have difficulty in coping with a full curriculum. The report noted that: “*These approaches to curricular flexibility not only support some of the specific needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, but also a much broader range of pupils who experience boredom and lack inspiration in school*” (p.17).

1.7 The need for developing an appealing and motivating educational offer which inspires young people to continue learning and thereby prevent them becoming disaffected was identified by the influential publication *A Curriculum for Excellence* (2004) which stated that: “*Our aspiration is to enable all children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society*” (p.1). Critically, the programme of reform presented by the Curriculum Review Group included “*greater choice and opportunity, earlier, for young people, to help them realise their individual talents and to help close the opportunity gap by better engaging those who currently switch off from formal education too young*” (p.2). Observing that young people in Scotland were “*not achieving all they were capable of*” (p.5), the Curriculum Review Group stated that the curriculum should “*make learning active, challenging and fun*” and should “*include a wide range of experiences and achieve a suitable blend of what has traditionally been seen as “academic” and “vocational”*” (p.5).

1.8 Learning environments can be as important as a diversified curriculum for motivating and engaging pupils, especially for the target group of young people who are risk of becoming NEET. Significantly, the Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland encourages “*the development of locally relevant links between schools, further education, higher education*”

institutions and employers to ease young people's transitions through school education and into training, further and higher education or employment" (Scottish Executive, 2003, p.22).

1.9 The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department at the Scottish Executive to carry out an evaluation of the implementation process of the DtS strategy which constitutes phase 1 of the national evaluation. This took place between September 2004 and August 2005. In order to draw on the understanding and expertise of the NFER researchers involved in the DtS phase 1 evaluation, and to reduce the research burden on participating LAs, a variation to contract was agreed to investigate how local authorities were identifying those at risk of becoming NEET, what provision they were implementing through DtS, and how effective this provision was. This final report presents the findings of this additional study.

1.10 Throughout the report the term "at risk" group will be used to refer to those young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. It is worth noting that there are many contributing factors that can lead a young person to become NEET and the group is by no means homogeneous. It includes young people who are disaffected learners, those who are disengaged from school, those who have truanted or have been excluded from school, and those who have achieved or are likely to achieve low qualifications in compulsory school. Young people face additional barriers if they are 'looked-after' (in the care of the local authority), have caring responsibilities, have mental health and/or drug misuse problems, have a learning or physical disability, or are homeless.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.11 The overall aim of this study was to identify the characteristics of effective practice in the delivery of activities engendered by DtS to young people at risk of becoming NEET.

1.12 More specifically, the key objectives of the research were:

- To identify the range of activities taking place in local authorities as a result of DtS, which may impact on young people at risk of becoming NEET
- To examine the context within which such activities are taking place, including their links with other relevant policies or initiatives
- To examine the extent to which activities are developed by individual schools or within school clusters
- To explore activities delivered through the mainstream curriculum as well as those outside the core timescale through external partnerships.

METHODOLOGY

1.13 The study adopted a qualitative methodology to address the key aims and objectives, focusing on eight Local Authorities (LAs). Across these eight areas, interviews were conducted with:

- Six Directors of Education (or their Deputies)
- Eleven local authority staff with responsibility for overseeing and developing strategies relevant to young people at risk of becoming NEET
- Eighteen provider staff involving in delivering projects or programmes to the target group

- Twenty-four young people involved in such projects or programmes.

1.14 Interviews with provider staff and young people were conducted as part of in-depth case study visits to 10 projects or programmes across six LAs. The providers were selected in consultation with the DtS strategic leader in each authority to represent the provision of enterprise or vocational learning activities targeted at those in the “at risk” group. The sample included six projects/programmes designed specifically for this group, two FE colleges, a vocational education centre, and a volunteer development centre. Each case study visit consisted of interviews with a senior manager or a course tutor and up to three young people who had participated in the project. The young people interviewed were aged between 13 years and 17 years and the sample included nine females and 15 males.

1.15 The NFER research team also drew on evidence from the wider phase 1 evaluation of DtS which is published separately, including interviews with DtS co-ordinators in all 32 LAs and 61 school staff across 18 schools.

1.16 The NFER research team also carried out a review of eight key documents (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999; Golden et al., 2002; Golden et al., 2004; Kendall and Kinder, 2005; Kendall et al., 2001; Merton and Parrott, 1999; Morris et al., 1999; Steer, 2000) in order to draw out key messages relating to good practice in the delivery of activities aimed at disaffected young people/those at risk of becoming NEET.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

1.17 The following chapters present the main findings of the research:

Chapter 2 Key Findings from the Literature draws on eight recent key documents in order to identify key messages relating to good practice in working with disaffected young people and those at risk of becoming NEET.

Chapter 3 The LA perspective presents local authority staff’s views and experiences of how DtS is seen as addressing the needs of the “at risk” group, what provision is available, and how DtS links with other initiatives in the authority.

Chapter 4 Provider and young people’s perspective draws on interviews with provider staff and young people in order to identify key approaches and what works in the delivery of activities aimed at disaffected young people and those at risk of becoming NEET.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and key messages presents the main conclusions of the research and raises key issues for further consideration by the Scottish Executive.

CHAPTER TWO KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

2.1 This chapter draws on relevant literature in order to identify key messages relating to good practice in working with disaffected young people and those at risk of becoming NEET. The eight documents reviewed include research reports, literature reviews and good practice guides and relate to England, Scotland and the wider European context. This chapter presents the evidence of good practice of working with the “at risk” group under four broad headings:

- Engaging the at-risk group
- Keeping them engaged
- Progression and achievement
- Organisational issues

The following sections present key findings relating to each of these headings from the eight key documents reviewed as part of this study.

ENGAGING THE AT-RISK GROUP

Finding the “Magnet” to Attract Them

2.2 Most of the documents reviewed concurred that for young people disaffected with the world of learning and work to become re-engaged, it is vital that they are offered opportunities, activities and services that attract them. Bentley and Gurusurthy (1999) use the term “magnet” to describe the aspects of projects that initially attract young people to engage in them. They distinguish between;

- “Cultural magnets” (centred around the arts, music or sport)
 - “Financial magnets” (using cash or vouchers as incentives)
 - Work and income (offering access to employment)
 - Quality services (such as free legal or housing advice or access to IT facilities).
- Generally, the research evidence suggests that projects are most successful at engaging young people if they offer *“interesting activities which were meaningful and relevant to young people”* (Golden et al. 2004).

Outreach

2.3 Some young people within the “at risk” group are easily identified – many of them have a history of disruption in schools or their local community and have often had a range of contact with local agencies or services. Others tend to go more unnoticed – not attending school because of fear of bullying, problems at home or disaffection with the delivery of education. Getting access to this latter group, who are effectively “out of the system”, can be very challenging and requires effective outreach approaches. The literature stressed the need for project workers to engage in informal outreach work to meet young people in their own territory. Merton and Parrott (1999, p.13), for example, conclude that: *“For many projects, especially in their early stages, there is no substitute for going to where the young adults are, and gaining their trust by talking with them”*. Such an approach was said to rely on *“skilled workers who need to be patient, resilient and able to deploy inter-personal skills of a high order”*. Steer (2000) found that such approaches were particularly successful where project

workers had an understanding of the community from which the young people came, be it a “geographical community” or a “community of interest”. Alternatively, research by Golden et al. (2002) suggests that “*using existing or previous clients to present, discuss and explain the project had been found to be an effective approach*”.

Voluntary participation

2.4 Most of the evidence reviewed found that projects or activities which rely on voluntary participation are more successful at engaging disaffected young people. As Steer (2000), based on a review of a recent research, concluded, project workers need to establish “*an equal relationship, in which the participation of the young person is completely voluntary and they are entrusted with choices*” (p. 16).

KEEPING THEM ENGAGED

Ensure buy-in/project ownership

2.5 Many of the documents reviewed emphasised that one of the key ways of keeping disaffected young people engaged in projects was to give them ownership, by involving them in decision-making and giving them opportunities to take responsibility. Steer (2000) argued, for example, that: “*The key element is that the young person is given a say in the activities of the project, thereby giving them a sense of ownership over it*” (p.17).

Importance of context and environment

2.6 Several evaluations suggest that it is the:

“Context rather than content, the hidden rather than the overt curriculum, which will make any projects and its learning programmes feel different from mainstream schooling.” (Merton and Parrott, p.24).

In other words, it is sometimes less important what is delivered than how and where it is delivered. A study by Kendall et al. (2001) that focused on the delivery of the curriculum to disengaged young people in Scotland found, for example, that changing the context of learning was key to ensuring engagement. In this respect, several of the studies reviewed found that many disaffected learners had very negative experiences of school and concluded that being “*not like school was an essential characteristic of successful programmes with disaffected young people*” (Merton and Parrott, p.24). Similarly, Steer (2000) found that most evaluations suggest that disaffected young people benefit particularly from the kind of “*individual attention and support of the kind that all too often is unavailable in school classroom*” (p.18).

Holistic, person-centred approach/Individually tailored support

2.7 The evidence reviewed suggested that projects are most successful which recognise that disaffected young people have a variety of needs and aspirations, which must be addressed in a holistic way if they are to achieve educational and/or employment progress. A review of research and practice across nine European countries concluded that the most successful projects are those which put the needs of the young people at the heart of the

approaches adopted (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). Similarly, Morris et al. (1999) argued that projects need to prioritise major life issues (such as housing, health and welfare), and focus on building self-esteem, confidence and motivation before addressing education and employment issues.

Structure versus flexibility

2.8 There was no conclusive evidence to suggest whether more structured or flexible projects were more successful. In his review of the literature, Steer (2000) concluded that: *“It seems likely that there isn’t a true opposition here, but rather that it is a question of getting the right balance of structure and informality according to the needs of particular groups or individuals”* (p.18).

PROGRESSION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Setting clear targets and monitoring progress

2.9 There is a danger that emphasising the need to adopt approaches while engaging young people in projects can lead to provider staff losing sight of the ultimate aims of their work. Thus, there was a clear consensus in the literature that achieving successful outcomes relies on setting clear targets and monitoring progress made. A review of research relating to strategies aimed at tackling disadvantaged youth by Morris et al. (1999), for example, found that there was evidence to suggest that projects were more successful which focused on the individual through target- and goal-setting, action planning, progress reviewing and mentoring.

Recognition of achievement

2.10 The review of the literature indicates the importance of recognising the achievements of young people via nationally recognised or less formal certificates or qualifications. However, Steer (2000) emphasised the importance of being responsive to the participants’ needs and recommended *“that achievements are celebrated and that assessment is undertaken primarily as a process that can be used to aid the development of young people”* (p.17). Projects need to recognise, though, that many disaffected young people have been put off qualifications and exams and that too much emphasis on these early on could have a negative effect. As Merton and Parrott (1999) point out:

“In schools, as disaffected young people know all too well, assessment is frequently used for other purposes than recognising achievement. It is used to select winners and losers and classify people.” (p.45).

Links with other agencies

2.11 Several studies found that successful outcomes could often not be achieved or sustained without establishing strong links with other local programmes, and other agencies which could support young people in their transition. Strong links with outside agencies were also seen as important to address issues that went beyond the experience and capabilities of project staff, such as housing, drug or alcohol-related issues. In the words of Merton and Parrott (1999): *“Joined up problems require joined up solutions”*.

Sustaining successful outcomes

2.12 Many projects targeted at the “at risk” group aim at moving them onto other education, employment or training. However, several of the studies reviewed found that this transition is rarely smooth and that young people need a lot of support to prevent them from dropping out subsequently. This includes “pre-transition support” to prepare them for leaving, as well as “post-transition support”. As regards the latter, research by Golden et al. (2004) concluded that maintaining contact with the young person once they had left the project, including providing guidance if they chose to change destination, was key in helping young people to sustain their transition.

ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

Staff support

2.13 Almost all of the documents reviewed emphasised that the skills and abilities of project staff were key to the success of projects. However, studies emphasised the need to recognise that working with disaffected young people can be very stressful and intensive and that effective support for project workers, through mutual support and good teamwork, is essential (Steer, 2000). Similarly, Kendall and Kinder (2005) stressed the need to provide teachers and other staff engaged in such projects with the necessary training to develop their skills to work with disengaged pupils.

Monitoring and evaluation

2.14 A common conclusion of much of the literature reviewed was that projects aimed at re-engaging disaffected young people are often not sufficiently evaluated and monitored. Steer (2000), for example, commented on the fact that there is often a lack of monitoring relating to long-term outcomes as well as so called “soft outcomes”, in favour of an over-emphasis on short-measures and hard outcomes.

MAIN FINDINGS

2.15 This chapter presented key messages relating to good practice in working with disaffected young people and those at risk of becoming NEET based on a review of the literature. Key findings were that:

- Disaffected young people need to be offered activities which are meaningful and relevant to them and which they can participate in on a voluntary basis
- Projects are more likely to keep disaffected young people engaged which give them ownership, provide an alternative learning environment from school, and address the needs of the individuals in a holistic way
- Previous evaluations have shown that projects are more likely to achieve and sustain successful outcomes which set clear targets, offer opportunities of recognising young people’s achievements, work together with other agencies and support participants in their transitions into other education, training or employment options

- The skills and qualities of project staff are key to re-engaging, motivating and helping disaffected young people to progress. To this end, they need appropriate support and training to achieve maximum impact.

CHAPTER THREE THE LOCAL AUTHORITY PERSPECTIVE

3.1 This chapter explores the views of LA staff on the extent to which DtS was seen as addressing the needs of the “at risk” group, what provision was available, and how DtS linked with other initiatives in the authorities. It draws on interviews with all 32 local authority DtS co-ordinators; interviews were carried out with six Directors of Education (or their Deputies) and with 11 LA staff with various levels of responsibility for overseeing and developing strategies relevant to the target group.³ The chapter initially explores the extent to which the authorities developed targets and implemented activities aimed at the “at risk” group in response to DtS. The following sections explore the management of such provision, approaches adopted to identify the target group and the perceived impact of DtS on the LA’s strategies.

FOCUS ON TARGET GROUP

3.2 As reported in the phase 1 DtS evaluation report (Spielhofer et al. 2006)⁴, about a third of the 32 LAs reported that they had designed their DtS strategies to focus on the needs of those at risk of becoming NEET. A similar number (13) said that they had put in place some provision for this group as a result of DtS but that it was not a specific target, while the remaining eight authorities reported that they had no specific DtS engendered provision for this group. Several respondents explained that they don’t focus on NEET due to there being no specific DtS recommendations relating to this group of young people. Others said that other strategies were in place already or that they did not want to see DtS as becoming “*just another programme aimed at disaffected learners*” and so had chosen not to focus activities on this group.

3.3 Of the eight LAs contacted as part of this study:

- Three authorities had specific targets relating to the at-risk group
- Four authorities had established co-ordinated and integrated approaches to addressing the issues of disaffection, non-participation and exclusions.
- Three authorities had no specific targets but had implemented some specific provision
- Two authorities had implemented no specific activities aimed at the target group, in response to DtS.

This distribution was broadly representative of all 32 local authorities (as found in the phase 1 DtS evaluation).

3.4 It is worth noting that of the three authorities with no specific targets but with some targeted provision, there was one LA which reported that they intended to make this more of a focus in the next year. Thus, they had advertised to appoint an Enterprise Development Officer (EDO) with a specific remit to focus their attention on the “at risk” group, were developing training for teachers on how to work with disengaged young people, and were asking schools to apply for an innovation fund with the aim of delivering specific activities

³ It is worth noting that the recommendations of the Review of Education for Work and Enterprise (Scottish Executive, 2002) did not contain any specific targets relating to those at risk of becoming NEET.

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/27152939/0>

targeted to reduce disaffection. It may well be that such an increased focus may have occurred in other LAs since being interviewed as part of this study.

3.5 Interviews with LA Directors of Education and other LA staff showed that there was some correlation between the extent to which disaffection/disengagement was identified as a significant issue and the use of DtS to implement activities or strategies targeted at this group. Thus, all three of the authorities who had specific targets relating to the “at risk” group reported that disaffection and disengagement were significant issues in schools in their authorities. Similarly, those authorities who saw this as less of an issue were more likely not to have focussed on implementing activities aimed at the target group.

3.6 However, it is worth noting that there was one exception – the authority which reported the highest level of young people at risk of becoming NEET had not implemented any activities specifically aimed at the target group in response to DtS. Instead, as its Director of Education commented, it already had many existing programmes in place prior to the introduction of DtS. Furthermore, many of the changes brought about by DtS were seen as being of general relevance to the “at risk” group:

“No DtS funds are being used to support the authority’s work with this group and so there is no direct association between DtS and the work done in this area. However, I believe that the broader aims of DtS, concerned with building skills and competencies, confidence, self-reliance and a “can-do, will-do” attitude, are all pertinent to addressing the issues of disaffection and non-participation.”

MANAGEMENT OF PROVISION

3.7 Most of the LAs visited indicated that responsibility for monitoring and addressing the needs of the at-risk group was shared by a variety of LA personnel and external agencies, including, for example, schools, children’s services, social work, the police, Careers Scotland, and community organisations.

3.8 Similarly, most authorities were able to identify other related strategies aimed at addressing the needs of the target group. These included strategies designed by other organisations such as Careers Scotland. In one authority, for example, Careers Scotland was already running a programme which:

“Is designed to give young people extra support in the final three months of school and is aimed at pupils who are likely to face most difficulties in moving on to a job, college or training place. The programme involves young people working in groups to increase their team building, personal development and career management skills. The programme also includes enterprise projects which encourage pupils to increase their confidence and build knowledge and understanding of how local businesses work.”

3.9 Several authorities referred to the flexible curriculum and increased opportunities for vocational learning, some of which were specifically targeted at the “at risk” group. One authority, for example, which had not implemented any activities in response to DtS, had such a vocational programme in place aimed at helping those at risk of becoming NEET. It

was an initiative “geared at providing targeted young people with a vocational experience of administration, hospitality, car maintenance, etcetera”. A cohort of 30 young people was involved last year, increasing to over 70 this year. This programme was not specifically related to DtS, but was seen as “sharing the strategy’s broad aims and goals”. No DtS money was used to fund it.

3.10 Three authorities had strategic DtS staff in place to develop strategies targeted at the at-risk group. Unsurprisingly, these were two of the three authorities which had specific targets as part of their DtS strategy aimed at pupils deemed to be at risk of becoming NEET. In contrast, most of the other eight LAs contacted felt that other departments or agencies had greater responsibility for addressing the needs of the target group.

3.11 Four authorities stood out for having established, what appeared to be, well co-ordinated and integrated approaches to addressing the issues of disaffection, non-participation and exclusion. In one of these LAs, for example, the Director of Education reported:

“A whole range [of agencies are involved]; Careers Scotland is heavily involved and I chair the lifelong learning group which involves a whole range of different agencies. We also work closely with the health department on health promoting schools and on other health related initiatives. We have forums and work with the police and other community organisations and agencies so that there is a joined up approach and we have a lot of support. I ultimately [have responsibility] but there is a corporate responsibility.”

3.12 Some authorities appeared to have less joined-up approaches. This was particularly noticeable in two authorities in which DtS/LA education staff contacted were not able to identify any specific individuals with responsibility for addressing issues related to disaffection/disengagement. In other authorities, responsibility was shared by different individuals, departments or agencies, but interviewees were not able to identify a person with a general overview of the LA strategy.

IDENTIFYING THE AT-RISK GROUP

3.13 Reflecting the findings of the literature, respondents’ comments showed that young people at-risk of becoming NEET are not a homogeneous group. Thus, several authorities commented on the fact that provision cannot be uniform but has to be tailored to individuals’ needs.

3.14 Three of the eight authorities contacted as part of this study were aware of formal LA-wide systems for identifying and monitoring young people deemed to be at risk of becoming NEET. In one of the LAs that was aware, for example, they had instituted a five-stage intervention and assessment process, which involved teachers and other agencies, such as social work or educational psychologists, in identifying issues and planning support:

“Kids can move up or down stages and it gives us a monitoring process that places kids in terms of their situation and the level of support from other agencies.”

The authority was trying to share this approach across other agencies in the LA *“to make this common to health and social work systems as well”*.

3.15 The other authorities appeared to rely on less systematic approaches – two authorities, for example, devolved responsibility to schools, while others saw other LA departments as having more of a responsibility in this area.

IMPACT OF DTS ON PROVISION

3.16 Six of the eight authorities reported that they had implemented at least some new activities or approaches targeted specifically at the at-risk group of young people as part of DtS. For the most part, these included alternative curriculum projects carried out within schools or externally in college or alternative settings. Most of these strategies were aimed at expanding vocational learning opportunities specifically aimed at disaffected or disengaged learners.

3.17 One of the authorities, for example, which regarded the expansion of strategies aimed at the at-risk group as a key focus of DtS, had set up a special innovation fund. Schools and other providers had to bid for funds to deliver projects aimed at finding *“different approaches and styles of learning that suit these young people better via alternative curriculum approaches”*. A lot of the DtS resources were said to have been concentrated on such alternative approaches.

3.18 One LA reported that while they had no particular focus on those at risk of becoming NEET in their DtS plan, they had set up some vocational projects specifically targeted at this group. Overall, the Director of Education in this authority believed though that DtS in itself provided a lot of opportunities for disengaged learners and that:

“The “can do” attitude can help to unlock poor attainment. Generally, giving young people opportunities to take responsibility for their learning can help overcome some of the problems related to disengagement.”

3.19 This belief was shared by the two authorities which reported no specific DtS activities targeted at this group. Furthermore, staff in both LAs thought that some DtS activities were particularly beneficial to those at risk of becoming NEET. One authority, for example, reported that they had set up a:

“Course as a result of DtS, in which young people have to work as part of a team. Although it is for all young people, it is particularly beneficial for those who are disaffected/disengaged, as it gives them a very high sense of achievement.”

3.20 Also worth noting is that some authorities intended to expand their provision targeted at the at-risk group in coming years and that this may not yet have been reflected in the strategies reported on here (see paragraph 3.4).

3.21 The following chapter provides a more detailed exploration of the types of activities or approaches implemented by six case study authorities visited as part of this research.

MAIN FINDINGS

3.22 This chapter presented the views of all 32 LA DtS co-ordinators, six Directors of Education (or their Deputies) and of 11 LA staff with various levels of responsibility for overseeing and developing strategies relevant to the target group. Key findings were that:

- Three of the eight authorities contacted as part of this study had specific targets relating to the “at risk” group, while two others had no targets but had implemented some activities aimed at disaffected young people
- Authorities which reported higher levels of young people at risk of becoming NEET were more likely to have implemented targets or activities aimed at the target group in response to DtS
- Responsibility for monitoring and addressing the needs of the target group were shared by a variety of organisations and agencies across the eight LAs. However, only half of them appeared to have established “joined up” approaches to addressing the issues of the “at risk” group
- Interviewees in three of the eight authorities contacted were aware of any formal LA-wide systems for identifying and monitoring young people deemed to be at risk of becoming NEET
- Six of the eight LAs reported that they had implemented at least some new activities aimed at the “at risk” group in response to DtS. Most of these were aimed at expanding vocational learning opportunities.

CHAPTER FOUR PROVIDER AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE

4.1 This chapter presents the evidence collected from interviews with 18 provider staff and 24 young people as part of the case study visits. It also makes some reference to interviews with 61 members of school staff, which were conducted as part of the evaluation of DtS phase 1 (for further information see Spielhofer et al., 2006). The chapter begins by examining the links between the different projects and the DtS strategy. A typology of the different types of provision is presented along with information about how the target groups were identified. Evidence related to inter-agency working and initial perceptions related to outcomes are then explored, along with identified key learning points and good practice recommendations.

LINKS TO THE DETERMINED TO SUCCEED STRATEGY

Perceived relevance of DtS to the “at risk” group

4.2 Interviews with school staff revealed that interviewees felt that DtS had enormous potential to make a difference to all pupils' experiences of education and to their learning gains and outcomes. Furthermore, the majority of school staff felt that DtS was relevant to all pupils and should not be targeted at those in the “at risk” group only. However, several interviewees said that, although it was relevant to all, certain types of pupils (such as those who were less academically able) could particularly benefit. A few respondents (four) working in the secondary sector felt that DtS was more relevant to disaffected pupils, as illustrated by the following quote:

“It helps disengaged learners most, those that are switched off, it is a way of engaging them as they can see a real, practical product at the end.”

Awareness of DtS among project staff

4.3 The majority of the 18 provider staff interviewed had previous experience of working with the “at risk” group. A number of interviewees had previously been involved in youth work with disadvantaged young people and several had a background in social work. Both of the further education (FE) colleges visited had existing links with the secondary schools in their area and had been offering vocational education opportunities for S3 and S4 pupils for a number of years. Two interviewees did not have any previous experience of working with the target group. One of these interviewees had previously worked in industry and one was a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT).

4.4 All of providers reported that they had heard of the DtS strategy, although only about one-third reported that they were familiar with the specific aims and objectives, particularly the aspects of DtS relating to vocational education. Most of these interviewees were working within a school setting (or had previously worked in a school) or they were working closely with LA staff who were involved in implementing DtS.

4.5 Although awareness of the specific aims and objectives of the DtS strategy was relatively low among providers, when asked whether or not DtS had impacted directly on

their provision for the “at risk” group, many interviewees felt that it had done so. Interviewees reported that the DtS strategy had:

- Provided additional funding so that provision could be expanded – *“DtS funding has enabled us to roll out our provision”*
- Led to the creation of new types of provision – *“This project has come about because of DtS so it is a direct result of the funding that the project has been set up and my post has been created”*
- Led to more collaboration in terms of provision within the LA – *“we are working much more collaboratively as an LA to provide facilities and it has become a lot more co-ordinated”*
- Led to increased demand for vocational education and more of a focus on the courses available – *“since DtS and there has been an increase in demand and there is more concern about what the pupils are doing and how it fits in to form a whole”*
- Encouraged more of a focus on enterprise activities within existing provision – *“It probably has had an impact because of the kinds of projects and enterprise activities we have been running”*.

TYOLOGY OF PROVISION

4.6 Overall, about half of the projects visited were specifically targeted and designed for the “at risk” group. The remaining projects were not intended to solely involve the “at risk” group. However, schools were reported often to select pupils from this group because places were limited and staff felt that these particular pupils would benefit most. In some cases, projects had been piloted with disaffected pupils initially but were now being offered more widely (this was particularly the case with the vocational education opportunities, in response to DtS Recommendation 2). All of the projects visited were targeted at secondary-age pupils. The majority were aimed at the pre-16 age group, although two were used with S5 and S6 pupils.

4.7 The ten provider case studies were offering provision that can be divided into 6 broad categories. These categories are:

- Alternative curriculum projects
- Vocational education programmes
- Transition to work programmes
- Outdoor education projects
- Volunteering projects
- Pupil support projects.

4.8 It is worth noting that there is some overlap between these categories and that some providers were offering more than one type of project. Some of the alternative education provision, for example, included elements of vocational education and/or outdoor education. Furthermore, some of the vocational programmes also focused on supporting transition. The different types of provision and what these entailed are discussed in more detail below.

4.9 Five of the providers were offering **alternative curriculum projects** which were all targeted at pupils in the “at risk” group (some or all of the pupils involved had additional support needs). The majority of these providers were based near to, or were linked to,

secondary schools. Most of these projects were long-term sustained projects for pupils usually from S2 upwards. In some cases, young people were attending the provision on a full time basis, while in others the projects were used to support pupils attending mainstream school. Activities included studying for Standard Grades, vocational education, key skills and extra curricular activities (usually involving outdoor activities). The projects were run and managed by a range of staff including teachers, youth workers, and support staff. The projects were usually funded by the LA, but in some cases projects had been set up with DtS funding.

4.10 Three of the ten providers visited were offering **vocational education programmes**. Two of these were FE colleges and one was a vocational education centre, although some of the provision at the centre was college-based. These providers were offering a programme of vocational education opportunities to pupils in S3 and S4, in a range of different subject areas including horticulture, first aid, floristry, construction, painting and decorating, and hair and beauty. These programmes were delivered over the sustained period of a year or more, most commonly, over two years, and they were generally taught by college tutors or, in some cases, by employers. The courses were usually hands-on, practical courses, often taught in a simulated environment or a real work situation, and were usually accredited courses. In most cases, the young people attended two or three sessions per week and were given additional learning support where necessary. Some of the providers also offered support for young people making the transition from school to work or further education. DtS funding was being used to support these programmes.

4.11 One of the providers was operating a **transition to work programme**. The programme was aimed at S6 pupils at a special school who wanted to progress onto employment, but needed additional support to do so. Pupils were given enhanced careers advice and support that was tailored to their specific needs. The young people were given help with writing CVs, arranging work placements and finding suitable employment or further education opportunities. The project was a short-term support programme and was delivered by a dedicated member of staff who was employed by the LA. Pupils usually attended a series of sessions which were delivered on a one-to-one basis in school.

4.12 Two distinct **outdoor education** experiences for young people were offered by a provider. Both projects offered a flexible programme with a range of activities that were adapted to suit the individuals involved. The activities were organised by youth development workers and young people could choose to take part. The projects aimed to help young people develop new skills and build positive relationships. The projects were being offered to pupils from S1 to S6. DtS funding had been used to support the work this provider was offering.

4.13 One provider was offering **volunteering** opportunities for young people. The provider offered a flexible, adaptable programme aimed at helping young people develop relationships with their local community. The programme was designed on an individual basis to help to broaden young people's horizons and help them gain future employment. The programme was delivered by youth development workers and involvement was optional to pupils from S1 to S6. A proportion of DtS funding had been allocated to the provider by the LA.

4.14 A **pupil support project** for young people was offered by a provider. The focus of the programme was on promoting pupils' personal and social development and developing

confidence. The project, which was set up using DtS funding, aimed to help pupils in the “at risk” group to overcome issues such as bullying that could lead to disaffection, and was delivered by youth workers within school. The young people (from S1 to S6) usually attended two sessions per week for six weeks and took part in activities and discussions in small groups.

Common characteristics

4.15 There were several common characteristics across the different projects or programmes visited. The providers tended to work with small groups of young people (no more than 13) and usually offered:

- Personalised learning opportunities tailored to individual needs
- Informal, flexible approaches to learning
- A focus on practical hands-on activities
- A focus on developing skills
- Elements of choice and autonomy
- On-going consultation and discussion
- On-going monitoring, review and assessment.

4.16 A minority of the providers made attempts to involve parents in provision and a few provided integrated multi-professional interventions and had staged assessment procedures in place.

4.17 Generally, the provider staff felt that the young people did identify with and have ownership of the different projects. However, in relation to ownership, interviewees indicated that this could vary depending on the project. Some of the staff running vocational programmes felt that the college environment could be overwhelming and there were less support structures in place for pupils. The vocational centre was slightly different as it offered a base for young people and staff were on hand to offer support. The member of staff based at the centre explained the differences between the college provision and the centre provision and how they had tried to overcome these issues:

“Those whose courses were based here feel a lot more ownership over the centre and that is less so for those who go to college. In college they have to cope with a big space and they are the youngest ones there in a big college. It is not practical to run all the courses here and we do have to use the college but what we are doing this year is that we are having an induction here at the start so they know the staff and the building”.

4.18 The majority of respondents felt that ownership developed over time and could be facilitated by:

- Consulting young people as much as possible – *“giving them more choice and consulting with them helps”*
- Helping young people to build positive relationships with staff – *“we work hard to build relationships with them and to provide a supportive environment”*
- Making the provision different from school – *“One of the assets we have here is that most people working here have come from industry and they treat the pupils more like they would at work and the pupils respond well to that”.*

Activities enjoyed most and least

4.19 Staff said that the young people tended to enjoy the practical hands-on activities best and that their preferences often reflected their immediate interests. In relation to vocational learning, these interests were often quite gender-stereotypical. The most popular courses for boys were engineering, car maintenance and construction, whereas, the girls often preferred hair and beauty and childcare. Some staff felt they needed to do more to help the young people *“realise that there is more out there and they can do other things too”*. Outdoor activities (including sports and recreation) were popular with both boys and girls.

4.20 Interviewees reported that the young people tended to dislike activities that were more classroom based and those that involved too much writing. One project co-ordinator, for example, explained:

“Anything that requires them to sit down and write things - I think for some of them they find that difficult and their skills in that area are not very good so they struggle”.

4.21 The young people interviewed reported liking a range of different vocational subjects and activities. Several of those interviewed said that they liked *“everything”*, as illustrated by the following quote from a pupil who had been attending college two days per week: *“there is not much I haven’t enjoyed, to be honest”*. Others said that they had particularly enjoyed meeting different people. Often they had met up with pupils from different schools and had made new friends as a result. Several of those interviewed said they had really liked the teachers and the informal teaching styles that were adopted as these often differed from those that were used more commonly at school – *“I just like the atmosphere - they talk to you in a more of a jokey way”*.

4.22 Most of the young people did not report disliking anything that they had been doing as part of the project/programme they had been involved in. A few reported disliking some of the specific activities they had been involved in at college (such as sanding walls or clearing up), usually because they thought these activities were *“boring”*.

IDENTIFYING THE TARGET GROUP

Characteristics of the young people

4.23 There were some common characteristics relating to the young people involved in the different projects/programmes, but there were also differences depending on the type of provision. Some of the providers were working with a mixed group, with a range of ages and abilities. However, most interviewees reported that a high proportion of these pupils were at risk of becoming NEET in the long term. A deputy principal at an FE college described the group of pupils who were involved in the vocational programme:

“I think the majority are at risk of becoming disengaged - some would just carry on at school if they were not coming here and would come out with a couple of good grades, but there are others who would drop out of school altogether because they are just not motivated”.

4.24 Providers often reported that they were working with young people who were not high achievers and some young people had specific learning difficulties or social and emotional difficulties. Some of the providers were working exclusively with the “at risk” group and these young people often had additional support needs and recognised problems related to family background issues, behaviour, attendance and alcohol misuse or drugs. Some of the young people were looked-after (in the care of the local authority) and others had been permanently excluded from mainstream school. A member of staff described the young people he worked with:

“They are all boys that I have just now and they all have SEB difficulties [social emotional and behavioural difficulties] and their education suffers because of that. The problems they have are social problems - a lot of the children in mainstream also have these social problems and they are able to cope with it but others can’t and they experience difficulties. They are all disaffected and disengaged when they come”.

Those working exclusively with the “at risk” group tended to work more with boys but the other providers were working with both genders.

Recruitment procedures

4.25 Provider staff were asked to describe how young people were recruited onto the different projects and programmes. In the majority of cases, this was done through schools (usually via guidance). Several other forms of recruitment were also mentioned by one or two interviewees including the police, Youth Justice, social work, educational psychologists, parents and also self-referral. One of the providers had a joint assessment team. The project co-ordinator explained the referral process and how this worked in practice:

“We have a joint assessment team which is a multidisciplinary team involving guidance, social work, school management team, health and educational psychologists. They come into this system via guidance so if a child is having problems in school then they would have a meeting with all these professionals and they would decide on the steps to take”

4.26 Most of the providers had set criteria relating to the kind of young people that their projects were aimed at (this was particularly the case with the alternative curriculum projects which were usually targeted specifically at the “at risk” group). Some of the projects were optional and were open to a range of pupils with mixed abilities. As discussed in paragraph 4.6, one of the projects had been piloted with the “at risk” group but was now being opened up more widely and offered to more pupils. The project co-ordinator explained the recruitment process and the changes they had made this year:

“Last year they were all referred but this year it has been put out to schools that it should be offered across the board which kind of fits with the DtS element in that it is for all. Schools will have interpreted this differently and due to the limited places and the practicality it probably won’t be offered to all. I think what most schools have done is that they have identified young people who they think will benefit most”.

4.27 All of the young people interviewed said they had been given a choice as to whether or not they wanted to be involved in the projects or programmes visited. Even those young people who had been targeted by schools or providers were given a choice as to whether or not they wanted to take part. The majority said they had chosen to get involved because they thought the provision would be dissimilar from school, as illustrated by the following quote: *“I thought it would be different to school, that you’d have more freedom - that was the main attraction”*. Several of those interviewed said they had decided to take part because they thought the activities would help prepare them for life after school. A boy attending a vocational course at college explained: *“I thought it would give me options and equip me better for what I want to do”*.

4.28 All of the young people anticipated that the projects/programmes they were going to be involved in would be different from school and most found this had turned out to be the case. In particular, they reported that they were:

- Given more choice and had more options open to them – *“you can do different things and they give you more options”*
- Treated more like adults - *“I thought it would be different from school and it is, it is completely different. You get treated like an adult not like school kids and they give you more respect”*
- Given more freedom and autonomy – *“I guess I thought it would be more relaxed. I knew I wouldn’t have to wear school uniform. I thought the rules would be different and the classroom stuff would be different”*
- Able to meet new people and make new friends – *“there are different people to get to know and to speak to”*
- Able to experience a work environment – *“it is like a real work situation and I can learn about what it would be like to work there”*.

Assessment of learning, development and support needs

4.29 Most of the providers asked for referral or assessment information when young people joined the project/programme. This was used initially to assess each individual’s learning, development and support needs. However, some interviewees said they preferred to make their own judgements about individuals, as they often responded differently when taken out of the school environment. This is illustrated by the following comment from one project co-ordinator:

“We ask for referral information because we need to know what their needs and issues are. Some of what we receive can make for scary reading when you look at what is happening in their home lives and some of them have aggressive behaviour. What we find though is that when you take them out of the environment that causes all that negative behaviour and you put them somewhere where I would like to think they feel valued and respected, they do behave quite differently.”

4.30 The majority of providers also carried out their own assessments to determine individual learning, development and support needs. The young people’s needs were usually reviewed on an individual basis and additional support was withdrawn or extended where necessary. Most providers were able to assign individual *“support workers”* to provide help

for young people where it was needed. A project co-ordinator explained the way this worked:

“Some people might require a support worker attached to them when they go to college or when they come here. Others might need additional help with reading and writing. We then monitor how they are doing when they start. A couple of young people last year started with a support worker but then that was withdrawn because they didn’t need it anymore”.

Induction procedures

4.31 All but one of the providers offered the young people an induction when they started the project or programme. However, it is worth noting that the different inductions varied considerably. Most offered inductions that introduced the young people to the project environment and the activities they would be involved in. One of the providers offered a two-week induction programme that included group activities and team building exercises. Another provider involved parents in an initial induction meeting and feedback was given to parents throughout the project to involve them in the provision. The staff coordinating this project felt that involving parents right from the start had led to positive outcomes:

“We found that getting parental involvement was key to success; we found that getting them involved from the start and calling them every week to give them an update was a really good way of getting their buy-in and they saw it as the school trying something new and for some of them it was the first time they got some positive feedback about their children”.

4.32 Only the transition to work programme did not start with a formal induction. Project staff felt that this was not necessary as young people were receiving advice and support on a one-to-one basis.

OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

4.33 As highlighted in paragraphs 4.7 to 4.14, the providers that were visited offered a range of provision, and they were targeted at different types of young people. Consequently, it is important that the outcomes of these projects for participants are assessed with reference to the initial nature and needs of the young people, and the types of provision that they were involved in. This was summed up by one member of staff, who was working with a group of disadvantaged and disengaged young people:

“Sometimes progress in our eyes is very slight, but for [the young people] it is a major step forward”.

4.34 Both provider staff and young people were asked about the outcomes of participation in the projects. Provider staff were asked what outcomes they were expecting young people to achieve as a result of participating in their programmes, while young people were asked how they had changed since starting the activities. At a general level, it appeared that participation had helped to keep the young people engaged in some form of learning, as many of the participants reported that they would not be attending school, if they had not become involved in the alternative provision.

4.35 Encouragingly, 23 of the 24 young people interviewed stated that they would recommend the project to other young people. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the one young person who said that he would not recommend the project did so because he did not want large numbers of pupils involved as he preferred to work in small groups.

4.36 The specific outcomes for young people identified by staff and participants could be divided into the following categories, which are discussed in further detail below:

- Achievement of qualifications
- Personal development
- Development of skills
- Impact on future choices.

Achievement of qualifications

4.37 Members of staff at eight of the ten providers reported that one of the main aims of their provision was for young people to achieve a qualification. The young people at these providers were working towards a range of qualifications, including Standard Grades, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, Scottish Progression Awards and Access courses, as well as other awards and certificates, such as the Millennium Volunteers Award, Leadership in the Community, and first aid certificates. Some of the certificates awarded were externally accredited, while others were created by the providers themselves.

4.38 Although some of the young people were unsure what specific qualifications they were working towards at the provider, others indicated that they valued their qualifications and other achievements. One male pupil who was undertaking a vocational course at an FE college, emphasised the value he placed on the qualifications and certificates he had achieved:

“They are very important to me...they will help me in the future; if I want to get on a different course or get a job, then it will be a head start....when you learn stuff in school, you just move onto the next bit and you don’t get a certificate, but things like that matter when you are trying to get a job”.

Personal development

4.39 In addition to achieving qualifications, the main expected outcomes for young people identified by provider staff related to the development of their personal and social skills. Most commonly, staff indicated that they anticipated improvements in young people’s **confidence and self-esteem** as a result of them taking part in the projects. More specifically, several interviewees stated that they hoped by participating in this provision, young people would feel more positive about their self-worth, and their potential to achieve.

4.40 These expectations were supported by the views of the young people themselves, as many of those interviewed felt that their confidence and self-esteem had improved as a result of participating in this provision. This was summed up by a pupil who was attending a vocational education centre, who explained that he had changed “*dramatically*” since he started to attend the centre. He added:

“When I first started I had low self-esteem, but it has built up my self-esteem coming here and built up my confidence...it is the best thing that has ever happened to me”.

Many of the young people also felt that they had become ‘*more grown up*’ as a result of taking part in the projects, and welcomed the opportunity to be given ‘*more responsibility and more freedom*’.

4.41 Project staff reported that they were expecting **changes in young people’s behaviour** as a result of participating in the projects. These changes included improvements in their communication and team-working skills, and their attendance and behaviour in school. Such changes in behaviour were reported by a number of the young people themselves, with most of these indicating that they were now better behaved in school. This was illustrated by one young person attending an alternative education centre, who explained why his behaviour and attendance had improved:

“My behaviour in class has improved because I want to stay in the group...if you don’t come into school, you get chucked out; it happened to one guy and I don’t want it to happen to me”.

4.42 Improvements in young people’s **attitudes towards school and learning** were also anticipated by several provider staff, and in fact a small number of pupils reported that their motivation and performance at school had improved since taking part in the projects.

Development of skills

4.43 Of particular importance for provider staff and young people were the effects that projects had on participants’ skills. As well as **course-related** skills that young people were developing through the qualifications they were working towards (such as cooking, painting and decorating and horticulture), gains were reported in young people’s **work-related** skills, including their interview skills, problem-solving skills and their ability to write a CV, and also in their **literacy and numeracy skills**. Both staff and young people hoped that these skills would help them progress onto further education or employment, as described by one male pupil: *“It gives us new skills, so we’ve got a better chance of getting a job in the future, so I won’t be on the dole”.*

Impact on future choices

4.44 Another of the main expected outcomes from young people’s participation in the projects visited related to their future choices. A number of provider staff hoped that the projects would help to raise young people’s aspirations and enable them to make informed choices about their future career plans. Other interviewees indicated that they anticipated that the skills and qualifications that pupils had achieved as a result of taking part in the projects would increase their chances of making a positive transition into further education or employment.

4.45 The extent to which young people’s participation in the projects had had a direct impact on their future choices varied. While some young people intended to follow a pre-existing career interest, others stated that they had been directly influenced by the activities they had been involved in. Young people reported that they had not only been able to discuss

their future plans with provider staff, but they had also been given the opportunity to “*try different things out*”. This was particularly the case for young people who were undertaking vocational courses, as these gave them a “taster” of different careers. This is illustrated by a comment from one male pupil who now planned to start an Apprenticeship in painting and decorating after leaving school as a result of taking a course at a vocational education centre: “*it helped you decide what you wanted to do because you could have a go at it*”.

Factors facilitating successful outcomes

4.46 Provider staff were asked to comment on the factors which they felt facilitated successful outcomes for young people, and, on the whole, these were consistent with the responses of young people regarding why they felt they had been able to achieve positive outcomes at the projects. It is also worth noting that the factors identified are generally consistent with the findings from the review of relevant literature, reported in Chapter 2.

4.47 Many of the young people were involved in out-of-school provision, and this opportunity to learn in a **different environment** was welcomed by both provider staff and young people. Many of the young people interviewed had had negative experiences at school, including instances of bullying, lack of achievement, boredom and dislike of particular teachers, and nearly all the respondents stated that they did not enjoy school. Thus, as illustrated by the following comment by a member of staff at a vocational education centre, the new environment was a key factor in facilitating successful outcomes for young people:

“I think the fact that we are not a school is what makes it a success for a lot of them. They are almost at loggerheads with the school and can’t get past that...they just see it as negative. When they come here they are getting away from that environment. They just enjoy being in a fresh new environment”.

4.48 The **positive relationships** that young people were able to build with provider staff were also identified as key in facilitating successful outcomes for young people. Most of the young people enjoyed the more informal, relaxed approach that staff adopted at the projects, and reported that they appreciated being treated as adults by staff, by being given “*more respect*”, “*trust*” and “*freedom*” by staff. This was reinforced by one member of staff, who stated that they adopt an “*unconditional positive regard*” towards all participants, in order to try to improve young people’s self-esteem and their attitudes towards authority figures and other adults.

4.49 The fact that providers tended to work with smaller numbers of young people than in schools meant that young people were often able to receive more **one-to-one attention and support**. Provider staff reported that they found it easier to build a rapport with young people and to establish positive, supportive relationships with them due to the small group sizes, and this was welcomed by the young people. This is illustrated by the comment of one young person, who appreciated the continuity of staffing he received:

“In school, you have seven different classes in a day with seven different teachers all in one day...in college, I have one class for the whole day and one teacher.”

4.50 Several provider staff emphasised the importance of providing **appropriate activities** for the young people, as they felt that this was key for both engaging the young people and enabling them to achieve successful outcomes. Provider staff highlighted the need for activities to be appropriate for young people in terms of content and delivery, and, in particular, to accommodate the different learning styles of participants. Interviewees particularly mentioned young people's preference for practical activities. Several members of staff also identified the need to encourage young people to develop ownership of the activities, by involving them in decision-making and giving them an element of responsibility.

4.51 The **links** that providers established **with schools** were also seen as an important factor in facilitating successful outcomes for young people, as interviewees felt that positive relationships between the different institutions enabled better communication about young people's support needs, and progress, and more continuous support for the participants.

Factors hindering successful outcomes

4.52 Despite the facilitating factors outlined above, provider staff identified a number of factors that they felt acted as barriers to young people achieving successful outcomes on projects, and they highlighted the challenges in trying to overcome these barriers.

4.53 Most commonly, the barriers identified related to the personal circumstances and **home backgrounds** of the young people. In some cases, the young people were reported to be coping with personal or family difficulties that acted as barriers to their engagement, while in others, the young people had parents who did not adequately support them, as illustrated by the following comment from one interviewee: *"If there is no one at home expecting anything of them then they don't believe they can achieve anything"*.

4.54 Given the complex support needs that many of the young people have, providers emphasised the need for them to receive adequate support. However, a number of interviewees were concerned that many young people do not have **access to consistent and continuous support** while they are not at the provider. These respondents felt that there should be a more "joined-up" approach to the support that young people receive, so that any outcomes they achieved were more likely to be sustained long-term. One member of staff, for example, commented that one of the main barriers for young people was:

"Not having the constant support throughout the whole week, so it's more of a drip-drip effect, rather than a consistent approach, and so outside problems interfere with our work with them".

4.55 Other barriers mentioned by provider staff included low self-esteem and confidence among participants, pressures that young people face in school, and a lack of knowledge of young people's support needs. In addition, although many of the young people welcomed the increased freedom that they were given as part of this provision, one member of staff at an FE college felt that this could act as a barrier for some young people:

"The organisational freedom they get hinders some of them because some of them need more structure or they just drift...there are diversions for some of them....there are massive differences in the social skills they have and for some of them that is a barrier".

Monitoring and evaluation strategies

4.56 Investigation of the systems that providers had in place to monitor and evaluate their provision revealed that these systems could be divided into three categories:

- Monitoring of the involvement of individual participants
- Evaluation of participants' progress and outcomes
- Evaluation/review of the project as a whole.

4.57 All ten of the providers implemented some form of **individual-level monitoring**. Most commonly this involved the monitoring of young people's attendance at the project, while only a few projects reported that they monitored pupils' behaviour, their progress and their plans for the future. The methods by which projects tended to monitor young people's attendance, behaviour and progress included the following:

- Attendance registers
- Behaviour plans
- One-to-one review meetings
- Observation checklists
- Daily written assessments.

4.58 Two providers reported that they shared this monitoring information with schools, particularly information about young people's attendance. One interviewee, for example, described:

“Every morning I check that everyone is here and that they have arrived safely. They are all registered in each class and that [information] goes straight to the school that morning so that the school knows where they are”.

4.59 Two other providers, both of which were schools that were providing activities for the “at risk” group, had close contact with parents, and provided them with regular feedback about their attendance and behaviour.

4.60 Four of the providers reported that they had undertaken formal **evaluations of young people's progress and outcomes** as a result of their participation in the projects. These evaluations included asking young people for their feedback on the activities they had been involved in, and their perceived outcomes from these activities; consulting project staff and school staff about their perceptions of young people's outcomes; and collecting and analysing detailed records of participants' progress over time. The frequency of these evaluations varied from regular evaluations of each activity or session that pupils were involved in, to one-off evaluations, either at a mid-point or at the end of young people's participation in the project. A further two providers reported that although they did not undertake any formal or systematic evaluation, they regularly gathered feedback from participants and school staff, through informal discussions and observation.

4.61 Five providers stated that they carried out reviews of their provision as a whole. These reviews involved internal staff meetings, in which staff reflected on their own practices and reviewed the progress and achievements of participants, as well as review meetings with

schools, and other partners involved in supporting the young people, such as the youth service.

INTER-AGENCY WORKING

Links with other organisations

4.62 Most of the providers had established links with other organisations to assist them in supporting the young people they were working with. The organisations identified by interviewees included:

- Careers Scotland
- FE colleges
- Training providers
- Youth work
- Voluntary organisations
- Police service
- Youth Justice
- Health agencies
- Children's services within the LA
- Employers.

4.63 Providers identified three main reasons for establishing these links, as follows:

- **To help with the delivery of provision** – four providers reported that they had linked with other organisations, such as FE colleges and training providers, to assist with the delivery of projects to young people, as they were able to draw on their expertise or facilities
- **To provide additional support to young people** – given the complex support needs of some young people in the “at risk” group, a number of providers emphasised the importance of participants receiving adequate and continuous support, to help them with issues that might act as barriers to their learning. Three providers reported that they linked with other organisations, including Careers Scotland, social work and housing services, in order to ensure that young people received support both within and outside the projects
- **To help with the recruitment of young people onto projects** – three providers indicated that they received referrals from organisations such as Youth Justice and Children's Services.

4.64 Although providers were involved in some inter-agency working, many interviewees reported that they would like to expand their links with other organisations, and in particular, to establish further links with local employers. A number of providers also identified the need for a more “joined-up” approach to provision for the “at risk” group, and better sharing of information about the young people. Although in two LAs, there was reported to be a multi-agency approach to working with these young people, this did not appear to be widespread across the other LAs visited (as discussed in Chapter 3). One member of provider staff, for example, explained:

“There is no multi-agency approach as yet. In some cases, it is not due to lack of intention, but just due to bad coordination and communication”.

4.65 In some LAs, schools were working in clusters to implement DtS. In these areas, close liaison between schools had usually taken place and, in some cases, operating as a cluster had prompted schools to work together on linked projects. Some secondary schools had made specific efforts to link with their feeder primary schools to aid the transition from P7 to S1. However, the NFER research team did not find any evidence of schools working together in clusters to develop provision specifically aimed at pupils in the “at risk” group, although, in some cases, individual schools were accessing the same provider. Interviews with LA staff in other areas showed though that some such provision had been targeted at the transition between primary and secondary schools, although no such projects were visited as part of this study.

Support from the Local Authority

4.66 Providers were asked about the support they had received from their LA in helping them run their projects, and most of the provider staff interviewed reported that they had received financial support from the LA, and were in regular communication with personnel at the LA, often the DtS co-ordinator.

4.67 Interviewees were generally satisfied with the level of support they received from their LA, although three members of staff, from three different LAs, reported that they would like more recognition and appreciation from their LA, and further promotion of their work. One staff member, who was employed by the LA, also reported that she would like more contact with the LA and better support and supervision:

“There is a difference between support and supervision. I don’t feel I have had adequate supervision. I supervise staff and I would like to have supervision too, so that I have somewhere to offload and to explore my own personal development”.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Challenges in working with young people in the “at risk” group

4.68 In general, providers did not perceive there to be many challenges in working with young people in the “at risk” group. Although a few providers indicated that the **behaviour** of some of the young people could, at times, be difficult to manage, others stressed that *“the young people themselves aren’t the issue”*. Rather, these providers argued that the main challenges they encounter are associated with setting up and running provision for these young people (such challenges are discussed in detail below).

4.69 Where provider staff did identify challenges in working with the young people, these most commonly related to **outside influences** that might negatively affect the young people and interfere with the work providers were doing. These included young people’s home backgrounds and personal circumstances, as illustrated by the following comment:

“We need to maintain the engagement level of young people, but what they have been doing the night before can affect how they behave the next day”.

This was reinforced by another member of staff who felt that they were competing with other influences on the young people:

“You spend a limited amount of time with them in relation to everything else and you hope that the work you are doing gets through to them”.

4.70 A few providers found it challenging to overcome participants’ low self-esteem, while others noted the challenge of overcoming young people’s negative views of education and adults. One project manager, for instance, made the following comment:

“If you deliver it in a normal class, you’ve immediately got the barrier that they’ll behave as if they were in a normal class and you’re their teacher”

Challenges in running provision for young people in the “at risk” group

4.71 Providers identified a range of challenges that they had encountered in setting up and running provision for young people in the “at risk” group. Most commonly, these related to the difficulties providers faced in securing adequate **funding** to deliver appropriate provision for the young people. Related to this, providers complained about the **lack of facilities and resources** they had, often due to a lack of funding, and the constraints this placed on what provision they were able to offer young people. One member of staff, for instance, who was working with young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, expressed regret that they were not able to offer the young people more practical learning experiences:

“We would like to try and be able to offer the technical subjects, but we don’t have the equipment and the resources. We are not very well resourced; we just have two rooms and no proper equipment”.

4.72 Many of the providers also highlighted that one of the main challenges they encountered related to **gaining credibility** with other organisations, due to the negative perceptions that some other practitioners, particularly school teachers, had of their provision. The manager at one alternative curriculum project, for example, explained:

“Because we’re not dressed like them they don’t treat us like fellow professionals, which leads to obvious tensions...many of them feel that education is about 28 young people in a classroom and not this kind of extra support...some of them also see it as rewarding bad behaviour and that pupils are acting up to be put on this programme”.

4.73 Other challenges mentioned by provider staff included finding appropriate staff, ensuring that staff were adequately trained and supported in their work with young people in the “at risk” group, and having sufficient time to deal with the administrative aspects of running a project.

Recommendations

4.74 Based on their own experiences, provider staff were asked to identify good practice recommendations that they would give to other providers with regard to developing and delivering provision for young people in the “at risk” group. Interviewees were specifically asked for recommendations relating to identifying the target group, providing relevant activities, monitoring progress and achieving and sustaining outcomes for young people.

4.75 With regard to **identifying and engaging the target group**, interviewees made several recommendations. These included:

- Establishing clear criteria for the types of young people at which provision is aimed
- Not relying too heavily on information on young people provided by other organisations – *“don’t judge them based on referral information...make your own assessments”*
- Ensuring that providers have sufficient information on the support needs that young people might have – *“we need to be informed in terms of their needs and any problems that we might need to be aware of”*
- Ensuring that young people are given a choice to participate in the provision – *“ensure that it is something the young people want to do...if they don’t it is more trouble than it is worth”*.

4.76 Providers were able to identify a wide range of recommendations relating to the **provision of appropriate activities** for young people in the “at risk” group, both in terms of the content and delivery of activities. The most common suggestions included:

- Offering a wide range of activities that young people can choose from
- Offering a flexible approach to activities, which can be changed to fit individual’s needs
- Consulting young people about the activities, and involving them in decision-making as much as possible – *“I try to get them to buy into the programme by asking them what they want to do...[it] keeps them focused”*
- Ensuring that activities are appropriate for young people’s abilities and interests – *“it is important to make it achievable so that you are not setting the young people up to fail”*
- Ensuring that staff are adequately trained to deliver activities to the target group, and ensuring that staff are appropriately supported.

4.77 Providers did not provide many recommendations for **monitoring the progress of young people**, apart from the need to build in time for monitoring and evaluation, to ensure that there is continuous monitoring of young people throughout their involvement in the project, and to give young people regular, one-to-one feedback on their progress.

4.78 As reported in paragraphs 4.46 to 4.51, interviewees identified a range of factors that they felt could lead to **successful outcomes** for young people, including giving young people the opportunity to learn in a different environment, fostering positive relationships between participants and staff, and providing one-to-one support. These factors were echoed in the recommendations that interviewees made regarding the achievement of successful outcomes. Other recommendations included:

- Making the young people the focus of the provision – *“make it clear to the young people that the programme is about them and that they deserve to have something that addresses*

their needs; it starts with when they come and we say to them, “this is about you; you’ve got the right to get something out of school”, rather than, “this is a privilege””

- Making engagement, rather than achievement, the focus of the provision and value the development of soft skills in young people – *“don’t be too strict and put young people under pressure to achieve...just concentrate on engaging them”*
- Adopting a more informal, anti-discipline approach – *“I had to be clear in my mind at the outset that, because of their backgrounds, I would be anti-discipline...instead, we discussed the ground rules between us about what would be acceptable and unacceptable behaviour....too many people tell them what to do and how to behave”*.

4.79 Only a minority of providers gave good practice recommendations regarding **sustaining successful outcomes**, and in fact, a number of interviewees felt that this was a significant challenge of their work. However, where comments were given, provider staff identified the need to follow up activities with young people over time, and to ensure a “joined-up”, multi-disciplinary approach to supporting young people in the “at risk” group, to ensure that outcomes are sustained even after they have left the projects.

Improvements for the future

4.80 When asked if there were any ways in which the project they were involved in could be improved, 19 of the 24 young people interviewed stated that there were not, and that *“it is good as it is”*. Two young people mentioned additional activities that they would like to take part in at the provider, while the same number stated that they would like to be given more choice about the activities offered to them, as illustrated by the following comment from a female pupil attending an FE college: *“They should give us more choice and let us decide what we want to do”*. A further two pupils reported that they would like to spend more time at their particular provider.

4.81 It is interesting to note that some providers reported that they were planning to respond to some of the issues mentioned by young people. One provider, for example, was planning to offer participants more choice and flexibility in the activities they provided. Another intended to extend the length of time that young people were on their project, as they felt that the young people would benefit from more sustained support.

4.82 On the whole, providers did not anticipate any major changes to their provision, but many planned to refine their practices. In addition to those mentioned in the previous paragraph, the changes identified by interviewees included:

- Increasing links with local employers
- Offering a wider range of activities
- Expanding their provision to include more schools/ young people
- Further promotion of their work.

MAIN FINDINGS

4.83 This chapter presented the findings from the interviews with provider staff and with young people participating in the projects. The key findings emerging from this data were as follows:

- Although awareness of the details of the DtS strategy was relatively low among provider staff, most thought that DtS had impacted directly on their provision for the “at risk” group
- About half of the projects were specifically targeted and designed for young people in the “at risk” group. The remaining projects were not intended to be solely targeted at these young people, although it was perceived that these particular pupils would benefit most from the provision. Young people were generally recruited onto projects through schools
- The case-study providers were offering a range of types of provision, including alternative curriculum projects, vocational education programmes and pupil support programmes
- A range of outcomes for young people were identified by both the provider staff and the participants interviewed, including the achievement of qualifications, personal development, the development of skills and impacts on future choices
- Factors, such as learning in a different environment, receiving one-to-one support and having the opportunity to build positive relationships with adults were perceived to facilitate successful outcomes for young people. The home backgrounds and personal circumstances of young people were identified as the main barriers to the achievement of successful outcomes
- Although all of the providers implemented some form of individual-level monitoring of participants’ attendance and behaviour, formal evaluation and review of their provision were less common
- Most of the providers had established links with other organisations, most commonly to help with the delivery of their provision, to provide additional support to young people, and to help with the recruitment of participants
- Providers were generally satisfied with the support they received from their LA, although a few interviewees reported that they would like more recognition, and further promotion of their work
- Providers identified a range of challenges that they had encountered in setting up and running provision for young people in the “at risk” group. These included difficulties securing adequate funding, a lack of facilities and resources and difficulties gaining credibility with other organisations.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS AND KEY MESSAGES

5.1 This chapter presents the main conclusions of this study and presents key considerations arising from the research related to the future development of policy aimed at the “at risk” group.

Needs of the “at risk” group

5.2 The study has shown that the “at risk” group is not homogeneous and that it includes young people with a variety of, and at times complex, support needs which have to be addressed in different ways. This means that provision needs to be both flexible and diverse. It also cannot rely on one type of provider alone, but should involve a variety of organisations and agencies which have the skills and expertise to address young people’s needs in a professional way. Schools, in conjunction – where appropriate – with other providers and agencies should work closely together to provide a continuous and consistent service to this vulnerable group of young people. Further research may be required to explore the approaches adopted and provision made by other organisations and agencies such as Careers Scotland for the “at risk” group.

LA strategic issues

5.3 The study set out to examine the impact DtS had had on engendering activities and projects aimed at young people at risk of becoming NEET. It has shown that while DtS had (at the time of the study, February – October 2005) enabled some authorities to expand, and in some cases initiate new, provision, progress had been varied and not uniform across LAs. Not all authorities had established DtS targets for reducing the number of young people who become NEET or implemented DtS specific provision aimed at this group. The lack of focus on addressing the NEET issue through DtS was hardly surprising, given the fact that the recommendations of the Review of Education for Work and Enterprise (Scottish Executive, 2002) did not contain any specific targets relating to those at risk of becoming NEET.

5.4 The main reasons given for the lack of focus on developing provision aimed at the “at risk” group differed across LAs. Some authorities were still at an early DtS implementation stage and had focused most of their resources on building up strategic and operational structures. There was evidence that some of these LAs were planning to put more emphasis on addressing the needs of young people at risk of becoming NEET in subsequent years. In other areas, there was a view that DtS activities should be offered to all pupils and not just to the disaffected ones. However, some of these authorities contended that even though not targeted at them, many of the DtS-funded activities or curricular changes were particularly suitable or beneficial for the “at risk” group. Furthermore, most LAs believed that DtS complemented and supported other existing strategies and initiatives aimed at the target group, including, for example, the Activate programme⁵ and the flexible curriculum⁶.

⁵ This programme run by Careers Scotland is designed to provide extra support in the final three months of school and is aimed at young people who are likely to face most difficulties in moving into a job, college or training place.

⁶ see Scottish Executive (2001c)

5.5 Evidence from the case study visits and the LA staff interviews showed that not all authorities had implemented ‘joined up’ approaches to addressing the needs of those at risk of becoming NEET. In particular, not all authorities appeared to have established clear cross-departmental strategies targeted at the “at risk” group. Furthermore, in some LAs there seemed to be a lack of coordination of activities and communication between those with responsibility for pre-16 and post-16 provision.

Best practice at an operational level

5.6 This study has confirmed many of the findings of previous research relating to good practice in the delivery of projects and activities for young people at risk of becoming NEET. In particular, it has shown that the key factors enabling disaffected learners to become re-engaged and achieve successful outcomes include:

- Offering them activities which are meaningful and relevant to them and which they can participate in on a voluntary basis
- Delivering learning in an alternative environment, which is not like school
- Providing one-to-one support to young people, which is tailored to their individual needs and circumstances
- Employing project staff who have the skills and qualities to develop meaningful and supportive relationships with the young people, many of whom have negative previous experiences of adults and people in authority
- Establishing strong links with schools and other agencies to support young people’s transition beyond their involvement in the project or activities.

Considerations for the Scottish Executive

5.7 The Scottish Executive may want to consider the extent to which all LAs should be required to develop DtS actions to implement specific provision – whether in a mainstream or alternative setting – aimed at young people at risk of becoming NEET. It may also consider putting in place additional support structures for those LAs with less experience or expertise in this area.

5.8 The Scottish Executive may need to consider working with LAs to establish more joined up approaches and strategies for monitoring and addressing the needs of the “at risk” group before and after leaving school. As part of this, it should also encourage LAs to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are made aware of the DtS strategy and how it can be used to develop and expand provision for those at risk of becoming NEET.

5.9 The Scottish Executive needs to consider how the best practice approaches identified by the research relating to discrete projects or activities can be embedded into mainstream provision and practice.

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APPENDIX 1 LIST OF INTERVIEW TOPICS

This appendix lists the topics covered across the interviews conducted as part of this study, including:

- LA Director of Education
- LA staff with responsibility for overseeing and developing strategies relevant to the “at risk” group
- Provider staff
- Young people (project participants).

LA DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Background

- Interviewee name/local authority
- Roles and responsibilities
- Strategic objectives and key priorities with regard to education in the LA
- Extent to which disaffection/NEET is seen an issue in the LA.

Aims and objectives of the DtS strategy

- Perceived aims of the DtS strategy
- Extent to which DtS strategy reflects local authorities’ objectives
- Relevance to other education/training/careers education and guidance initiatives in Scotland.

Focus on NEET – role of DtS

- Development of DtS implementation plan
- Importance of DtS to address issue of NEET in local authority
- Strategies developed as part of DtS aimed at target group
- Other strategies adopted by local authority aimed at target group
- Other agencies involved in providing support to target group
- Responsibility for monitoring issues of disaffection, exclusion and non-participation in local authority.

Impact of DtS

- Perceived impact of DtS on local authorities
- Perceived impact on schools
- Perceived impact on reducing the number of disaffected/disengaged pupils.

LOCAL AUTHORITY STAFF

Background

- Interviewee name/ local authority
- Roles and responsibilities in relation to managing, organising and monitoring activities aimed at young people at risk of becoming NEET
- Extent to which disaffection/NEET is an issue in the local authority
- Strategies adopted by local authority aimed at target group
- Agencies involved in providing support to target group.

Views on DtS strategy

- Awareness of aims and objectives of DtS strategy
- Extent to which DtS is targeted at “at risk” group
- Importance of DtS to address issue of NEET in local authority
- Impact of DtS on provision of services aimed at “at risk” group
- Examples of innovatory practices initiated as a result of DtS by schools or providers
- Involvement in monitoring and evaluating impact of DtS on “at risk” group.

Lessons learned

- Lessons learnt from coordinating services to young people at risk of becoming NEET
- Good practice recommendations to other authorities in relation to:
 - Identifying the target group
 - Providing relevant activities
 - Monitoring progress
 - Achieving successful outcomes
 - Sustaining positive outcomes.

PROVIDER STAFF

Background

- Interviewee name and organisation
- Local authority
- Role and responsibilities
- Experience of working with the client group
- Awareness of aims and objective of DtS strategy.

Project details

- Outline of the project including main focus/aim/objectives, delivery model/style, and activities provided
- Characteristics of young people, including needs, age, gender, etc.
- How young people are recruited onto the project.

Joining the project

- Induction procedures and processes
- Assessment of young people's learning, development and support needs
- Extent to which young people are consulted about what they want to do whilst they are on the project.

Views on provision

- Project activities liked most/least
- How young people are made to feel ownership of project/activities
- Responsiveness to young people's views.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

- Approach adopted to monitor young people's participation and progress on the project
- Approach adopted to evaluate progress and outcomes
- Project reviews.

Outcomes

- Expected outcomes
- Main factors which enable successful outcomes to be achieved
- Barriers to achieving successful outcomes.

Links with other organisations

- Extent and use of links with schools, Careers Scotland, Youth Service, Social Services, local authorities, employers
- Other links wanted.

Local authority support

- Views on range and adequacy of support received from local authority in helping to run project
- Further advice and support required.

Challenges and lessons learned

- Main challenges in working with disengaged/disaffected young people
- Main challenges in setting up and running projects aimed at "at risk" group
- Good practice recommendations for other providers with regard to:
 - Identifying the target group
 - Providing relevant activities
 - Monitoring progress
 - Achieving successful outcomes
 - Sustaining positive outcomes.

YOUNG PEOPLE (PROJECT PARTICIPANTS)

Background

- Name and age of young person:
- Name of provider young person attending
- Local authority area
- Details of activities/learning programme involved in
- Extent to which they were given a choice whether they wanted to participate or not.

Views on activities/learning programme

- Project activities liked most/least
- Suggested improvements.

Impact and future steps

- Impact of participating in activities/learning programme on personal development, own attitudes/behaviour, development of interests/skills, future progression
- Working towards or achievement of any certificates or qualifications
- What would you be doing if you were not coming here?
- Future plans when leaving project/leaving school and extent to which project/activity has impacted on these.

Final questions

- Views on school in general and in comparison with project activities/learning programme
- Would you recommend this activity/learning programme to other young people?

ISSN 0950 2254
ISBN 0 7559 6076 9

www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

Astron B47018 5/06

ISBN 0-7559-6076-9



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