

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF THE LEARNING GATEWAY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Learning Gateway, which forms a vital component of the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) Connexions strategy, provides support and learning for young people aged 16–18 who are not participating in education, training or employment. Introduced in September 1999, it aims to meet the needs of these young people by providing individually-tailored support. It comprises a front end during which needs are assessed, the continuing support of a Personal Adviser (PA), followed by progression to Life Skills courses or mainstream learning and employment options. The DfEE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to undertake a study of young people's experiences of the Learning Gateway.

1.2 Aims and Methods

The main aim of the study was to inform the future development of the Connexions strategy. The objectives were to:

- ♦ investigate how the Learning Gateway is being received by young people and identify the factors which determine and affect their participation and outcomes;
- ♦ develop an understanding of young people's expectations of the Learning Gateway, and explore whether or not these were realised; and
- ♦ gain young people's views at various stages of the Learning Gateway and their experiences of moving through it.

The study used qualitative methods to get under the surface of young people's experiences and achieve an in-depth, detailed exploration of their views. It was carried out between October 2000 and March 2001 in eight careers service areas. Interviews and/or group discussions were undertaken with 152 young people aged 16–18 at different stages of the Learning Gateway: on the front end, on Life Skills, having rejoined and having left the Learning Gateway. All the data were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. In addition, eight senior careers service managers and 17 PAs were interviewed to gather information on the organisation and delivery of the Learning Gateway.

It should be noted that, as young people make use of the Learning Gateway in a fluid and transient way, no detailed profile of the whole client group exists. Consequently, it is not possible to assess with any precision the

representativeness of the client sample in this study. However, the views of a wide range of young people who had a variety of experiences of the Learning Gateway across the country are represented.

2. KEY FINDINGS

This summary presents the key research findings from the study.

2.1 Young People on the Learning Gateway

The young people's backgrounds and lifestyles revealed that many faced major challenges linked to multiple disadvantage. These included dealing with accommodation problems and coping with poverty. Some young people were living in unstable or complicated family environments, or had been told to leave home, which made it difficult for them to find training or employment. Not surprisingly, some reported that they felt under stress.

Low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem were common. This sometimes originated in bullying, or was related to shyness and finding difficulty in getting along with people. Whilst some had poor motivation and time-keeping, others displayed anger and frustration or were suspicious of those in positions of authority. Some young people had serious personal problems related to a history of offending, substance misuse, and pregnancy and parenthood.

What characterised most young people's career histories was the sporadic nature of their lives since leaving school. Many had not done much before joining the Learning Gateway, and those who had worked, had done so in an unplanned and intermittent way. Some had left school early owing to exclusion, specific difficulties that had resulted in home tuition, or absenteeism.

Young people's priorities were extremely variable, focusing on personal aspects of their lives in addition to their education, training and employment interests. Many did not have clear priorities and were unable to think through, or articulate, what they wanted to get out of life. A few had unrealistic expectations.

2.2 Joining the Learning Gateway

Young people's conception of the Learning Gateway was varied. Whilst a minority understood it as an overall programme, some did not recognise the term at all, and others identified it with individual courses or their PAs. The most common way in which they had become involved in the Gateway was by dropping in at a local careers centre to look for jobs. Other routes included referrals from schools, school careers advisers, social workers, care homes or Job Centres, and through friends.

The main motives for joining the Gateway ranged from a need to get some money, find a job, gain qualifications, change their lifestyle, or as a response

to family pressure. Young people were vague and uncertain about information received, which only some said provided details of the financial implications of being on the Gateway or course content. Although many found it difficult to articulate their expectations of the Gateway, some said that they wanted to get a job or career or wanted to develop skills and gain qualifications.

2.3 Experiences of the Learning Gateway

Experiences of the front end: whilst not all young people had been involved in the front end for a significant period of time (over four months), those who had been involved were often grappling with a range of complex personal problems. They had two main experiences of the front end:

- ♦ working with a PA to sort out various social, financial and personal problems, and starting to think about training and employment options; and
- ♦ taking part in short training courses designed to develop certain skills that might prepare them for Life Skills training or job search, alongside meetings with a PA.

Interaction with a PA was critical. Positive experiences were associated with having developed a trusting relationship with someone they could talk to, who would listen to them, and who would do their best to help sort out their problems. Practical support in making job applications and job-search strategies was another valued aspect of front end provision. The main barriers to young people moving off the front end were dealing with complex personal issues followed by a lack of motivation, unsuitable Life Skills provision, and a lack of relevant jobs or training provision.

Experiences of Life Skills: young people's views on the usefulness of Life Skills varied. Life Skills programmes which were individually tailored to meet the needs and interests of the young people, and which included work placements or Outward Bound activities, were particularly appreciated. Courses were also welcomed which provided training in practical tasks which led to certification, help with finding placements and with developing job-search skills. Young people appreciated courses which were conducted in a friendly, adult working environment. Life Skills programmes that focused on teamwork and confidence-building games received a more mixed reaction, whilst basic skills tuition and written work were often regarded as the negative aspects of Life Skills. Young people often found such work boring or not challenging enough, or in a few cases, they considered that Life Skills was delivered at too low a level. Overall, they preferred doing practical tasks.

Leaving the Gateway: the majority of leavers in the study had moved on to mainstream education or training options. In most cases, they were working towards NVQ level 2 or a GNVQ Intermediate. The other destinations were jobs with or without training and, for a minority, unemployment. Most leavers were positive about their current education, training or employment, though some found their new environments challenging. Where leavers had not got

the option they wanted, they intended to stay until they could find something better. Many leavers kept in touch with their PA on an informal basis.

Most young people had moved from the front end or Life Skills into their mainstream options without a break in time. Where this was not the case, the reasons were related to difficulties in finding suitable placements and to young people needing more intensive personal and social support or basic skills development before they were in a position to progress. To some extent, this reflects the characteristics and challenges presented by this client group.

Rejoining the Gateway: although officially some young people had left and rejoined the Gateway, their recollection of this was uncertain and indeed the number of times that they had left and rejoined was often unclear. Furthermore, they seemed confused which of the activities they had been engaged in were actually part of the Gateway. Various reasons were given for rejoining the Gateway by young people who had left but not yet progressed to mainstream options. Some saw coming into the careers centre and meeting with their PA as something to do. Some were hoping to progress to Life Skills, either for the first time, or to a different Life Skills provider. Some wanted to move into a mainstream education, training or employment option, for the first or second time.

Other issues: the main findings on other aspects of the Learning Gateway were as follows:

In general, clients found their PAs to be supportive and helpful. PAs provided practical help with finding courses and jobs, and finding accommodation, and with accessing benefits.

- ♦ Young people were often not familiar with the name 'Individual Development Plan'. Some had not found the process useful and suggested that its completion was more for the benefit of the careers service than the individual. Others were indifferent to the experience. For some, the IDP was a 'live' document which was used to support their progress through the Gateway.
- ♦ Whilst some young people said that they had been given opportunities to provide feedback on their experiences of the Gateway and had done so, others had chosen not to. Some young people who had not been consulted would have liked the opportunity but others were not unduly concerned. Where consultation had taken place it was through a discussion or questionnaire. Participants rarely knew what or whether anything had happened as a result.

Clients made several suggestions for developing the Gateway. These included providing more activities, meeting individual needs better by tailoring provision, and offering more money. Most said that they would recommend the Gateway to others and some had already done this.

2.4 Outcomes of Being on the Learning Gateway

Personal development: the Gateway helped young people to develop a more positive attitude to life and their future, and to deal with stress and anger more effectively. Young people felt that other gains included enhanced self-confidence, improved communication and social skills, increased motivation to organise their lives more productively, and raised aspirations.

Learning and skills development: whilst a few young people indicated that their numeracy and literacy had improved, others were disappointed that the Gateway had not helped to improve their basic skills. Some had enhanced their career-related skills such as job search, CV preparation and interview techniques. Others had developed employment-related skills such as Information Technology (IT) and working in teams in addition to more specific occupational skills.

Progression: clients' progression to training and employment was not necessarily linear as some sampled opportunities and returned to their PA who helped them find more suitable options. Most of the leavers interviewed moved on to training or jobs with training, and many acknowledged the support received through the Gateway in helping them to progress. The minority who remained unemployed thought that the Gateway could do more to help them.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The main implications of the research findings for policy and practice are outlined below.

- ♦ **Promotion:** the bonus payments should be part of the Learning Gateway promotional strategy as they act as an incentive and encourage some young people to join who might otherwise miss out on the positive outcomes that some clients experience.
- ♦ **Professional development:** PAs need to have or develop a range of skills and strategies to provide an effective service for Gateway clients who have complex needs and who are struggling with serious personal and social problems. They also require continuing support from colleagues and managers to help them fulfil their particularly challenging roles.
- ♦ **Managing access to PAs:** it is important that access is managed in such a way that young people gain the support they want, for example leavers in all areas still liked to meet occasionally with their PA, without overstressing PAs who are attempting to meet the needs of a very demanding client group.
- ♦ **IDPs:** it is necessary to review how IDPs are being used and the extent to which they are primarily being used for the benefit of clients.
- ♦ **Life Skills:** it is important to examine how far Life Skills provision is meeting the needs of all clients who use it and, if their needs are not being

met, to seek more innovative and flexible provision. There may be a need for provision that is more bespoke or tailored to the needs of the individual.

- ♦ **Placements:** it is advisable that organisations providing training and employment placements are given a thorough briefing on the characteristics of Gateway clients, including their needs and the challenges they are likely to present, so that they can better meet their requirements.
- ♦ **Consultation:** it is important to find the most effective and efficient way of gaining feedback from clients and deciding how best to use such information for the future development of the Learning Gateway.
- ♦ **Outcomes:** it is worthwhile reviewing how the ‘softer’ and less formal outcomes from the Gateway can be given recognition in order to reflect the efforts made by both young people and staff and the progress achieved.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research

The Learning Gateway, which forms a vital component of the Department for Education and Employment's Connexions strategy, provides support and learning opportunities for young people aged 16–18 who are not involved in education, training or employment.

The Social Exclusion Unit¹ has identified that, at any one time, some 161,000 16- to 18-year-olds, or nine per cent of the age group, are not participating in education, training or work. It reported that these young people often have multiple problems, including low self-confidence and self-esteem, and low levels of educational achievement and basic skills. Stone *et al.* (2000)² found that the main causes of disaffection and disengagement amongst young people were personality and behavioural difficulties, lack of confidence, living in a dysfunctional family or experience of a traumatic event.

Introduced in September 1999, the Learning Gateway aims to meet the needs of these young people by providing individually tailored support. It comprises a front end during which young people's needs are assessed and they are offered help and guidance, the continuing support of a Personal Adviser (PA), followed by progression to Life Skills courses or mainstream learning and employment options. A multi-agency approach is taken to identifying clients and providing an appropriate range of opportunities and activities – partnership working includes the careers service, training providers and colleges, and other agencies such as the Youth Service, Youth Offending Teams and voluntary organisations.

The DfEE commissioned a qualitative study to enhance understanding of the extent to which the Learning Gateway is meeting the needs of young people by exploring their experiences. This report presents the findings of the research undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) between October 2000 and March 2001.

¹ GREAT BRITAIN. PARLIAMENT. HOUSE OF COMMONS (1999). *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16–18 Year Olds not in Education, Employment or Training. Report by the Social Exclusion Unit* (Cm.4405). London: The Stationery Office.

² STONE, V., COTTON, D. and THOMAS, A. (2000). *Mapping Troubled Lives: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training* (DfEE Research Report 181). London: DfEE.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study was to help to promote good practice in the delivery of the Learning Gateway, and to make recommendations for the future development of the Connexions strategy by drawing out the implications for policy and practice from the research findings.

The research objectives were to:

- ♦ investigate how the Learning Gateway is being received by young people and identify factors which determine and affect their participation and the outcomes;
- ♦ develop an understanding of young people's expectations of the Learning Gateway, and explore whether or not these were realised; and
- ♦ gain young people's views at various stages of the Learning Gateway and their experience of moving through it.

1.3 Methodology

The research undertaken was based on a qualitative methodology in order to get under the surface of young people's experience and achieve an in-depth, detailed exploration of their views. In consultation with the project steering group, four Government Offices were selected as case-study areas on the basis of ensuring a good geographical spread, a mix of urban and rural labour markets, and the inclusion of some areas with careers services which are known to exhibit good practice and/or which were Connexions pilot areas.

Interviews were carried out with senior managers and PAs in two careers services in each case-study area: a total of eight senior managers and 17 PAs. These interviews were used to gather background information on the organisation and delivery of the Learning Gateway and to gain insights into the characteristics of the client groups. In addition, ways of accessing young people for the study were discussed with, and arranged through, careers service staff.

In-depth, qualitative interviews and/or group discussions were carried out with 152 young people (92 males, 60 females) who had experience of the Learning Gateway as follows:

- ♦ 27 who had been on the front end of the Gateway for a significant period of time;
- ♦ 65 who were on Life Skills;
- ♦ 25 who had rejoined the Gateway;
- ♦ 35 who had left the Gateway.

The sample chosen was not fully representative of all the young people on the Learning Gateway, although efforts were made to gain the views of a large group of individuals at various stages of the Learning Gateway and in different geographical locations across the North, Midlands and South of England.

All of the young people agreed to the interviews and group discussions being audio taped. The tapes were transcribed and used for analysis.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The structure of the report is as follows:

- ◆ Chapter 2 presents information on the backgrounds, characteristics and career histories of the young people who participated in the study.
- ◆ Chapter 3 focuses on young people's expectations of, and reasons for, joining the Learning Gateway.
- ◆ Chapter 4 explores the experiences of young people at the four different vantage points in relation to the Learning Gateway, including their views on the support provided by PAs.
- ◆ Chapter 5 examines the outcomes of the Learning Gateway in terms of clients' personal development and the impact on their education, training and skills and on their future progression.
- ◆ The final chapter presents the key findings from the research and draws out the implications for policy and practice.



2. YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE LEARNING GATEWAY

This chapter focuses on the nature of the Learning Gateway client group in terms of their:

- ◆ backgrounds and lifestyles – housing situations, financial circumstances and family environments;
- ◆ individual characteristics – low levels of confidence and self-esteem, basic skills needs, poor motivation and time-keeping, anger, frustration and problems dealing with authority;
- ◆ personal problems – a history of offending, substance misuse, pregnancy and parenthood;
- ◆ career histories – early school leaving and sporadic employment;
- ◆ priorities – personal, and education, employment and training-related.

The chapter concludes by stressing the importance of understanding the varied and complex personal experiences and priorities of Learning Gateway clients. In turn, this places their experiences of the Learning Gateway, and the outcomes of their involvement, in context.

2.1 Backgrounds and Lifestyles

It should be stressed that the young people were not asked direct or detailed questions about their backgrounds, characteristics and lifestyles, because of the anticipated sensitivity of such questioning. However, many insights into the issues that affected them were gained throughout the course of each in-depth interview. Such issues were raised to differing extents according to the willingness of the young people to ‘open up’ to interviewers. Whilst some were reticent, despite extensive probing, of giving more than short responses to interviewers’ questions, others clearly saw the interviews as an opportunity to discuss a range of personal issues. The responses gained during interviews were so variable, that it would be impossible to quantify or ‘rank’ the points raised below in terms of which were the most, or least, significant.

There were some common features to nearly all the young people’s backgrounds that had influenced their decisions to become involved in the Learning Gateway. These included having struggled with, or not enjoyed, school for a variety of reasons and having reached the age of 16 or 17 with no, or very few, qualifications. ‘*I left school quite early, so I didn’t have any qualifications*’ was a typical comment. The young people hence often found themselves in a position where they were unable to get jobs. Many claimed to have been uncertain at this point about what to do with their lives, or how to move on. In addition, individual interviewees mentioned a range of lifestyle factors that had an additional impact upon their views on life and their priorities.

2.1.1 Housing situations

A large number of the interviewees were facing quite severe problems in terms of finding adequate housing for themselves. Some were without permanent accommodation – living in hostels, sleeping rough or sleeping on friends' or relatives' sofas. A number said that they had been '*kicked out*' of home, and were struggling to find somewhere to live: '*I was 15. Mum threw me out and I had nowhere to live. I was on my own basically.*' Others were care leavers: '*I've been in a children's home, been back to my Dad's, got my own flat, been back into a children's home and that's it.*'

Not surprisingly, finding somewhere secure to live was the major priority for these young people – way ahead of their interest in obtaining learning or employment opportunities. As one young woman said in relation to a question on the sorts of activities that she had been involved in since embarking on the Learning Gateway: '*I haven't done any activities or anything like that. I'm just trying to concentrate on housing.*' Another young man, who was homeless and living in the woods, had reached a point of personal crisis. His situation appeared to be affecting his mental health:

My Mum kicked me out 'cos I weren't trying to get a job. So I ended up living in the woods for a while. I thought it was all right living outside, but then it started getting cold and that and I was starving...You can't keep your head warm outside. It's freezing. So you end up feeling like a bit brain damaged. It's like you start to lose all your connections with people. When I was living in the woods I started cracking up a bit, like hearing squirrels, being in my own little world.

He felt that no one in an official capacity, other than his PA, was attempting to help him secure accommodation. He commented that officials at the housing department were '*degrading*' and would not listen to his case. In contrast, his PA had been able to act as an advocate on his behalf: '*He's like a proper businessman and he put his foot down and that.*' This young man's sole reason for having joined the Learning Gateway was to gain support in securing accommodation.

2.1.2 Financial circumstances

Without saying overtly that they, or their families, were living in poverty, interviewees made numerous references to not having enough money to live on, in terms of affording basic things such as food and clothes, and paying bills. Money was an extremely significant issue for many of the young people, to the extent that some had turned down training options because the allowances they would have received were believed to preclude their families from claiming various benefits. As one young woman stated:

I was going to go on one Learning Gateway where I was paid, which was £40 a week. Unfortunately, it would have affected my Mum's benefits at the time, and I told my Mum I wasn't going to cut her throat to save mine, so I didn't go.

Another had turned down the opportunity of attending an interview, because he felt that he could not afford to dress appropriately for it:

I was meant to have started a college in [name of town], but they said to me that I had to wear a shirt, trousers and shoes and that, and I don't have the money to do it, so I couldn't go to the interview. So it's their fault really.

Many young people, and their families, seemed to have little spare money – with many reporting that their families were receiving benefits. This goes a long way to explaining the extent to which the young people prioritised securing jobs and earning money in the short term as goals for their involvement in the Learning Gateway. This point is discussed in more detail in Section 2.5 below.

2.1.3 Family environments

For other young people, unstable, or complicated, family environments were a feature of their day-to-day lives, which could overshadow the work that PAs were attempting to do to secure these young people employment or learning options. One young man was finding his family relationships so difficult, that he wanted to spend most of his time talking to his PA about these issues:

Like the problems I had with my family and other things. All the time I had problems with my family, 'cos me and my brother don't get along now. Me brother's arguing with Mum and Dad and everything...I didn't talk to my Mum and Dad for about three years.

Another young man confided: *'I had a lot of trouble with my Mum. She kicked me out, spread rumours about me and tried to get me killed – messed me up in the head.'* One young woman was living with an older boyfriend, who was said by her PA to be extremely possessive, domineering and jealous. Much of the interview with this young woman was taken up with her describing this relationship, and the impact that it had upon her ability to engage in the Learning Gateway. Some examples of her comments included:

Q. So you didn't do Life Skills?

A. *No, I would have gone, but my boyfriend wouldn't let me. I'm not allowed anywhere near lads. It's a long story.*

-
- Q. Have you tried out any jobs since you've been on the Learning Gateway?
- A. *No, because I want to be a receptionist and I haven't got any NVQs to get it.*
- Q. Have you got any ideas on how to go about getting the NVQs? Would you think about going to college?
- A. *I would, but I'm not allowed.*
- Q. How about doing a job that's got some training with it?
- A. *As long as I'm not with lads my boyfriend wouldn't mind...I never used to be like this, I used to be a right laugh. I was never upset until I met my boyfriend.*

2.2 Individual Characteristics

Over and above these various lifestyle issues, there was a whole range of factors that impacted upon interviewees at an individual level. Lifestyle issues and individual characteristics were not necessarily unrelated. Indeed, some of the issues discussed above seemed, in some instances, to have manifested themselves in the following ways.

2.2.1 Low levels of confidence and self-esteem

This appeared to be a major issue. Some young people stated explicitly, early on in interviews, that they lacked confidence or self-esteem. For example: *'By the time I'd left school, I had zero confidence left', 'I just get all nervous. I get a lump in my throat and I can't talk' and 'I'm not a big social person. I don't like meeting new people. I'm a bit shy'*. In addition, comments made by others about the Learning Gateway having boosted their confidence implied that they had initially lacked such confidence. For example: *'It has really helped build my confidence up' and 'I have a bit more confidence, because I had no confidence at all when I started'*. Others made more specific comments about their feelings of low self-esteem, which often stemmed from factors such as a history of having been bullied and finding it difficult to get along with other people. The following are just two of many similar examples:

When I was at school and at college I used to sit on my own because everybody used to pick on me. I didn't get along with any people. I used to sit and do projects on my own.

My confidence was knocked at school. I got verbal abuse and physical abuse as well. One lad decided to sprain my hand for me because I'm so big. I don't go out much. I don't have many friends. They all decided to talk about me behind my back because I'm big. They think it's good to call me names.

Issues such as these made some of the young people wary about becoming involved in Life Skills programmes or taking up training options, purely because of the group and teamwork aspects that they envisaged would be involved. Nevertheless, occasions where such young people had declined to take up such options were rare, and, as discussed in Chapter 5, the personal outcomes for them of taking up such options, were sometimes quite significant.

Leaver who gained in personal development

Louise left school with GCSEs but was not yet old enough to embark on her chosen career in the police force and *'didn't fancy'* going to college. She had been bullied at school, which had meant that her *'confidence had been affected'*. Having discussed her career options with her PA, she started on a Life Skills course which included a residential element.

Although she found it *'nerve-racking'* meeting new people, the team-building games and communication skills activities she participated in helped to make her *'feel a lot more confident'*. She thought that these were *'really good'* because *'before I went on to this, I never spoke much and I never expressed myself. If I was being picked on, I'd just stand there and let them do it, but now I'll give just as much back'*. Louise also made new friends during the residential, and was the *'agony aunt'* of the group. She *'felt really proud because they could come and talk to me. I was a total stranger but they wanted to talk to me, nobody else'*.

The combination of the Life Skills course, her peers' influence and support from her PA gave Louise a *'kick up the backside'*. She explained that *'my attitude's changed a lot to what it used to be before. For example, the bullying, that has changed. I don't take it at all now. My attitude to work before has changed now. I don't want to sit on my bum – I'm going to get out and I'm going to work.'* She is currently seeking a job with training in retail.

2.2.2 Basic skills needs

According to PAs, many Learning Gateway clients had basic skills needs, in particular, the need to improve their reading and writing. In some cases, this may have contributed to a self-reported lack of confidence or self-esteem. Some of the young people admitted that they struggled with basic skills, making comments such as: *'I'm a bit slow in reading and writing...I am no good at spelling either. I got behind a couple of years with stuff like that'*, *'I needed a lot of help with my maths'* and *'I've got learning disabilities'*. However, most did not make explicit references to finding reading and written work difficult, although many stressed that they did not *like* written work. Most clients said that they preferred the more *'practical'* aspects of their provision to those that involved Word Power or Number Power. In addition, some claimed to suffer from dyslexia. One young woman, who had specifically hoped that her Life Skills course would provide her with assistance in basic skills, was disappointed that this had not been the focus of the course:

I expected it to be like school, because half of us wanted to get our maths and English done. I'm classed as dyslexic, and I wanted the help...It was pathetic what I was on. We didn't do any work.

Another young woman stressed that the reasons for her not having achieved many qualifications to date were to do with her dyslexia. She hoped that the Learning Gateway was going to offer her the opportunity to gain qualifications that she had been unable to achieve at school:

I've started my NVQ level 2. That's quite important to me, because of me having low GCSEs – they're all passes but they're all low because I'm dyslexic.

2.2.3 Poor motivation and time-keeping

That poor motivation was a major issue was deduced both from the young people's self-reporting, and also from observations made by researchers during the course of interviews. Many interviewees had low, or no particular, aspirations or were apathetic about the various activities they had been involved in and the options open to them. The young people also seemed to find keeping appointments and punctuality particularly challenging. As one young man said: *'When I went into the careers office I had lots of interviews, but I never turned up because I was always out of bed late'* and one young woman said of her PA: *'Yeah, she does help actually, but what's the point of coming when you can stay in bed?'*

A young man who had been on the front end for a significant period of time said of his reasons for not holding down any of the jobs he had been offered: *'I just have a job for a few days and then I just give up. I'm lazy.'* Similarly, a young man who had rejoined the Gateway on a number of occasions admitted: *'I've been drifting in and out. It isn't the careers' fault really, it's mine you know, keeping up contact and that...Something like a drifter I've been. Out and about.'*

Another client, who had left the Learning Gateway and subsequently rejoined, said that he had decided to leave initially because he didn't want to be missing out on the fun of spending time with friends:

Yes, just hanging around with my mates having fun like. I'd think that I've got to go there [the careers centre], but it confused the matter, because if there was something good going on I didn't want to miss out on the fun – I'd want to be there. So I stopped coming down.

Motivating young people who, either had very poor personal time management skills, or very little interest in gaining jobs or training, was a major, and time-consuming issue for PAs.

2.2.4 Anger, frustration and problems dealing with authority

Almost in contrast to the apathy and poor motivation of some of the young people, there was a clear tendency amongst others to displays of temper, anger, frustration or suspicion of those in positions of authority. Such factors had, in many cases, been the cause of young people leaving or rejoining the

Learning Gateway – having been excluded from Life Skills programmes, or mainstream options. The young people for whom this was an issue were differentiated as follows:

- ◆ Those who tended to be quite frank about their problems – in many cases recognising that they had ‘anger-management’ needs.
- ◆ Those who did not acknowledge that they had anger-management needs, but displayed their anger, or mistrust of those in authority, through their language and descriptions of others – often feeling that *they* had been inappropriately treated or abused by those in authority.

Examples of those falling within the first category included:

All [the help] I want is my anger management, because I don't like losing my temper. I do a lot of damage when I lose my temper... I need to calm down a hell of a lot.

I am one of those people that lets it all bottle up inside me, and I end up lashing out and breaking things.

While I was still in school I were much more violent. I got in trouble at school a lot for stuff related to that. I was never stupid, thick or owt like that. I were never ignorant, I was just violent – even though I could probably find a way around the situation intelligently. It's not that it's easy to use violence. It seemed the only logical solution most of the time because if someone's going to hit you, hit them first.

Others displayed their anger and mistrust of those in authority as follows:

One of the teachers was a xxxx. She just didn't get on with me at all. She just kept kicking off at me. I don't know why...She seemed a proper xxxx to me. I'd like smacking her but I wasn't allowed...I like to speak my mind and that. If they xxxx me off then I'll tell them. I don't care really.

I found out I was pregnant one day when I was there, because I went for a pregnancy test, and they were shouting at me because I was late. They had no sympathy for me. They said I was violent and told me to get out. I told them they didn't need to get into my head.

A number of Learning Gateway clients also expressed that they found their lives ‘stressful’ at one level or another. Comments included: ‘*I need to de-stress*’, ‘*I actually had to take medication to keep my stress levels down, because it was just so bad for me*’ and ‘*she [PA] like took stress off my head*’. The underlying causes of such stress were varied, but were often linked to difficult home circumstances, social problems and having been bullied. In some cases, they manifested themselves in displays of temper: ‘*I was throwing chairs at all the girls and teachers. I got so stressed I was crying.*’ In one

fairly extreme case, the stress faced by a young man in coping with a history of bullying led him to say the following:

The stress I had been put under had been like, a bit pressurising...I wrote a poem about myself, feeling like what's happened, 'cos like on some occasions I just feel like committing suicide because of what I have been through, which is a waste for me really.

The specific character traits and characteristics described above were not necessarily confined to individual clients. Indeed many displayed, or stated that they had, a number of these characteristics, in addition to being affected by a combination of the lifestyle issues described in Section 2.1. Most careers service senior managers and personal advisers substantiated this, stressing that multiple disadvantage was a real issue for many Learning Gateway clients. One careers service senior manager mused that: '*all conditions of humanity*' join the Learning Gateway, and a PA in a different careers service stated:

Most of them have money problems, housing problems, social problems and basic skills needs. If you found someone who had a single issue, that would be the exception.

2.3 Personal Problems

In addition, some Learning Gateway clients clearly had more complex personal problems, possibly derived from the multiple disadvantage faced throughout their lives. Particular issues raised by the young people interviewed included: a history of offending, substance misuse and pregnancy and parenthood. The implications of these are discussed below.

2.3.1 History of offending

Given the potential of past, or current, offending behaviour to be viewed as quite sensitive by interviewees, it was surprising how many of the young people made reference to the fact that they had been involved in criminal activity of one form or another, or had spent time in Young Offenders' Institutions. One stated: '*I started [the Learning Gateway] this Monday because I've only been out of prison for about three or four days, see*' and another confided that:

The first time I got three months...then that time I done five months. Then I come out, done about three or four months at [name of Life Skills provider], and I got sentenced again, and seen someone inside – got me to meet [name of PA] straightaway, got a job straightaway again, and then I got sentenced again to jail. So I haven't been good.

There seemed to be a distinction between those for whom this type of activity was still a feature of their lives, and those who were keen to stress that they *used* to be involved in crime, but were no longer. The extent to which experiences of the Learning Gateway had impacted upon the changes in behaviour of the latter group are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Many comments focused around how difficult the young people found it to stay out of trouble. As one young man said: *'It is hard to stay out of trouble, because the people you hang around with, and what they do, you always get involved in...When I was a kid I was always getting done by the police and stuff.'* Two other young men, facing similar challenges, saw the Learning Gateway as something that would hopefully keep them out of such trouble. One stated: *'I've got that many court cases, I don't want to get locked up. If you've got a job, you've got something to fall back on.'* The other stressed:

I don't want to go back to being a thief or a criminal, so that's why I've come here...I've been to prison twice now, but only for one day and two months...The next time I get nicked I go to prison for two years, which is a long time.

Talking about the college course in which he was now involved, the same interviewee said:

We were going from 11 in the morning until three to four at night. We were there all day, but I didn't mind because it was keeping me off the estates – keeps me away from trouble, which is good.

In contrast, other young people felt that their previous criminal activity was precluding them from undertaking some of the activities that they would like to be involved in now. For example, as one young woman said: *'I've had quite a few interviews off them [a Life Skills provider], but I've got a criminal record, so that stops me [from getting jobs] ...It was for shoplifting when I was younger.'*

2.3.2 Substance misuse

For some of the young people, there was a clear overlap between their offending behaviour and problems that they had encountered to do with the misuse of drugs and alcohol. As one young man said: *'My Dad thinks that I'm a low-life – a thief and a druggie.'* For others, drug or alcohol misuse had led to health or psychological problems, which impacted upon their ability to engage in various aspects of the Learning Gateway. Although the focus of the interviews was on young people's experiences of the Learning Gateway, and their education, training and employment plans, some interviewees clearly did not wish to discuss these points in detail. In these cases, the personal problems that they were facing were so extreme that this was all that they wished to discuss with interviewers. For one young woman, who had been misusing class A drugs for some time, and was now attempting to stop using them, the interview seemed to serve the purpose of a semi-counselling session. Her comments are used below as an illustration of the complications of attempting to help young people through the Learning Gateway, when they have acute personal problems:

I didn't know I was getting deeper and deeper into drugs, and I started asking for help physically to let me know myself...I was injecting in the end, that's how bad it got...I get in mood swings now because of it. One minute I can be laughing and smiling, and then someone can say something to me, something stupid, and I can flip. I know that's the last stage – the mood swings.

This young woman had left the Learning Gateway not having progressed to a mainstream education or training option, although she had secured a job in a packing factory. The fact that this did not entitle her to the £50 progression bonus was a source of consternation to her: *'I don't understand that because when you're in full-time work you haven't got time for education. I still reckon I'm entitled to that £50 bonus.'* One of the reasons she gave for not having moved into a mainstream option was that her experience of training through her Life Skills programme had been damaging. Consequently, she had vowed never to undertake such training again: *'No. I've been that messed around by college that I've decided I'm not going back into jobs with training. I'm not doing that...I think I need a proper job now, just factory work or whatever.'* The reason for this young woman's negative attitude towards training was that the other young people involved in her Life Skills programme had tried to pressurise her into taking drugs:

When I went there, some of the girls were still doing drugs without the people knowing. They were passing spliffs around, and they came to me. They used to ask why I used to do it but I wasn't doing it now, which I got upset about...The pressure was on that much that I walked out and burst into tears because I couldn't do it and they were nagging me. They [the trainers] tried to push me into going back there, but I said I wasn't going back. Then she [the trainer] lost her temper with me and started shouting. I told her to xxxx it.

2.3.3 Pregnancy and parenthood

A few of the female clients were either pregnant, or told interviewers that they had a young dependent child. Some were coping with their pregnancies, or children, alone, without the support of a partner or their families, whilst others mentioned boyfriends or had the support of their parents. For young women in the former group, their circumstances as pregnant women or young mothers sometimes compounded other problems they were already facing such as inadequate housing or living on a low income. The flexibility of all these women to take up education, training or employment options could be seriously limited, as the following statements illustrate. The first was made by a young woman, with a dependent baby, who was keen to get back into training, and the second by a female client who was three-and-a-half months pregnant:

At the minute I get very stressed out because I am stuck in all the time, but my boyfriend gets his freedom. It annoys me sometimes.

I'm doing nothing. I'm trying to get a job in hairdressing but I can't because I'm pregnant. So I don't see the point in coming here [the

careers centre], *not if they can't do anything...Even* [name of personal adviser] *said that no one's going to set you on work while you're pregnant.*

The second young woman was frustrated, and felt that she was being discriminated against, because her pregnancy was preventing her from securing a job or training option. Her experience of Life Skills had been negative, because she felt that she had been treated in a 'sexist' manner when the trainers there found out that she was pregnant. This was enough to make her say that, although she hoped to gain a hairdressing job or training place after the birth of her baby, she would not come back to the Learning Gateway for help to find such a position.

One male client, who had just been released from a Young Offenders Institution, had recently become a father. For him, this had created a certain motivation to get a job and stick with it in order to be able to provide financially for the baby: *'I had a kid about four weeks ago, a girl...so I've been trying to get work.'*

2.4 Career Histories

It is somewhat difficult to map out the 'career histories' of the young people who were interviewed. Whilst there were some common features, what characterised most of their histories was the sporadic nature of their lives since leaving school, and the tendency of many not to have done much in particular in the space of time between leaving school and joining the Learning Gateway. Comments such as *'just hanging around'* or *'just dossing'* were quite common.

2.4.1 Early school leaving

Whilst some clients had left school at the end of Year 11, after sitting their public examinations, a large number reported that they had left school earlier than this, through exclusion, specific difficulties that had resulted in home tuition, or absenteeism. Given that there was a tendency to claim to have been doing nothing in particular since leaving school, some had clearly been unoccupied for considerable lengths of time. Examples included: *'I left in Year 8'*, *'I left at 13'*, *'I was expelled, I think it was in Year 9'* and *'I was hardly ever in school. I've only done two-and-a-half years out of the five'*.

Reported reasons for exclusion included poor behaviour in school, and always being in trouble. As one young man stated: *'I got kicked out...well, sort of like suspended...for smoking and fighting.'* Another, who had left school at the age of 14, said that he had first got to know his PA during his time in a Pupil Referral Unit. Others who had left school early did not always give reasons, but there seemed to be a relationship for some between a history of having been the victims of bullying, suffering from low confidence or a lack of self-esteem, and struggling with basic skills. Perhaps a sense of low achievement

or fear of going to school encouraged some of these young people to leave before taking their public examinations. Certainly a common issue for most Learning Gateway clients was a lack of formal achievement to date, few or no GCSE passes.

Not all clients had been unoccupied since leaving school, however. Others had undertaken varying types of employment, although few had tried out training courses before enrolling on the Learning Gateway. Most jobs that the young people had undertaken had been characterised by their unskilled or casual nature, or by the fact that the young people had had a number of different, short-term positions since leaving school.

2.4.2 Sporadic employment

On balance, it seemed that those young people who had worked prior to joining the Learning Gateway, and during their time on the front end, had had fairly sporadic employment histories, which were largely unplanned, and reactionary. The following description by one young man, of what he had been doing since leaving school, illustrates this point:

Packaging was my first job, yes, that was at Cox Produce up in [name of town]. Then County Training and Elmhurst. Then Mole Salvage in [name of town] then Securicor over there, then I ended up back here. Oh no, before that I was in County Training, which is downstairs, then Securicor.

Not all clients were happy with the types of employment they had been engaged in to date, and indeed were hoping that the Learning Gateway would offer them opportunities to gain skills and training that might improve their employment prospects in the long run. One young woman, for example, who said ‘*I was in a factory for four months, another factory for two months and then I went to Life Skills*’, was asked whether she had enjoyed the factory work. She said: ‘*Oh no, because you stand up all day, you don’t sit down.*’ Another young man said:

I had a job in a bottle factory when I left school which I hated. I left there and went back to the careers office. I was on the production line doing the same horrible job day in and day out. It was boring and they talked to you like you were nothing.

This brings us to the final section of this chapter, which considers the priorities of young people engaged in the Learning Gateway.

2.5 Priorities

Young people’s priorities were extremely variable, focusing around personal aspects of their lives in general, as well as on their wishes for education, employment and training opportunities. It should be stressed that many of the

young people described how their initial priorities had changed as a result of involvement in the Learning Gateway. For example, as one young man said: *'When I first started I just didn't want a job. I didn't know what I wanted in life, and now I know exactly what I want.'* Young people's aims and aspirations are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

In addition, many of the young people did not have any clear priorities, being unable to think through, or articulate, what they wanted to get out of life. One such example was of a young man who had been on the front end of the Learning Gateway for a significant period of time. In response to a question about where he wanted his life to be heading he said: *'Not a clue. That's why I'm always in with [name of PA].'* Another young woman on the front end said: *'I really don't know what I want to do in life...I don't know what I want to do next.'*

In contrast, a minority of interviewees appeared to have aspirations and priorities that were potentially difficult to achieve. These young people stated that they wished to move into particular occupational areas, which either required much professional training (*'I'll probably get a career in teaching or something like that'*, *'I need experience, like at college, and get a qualification, like a degree'* or *'I'd like to do medical forensics'*) or which were somewhat glamorous (*'I'm 16. I would like to be a fighter pilot'*). Whilst at one level this is not unusual for young people in this age group, at another, such clients were frequently unwilling to be swayed on their choices, which meant that their PAs often found it very difficult to progress them through the Learning Gateway. These, and the following, examples were generally given by young people with few qualifications to date, who sometimes had low basic skills levels. They were all on the front end or Life Skills, or had rejoined the Learning Gateway:

I want to be a music producer. I want to work in retail stores, but that is just to get some money together, until I can get my own studio and start making my own CDs. I want to be a rapper.

After I've done this course, I hopefully want to start up at [local] FM and be a radio presenter. That's my aim. My friend said 'If you do this training then you could get this job'.

For those who expressed their priorities, or for whom their priorities became clear throughout the course of interviews, there appeared to be a three-way differentiation.

- ◆ Those whose priority was dealing with a range of personal, social and economic issues (as raised in Sections 2.1 to 2.3 above). For young people facing issues such as housing problems, financial difficulties, family problems, drug or alcohol addiction or pregnancy, these factors tended to dominate their thoughts and actions. For the young people, and often, their personal advisers, sorting out these 'problems' was a key priority. In

a sense, until these issues had been dealt with, few were in a position to move into education, employment or training options.

- ◆ Those whose priority was to **earn money** – usually as much as possible, but without any particular aspirations to undertake further education or training, or to embark upon a ‘career’ as such.
- ◆ Those whose priority was to **gain an education, employment or training position** that was, in some way, personally satisfying, or which had the potential to lead on to greater things in the future. Young people who were disillusioned with their current status, or employment history, tended to have such priorities. Most had realistic expectations, but a minority, as indicated above, did not.

Examples of those for whom earning money was a key priority were plentiful. One young man, who said that what he wanted to get out of the Learning Gateway was ‘a job’, was asked whether he was interested in gaining any training alongside this. His response was: ‘*I ain’t bothered – just money...I don’t know what I want to get out of it myself. I just want to earn some money.*’ Another said:

My mind is undecided. I’ve had that many jobs, but I don’t want training because of money...I do make excuses about things she’s offered, like it’s too far and not what I want to do in the future. I want the best job now, not wait.

One Life Skills group, when asked what they were hoping to get out of their course, responded: ‘*Money, yes money.*’ Another young man said of what he had hoped to get out of attending his Life Skills course: ‘*Not much. I just thought of it as a way of, it sounds a bit shallow, but just as a way of getting money. I needed it, and I had no other option really.*’

Other interviewees stressed that they wanted jobs, not training, because the rewards were felt to be more immediate:

I want to go out and work really, but every time I came here [the careers centre] they told me college, college, college. They directed me to college, so I stopped asking for it.

I would like it if she [PA] could help me out with a job more than anything. She concentrates more on the training. Even though I do want to go to training, I would rather concentrate on getting a job more than anything because of the money. I don’t like depending on my Mum. I like to be independent.

Whilst responses such as the above were plentiful, they were not unanimous. Other young people were specifically looking to gain training, in order to maximise their chances of getting a good job. One isolated individual said: ‘*I don’t want to get a job yet. I want to go to college.*’ More common was a desire to gain a job with a training component running alongside. As one young man said:

My first priority was work, but since I was looking for jobs so much and interviews I was getting were unsuccessful, I thought it was in my best interest to actually go back into college again.

One young woman summed up what she saw as the benefits of this option:

I want to find a job and go to college, because you've got education plus you've got a job. I'm going to college and I get to learn something, plus I'm working with other people and getting money for it as well. It's really good.

Understanding the varied personal issues and priorities expressed by the young people is crucial in terms of appreciating their experiences of the Learning Gateway, and the outcomes for them of their involvement. These issues are the focus of Chapters 4 and 5.

Key Findings

Learning Gateway clients were found to be contending with a range of complex personal, social and financial problems, which impacted upon their levels of engagement with the Learning Gateway as follows:

- ◆ Their backgrounds and lifestyles were often characterised by a lack of stability – physical, financial and emotional. A large number of interviewees were without permanent accommodation, living on low incomes and, sometimes, experiencing little, or no, support from home.
- ◆ Many suffered from a lack of self-confidence, or low self-esteem, often brought about as a result of their fractured lives or earlier experiences of school. This, and low basic skills levels among some, made many wary of Life Skills programmes or other learning options, because of concerns about the teamwork and written aspects they might involve.
- ◆ Poor motivation was an issue for many clients. In particular, some young people found keeping appointments and sticking with programmes for any length of time challenging. Some admitted to being lazy, or to drifting from one thing to the next. Others simply said that they found it very difficult to get out of bed in the mornings.

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- ◆ Others found it difficult to control their tempers, being prone to displays of anger or frustration, particularly with those in positions of authority. This was sometimes a result of what the young people described as ‘stress’ in their lives – often related to personal, social or financial problems. It had been a cause of some young people being excluded from Gateway provision.
 - ◆ More acute personal problems faced by some clients included a history of offending, and finding it difficult to stay out of trouble, the misuse of drugs and alcohol which had, in some cases, led to health or psychological problems, and pregnancy or parenthood. The last had often affected young women’s education, training or employment options, and hence the extent to which they could progress through the Learning Gateway.
 - ◆ Many clients’ ‘career histories’ were characterised by having left school early, sometimes a number of years before the end of Year 11, with few, or no, formal qualifications. Whilst some had been occupied in a variety of temporary or casual employment positions in the intervening period, others said they had been doing very little. Some young people’s motivation for joining the Gateway was specifically to improve their employment prospects in the longer term or to give them a sense of direction.
 - ◆ Young people’s life priorities were extremely variable. Some clients’ thoughts and actions were dominated by dealing with a range of personal, social and financial issues. Other young people expressed a desire to earn as much money as possible in the short term, without particular aspirations to further learning or securing a ‘career’. A further group of clients wished to gain learning or employment opportunities that were personally satisfying, and had the potential to lead to greater things in the future.

3. JOINING THE LEARNING GATEWAY

This chapter presents the findings on the young people's experience of joining the Learning Gateway. It provides insights into:

- ◆ how the young people became aware of, and involved in, the Learning Gateway;
- ◆ their reasons for joining the Learning Gateway and the main influences on that decision;
- ◆ the information about the Learning Gateway which the young people said they had received when they became involved;
- ◆ their expectations of the Learning Gateway and the extent to which these were realised.

3.1 Joining the Learning Gateway

It was apparent from the interviews with the young people that their conceptions of the Learning Gateway were varied. Some did not recognise the term at all, others identified it with the individual courses they were or had been following, or with their PA, while a few understood it as an overall programme. It is within this context, therefore, that their views of joining the Learning Gateway and their expectations, which are the focus of this chapter, are presented.

3.1.1 Becoming aware of the Learning Gateway

The young people had become involved in the Learning Gateway through a variety of routes as follows:

- ◆ dropping in at the local Careers Centre;
- ◆ referral from school or school careers adviser;
- ◆ referral from social worker, key worker or care home;
- ◆ referral from Job Centre;
- ◆ through a friend;
- ◆ through direct contact with a local Life Skills provider;
- ◆ direct contact from the careers service.

These routes into the Learning Gateway are discussed in more detail below.

The most commonly mentioned way in which the young people who were interviewed had found out about the Learning Gateway was when they were '*coming in to look at jobs on the boards and that*'. They would then speak to

one of the careers advisers on duty, who would refer them to the Learning Gateway, as one young woman's experience illustrates:

When I was coming here...I was asking if there was anything I could go to for training to help me, and they suggested the Learning Gateway. I read about it and saw what the offers were and thought it sounded good so I looked at it more.

Another reason for dropping into the careers centre, mentioned by some interviewees, was because they wanted to arrange a 'bridging allowance' and, in the ensuing discussion with careers service staff, the Learning Gateway was suggested to them.

Some young people had been referred to the Learning Gateway by their school, as one explained: *'My previous school got me here, I think. I'm not even sure how I got here but my school sent a letter to this place and then I came to visit.'* For others, the link with their school was clearer. For example, one young man said he had been directed to the Learning Gateway by his school careers adviser: *'[the careers adviser] said come down and talk to them. I wanted to get a job, I weren't happy at school.'* Another young woman's PA had been her careers adviser at school: *'I started seeing my PA as a careers adviser at first when I was in my school, Year 11, and then I had some housing problems and she became my PA. She explained to me about the Learning Gateway through that.'*

There were instances of referral by other agencies, although these were not widespread. In particular, interviewees mentioned their social worker or children's home having put them in touch with the careers service. Some interviewees who had been in Young Offenders Institutions had been referred to their PA by staff at the Institution. This approach had been particularly effective for one young man, who made the following comments: *'They got me on a course straightaway, so I was really chuffed.'*

Young people who were seeking work would often *'drop in'* to the local Job Centre, who referred them to the careers service, as this comment from one young man illustrates: *'I didn't know what to do with myself, and I went to the Job Centre and then they said that I had to go up to my local Careers Office, and I didn't know what that was then.'* This last comment demonstrates the value of agencies working together to facilitate access to the most appropriate help for young people.

Some of the interviewees had been referred to the Learning Gateway by a friend. As one young woman said: *'My friend...told me about it. She said she was coming here and [PA] said she could bring a friend.'* Another stated: *'One of my friends, she started the course, and she told me all about it and that, so I thought I would come and have a chat with [PAs] and see if I could get on it.'* A third young woman had heard about the Learning Gateway from someone who had been through it, as she explained: *'Someone told me about*

it. They'd got the job they wanted and when I asked them how they got it, they said it was through the careers service, so I went along.' Moreover, some of the interviewees themselves pointed out that they too, had recommended to their friends that they should join the Learning Gateway.

A second informal mechanism by which some interviewees had become aware of the Learning Gateway was through having noticed or heard about a local Life Skills provider. For example, one young woman explained that she had contacted the Life Skills provider herself because she *'wanted to start the [Life Skills] class'*. Similarly, another young man said: *'I just walked past and walked in and said "What do you do here?" and they said "It's for young people" and so I said "Can I sign up?"'*

One further way in which young people became aware of the Learning Gateway was through the careers service contacting them directly. For example, one commented that *'someone phoned up'* while another recalled receiving *'a card'* through the post. This approach is summed up in the experience of one young man who said:

They sent me a letter saying that you've got to come and register with us and for months I ignored it and didn't do owt. I was getting a bit of pressure from my parents and boredom so I thought I'd better get a job, so I went in there...

This observation also provides some insight into young people's motivations to become involved in the Learning Gateway, which are explored in more depth in the next section.

3.1.2 Reasons for joining the Learning Gateway

The reasons given by interviewees for joining the Learning Gateway reflect their backgrounds and priorities outlined in Chapter 2. The motivating factors, which were interrelated, included the need to:

- ◆ access money;
- ◆ obtain a job;
- ◆ rejoin education, including to gain some qualifications;
- ◆ change their lifestyle;
- ◆ respond to pressure from their families.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, **financial considerations** were a notable preoccupation of the young people who were interviewed. The comment of one leaver – *'then he offered me this Gateway thing, so I took it up because I needed money and wanted a job'* – reflects the experience of many. The relationship between joining the Learning Gateway and the Government benefits they could gain was an influential factor for many of the young

people joining the Learning Gateway. One young leaver said: *'She told me I had to go or she'd stop my giro'*, and a number of others mentioned the training allowance of around £40 to £45 per week which they received while on a training option. Some of the young people mentioned that the bonus of £50, which they generally received when they started on Life Skills or their first training programme, was an incentive for joining the Learning Gateway, as the following comment illustrates:

...if I was to get a placement and keep it for a certain amount of time, I'd get a £50 bonus. That was a good incentive for everyone.

Some other interviewees did not see the bonus as a particular incentive, making the following types of comments: *'I would have been interested anyway'* or *'I'd have done it anyway'*. In summary, there did not appear to be a common view on the extent to which the bonus was or was not an incentive to join the Gateway. The extent to which it was appeared to depend on the needs and priorities of the individual, as one young woman, reflecting back on her Life Skills course, explained:

I wasn't really bothered about the money. I wanted to build up my confidence first.

Another common reason given by interviewees for joining the Learning Gateway was because they saw it as a means towards **gaining a job**. The comment of one young woman, who had rejoined the Gateway, demonstrates the position that some young people found themselves in, and the role of the Learning Gateway provision in supporting them:

When I left school, it was impossible to get a job. I really felt that no one wanted to employ me. I came here and it was really nice. I met [PA] and she was really determined to get me a job, so I came here every week and she would go on the computer and she'd see if there was a vacancy for me.

Some of the young people had been dissatisfied with their employment since leaving school and saw the Learning Gateway as a means of improving their job search skills and accessing a wider range of occupations. This view is encapsulated in the comment of one young man who said that *'I'd done factory work, I wanted to find out about other jobs'*.

Some interviewees had identified the need to **return to education or training** to develop skills and gain qualifications in order to be in a position to get a job and earn money. A young man had realised that there was a need to do this through his job-seeking activities: *'There's nothing in the Job Centre really for my age, you need skills.'* Another young woman commented that she had become involved in the Gateway *'to find a job and go to college, because you've got an education plus you've got a job'*. Similarly, young people in two of the Life Skills groups, while initially saying they were involved

'because I had no money' conceded that they wanted to 'see if I could get something out of it as well while you're here'.

Some interviewees mentioned specific skills which they hoped to develop through their involvement in the Learning Gateway, including basic and interpersonal skills. For example, one commented: *'I needed help mostly with my maths'*, while another said: *'It helps you with your maths and English and I weren't really good at maths and English'*. Others stated that they wanted to build their confidence or assertiveness.

A further influential factor in the young people's decision to join the Learning Gateway can be characterised as a desire to **change their lifestyle**. As was discussed in Chapter 2, often the young people did not have anything to do and the desire to escape boredom was a motivating factor for some of the interviewees, as these comments illustrate:

'cos I didn't have nothing to do, it was boring and I had no money, and I felt like I need a job.

Because I was bored sitting in the house all the time and I had no GCSEs or nothing, I wanted to go back to college to get some qualifications so I could do something with my life.

Interviewees who were currently on Life Skills expressed a similar view when they said that they attended the course partly because *'it gets you out of the house'* and to *'get off the streets'*. Related to this was the desire expressed by one young man to re-engage in training or employment: *'So I'm not on the streets doing nothing, because there's nothing to do around the area. I don't want to go back to being a thief or a criminal, so that's why I have come here.'*

The final factor which appeared to influence the decision to join the Learning Gateway was **pressure from their family**. *'Me mum moaned at me'* was a common refrain, but for some young people the pressure was more serious. For example, one young man said that he had joined *'because if I didn't, my sister would kick me out'*. It is worth noting here that a number of the young people who were interviewed were not living with a parent, having already been *'kicked out'* of home or because they were care leavers. The influence of family pressure may not, therefore, be a factor for a sizeable proportion of Learning Gateway clients.

The comments and observations of the young people outlined in this section reveal the complex nature of the ways in which the young people became aware of the Learning Gateway and subsequently made the decision to become involved. While the link to benefits and money was obviously influential, the individual's desire to re-engage in employment, education and training or to make a change in their life was also a key consideration. The extent to which these needs were met forms the focus of Chapter 5. The next

sections explore the information received by the young people once they had joined the Learning Gateway, and their expectations.

3.2 Information Received about the Learning Gateway

In general, the young people were somewhat vague about the information they had received about the Learning Gateway. This partly reflects their conception of the Learning Gateway, as mentioned earlier, which was often associated with individual training courses or Life Skills. Their comments, should be viewed within this context.

Interviewees were aware of having been told the financial implications of being involved in the Learning Gateway. For example, one young man said he had been told *'there's a course started up called Life Skills...you get paid to go there like and you get paid to do training and stuff like that, so I went along'*. While interviewees were generally aware of the incentive bonus payment for attending Life Skills, some PAs appeared to use their discretion in informing young people about it. As one young man explained: *'She didn't tell me about it at first. She only really mentioned it when I confirmed that I was going, because I think she wanted to make sure that I wasn't going for the wrong reasons.'*

In addition to financial details, some young people were given details of *'schemes coming up'* and some had been given details of the content of the course they were about to start on. For example, one Life Skills group, when asked what they had been told about the course before it started, said: *'Communication skills, key skills, mainly communication and that, computer stuff.'* However one of the group commented: *'They told me nothing.'* Another young person recalled seeing *'a big list of what it was meant to teach you about, like, CVs, you get certificates and things like that'*.

For some interviewees, being given details of the content of the training or Life Skills programme assisted them in deciding whether or not to join the programme. One young man had been told *'that it was an opportunity to learn team building and confidence and stuff like that'*. As he had been bullied at school, he thought: *'If I did this, it would be good for me.'* Others had also not only been given the information but had discussed whether and why it would be appropriate for them with their PA. One young woman, who had recently had some personal difficulties, said that her PA *'explained that it helps me to get into a job. She said that it might help me socialise with people again...because you don't have to decide what you want to do, you can just go there and socialise'*.

Some interviewees commented on the efforts made by their PAs to explain the programme and ensure they were making an informed choice. One young woman commented that *'she showed me the options...I did not fancy [training provider] because some idiots go there'*, while another said: *'She took me to look round the place and things like that.'* The value of having accurate

information clearly communicated is summed up in the comment of one young man who said '[PA] is good, she tells you basically the truth – what is going to happen.'

While some of the interviewees were able to recall receiving quite detailed information, others had a more vague sense of the information received, as the following comments show:

Just general things, like we'd be in a group and we'd go down to [training centre] and do different things...we found out what happened each week.

They did and they didn't [explain]. They just sat down and said that I'd do all this different stuff and that they'd try and get me a job. They told me I'd get £40 a week and my bus fare paid.

Some of the interviewees did not mind that they did not have a detailed explanation of the content of courses. As one young woman expressed it: '*They do make it clear, but when you get there you saw there were different things. Different things but you didn't mind.*' Others felt that they had not been given enough information, or the information did not reflect their subsequent experience. For example, young people in a Life Skills group felt that they needed to know more about the programme from the start and one particularly mentioned the time he had spent on the course: '*I was told I could come here for six weeks, then I would go on another training course. I am on this longer than I thought I would be.*'

3.3 Expectations of the Learning Gateway

The young people's expectations of the Learning Gateway are related to their reasons for joining and the information received, in addition to their understanding and definition of the service. Whilst not all interviewees were able to identify their expectations, those who did, identified a variety.

Naturally some expected to get a job or develop a career as a consequence of their involvement. One young man noted the challenge that he and his peers faced in this regard when he said: '*[I'm] hoping to get a job or career...it's hard to get a job for a teenager. That's why you have to go to college or do something, or get good grades in your GCSEs. Otherwise you're not going to get anywhere.*' Related to this was the expectation of some interviewees that involvement in the Learning Gateway would help them to identify an appropriate course. One young man pointed out what his PA had told him: '*Anything that I want to look for that I want to do in training, that she can help me with, I go and see her about.*'

Others wanted to develop skills and gain qualifications. However, some were not certain what qualification their course would lead to. For example, one

young man who had left the Learning Gateway commented: *'I'm not quite sure you know, but really it must be a qualification because you've got to have a qualification to, like, do web pages.'* Some interviewees said that they expected to meet new people through the Learning Gateway and, in some instances, were *'hoping to improve the confidence really'*. Finally, some young people said that they were particularly interested in the money they would get as a consequence of being on the Gateway.

It should be noted that the extent to which young people's expectations appeared to have been met is covered to some degree in Chapter 5. Those who had found that their expectations had not been met commented that the content and level of courses they had undertaken did not stretch them: *'They sent me there and I did absolutely nothing'* or *'I expected to know more by now'*. Others commented on the lack of appropriate work placements. For example, one young woman explained that her expectations had not been met *'because they didn't have a placement or anything'*.

Where they had found the experience to be better than expected, one young man commented that *'I thought it would be worse, but it turned out better than I thought it would be. I thought it would be sitting round a table every day, talking'*, while another said: *'It wasn't what I expected, but it took a lot of pressure off me because I thought it was going to be something that I would actually have to put some effort in to do, but it turned out to be a "sit back and relax" kind of thing.'*

Another young man, who had successfully left the Learning Gateway, believed it had lived up to his expectations and attributed this to having identified a clear aim for himself at the outset. As he said: *'I knew what I wanted to do. I stuck to that and that's how I got what I wanted. Some of my friends went there and they were expecting an easy ride and didn't know what to do, so didn't get anything out of it.'*

This section has outlined the young people's initial motivations for joining and their expectations of the Learning Gateway. It has shown that they joined for a variety of reasons, though their expectations of what they might receive or how they might benefit were not always clearly articulated. The young people's views of their provision, including their observations on their PAs, are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Key Findings

- ◆ Young People most commonly became aware of, and involved in, the Learning Gateway through dropping in at their local careers centre. Informal approaches such as 'word of mouth' information from friends and family and direct contact with a local Life Skills provider were other methods identified. In addition, some young people had formal referrals from school, Job Centres or other agencies or direct approaches from the careers service.
- ◆ Young people often joined the Learning Gateway in response to a combination of factors which were both practical, for example financial considerations and family pressures, and personal, such as a desire to change their lifestyle or to re-engage in education and training.

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- ◆ The interviewees were somewhat vague about the information they had received relating to the content of the Learning Gateway, although this lack of clarity was not a major concern for most of them.
 - ◆ On the whole, where the young people had any expectations of the Learning Gateway, these related to gaining work or training. In the main, they reported that their experience had been as good as, or better than, expected. Where their expectations had not been met, this was due to the content and level of the courses they had undertaken or the lack of appropriate work placements.



4. EXPERIENCES OF THE LEARNING GATEWAY

This chapter considers young people's experiences of the Learning Gateway, and discusses the relevant issues, in relation to:

- ♦ having been on the front end for a significant period of time, and the reasons for not moving on;
- ♦ having been on Life Skills, and the types of programmes that were particularly appreciated;
- ♦ rejoining the Learning Gateway, and the reasons for leaving and subsequently rejoining the Gateway;
- ♦ leaving the Learning Gateway, and the experiences of those who had and had not moved on to mainstream options;
- ♦ working with a PA, and the support provided by these to their clients;
- ♦ completing an Individual Development Plan (IDP), and the reasons why many young people did not value this process;
- ♦ being consulted and giving feedback on the Learning Gateway, and the young people's views on the changes that are needed.

4.1 Experiences of the Front End

This section focuses on the experiences of those who had been on the front end of the Learning Gateway for a significant period of time, mostly between four months and one year. Many of the other interviewees – those who were involved in Life Skills, those who had rejoined, and those who had left the Learning Gateway – had also experienced the front end. However, these clients usually viewed this stage as a short period during which they met with a PA from the careers service, who assessed their needs and placed them on a Life Skills programme, or into a mainstream option relatively quickly. Their views and experiences of working with a PA are the focus of Section 4.5, and are not directly relevant here.

In the main, young people who had been involved in the front end for a significant period of time had two particular experiences:

- ♦ Working with a PA, in order to sort out various social, economic and personal problems, and to begin to start thinking about employment and training options.

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- ♦ Undertaking short training courses, designed to develop certain skills that might prepare them for Life Skills training or job search, alongside meetings with a PA.

4.1.1 Reasons for not moving on

At the outset, it is worth stressing that amongst the young people who fell into this ‘category’, were some of the most acute cases of need described in Chapter 2. Many of the young people were grappling with a range of complex personal issues, which took a considerable amount of time to sort out, and were not yet in a position to think seriously about education or training options. This goes some way to explaining the lengthy periods of time for which some were involved in the front end. Other reasons why some young people tended to stay on the front end for a significant period of time, and did not move on to Life Skills or into education or training options, included:

- ♦ a lack of motivation to move on;
- ♦ unsuitable Life Skills provision;
- ♦ a lack of relevant jobs or training provision.

Some of the young people on the front end demonstrated a lack of motivation to find a job or move into some form of education or training. While most said that they came along to the careers centre to get advice on jobs and training, those who had been offered employment or training options had often turned them down. One young man, who had declined many of the options that his PA had attempted to secure for him said, of the things that he had been offered:

College courses, job vacancies, and training programmes to work with animals, but these were quite rare. They knew how stubborn I was, so they didn't offer me too much anyway... I always see the downfalls, like office work – the interviews are horrible.

Other young people appeared to be stopped from moving on due to, what they perceived to be, a lack of suitable Life Skills or other training provision. One young man had attended a computer course for a short period of time, but had dropped out because he felt the provision was unsuitable for his needs, as this quotation indicates:

I was up there for a couple of weeks, but the people that was there, it was special needs, so I didn't like really think that I fitted in. Well it was all right, yeah it was good, but it was too easy because it was for the special needs people, so it was really, really easy. I could have stuck it out you see, but I just didn't feel right with them people. They were all like Down Syndromes.

This raises a broader issue, as discussed in the following section on young people's experiences of Life Skills, about whether Learning Gateway training

provision was closely enough tailored to young people's needs in all instances. In the case described above, what this client felt was a mismatch between his needs and course provision prevented him from moving on.

Similarly, one of the reasons why others had so far not moved on from the front end was a lack of places on courses they wanted to do. One young man, for example, explained that the courses offered to him were either not what he wanted to do or were too far away in another part of his city. The courses that he was interested in doing were fully booked up, as this comment shows:

Everything I wanted to do, there's been something to hold me back. I wanted to do a music course but I can't do that because the course is booked and has been for a long time. I wanted to do a painting and decorating course, and that's booked too.

The following sections discuss the practical help, support and guidance young people received from their PAs while being on the front end of the Learning Gateway.

4.1.2 Receiving support and guidance

Many of the young people on the front end perceived the Learning Gateway as being solely about interaction with their PAs. Their positive experiences tended to be associated with having developed a trusting relationship over time with someone who they saw as a 'critical friend', someone who they could talk to, who would listen to them, and who would do their best to sort out their problems for them. As one young man pointed out, '*Basically, I got someone who I can talk to and who I can trust and that is what I really wanted*'. A point made in Section 4.5 below, is that, for some young people, PAs were seen in a role more akin to a social worker than a careers adviser.

This is not to suggest that all young people who had been on the front end for a significant period of time visited their PAs purely with a view to sorting out personal or social problems. Others had specific skills needs including literacy, numeracy, anger management, social awareness and personal organisation. PAs were perceived by many of the young people as providing support and getting them to a position where they would be able to progress to a job, Life Skills or other training. Of course, the two factors were not unrelated. A number of clients stressed that the Learning Gateway was somewhere where they could get help and advice on personal issues *and* on jobs and training. One young man, when asked what kinds of things he talked to his PA about said: '*All sorts, about my future, jobs and personal things too.*' This poses a number of challenges for PAs, in terms of the skills they need to have at their disposal for dealing with such a complex range of issues.

4.1.3 Practical help and advice

A further aspect of front end provision that many clients felt had been helpful and useful was practical help in job application and interview techniques and

job search strategies. In most cases, clients had received this sort of advice during their one-to-one sessions with their PAs, and in one instance, through a specially tailored week-long course designed to develop such skills. Common references included: *'They do practice interviews and things, help you get started in jobs, and they're just really helpful. I needed help and support', '[name of PA] has helped me, telling me the right things to say and how to look...How to act in interviews, not that I've been very good at those. I have learned a bit.'*

This emphasis on job application skills rather than on developing their occupational skills reflects the value many of the young people in this group placed on getting a job that would earn them money in the short term, being fairly disinterested in training. Given that PAs are encouraged to place young people into work-based training or training courses, this presents a dilemma for them, and provides a further possible explanation as to why some young people spend considerable amounts of time on the front end.

4.2 Experiences of Life Skills

With the exception of young people who had been involved in the front end of the Learning Gateway for a significant period of time, most, although not all, other interviewees had experienced Life Skills. This section considers their experiences of such provision.

4.2.1 The nature of Life Skills

It was difficult to gain an impression of the scope, scale and nature of Life Skills provision across the careers service areas from the young people interviewed, though they did have views on specific aspects of the particular courses in which they had been involved. Careers service staff, however, gave a flavour of the variability of Life Skills across the eight areas, and an indication of the quality of that provision.

In five areas, Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were responsible for purchasing Life Skills provision, but in three areas, careers services had this responsibility. It appeared that where careers services organised Life Skills provision, by sub-contracting to a range of training providers and other organisations, the programmes offered to young people were more bespoke than in other areas, where TECs sub-contracted work to, perhaps, their more traditional suppliers. As one senior manager in a careers service with control of Life Skills provision said: *'It's quite sophisticated...as individualised as possible...It's quite expensive because it's deluxe.'*

Most careers services stressed that the majority of their providers were of a more *'traditional'* variety – colleges and local authority training providers – who tended to offer class-based courses over a set period of time, with a fixed start and end date. One careers service described such provision as *'rehashed YT'* and another was concerned that such provision could *'smack of school'*, which had been a negative experience for many of the young people. *'Niche'* providers, including private and voluntary organisations, which were in a

position to offer programmes designed to raise levels of confidence, engagement and motivation, often through non class-based means, were harder to bring on board, although this was beginning to happen. Such providers were in more of a position to offer flexible provision, including roll-on, roll-off programmes, that responded to individual clients' needs. Only in one careers service area can it truly be said that each Life Skills programme was totally bespoke – tailored to the needs of each individual. As a PA in a different careers service said:

Most of them should be getting something tailor-made, but in practice there tends to be a lot of commonality in their programmes...There isn't a whole range of suppliers waiting to come in.

The range of activities that was included in Life Skills programmes included:

- ◆ Work experience and employment tasters.
- ◆ Outward Bound activities.
- ◆ Basic/key skills and IT work.
- ◆ Teamwork activities, discussions and confidence-building games.
- ◆ Health and safety, hygiene and fire-safety, often leading to certification.

Young people were fairly evenly divided in terms of whether they thought their Life Skills provision had been good or, in the word of a number of clients, 'rubbish'. Young people who were interviewed on a one-to-one basis (rejoiners and leavers who had experienced Life Skills) tended towards a positive view of Life Skills, whereas those interviewed in groups (current Life Skills trainees) tended towards a more negative view. There are two possible reasons why this was the case:

- ◆ **Group dynamics.** It tended to be the case that the individuals who were most vocal in group discussions were the most negative. It was difficult to encourage other group members to express differing opinions – generally quieter members indicated tacit agreement with the views expressed by their more vocal peers.
- ◆ **Deferred appreciation.** Young people who had moved on from Life Skills, especially those who progressed to positive outcomes, were more likely to appreciate what they had done on Life Skills than those who were currently involved in the process.

Nevertheless, most interviewees were able to express what it was about Life Skills that had been beneficial, and why, and which aspects had not been very helpful. Even where interviewees were broadly positive or negative, they could generally find something to say about a single aspect of the provision that differed from their overall impression of it.

4.2.2 Positive views on Life Skills provision

Those Life Skills courses were particularly appreciated which:

- ◆ were individually tailored to meet the needs and interests of the young people;
- ◆ included work placements;
- ◆ included Outward Bound activities;
- ◆ provided training in practical tasks which led to certification;
- ◆ provided practical help with finding work and job search skills;
- ◆ were conducted in a friendly, adult working environment.

Of greatest importance to many of the young people was the question of whether programmes had been tailored to suit their needs, abilities and interests. One young man, who had been given the opportunity to work for a car manufacturer, commended the way the programme had been tailored to suit his wishes: *'We said what we wanted to do and they made it happen!'* In contrast, one of most commonly-voiced complaints from young people was that their programme had not been designed in response to their needs but that they had had to do the same as everyone else. One young man, currently on Life Skills, argued that the programme would have been much improved if he had been consulted more: *'Ask people what they want. If you ask them what they want, you can't go wrong.'*

However, not all case-study areas were able to offer this type of provision to their clients. This was usually due to a lack of providers offering a more bespoke service and a lack of resources to fund individually-tailored programmes. The two careers services which were found to have particularly well developed bespoke provision had addressed these issues by:

- ◆ negotiating access to a wide range of traditional and non-traditional providers; one careers service had, for example, drawn on the services of the voluntary sector, a local authority training department, a private sector training department, careers guidance staff, and a college lecturer;
- ◆ retaining control of the funding of the Life Skills provision and buying in provision that met their needs; one careers service that offered a particularly bespoke programme had, for example, achieved this by being sub-contracted by the TEC to organise the Life Skills provision.

Another aspect of Life Skills programmes that was rated very highly was the inclusion of a work placement. This was seen as particularly valuable for the future when applying for jobs:

The experience, that's good. I've been for jobs before and they said that I hadn't got the experience. Now I've got some experience.

Others saw the work placement as an opportunity to gain permanent employment with the placement provider. Many of those who were not offered a placement said they would have valued having one: *'There's no work placement and we'd like them.'*

Outward Bound activities were viewed in a positive light by most of the young people who had taken part in them. Such provision was usually made available to those who had been identified as having low confidence or self-esteem. The outcomes of such provision tended to have been significant in terms of personal development, and it was noticeable how keen they were to elaborate enthusiastically on what their activities had involved. The following quotations illustrate this:

It's an outdoor pursuits place. We used to do abseiling and canoeing and that. It was good for team building, like we were in groups there and after the first week we was all talking and it takes a long time for like a group in a classroom to start talking...It brought the team together.

We were doing mountain climbing and climbing walls. You had to trust them to hold the ropes for you, which builds up your confidence. We had to do like a team building exercise where we had to all use our heads to sort out this one problem which, really, you had no team leaders, you were all just one group as a team.

Despite the clear enjoyment that these young people had obtained from being involved in Outward Bound pursuits, and the self-reported boost in confidence and social skills that this had given some, two interviewees stressed that they had gained less from involvement in such activities in terms of practical skills for the future. In such instances, the young people saw the skills they had developed through these programmes as separate from the skills that they would need to gain jobs or training.

Another aspect of Life Skills provision that had been popular, for those that had undertaken it, was practical training in areas such as first aid or health and safety, which led to a specific end-product – a certificate. One client said: *'I'm getting all certificates in there for my First Aid and my Health and Safety...It's dead good.'* Another young man, who had found most other aspects of his Life Skills provision inappropriate, said: *'I was quite happy with the First Aid. We went to do First Aid. I like to do that because we got a certificate at the end of it.'* None of the interviewees who had been involved in this type of training had found it to be a waste of time or not useful. However, some young people complained about the lack of opportunity for gaining recognised qualifications or certificates which they saw as essential for gaining employment once they left the Learning Gateway: *'We all want to get qualifications but no one will let us.'*

Life Skills programmes that provided practical help with finding work and helped with job search skills tended to be universally well received by young people. As one young man said: *'They were showing me books and things to*

do with catering – what kind of jobs there are in catering, the money, the hours. It's unsociable hours. They just let me know what I was getting myself in for.' Others commented favourably on the benefits of getting help with how to behave in, and dress for, interviews and with completing a CV.

However, some of the young people who commented on this aspect of Life Skills provision were negative about what they had received on the grounds that it did not offer *enough* practical information and advice on jobs, and on how to go about looking for them, nor did this provision offer appropriate training opportunities or work placements. One young person commented:

When I went in, I told them that I wanted to do catering and that I was in the wrong kind of place. They sent me to a [building] workshop, so I couldn't really do much. I told them that I wanted to go somewhere where it would be more of an environment for catering.

Finally, the working environment in which young people found themselves appeared to be important to young people's appreciation of the Life Skills programmes. There were many references to the importance of being treated like adults, and the fact that most Life Skills providers were different from the school environment – more relaxed and less formal: *'It's OK. It's not like school. You can wear your own clothes, and the teachers don't nag as much.'* The attitudes and dispositions of staff appeared to be crucial to young people's experience of Life Skills – often more important to them than the content of their programmes. For one young woman, what had been good about her trainers was that: *'They were like your friends, not like teachers.'* Another said: *'The tutors are solid, but it was just the stuff we were doing.'* For others, however, it was the attitude of trainers that had put them off their Life Skills provision altogether. One group of young people were particularly negative about the way they had been treated, commenting on the way the staff had used the threat of withdrawing the training allowance as a punishment for bad behaviour: *'If you disagree with what they're having a go at you for and answer back, they dock your pay.'*

4.2.3 Mixed views on Life Skills provision

Life Skills programmes that focused on teamwork, discussion work and confidence-building games received a more mixed reaction from Learning Gateway clients. One female client had found the experience of confidence-building activities to be extremely rewarding, recognising that her self-esteem and ability to communicate with others had increased greatly. The enthusiasm with which she described the activities in which she had been involved was testament to this:

We did one game where we all had to take our shoes off and stand on chairs in a circle, and we all had to move round by order of height...Then we did things like making collages of what we wanted to do, and what we did in the past...We did one where we had to get a partner and sit back with Lego and give each other instructions. One person was the listener, the other person was the one that gave you the

instructions, and you had to try and make the same thing without looking at each other's work.

Interestingly, these types of activities were precisely the sorts of things that other clients described as 'babyish', 'childish' or 'silly'. As one said: 'It was just baby stuff.' The perceptions of trainees appeared to hinge very much on what they wanted to get from their Life Skills training and what they thought it should be about. There seemed to be a problem for young people who did not particularly perceive themselves to have confidence or self-esteem problems, but rather wanted practical help on how to get jobs or training. These young people tended to think that they were wasting their time being involved in Life Skills programmes which were based around team or confidence-building activities.

4.2.4 Negative views on Life Skills provision

There was only one major issue raised by clients, over and above those points already mentioned, which had led to negative perceptions of Life Skills training. This was that most of the Life Skills trainees, who had had a basic skills or written work component as part of their course had not liked this aspect of their provision. Comments included:

It was rubbish, just English and maths and stuff.

The worst – I'm not sure. Number Power was boring.

I ain't no good at writing. I don't want to do that sort of stuff.

Given that many of the young people had basic skills needs, there is an issue for Learning Gateway staff in terms of how to engage clients in such work, which may be crucial for them in terms of gaining jobs or training in the future.

Other problems identified by a small number of respondents included that some taster courses were too short in length and that there was sometimes too much repetition of course modules.

4.3 Leaving the Learning Gateway

The views of young people who had left the Learning Gateway on the extent to which it had helped them move on are discussed in Chapter 5, which deals with the outcomes of involvement in the Learning Gateway. This section focuses instead on young people's experiences of the process of leaving the Learning Gateway, how this worked in practice, and how they viewed their transitions.

The young people who had left the Learning Gateway were found to have moved on to one of the following five 'destinations' – only the first two of which are defined by the DfEE as mainstream options:

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- ◆ further education or training (leading to a qualification at level 2);
 - ◆ job with training (leading to a qualification at level 2);
 - ◆ full-time job without training;
 - ◆ part-time job without training;
 - ◆ unemployment.

The majority of leavers interviewed as part of the research had moved on to mainstream education or training options. Only seven out of 35 had so far not moved on to mainstream learning options. This was due to the fact that careers services found it much harder to get in contact with, and encourage, young people who had not progressed to mainstream options, to attend an interview. In some cases, they had lost official contact with these young people themselves.

4.3.1 Leavers who had not progressed to mainstream options

Of the seven young people who had left the Learning Gateway without moving on to a mainstream option, four might be described as some of the hardest to help in terms of the types of young people careers services are attempting to support. One was a young offender, another was pregnant, one had a serious drug problem, and the other was living with a controlling older boyfriend who prevented her from undertaking any kind of training, or working in an environment with other men.

These young people tended to feel that they had gained very little from the Learning Gateway, and that it had not helped them to progress. Most were adamant that they were not interested in gaining training. Indeed, Life Skills provision tended not to have been particularly effective with these young people, with a tendency for them to move on from one provider to the next, or to have been excluded for various incidents. One young man had left the Learning Gateway, because he had been excluded by three different training providers for inappropriate behaviour. In this case, there was no other Life Skills provision that the careers centre could arrange for him.

Most stressed that they wanted to get jobs that paid a reasonable wage straightaway, seeking immediate rather than deferred gratification. One said: *‘I just want to earn some money’*, and another argued: *‘No, I think I’m getting too old now to go back into training.’* One young man had started an NVQ after leaving the Learning Gateway, but had dropped out of it subsequently after finding a part-time job during the holidays.

I was on a NVQ course but I think I gave it up because I was off for two months...I was sat doing nothing and I thought I’d get myself a job and by the time I got myself a job I only had two weeks left [before the course started again]. But then I got my first wage slip and I thought I don’t want to lose it.

The interviews with these clients raised an issue about a potential mismatch between the aspirations of very hard to help young people, and what the Learning Gateway was set up to achieve. How much *can* the Learning Gateway help young people who do not desire a training option, or work-based training? The young people interviewed often did not understand the distinction between jobs with and without training, or why one was supposedly more desirable than the other, and felt let down because their PAs had not been able to find them jobs. Most displayed a lack of awareness that without any training or qualifications behind them, it was very difficult for their PAs to help them secure employment.

Only two of these clients had progressed to full-time employment, albeit without training, and tended to be satisfied with this transition. Both felt that, without the Learning Gateway, they would not have achieved such a 'positive' outcome. One of the two pointed out, for example, that the Learning Gateway had helped him to make this transition by providing him with:

more references, because I've had jobs and that from here. They help me with CVs so I've got CVs and references now which I never had before. I can get them all now, only because I started coming here...I've got a more positive attitude now. Even my Mum says I've got a more positive attitude now.

4.3.2 Leavers who had progressed to mainstream options

Although this was not universally the case, young people who had progressed to mainstream education, employment or training options tended to be more positive about their experiences of the Learning Gateway than young people who had not. They were more likely to feel that it had helped them to progress.

Roughly the same number of clients interviewed had progressed to full-time college courses as had taken up work-based training options. In most cases, interviewees said that they were working towards an NVQ level 2 or a GNVQ Intermediate, but there were instances where individuals were undertaking level 1 qualifications, or were not sure about the qualification towards which they were working.

The level of contact that most of the young people had with their PAs after they had officially left the Learning Gateway was fairly limited, although rarely non-existent. Many said that they kept in touch with their PAs, but on an informal, *ad hoc*, basis. Comments such as: '*I see her about once a month, when I get in touch*', '*Yes, I still pop in and see him occasionally*' and '*only now and again really*' were common. However, others had maintained more regular contact. One male client said:

She comes and chats with me quite regularly, like every fortnight at least. So I see her at least sometimes once a week. It depends what we've got to do because I've just moved into somewhere, so she'll

come and check on me, you know, like every week, and see if it's OK, and if I'm happy with the course and that.

Others still drew on the support of their PAs for help and guidance on specific issues and problems. One female client illustrated this in the following way:

I was going to come in and see her today actually, 'cos I was getting stressed out with the work I've had to do [at college]. I had to come in anyway so I thought I might as well see [names of PAs] and see if they can help me out a little bit.

That some PAs were still maintaining contact, sometimes quite regularly, with clients after they had left the Learning Gateway is a credit to their professionalism and illustrates their desire to see that the young people continued to progress. However, given that these clients were no longer 'on their books' as such, this must also have had considerable time implications for them. It was clear that the young people still saw their PAs as a key point of contact, either for general discussion, or for help with more specific issues as these arose.

Clients' views of their current learning provision were mixed. Most were positive about the options they had progressed to. One very enthusiastic young man, for example, who was doing a college course, said:

Obviously to start with it was a bit difficult, starting college, because I'd been out of education for a year and it was a bit difficult. I was worried about it because I'd had a lot of trouble at school. I was bullied at school, and I wondered if it was going to happen again at college. But it's a totally different environment. Everyone is a lot more grown up and the teachers respect you for what you want to do and everything. I'm happier there now.

Others were getting on with their chosen options reasonably well, but were finding the new environments in which they were working quite challenging, or seemed to be missing the one-to-one support to which they had become accustomed during their time on the Learning Gateway. One female client, who was undertaking an IT course at college, stated:

I can do the work, all the work I have to do I can do, but there's like bits of it that I don't understand, and you ask one of the people there who teach you but they walk off on you and leave you to do it yourself. They have to help the other people there because they keep getting stuck on it. They just leave me to do it, so I get stressed out and I end up walking out, having a ciggie and coming back in.

In contrast, other leavers were not particularly content with their current options, suggesting that they would not stick with them for long, or viewed them as a temporary measure until something better came along. One young man who was undertaking a general IT course said that this was not what he really wanted to be doing; rather he had his eye on a specialist computer course on art skills: *'I've been waiting to get on Art Skills for year...My*

name's been down there, and it must have been down there for like ever...Like two and a half years.' However, in the mean time, he viewed doing something related to what he wanted to do in the long term as a better option than doing nothing.

Most of those who had moved on to mainstream options felt that the Learning Gateway had helped them to get where they were. Most of these interviewees had undertaken Life Skills programmes before progressing, with only a handful having gone directly from the front end into mainstream options. Those who had undertaken Life Skills programmes tended to see the providers of these programmes as the people who had most helped them to achieve their employment or training positions, whereas those who had moved directly from the front end viewed their PAs as the people who had been the most helpful at this point of transition.

A number of comments related to the fact that Life Skills providers had helped the young people to think about what they wanted to do with their futures, to look for jobs and to secure interviews. Comments included:

As soon as I got on to the Learning Gateway, we all had to make our minds up what we wanted...I suppose it gave me a kick up the backside.

It sorted out for me what I wanted to do. It helped me decide what I want to do in my life – where I wanted to go with my career. It did help me out a lot.

For those who had progressed directly from the front end, similar comments were made about the assistance received from PAs in making this transition. One male client stressed how his PA had raised his self-confidence and awareness: *'Basically he showed me that I could easily do all kinds of things, which is why I am doing this training now...I don't think there is anything else I could have reasonably expected him to provide.'*

Only one or two leavers who had progressed to mainstream options felt that they had done so in spite of the 'help' they had received throughout the Learning Gateway. Following one young woman's negative experience of Life Skills provision, which she and a friend had left to take up agency work, she decided to get herself a place at college to do a course in community care. When asked whether she had had any help from Learning Gateway staff in securing this placement, she said: *'No, we did it for ourselves through a friend. She told us what course she was starting and we said we'd like to do that.'*

Most of the young people seemed to have moved from the front end or Life Skills into their mainstream options without a break in time, indicating that their transitions were relatively seamless. However, whilst most had not experienced a period of inactivity as such, it became clear in the interviews that a number of the clients had been kept on Life Skills for longer than they had wished, even though some claimed to know exactly what they wanted to progress to and wanted to get on to this, whilst others seemed to have

undertaken a number of short courses or voluntary work, whilst trying to secure placements. One young man's experience summed this up:

They [the Life Skills provider] said 'What do you want to be interested in?' and I said 'I want to do catering'...This was, like, they were saying after the third week and I didn't get to see this [name of trainer] who does the catering side of it until about 12 weeks and I thought, well, they've kept me here so long, I could have just gone and got a job.

Whilst the young people themselves did not always perceive that their transitions had been as swift or as direct as they would have liked, interviews with them did not, of course, elicit information on training providers' or PAs' reasons for keeping them engaged in training activities or voluntary work. Such reasons may have included that:

- ♦ It was not always possible to find suitable placements for the young people in the short term, and hence Gateway staff did their best to keep the young people occupied in the interim, to avoid losing them all together. This point was made during interviews with careers service staff, who stressed that, in particular, there was a need to keep occupied those young people who wished to progress to college courses, because these often had only termly or annual intakes.
- ♦ It may have been felt that some clients needed more intensive personal, social, key or basic skills development before they were in a position to progress to a mainstream option. The young people themselves did not, of course, always perceive that they had such needs.

Negative experiences were the exception: most of the clients interviewed were positive about the options they had progressed to. Most felt that the Learning Gateway had helped them to achieve their goals in a way which they acknowledged they would not have been able to without the support they had received.

4.4 Rejoining the Learning Gateway

Getting a sense of young people's experiences of rejoining the Learning Gateway was complicated by the following factors:

- ♦ Many of the clients who were classed as 'rejoiners' by their careers services were not particularly *aware* that they had left the Learning Gateway and subsequently rejoined. Such young people tended to believe that they had been involved in a series of ongoing support and training activities, without having left the Learning Gateway in between.
- ♦ Some young people were also confused about which of the activities that they had been engaged in were and were not part of the Learning Gateway. For example, some had been seeing their PAs at the careers centre prior to the launch of the Learning Gateway, or reported that they had had jobs

without training, which they talked about as part of their Learning Gateway experience.

For these reasons, some of the young people found it quite difficult to *articulate* their experiences as ‘rejoiners’, and to express their reasons for having left and subsequently come back to the Learning Gateway. However, others were conscious that they had rejoined, and careful probing by interviewers elicited some insights into the choices that the young people had made at key points within the Gateway, providing an explanation of why some had returned to the front end.

Most of those clients who could say with certainty when it was that they first joined the Learning Gateway reported that they had become involved around six months previously, at the end of the school year. Others had joined more recently, but quite a large number claimed to have joined as long as one-and-a-half to two years ago. This illustrates the point made above, that some young people did not perceive a difference between the support they had been receiving from careers advisers prior to the Learning Gateway, and the front end support that they had received, often from the same individuals, who were now classed as their PAs.

4.4.1 Experiences the first time around

Those clients who were interviewed in their capacity as rejoiners had had a range of provision and experiences prior to rejoining the Gateway. Young people were interviewed who had left after:

- ◆ having been solely on the front end of the Learning Gateway;
- ◆ having progressed from the front end into Life Skills but not beyond;
- ◆ having progressed from the front end directly into a mainstream education, training or employment option;
- ◆ having started on the front end, moved on to Life Skills and then progressed into a mainstream option.

Reasons given for leaving seemed to vary according to the stage in the Learning Gateway that clients had been at prior to their leaving. For example, those who had been on the front end were most likely to have left due to a lack of interest or motivation in moving on to a Life Skills or mainstream option, or because they became frustrated at not gaining the type of employment they were looking for.

The first point was illustrated by one client who, in response to a question about why he had stopped coming to the careers centre, said: *‘I don’t know. I just didn’t have the chance to come down like...They put me on appointments but I missed them.’* The second point was very relevant to one young woman who felt that she had been stuck on the front end for a long period of time. This was because it was proving very difficult for her PA to find her an

employment or training opening in the occupation in which she was interested – tattoo artistry. She had been offered alternative courses, but was not interested in these: *‘I find people want to push me into other stuff, like theatrical make-up, but I don’t want that.’* She had decided to leave the Gateway in the end because:

They try and help, but it’s not enough. [Name of PA] is trying to help locate the course in [name of town], but that was weeks ago and I haven’t heard anything. I want to start it now. They do just tell you what they think you should do instead of letting you make up your own mind. It’s like you don’t have your own opinion.

Those who had undertaken Life Skills programmes gave various reasons for leaving the Learning Gateway either before or after completion of their programmes. Some had left the Learning Gateway to take up jobs without training. Such outcomes are not regarded by the DfEE in such a positive light as moving on to a mainstream option – hence, they are not rewarded with a £50 bonus payment. However, from the young people’s point of view such outcomes were seen as a major achievement, as is illustrated by the following quotation:

I joined it [the Learning Gateway] for a while. I was on it for about three months, but then I left because of my Marks and Spencer’s job. But the job was only temp...I left to see if I could do it, because I was getting a lot of good feedback from the Learning Gateway – from staff and other people. So I was determined to do it on my own really. Let’s see if I can do it now – and I did! I always told myself and my friends that I didn’t want to work in Marks and Spencer’s – there’s a hard test to get in there. I always thought I was hopeless, but when I got in I was so happy.

Others had left, losing contact with their PAs, because they had not been able to move on to a mainstream option. For the majority of such young people, it appeared that the skills and knowledge they had developed during Life Skills programmes were not sufficient or appropriate to enable them to move on at this stage. For some, this was simply a reflection of the fact that they still needed more intensive basic skills or personal training before they would be in a position to move on. For others, however, this raises a question about whether the Life Skills provision they had received was appropriate to their needs, or closely enough tailored to what they hoped to move on to in the future.

There were also those who had finished Life Skills simply not knowing what they wanted to do, and hence not being in a position to do much other than leave the Learning Gateway, or rejoin in order to gain one-to-one support from a PA again, and hopefully some sense of direction. In contrast, there were one or two examples of former Life Skills clients who had gained so much from their programmes, that they now wanted to move on to a higher level of this type of training. One young woman, for example, had undertaken a Life Skills

course in health and beauty and basic skills, which she had completed over a period of four months. When this had come to an end, she had requested further training in health and beauty, which she had since gained, but only after a break:

I wanted another course so I could get even better at it, so I went back to see her [PA] so she could organise that. I eventually want my own business...I've got the course on sun-beds that I wanted and, again, I want to study English and maths...I need to do another course, but it's for three years in business studies. I can do that after my health and beauty. I found that out from [name of PA].

Young people who had progressed to a mainstream option, either direct from the front end or via Life Skills, gave a number of reasons for leaving their employment or training and rejoining the Learning Gateway. Perhaps rather negatively, the main cause appeared to have been non-completion of training programmes or work placements due to incidents that led to young people being excluded. One client explained that:

I don't really want to say anything about that – she [a college tutor] had something against me. She had it in for me and I was asked to leave...I went to appeal. I knew a boy that was in my class and he appealed and he got back on. So I thought, save going mad, I went down there. I phoned them and they said all they could do was give me an interview in February, which was two months later. I thought 'no'.

Others had left their courses or employment of their own accord, having lost interest or wanting to do something else. One young man, for example, explained that he had dropped off his course because it had turned out to be less practical than he had expected:

I was doing a child care programme. ...I was on it for about five months and I thought I would have got more out of the programme so I left. We was in the centre for about six weeks before we went to a placement, so I found that a bit boring. The work on placement I thought I would be doing more with the children but I wasn't, so...there was no point in me staying if I don't like it.

In another instance, a young woman explained that the employer of her work-based training placement was unable to keep her on in the long term: 'After Christmas there wasn't really enough work for me so they let me go.' She said that she had really enjoyed working for the company and was upset when she found that she was going to have to leave.

4.4.2 Experiences the second time around

The majority of young people who were interviewed in their capacity as rejoiners were back on the front end of the Learning Gateway, with a smaller

number engaged in Life Skills. Young people had different reasons for having rejoined as follows:

- ◆ Those who were not sure what they wanted to get out of the Learning Gateway or what they hoped to progress to, but saw coming into the careers centre and meeting with a PA as something to do.
- ◆ Those who were hoping to progress to Life Skills, either for the first time, or to a different Life Skills provider where they had tried out Life Skills before.
- ◆ Those who hoped to move into a mainstream education, training or employment option, for the first or second time.

Other reasons for rejoining included disappointment that previous Life Skills programmes or mainstream options had not worked out, wanting to be given a second chance, and the possibility of continuing to develop and learn new skills.

One young woman, who had just gained a place on a Life Skills programme, said of her experiences the second time around: *'From the last time it's been better...I can come here and talk to my personal adviser. She'll sort all my problems out. We really bonded and she helped me to get something else [Life Skills provision].'* Another young man, who was undertaking his third Life Skills programme, seemed to think that this time he had found something that he wanted to continue with: *'I started off on retail and then it went to mechanics and now it's gone on to manufacturing, and that's what I'm sticking at.'* A male client, who had not progressed beyond the front end before leaving the Learning Gateway previously, had been told that he had to rejoin at the front end, and prove to his PA that he had the motivation to take up a Life Skills programme:

To get in this college I have to prove that I want to go, so I have to come in [to the careers centre] once a week or so at certain times, so they know I'm interested. If they let you on, and I mess up, there is someone else there who could do better, like.

This young man seemed keen to prove that he had the necessary commitment, and wanted to make the Learning Gateway work for him this time around. Another rejoiner said, when asked whether he thought the Learning Gateway would be better this time around, *'Yes, because I'm more interested now...I've realised now that I need to do something before it's too late.'*

For those who stated that they had rejoined in order to move on to jobs or training, there appeared to be a distinction. Some said that they wanted to *'get jobs'*, but had little idea of what they hoped to do, or how to achieve this. Such young people were generally meeting their PAs in the hope that they would be able to find something for them. Others, however, had clear ideas about what they wanted to achieve, and were using their time with PAs to seek

out relevant opportunities, to compile CVs and to complete job applications. As one female client said: *'I have filled in a couple of applications last week and I'm waiting for them to come back. That's when I came in last Tuesday and spoke to [name of PA]. She looked on the computer and helped me look at the job vacancies.'*

Some young people expressed more negative or apathetic reasons for having rejoined the Learning Gateway. One young man said, for example: *'It was either come back here, look for work, or get kicked out [of home]'*, and another said of his reasons for rejoining: *'Dunno, I just need the money.'* For others, the Learning Gateway was viewed as a 'holding operation' whilst they waited for something more interesting to turn up. This is illustrated by the following example:

Half the stuff they offer is xxxx. I'd rather be doing something I want to do like baking, but I'll carry on with this for now.

On balance, however, more rejoiners than not were hoping to gain something positive from their second or third time through the Learning Gateway, even though what they hoped to achieve was not always clearly defined in their own minds.

4.5 Clients' Views of their Personal Advisers

On the whole, the young people who were interviewed were content with their PAs, whom they had found to be supportive and helpful. While it is possible that the clients who agreed to participate in the research interviews, when requested to do so by their PAs, might be more well-disposed towards their PA than some of their peers. Nevertheless, the comments from a wide range of clients were expressed.

4.5.1 Frequency of meetings

The Learning Gateway clients who were interviewed, commonly met (or had met in the case of leavers) with their PAs on a regular basis. The frequency of the meetings ranged from daily to every few weeks but, most commonly, the young people saw their PA every week. This pattern did not vary markedly in relation to whether the young person had been on the front end for some time or was a rejoiner, though those currently on Life Skills saw their PA less often.

In addition to the regular meetings, some clients mentioned that they would contact their PA on a more *ad hoc* basis. For example, one said that *'I pop in just for a natter sometimes'*, while another commented that *'I phone her most of the time as well'*. The flexibility and responsiveness of the PAs are evident in the finding that the young people generally felt confident that they could contact their PA at short notice. However, the implications for managing this approach are suggested in the comments of the young people, for example that *'I can just pop in to see him. If he's busy, I can arrange a day whenever he is*

free to see me’ or ‘I just drop in and sometimes she’s there and sometimes she’s not’.

4.5.2 Difficulties getting to meetings

The majority of young people did not report any significant difficulties getting to meetings with their PAs. Meetings generally took place at the careers centre, which they could walk or take a bus. Where they had missed meetings, it was usually due to not having the money for the bus fare, as one young person explained: – *‘Because I live a long way away...I do get that [the bus fare] back when I come in, though...It’s just a problem getting the money to come in.’* The other reason given for missing meetings with a PA was *‘just not getting out of bed early in the mornings’*, as one interviewee remarked. This explanation was confirmed by one of the PAs interviewed who pointed out that sometimes there was *‘a problem getting them in – they turn up at their convenience’*.

4.5.3 Support provided by Personal Advisers

The support provided for the young people who were interviewed took two main forms:

- ♦ practical help;
- ♦ personal and social support.

To a great extent, the practical support which was provided related to careers advice and guidance. Interviewees reported receiving help with finding courses and jobs and with application forms and interview skills. As one explained: *‘If I’ve got application forms and I don’t know what questions, I’d come down and see [PA] and she would help me fill it in and talk to me about the job so I understand it properly.’* The role of the PA in opening new horizons for the young people was particularly critical for this client group who, as outlined in Chapter 2, had often left school without qualifications. The reflections of one young man who had left the Learning Gateway illustrated this:

He showed me options that I didn’t know existed, you know. I just thought – I didn’t think there’d be anything for me because when I left school I didn’t have any qualifications so I didn’t think I could go to college.

Some of the young people were very positive about the way in which their PAs understood what they wanted to do and had offered them support that was relevant to their needs.

They ask you what you want to do and if you say ‘no’ or you say ‘yes’, that’s the decision you go for. They go with your decision.

She won't tell you what to do; she'll ask you what you want to do. That's what you need because all your life you get told what to do, and when you get to a certain age, you don't want to be told what to do. You want to do what you want to do.

Some young people commented on how this approach contrasted with their previous experiences. One said: *'Wow, they are not telling me what to do, they are asking me what I actually want to do...it was a really big difference.'*

The assistance provided by the PAs to the young people in relation to finding a job or training place extended to going with the client to the interview, or to view the training place before starting. For example, one young man on the front end said about his PA: *'He takes me to interviews and makes sure I go. I'm hopeless on buses, could end up anywhere.'* These comments show how many of the PAs were responding to the personal organisation and motivation issues of their clients, as outlined in Chapter 2.

In addition to such careers-focused support, some PAs were providing other practical assistance to their young clients. Interviewees particularly mentioned help they had received with housing and finance. For example, one young man explained that his PA *'helped [him] when [he] left home, finding Job Seekers Allowance and Accommodation Protect that pay rent for under 18s to the person you're staying with'*. Similarly, another said that her PA sorted her out with *'jobs and stuff and interviews...and if I need help with my housing benefit and stuff like that, just ring them up and she'll help me out. She's quicker than my social workers anyway...she may as well be my social worker.'*

Another form of practical support provided by some PAs, according to their clients, was to resolve issues and disputes which arose during training, as illustrated by the comment of one client that *'if something's going on, say at work, if I'm getting into problems, she gets on to the training provider and helps sort it out'*. This role might also involve talking to the young person about *'things I have done wrong and how I can make them right'*.

In addition to liaising with other organisations in order to resolve disputes, it was evident from the interviews that the PA's role complemented the support provided from other quarters. Interviewees commented that *'if she can't help you, she'll find someone who can'* or *'if I had a problem, I'd come in and see [Life Skills tutor] and if she couldn't sort it out, I'd have a chat with [PA]. If she couldn't sort it out they'd both get together and we'd have, like, a little chat'*. This last comment illustrates the complementary role occasionally played by the PAs.

Some of the young people who were interviewed also received more personal support, both directly and indirectly, from their PA. One interviewee, a successful leaver, made the following observation about his PA:

I was really grateful to her for helping me out because she helped me out on a personal level as well as on careers...at first I didn't tell her anything because I didn't think it was any of her business, but after a period of time I got to trust her and I told her...she came with me to the housing advice...she was always calling me up and asking if there was any change. I was very grateful for that. I couldn't really talk to anyone else, and she always said that if I ever needed to talk to her she's always there for me.

It appears that some of the young people did not always have access to a person who was willing to listen to them and the PA fulfilled an important role for them in this regard. For example, one commented '*I can't lose. If no one wants to listen to me at all, I can come here*' and another said that '*I just did not like talking to no one at first, but with [PA], she's just dead happy and cheerful and you just like spill everything out to her. You go in and have a chat to her and go out feeling better*'.

While some of the clients were supported on a personal level by their PA, not all were or wanted to be. As one commented, '*you can't tell her everything because she can't help you with everything. She can only help you with certain things*'. This view is reflected in the comment of another interviewee that '*if it was a job problem, I would probably talk to [PA] but if it was a family problem, I would probably just talk to my sister*'.

The young people's comments suggested that the main key to a successful relationship with their PAs was if they could trust them. One young man explained that '*you've got things you want to do which I don't really tell people about. You get to know your personal adviser more and get to open up more to them and so, like, things now a lot of advisers wouldn't know about me, [PA] knows about me*'. Later in the interview he noted that '*maintaining*' [self-motivation] had been his biggest achievement and attributed it to the support he had received, saying '*when you let yourself down, you lower other people down and let people like [PA] down...a lot of people that have helped me*'.

Some interviewees believed that their PAs were more able to help them make the right decisions because of the relationship and understanding that they had built up. For example, one young man commented that it was better to see the same person every time he went into the careers office because '*it would have been a lot more impersonal if it's a different person every time who didn't know me and had to try and guess what I want*'. The effect of this is illustrated by his comment later in the interview that '*if he'd [the PA] told me to do something I know that it's going to be right for me because I know he understands the way I am*'.

4.5.4 Characteristics of a Personal Adviser

The young people suggested that they particularly valued the following characteristics in their PAs:

- ♦ the ability to listen and offer appropriate choices – *‘they listen and explain things fully’*;
- ♦ good communication skills – *‘he helps by explaining things in a way I understand’*;
- ♦ the ability to build up a relationship of trust – *‘he’s not one of those that will go blabbing to his workmates’*.

In some cases, the respective personalities of the PA and the client seemed to be just as important as these characteristics for establishing an effective working relationship. As one young man, describing his first PA, stated, *‘we just didn’t click’*, while others, who had more positive relationships with their PAs made comments such as:

I’ve never seen her angry ever, she’s a very calm person, she takes everything in her stride as well.

I ended up having a laugh with her ’cos she’s a really outgoing person, you can get on with her.

4.5.5 Additional help required

The young people could not, on the whole, identify any additional help that they required from their PA. It may be that they were unable to identify what they did not know might be on offer to them, but their responses suggested that they had received sufficient help, for example *‘I get all the help I need really’*, or *‘they’ve helped me all they could’*, and finally, *‘she’s tried doing everything’*. Underlying this contentment with what the PAs had been able to provide was a sense that the young people could get any help that they needed if they were to ask. As one young woman explained: *‘If there’s anything, I can go over to her and ask her and she will help you if she can, but so far now, I don’t need any help.’*

Although the young people who participated in the interviews had a range of experiences of working with PAs, overall they had found having a named person, who they saw each time they visited the careers centre, and with whom they could build up a relationship of trust and understanding, to be a positive aspect of the Learning Gateway provision. The prevailing view can be summed up in the comment of one young person that *‘there isn’t anything bad about having your own adviser’*.

4.6 Individual Development Plans

The large majority of young people were often not familiar with the term ‘Individual Development Plan’ – comments such as *‘I’m not sure, I’ve signed so much stuff’* were typical. However, probing by the interviewers revealed that some had been through the process of completing one with their PA. Their experiences of this, and the value they attributed to it, were varied.

Some young people indicated that they had not found the process useful and suggested that its completion was more for the benefit of the careers service or training provider than the individual. The views of one young woman revealed the mistrust which she felt towards the process:

There’s no point in doing them. I thought that was just being nosy, that, trying to...find out what they wanted. Being nosy into my personal life and they didn’t even take notice of it.

Another young man did not feel involved in the process, or that the outcome reflected his view, as he explained: *‘I think it was mainly for them, but what they wrote on it was total xxxx in the end...She was typing it. I wasn’t even saying anything, she was just typing it.’*

Some other interviewees were largely indifferent to the experience – *‘I don’t get a copy, but I don’t really need it’* one young woman said. Again, this view was sometimes due to their perception that the aim of the process was to produce information for the careers service or training provider. The following comment from a young woman who could not recall using her IDP after completing it illustrates this point: *‘I think it’s just so they know what I was like before I start going there.’* Similarly, another young woman said: *‘It gets passed on to the places I go so they can see what I need help on.’*

In only a few cases, the IDP was a live document which was revisited and used to support the young people’s development through the Learning Gateway. This was particularly the case in one careers service, where a lot of work had gone into designing an IDP, in consultation with the TEC and local training providers, in order to develop a document that would appeal to young people. All clients had their own copies of the IDP in a ‘Learning Gateway File’, which was used by the young people to collect evidence of their achievements, certificates, and other assessments carried out whilst on the front end of the Learning Gateway.

The following examples illustrate more positive views on the process of using an IDP:

We have little sheets, and she comes and asks me ‘What are you doing? – Write it down’. Then she’ll ask me if there’s things I need and then she’ll write them down, anything I need help with, and then we’ll both sign it, and like the college have a copy and [name of PA]

has a copy, so they can help you, if there's anything in it that you think you need to do.

He types it into the computer. Sometimes I get a photocopy, that is useful so you know where you are. I do refer to it and show my Mum. We discuss...what we are going to write down – what's our goals. It's done on the computer. We sit and discuss what's changed, what needs to be improved and whether I am happy with what's gone on. That gets written down.

The extent to which the IDP was regarded as useful by young people may be dependent on the way in which it is introduced and used and the attitude of the young person. For example, if it is regarded by the young person as an end document to provide information to the careers service and training provider, without the value of the process being explained, the young person may not perceive it as an ongoing process which could be of value and interest to him or her.

4.7 Consultation, Feedback and Development of the Learning Gateway

In this section, the extent to which the young people had been given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences of the Learning Gateway will be explored. Their suggestions for the future development of the Learning Gateway are then outlined.

4.7.1 Consultation and feedback

A number of the young people said that they had not been asked what they thought about the Learning Gateway provision. In the main, these young people were not concerned that they had not been consulted and given the opportunity to provide feedback from their perspective. The view expressed by one young person that *'I wouldn't go back there if I thought it was rubbish'* may reflect a wider viewpoint. However, as has been discussed, there are other factors which may lead to continued attendance, for example the link with benefits or the social element of attending Life Skills. The young people may also have been reticent to express their feelings, as this comment from a young man who had left the Gateway successfully indicates:

...I didn't really want to say to them, because that's their job and I don't want to go and say to them and say something to criticise their job really, to their face anyway.

Some of the young people who said that they had not been asked what they thought of the provision indicated that they would have liked to have been asked. As one young woman said, *'I'd ask them what they liked and didn't like. They didn't do that enough for me'*. Another young man explained why he thought that young people may not have been consulted:

They probably did when it first started but they never got any answers so they just stopped...because if they'd asked me, I'd have talked to them about it but if they asked some of the people that were doing it, they just wouldn't talk to you...they can't talk in any way openly because they feel threatened probably or something like that.

This view gives an indication of the challenge which is presented to providers of a service for these young people if they are to seek to meet their needs and address any issues which arise for them.

Despite this, there was evidence from the interviews that some of the young people had been consulted. In some instances, this consultation appeared to have been through a formal mechanism, such as a questionnaire or discussion, as the following comments illustrate:

They asked us questions like how did we like it and what were the good and bad things.

In the reviews they ask like how you feel about the course and how you feel about them in person, what they have been like, have they been able to help you enough...

Although the clients could be invited to provide feedback, they may choose not to do so, as illustrated by the comment of one young man that *'I was given this little form but I didn't really look at it. It didn't really interest me, so I didn't fill anything in'*. Another approach to consulting and gaining feedback to emerge from the interviews was through informal discussion, usually with a PA. For example, one young woman recalled her PA talking with her about *'anything we didn't like about it or really enjoyed'*. Another young woman explained that she was asked informally by staff, commenting: *'One of the other staff asked me. I said it's good. They know if it's going all right because I'm cheery. If it's not going all right, then I'm being grumpy.'*

The young people who had been consulted rarely knew whether there had been any changes to provision after, or as a consequence of, their feedback, as they had moved on from the course. Comments such as *'I don't know if they made any changes'* or *'I think they did [ask] towards the end of Life Skills...it would probably affect the next group'* were often given in response to the question. These observations suggest the need to examine the appropriateness of the timing of any feedback opportunity. Sometimes the young people were aware that their feedback had been acted on. One young man, who had been unhappy with the Life Skills provision, explained:

[PA] asked me what I thought of it after we had left, and I told him it was xxx...they actually stopped it after ours. We all came in here and had a big discussion about it because we all thought it was rubbish. The people that were trying to teach us were talking down to us all the time and treating us like kids. None of us liked it.

4.7.2 Development of the Learning Gateway

The young people were asked what changes they would suggest for the Learning Gateway provision. While a number of them said that they would leave it as it is and not make any changes, some did provide some insights into how they believed it could be improved. The required changes related to:

- ◆ the content of programmes – mainly in relation to Life Skills provision;
- ◆ the programme delivery;
- ◆ matters relating to pay;
- ◆ a lack of promotion of the Learning Gateway.

With regard to the content of the provision, some young people suggested ‘*more activities*’. More detailed suggestions included an increase in arts, sports, IT and practical activities and more ‘*days out*’. As indicated in Section 4.2.1 above, some young people perceived the content of Life Skills to be inappropriate to their needs – ‘*it was rubbish, just English and maths and stuff. It could’ve been better if there was something to do...*’ Two young people detailed the changes they would like to see:

Change Life Skills into a way that would be better for people 16, 17 who have left school, I think, because people who’ve left school and gone to Life Skills haven’t done well in school or they’ve been kicked out. That’s why they are at Life Skills. You should include more things to do, more paths to take, like going down and doing computers.

Doing proper stuff, a 16-year-old’s work, not writing down sums and stuff like that. Do something they need to learn when they are moving into a flat or something, maybe on their own. Independent stuff...budgeting and stuff like that.

These comments highlight the need to be explicit in making clear links between the content of the course and the life of the young person, and to be creative in conveying the content in innovative and perhaps unconventional ways.

Sensitivity to the needs of the clients was another issue which was raised by some interviewees, as one young man explained:

They could put different classrooms for different kinds of people for what they want to do, people with learning difficulties like me, I can’t spell at all. I’m a bit ashamed of it. They should put us in separate rooms, for kids who are a bit hard on learning things. I don’t like saying things in front of people. I think they’d be a lot more open if you were all in the same boat.

In addition to suggesting changes to the content of the courses, some young people commented on the delivery. A number observed that they would take time at the outset to establish what the young people wanted. As one young woman expressed it:

I'd ask them what they wanted, their interests and stuff and meet them on a one to one and find a course that interests them. I'd go back and check that everything is OK and offer them guidance for the future. I'd definitely offer the Life Skills programme and include extra help if they need it. Too many people are unhappy what they're doing.

Another young man also mentioned the need for bespoke provision when he said he would offer young people *'friendly staff, one-to-one person for each different person so they're not all seeing the same person, find out what they all want. Tailored to what you want'*. Many young people mentioned that they would keep the PA role in any provision. They believed the PA should offer *'friendly and down to earth advice, not be uptight, snotty or overpowering'* on a one-to-one basis so *'you can earn their trust'*.

As is apparent from the comments above, the young people were concerned that the attitude of the person with whom they would be working should be appropriate. The comment of one young man who said *'treat us with our age, not treat us like "I'm above you, I've got a job"'* reflects the view of many.

Given the relationship between the Learning Gateway and the benefits, and the financial constraints that these young people were under, it is unsurprising that one of the aspects of the provision which they would change related to money. Three young people, who were all rejoiners made the following comments:

I'd give them a bit more money.

I'd put the money up because you get £40 a week.

Pay them more, definitely.

Moreover, two young people, both on the front end, suggested that they would provide a bus pass and a travel allowance.

In general, the young people indicated that they would recommend the Learning Gateway to friends and one of the improvements suggested was to promote the Learning Gateway more effectively. One young woman said: *'They need more Learning Gateways out there...I never knew it was there.'* Similarly, a young man observed that *'I'd offer knowledge...when I left school. I didn't know you could go on a course or anything like that at all. I didn't really know the careers office'*.

This chapter has explored the experiences of the young people at various stages of the Learning Gateway and the role of the PA in supporting them.

The next chapter will present the outcomes of the Learning Gateway experience for those young people who had progressed through it.

Key Findings

- ◆ Most clients who had been on the front end for a long time had not moved beyond this stage because they faced a complexity of personal and social issues. These generally needed to be sorted out before they could move on to education and training options. Additionally, some young people had not moved on because of a lack of motivation, or there being a lack of suitable Life Skills, employment or learning options for them to move into.
- ◆ Clients most appreciated Life Skills programmes that had been individually tailored to suit their needs, abilities and interests and which included work placements or Outward Bound activities. Programmes that provided training in practical tasks which led to certification, help in job searching and which were conducted in a friendly, adult environment were also welcomed. Programmes that were built around teamwork and confidence-building games received a more mixed reaction, whilst a focus on reading, writing and numeracy was generally viewed in a negative light.
- ◆ The majority of young people interviewed who had left the Gateway had moved into mainstream learning or work-based training options. A smaller number had secured jobs without training, whilst a minority were unemployed. Those who had progressed to mainstream options tended to be the most positive about their experiences of the Gateway, feeling that without their PAs and/or Life Skills provision, they would not have got to where they were now.
- ◆ Most leavers had moved from the front end or Life Skills into mainstream options without a break in time. Where this was not the case, the reasons were related to difficulties in finding suitable placements and to young people needing more intensive personal and social support or basic skills development before they were in a position to progress.
- ◆ Reasons for young people leaving, and subsequently rejoining, the Gateway varied. Those who had been on the front end were most likely to have left due to a lack of motivation to move on. Those who had undertaken Life Skills had often left to take up jobs without training or had not been in a position to move on to a mainstream option. Those who had progressed to a mainstream option had sometimes left and rejoined the Gateway as a result of incidents at work or college or because they had lost interest.
- ◆ On the whole, most clients were very positive about the personal support and practical help that they had received from their PAs. Above all, young people valued developing a relationship of trust with one person whom they could rely on and who provided practical solutions to problems they experienced.
- ◆ The large majority of young people were not aware of having completed an IDP or any similar document. Among those who were aware of having completed one, there were very few who regarded it as a meaningful process and as a live document which was revisited and used to support their development.
- ◆ Very few of the young people felt that they had been actively consulted about their Learning Gateway provision. Some of those who had been asked reported that this only happened at the end of the programme and did not lead to any changes that affected their experience of the Learning Gateway. This highlights the importance of providing ongoing opportunities for feedback during the whole process of the programme delivery.

5. OUTCOMES OF BEING ON THE LEARNING GATEWAY

This chapter focuses on the outcomes experienced by young people who have been through the Learning Gateway. It covers outcomes in the following areas:

- ◆ Personal development – attitude, behaviour, confidence, social skills and interaction, organisational skills, and awareness and aspirations.
- ◆ Learning and skills development – basic skills, career-related skills, and occupational skills.
- ◆ Progression – training, employment, and seeking work.

The chapter concludes by identifying how the Gateway helps young people by offering a second chance, a ‘breathing space’, and a structure to their lives.

5.1 Personal Development

It is important to consider the outcomes from the Learning Gateway, as identified in this research, in the context of clients’ backgrounds and lifestyles, characteristics, personal problems, career histories and priorities which were described in Chapter 2. In this chapter it was reported that Learning Gateway clients often led lives that were punctuated by lack of stability, lack of resources and lack of opportunities. Moreover, many did not appear to have the necessary skills and strategies to address the critical challenges that emerged in their sometimes chaotic, disrupted and disadvantaged lives.

Young people revealed that their exposure to, and experience of, the Learning Gateway had enhanced their personal development in various ways. The benefits were in the following areas:

- ◆ Attitude
- ◆ Behaviour
- ◆ Confidence
- ◆ Social skills and interaction
- ◆ Organisational skills
- ◆ Awareness and aspirations.

The findings relating to each of the areas are presented in Sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.6.

5.1.1 Attitude

Some of the young people interviewed said that their outlook had changed as a result of being on the Learning Gateway. They explained that the experience had helped them to reflect on their lives, what they had done and where they were going. Their comments indicated that they were more positive in their attitude and more determined to change.

This was encapsulated in the comments made by this client on the front end of the Gateway:

I suppose I've been given more options than anywhere else with [name of PA]. It's made me think a lot more. I don't want to be on the social. I want a good job and a good life. I don't want to be a layabout.

Similar comments were made by clients at different stages of the Learning Gateway. For example, a rejoiner said that she was more interested in getting something out of the Gateway this time '*because I've realised now that I need to do something before it's too late*'. When asked what she had got out of coming to the careers service and meeting with her PA, she replied:

They made me realise that I need to do something like, because when all my friends left school, they are going to be doing something and I'm going to be the one that's with nothing. So, it's better if I do it now.

Likewise, another rejoiner remarked that she had changed, saying '*I feel like I've got my head screwed on and no more messing around all the time. This has certainly helped*'. A leaver who was doing a community care course considered that the Gateway had helped to concentrate her mind on the future:

I learned a lot about myself...It helped me think what I wanted out of life because I didn't want to be stuck there doing nothing and having no money...This time last year, I wouldn't have dreamed about going to college...It made me think about things. You only get one chance in life, don't you? If you want something done, you've got to get something done.

A leaver who was working in a factory reported that he had changed since joining the Gateway, saying: '*Yes, I've got a more positive attitude now. Even my Mum says that I've got a more positive attitude now.*' Another leaver, doing an IT training course, gave a similar response: '*Well, my attitude's more positive now you know because [name of PA] gives me a lot of positive lessons, things like that. Really, I'm just a better person, better off now than, you know, than I ever would have been, ever was. I think I'm a better person all round – headwise, soulwise, bodywise.*'

Advocating that young people should not be afraid to make the most of what was available, one young woman urged that *'there's options you can grab and take. That's what they show you – they put that forward to you. Don't think you can't do it, because you can. Always think positive. If you want that NVQ level 2 you can'*.

5.1.2 Behaviour

Several of the clients reported that their behaviour had changed, and attributed this to their participation in the Gateway and especially the contact they had with their PAs. They talked about being calmer and more at ease with other people. A good illustration of this type of outcome was a leaver who was now doing a catering course who reflected on how he had changed:

In school, I blew me stack in an instant but now, because going to [a residential centre] and that, it calms you down because you realise the way other people react and stuff.

Another leaver who was doing a business administration course also thought that he had become more relaxed through his experience of the Gateway: *'If I want to say something then I say it and I'm a lot more polite. I just stay calm and get on with life.'*

As noted in Chapter 2, managing their anger was a challenge for some Learning Gateway clients. Interestingly, one young man recalled that he had put down anger management as an aim in his IDP, adding that involvement in Life Skills classes had helped in this regard:

I learned how to relax and put stuff in my mind to keep it calm. At first, the Learning Gateway advised you to count up to ten. It didn't work, so I tried 100. That still didn't work. I started counting up to 500 and that started to work! Now, if I ever get stressed or angry, I either go outside or upstairs.

A young man who had been expelled from school and been in trouble with the police reported that now he had more self-control. His explanation was as follows:

With the Life Skills course, from that I've got good communication skills. I haven't got a temper, I'm not like that. When I was little I used to go round mugging people on trains. I'm grown up now...I'm not doing crime so much as I used to. I get on well with people. I don't have any grudges. When I first started, I was really off people because I didn't know them. When you get to know them it's better, you can communicate more.

A young woman who was now doing training in business administration had noticed a similar change in her behaviour, saying:

I have changed. I got told when I was in school that I was a little scally because I was always getting done and I was hardly ever in school. But when I started Life Skills I was always in, I never got into any fights and I never got done at all because I never done nothing wrong...my Dad said that I've really calmed down.

It emerged from the interviews that, in some cases, the Learning Gateway had enabled young people to gain access to a new social milieu which had helped to foster different behaviour. This was exemplified by the experience of a young man, who had done a childcare placement and when asked how helpful this had been, he said: *'Sorted me head out. I used to be a hooligan. I've started going into college and that.'* Later on in the interview, he added: *'I don't thief no more. I used to be a thief'*, and said that this change had been assisted by *'a different social life now, different mates'*.

5.1.3 Confidence

Increased confidence was an outcome mentioned by several of the interviewees. For example, one young man noted that his biggest achievement on the Learning Gateway had been *'actually being able to get on with people'*. Asked how he felt that he had changed, he replied: *'I'm more confident now, because before I was very shy. Now I've got more confidence and I'm not shy. That's the main thing.'* He explained that he had been bullied at school and that Life Skills had been a different experience: *'When I did the first Life Skills, we all got on straightaway. I actually met friends, instead of people picking on me and bullying me.'*

A young woman said that the experiences she had gained on the Learning Gateway had helped to increase her confidence. Initially wary of working as a receptionist in one of her placements – *'...first when they asked me, I was "No, I might stutter when I'm on the phone"'* – she was pleased to report that the experience *'did really build my confidence up in that way and it was dead good'*.

Increased confidence was cited by some interviewees as the main way in which the Learning Gateway had helped them to prepare for the future. For example, whilst one client commented that it had helped *'a bit. Just taught me to talk to people I didn't know, to build my confidence'*, another said *'Yes. Building my confidence up to go to interviews'*. A young man who was doing a catering course noted that gaining qualifications had helped to increase his confidence as well as open up employment possibilities: *'I feel a lot more confident because I've got my NVQ behind me. I've got a new one on the way, and I'm looking at different opportunities for me like cruise liners or the army or the navy.'*

5.1.4 Social skills and interaction

Several interviewees said that they had developed their social skills, pointing out that the Learning Gateway had given them opportunities for interacting

with other people. For example, a young man who was now doing an IT training course remarked that: *'I've learnt a lot of things. I've learnt how to communicate with a lot of other people too. That's very important. Now I can go to many places and talk universally, by lingo, things like that so that's a good thing to learn.'*

Enhanced ability to communicate was highlighted by another leaver who, when asked what was the most useful thing she had gained from the Learning Gateway, declared: *'How to express myself because we did an exercise where you had to try and express yourself...that was a really good thing to do.'* She now felt better able to articulate her thoughts and stand up for herself.

A young woman who was doing business administration training said that her main achievement during the Gateway had been learning how to communicate with people. Reflecting on a previous experience she explained that: *'When I was on work experience I had a man shouting down the phone to me and I didn't know what to do. I told him to calm down and that I was only the work experience girl, and he got even more angry and swore at me. I was in shock but now I know how to deal with things like that.'*

Elsewhere, a young woman attributed her improved social skills to the Life Skills course she had completed. When asked what she had learned, her reply was *'Only how to talk to people because before when I was talking to someone, I wouldn't look at them. I'd be like looking at the floor or looking up or looking away from them, and now I can talk to people with looking at them as well'.*

Some interviewees talked about how the Learning Gateway had increased their contact and interaction with other people. This is illustrated by the comment made by one young man currently doing training in catering who, when asked how the Gateway had helped him to get where he was now, observed: *'It got me more sociable. It helped me to mingle more with people because I'm not a big social person. I don't like meeting new people. I'm a bit shy, so that helped me out a bit. Got me talking to people.'* This experience was echoed in the response of a young woman who reflected that *'if it wasn't for Life Skills, I wouldn't be able to socialise with anyone. I used to sit in my little corner all day'.*

5.1.5 Organisational skills

Improved organisational skills were identified by several interviewees as an outcome from participating in the Learning Gateway. A stark expression of this was given by a young woman who, when asked what she had gained from her meetings with her PA, said: *'I know what punctuality is now!'*

Adopting a new daily regime had meant that clients had needed to learn how to organise themselves and their lives in a different way. For example, a young woman who was doing a website course reflected on how she had changed: *'I'm used to getting up now and going to classes instead of lying in bed all day. I am trying.'*

Some interviewees acknowledged that through the Gateway they had gained motivation to organise their lives differently. Significantly, this included gaining the motivation to organise themselves in a way that enabled them to undertake training and go to work on a regular basis. Two illustrations give young people's accounts of the impact on their organisational skills:

I'm able to work on my future a lot better. I've got to get up, go to work, meet my adviser and get on with my life. Take things day by day.

Getting the motivation going to go to a job every day. Getting me motivated to get up in the morning and get myself ready.

It was clear from the interviews that some of the young people were proud of proving to themselves and others that they could complete a course or set of activities and begin to develop the skills to reorganise their lives. This feeling was articulated by a young man, now doing an IT training course, who remarked that:

Maintaining [self-motivation], that has been the biggest achievement, like learning how to get up every morning and go and do computers and look at the screen for two hours and stuff like that. That's an accomplishment in itself. I never would have thought I could do that.

A young man who had started a factory job recalled that completing an action plan (IDP) had helped to provide him with a structure for considering his options. When asked how useful filling in the action plan had been, he responded: '*Didn't learn nothing I didn't know already but it helps to give you a plan of what sort of things you're going to be doing.*'

5.1.6 Awareness and aspirations

Awareness and aspirations are the final areas of personal development where Learning Gateway clients indicated that they had made gains. Some of the interviewees revealed that they were now more aware of what was expected of them in terms of getting on a further education course, finding training or gaining employment. For example, a young man who was doing IT training said that, as a result of talking things through with his PA and his cousin, he had realised that he should go back to college '*because these days you need experience and qualifications. Although I had a few, I needed extra*'.

Some of the interviewees had realised that they needed to clarify what they were going to do and make career decisions if they were going to avoid an uncertain future. This was exemplified by an interviewee who said that his PA had brought home to him the importance of getting training and settled employment: '*...she explains things well...Just what I've got to do with my life and that, and then if I don't start now, then I'll never start anywhere. I'll just be like in and out of jobs all my life I suppose, you know.*' A young woman had also realised what she had to do to move on and gain the skills she needed:

I need to finish my Life Skills course because I've been on it three times and I haven't finished it, so that's what I'm aiming to do this time. Finish the course properly and then, hopefully, go on to do business admin and get computer skills and stuff like that.

Attempting to secure the future was mentioned by several interviewees alongside the observation that it was vital for them to achieve something. A young man who was doing a catering course explained why becoming a trained chef was important to him:

Chef, yes, this course I'm doing now is 18 months long so I'm going to be there for a long time but I want to pass it because if I don't do this I've got nothing else to fall back on and I think I've done what I always wanted to do...I will pass, I know I'll pass.

Even where interviewees were still unsure about their career choice, some showed that they were aware of what their training and qualifications could do for them. This was demonstrated by a young man doing IT training, who stated that:

My goal is now to finish level 1 so I'll finish that soon and next after that will be level 2 and then maybe I'll go for level 3 or I might just get a job, it depends. Or I might just move out of IT totally, and you know, switch on to something else, but still I've got the knowledge and the qualifications for IT to back me up.

Similarly, a young man who was doing level 2 training in desktop publishing saw NVQs as enabling him to progress to higher level training: *'After this, I've seen what I could go on to because having an NVQ in anything allows you to go on to the next level of NVQ...so I might go to college and get the next thing up in that and then move on to something I'm more interested in.'* Another leaver, who was doing an NVQ level 1 business administration course, pointed out that: *'If I do this one, I can do level 2 and after that I can do level 3, which will mean that I have a better chance of getting like a receptionist job or something to do with computers, which I really want to do.'*

It was clear from the interviews that some clients' aspirations and ambitions had increased whilst they were on the Learning Gateway. This was illustrated by a young man who was now enjoying doing a woodwork course and, as a consequence, was keen to take this type of work up for a career: *'I'm hoping to get qualifications in manufacturing and go on to doing my own joinery business. It'll take three years to get four qualifications.'* He aimed to achieve level 3 qualifications and then do a business course. Another interviewee who had experienced accommodation problems and had worked in a temporary job in a large shop voiced her hopes for the future: *'If I'm not working in something really good, I would like to go to uni and do a degree in sociology. I don't think I want to work in retail anymore.'*

In some cases, interviewees' experience of placements had helped to firm up their career decisions and had spurred them to strive for what they wanted.

This was illustrated by a young woman who had tried a placement in administration with a chamber of commerce and found that she didn't like this type of work but completed two placements as a care assistant and discovered that this was what she wanted to do. As a result, her horizons had broadened: she had applied to do a care assistant training course and further study: *'I'm thinking about going back to college in September and doing child psychology at night, and a course at college that will help me get qualifications that I want to get to help me through it all.'*

5.2 Learning and Skills Development

The research identified a range of learning and skills outcomes from the Learning Gateway. The three main types of learning and skills development among Learning Gateway clients were found to be basic skills (literacy and numeracy), career-related skills and occupational skills. The findings relating to each type are presented in Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.3.

5.2.1 Basic skills

A few interviewees reported that doing Life Skills and other courses had helped them to improve their literacy and numeracy. A rejoinder who said that Life Skills had been useful in this respect, observed that:

...it's maths and English, it helps you with all that, and your literature, and because I didn't go to school they thought that it would be the best course for me...it has been good, it has really helped me.

Another example was a client on placement who wanted to work in health and beauty and had completed a four-month course on which she had completed the basics of health and beauty and *'catching up with my English and maths'*. When asked what skills she had developed, she replied: *'On the practical side, I've learned about manicures and things. I have become a lot better at maths and English too.'* Admitting that he had *'problems with writing'*, one client who was doing a retail placement said that he did English and maths whilst on Life Skills, adding *'it gets a bit boring but it's helping me a bit'*.

Two interviewees said that they needed further help with literacy. One, a leaver who wanted to get a job as a receptionist, noted that apart from meeting with her PA, the Gateway involved *'just writing and maths because I've got learning disabilities. It was Word Power'*. Later in the interview she pointed out that she still needed help with reading and writing. The other, also a leaver, who wanted a job – *'just factory work or whatever'* – felt let down that Life Skills had not improved her basic skills.

Another leaver who had been in and out of jobs also thought that the literacy tuition provided on the Life Skills was at too low a level. When asked what the worst aspect of the Gateway was, he commented: *'The stuff we had to read. I know I'm thick but I can read and write just about...I don't need something like that to do.'*

The experiences of these interviewees suggests that organisations which deliver this type of provision need to have effective systems for identifying clients' needs and ensuring that they are dealt with at the right level.

5.2.2 Career-related skills

Some interviewees said that they had developed career-related skills such as job search strategies, preparing CVs and interview techniques. Several noted that their PA had shown them how to identify a range of jobs that fitted their interests and aptitudes. For example, one client on the front end reported that his PA helped him to search for jobs that he liked *'on the Internet, yeah. I just search and then it flicks through and a load of jobs come up'*.

Some interviewees valued the way that, whilst their PAs showed them job search techniques, they didn't pressure them to go for jobs they were not interested in. Several pointed out that one of the most useful aspects of the Gateway was writing their CV and producing a presentable version on computer.

The interviews revealed that several Learning Gateway clients had received coaching in how to approach and perform in job interviews. For example, a leaver working in horticulture, when asked what he had learned from Life Skills, replied that:

There's a lot of skills I learned, like interview skills. That prepared me for now. We used to get a piece of paper and write down what you had to say to a person who you had to interview.

A client on the front end who had experienced unskilled jobs and didn't like them had been unsuccessful with job interviews but added that his PA *'has helped me though, telling me the right things to say and how to look'*.

Another front end client reported that she had learned what to do in interviews from her PA, saying *'she used to sit down to talk about them...that was about interview techniques and stuff like that every so often'*. A leaver who was doing a course in business administration, when asked what was the most useful thing she had done since she met her PA, said: *'The best things are learning my interview techniques.'*

5.2.3 Occupational skills

Learning Gateway clients reported that they had gained occupational skills. IT skills were mentioned by several including one employed leaver who said how much he had gained from his Life Skills course: *'I've got skills in basic computer knowledge. I've got that and such things as how to take care of your money and stuff, you know, money management and gross pay and stuff like that, you know, your tax and deductions and your bills.'*

The interviews found that clients had learned skills relating to the following occupational areas: auto-electrics, business administration, catering,

horticulture, IT, desktop publishing, retailing, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, health and beauty, music and drama, childcare and community care. The qualifications that they were working towards were usually NVQ level 2, though some were not sure about this.

Some interviewees said that they had gained less easily definable occupational skills from doing work or volunteering placements organised through the Gateway. These included learning work routines (e.g. getting to work on time) and learning how to perform specific occupational tasks.

Teamwork skills were mentioned by a few interviewees who had developed these in their Life Skills courses. In some cases, this had been delivered through residentials and outdoor activities such as rock climbing, canoeing and abseiling. Some elaborated how this involved learning to trust other members of the team in order to work effectively with them.

A few interviewees recalled that in their Life Skills courses they had learned problem-solving skills, time management, budgeting, first aid and health and safety, which are useful for all occupations.

5.3 Progression

The research found that Learning Gateway clients' progression to training and employment wasn't necessarily linear as some of them sampled opportunities which they did not like and returned to seek further guidance and support from their PA. Most of the leavers who were interviewed had moved on to full-time training courses or full-time jobs with training. The minority (seven) who had not, were on the unemployment register seeking work or in jobs without training.

Many of the leavers said that their experience on the Learning Gateway had helped them to secure their current job or training. They acknowledged the experience gained from doing work placements, coaching in interview techniques, and the support given in identifying suitable courses or jobs. This was illustrated by a leaver who was doing a Modern Apprenticeship in auto-electrics who explained how he had been assisted:

I left school without any decent grades. I did quite a bit of factory work, that was just skipping around doing temporary work. I came up to the careers and spoke to [name of PA]. She tried to sort out what I liked and what I didn't like. I think the Learning Gateway is good because you're with loads of people of your own age and they're all in the same boat, really...it helped me because I was on the dole for a bit...it really just teaches you to do interviews and people skills, you get to talk to people properly...it makes you want to progress in whatever you want.

A second illustration is the leaver who now had a catering job and was doing his NVQ level 2, having completed a level 1. Despite missing a year of school

through family problems and getting low grades in his GCSEs and doing two work placements, one in a pub which he left *'over a few disagreements with the manager'* and one in a glass factory which *'was rubbish, to be quite honest with you...they were talking down to me and being snotty, so I didn't find it very good'*, his PA had helped him to find a placement that he liked which had led to full-time employment. He valued the way that careers staff explained the requirements of working in catering, including unsociable hours, observing *'They just let me know what I was letting myself in for'*. Interestingly, he still visited his PA occasionally to talk because *'I've got a few problems at home. I talk to [name of PA] about them sometimes and he helps me out. I can come in to him and talk about work if I've got a problem at work'*.

Another leaver, who had previously undertaken a work placement in retailing – *'I didn't like retail, I hated it'* – had now moved on to a full-time training course leading to an NVQ level 1 in Business Administration which she much preferred because she liked working with computers. She wanted to gain a level 2 award and was interested in getting a job in travel and tourism.

A leaver who had progressed to college and was doing a GNVQ Intermediate in Art and Design said that the Gateway had not only increased his confidence, *'it's given me a second chance as well because I messed up at school. If I was just on my own, I wouldn't have got into college'*.

Leaver who progressed into a job with training

Rob, 17, left school not having done well in his GCSE exams and with very low career expectations. He always wanted to be an estate agent but thought that his poor exam grades had ruined his chances: *'I never liked school. They drummed it into you that if you didn't get your four Cs in school that would be it – you wouldn't get anywhere. ...I didn't get my four Cs and I thought I wasn't going anywhere.'* After having done a casual job in a local sports shop for a while, he went to the careers service for advice and was told about the Learning Gateway.

Rob got a lot of support from his PA, who helped him sort out how he could realise his ambition of becoming an estate agent. He had found the use of an IDP particularly helpful as part of this process: *'We used to write down every week what we were going to do and what I was going to achieve in that week. Things were supposed to be done by certain deadlines. It all fitted in place.'* After doing a short course that helped to build up his confidence and improve his communication skills, he started a work placement with an estate agent. The Learning Gateway helped him get a good job reference, it enabled him to make new friends, and it helped to change his outlook: *'I suppose I've got more ambitious now. When I was stuck in a shop, there isn't much ambition there, really.'* Rob found a full-time job with an estate agent after finishing on the Learning Gateway, and he has recommended the programme to his friends.

Leaver who progressed to college

Paul, 18, left school over a year ago without any clear plans about what to do in the future and feeling reluctant to go back to college due to his bad experiences at school: *'I was worried about it because I'd had a lot of trouble at school. I was bullied at school, and I wondered if it was going to happen again at college.'* He was told about the Learning Gateway by his school careers adviser, whom he had kept in contact with after leaving school. He decided to join, hoping it would boost his confidence and help him decide what to do next: *'I think what persuaded me was the fact that I still wasn't doing anything specific, and I thought I'd like to do something, and get some advice on what to do, and that was what the course was going to offer me.'*

As part of the Learning Gateway, Paul took part in an initial two-week course, which included *'advice on writing our CV, writing applications, college courses, charity events and things. We had role-playing games and we went on a trip on the last day'*. After that he spent a lot of time at the careers centre discussing his options, considering different courses, and arranging and preparing for interviews. He also had the chance to do some work experience, at a local paper and radio station, and did a short film course. The experience of being on the Learning Gateway turned out to be even better than expected and had benefited him in many ways: *'... it boosted my confidence no end. ...I've done a lot and it did point me in the right direction. It pointed me towards college.'* Paul is now at college doing a National Diploma in photography.

~~The leavers who had not yet progressed to training or employment said that~~ they were still looking for suitable opportunities but pointed out the barriers they faced. For example, one wanted to get a job as a receptionist but lamented that *'I haven't got any NVQs to get it'*. A second explained that she was trying to get a job in hairdressing, adding *'but I can't because I'm pregnant'*. Another leaver who had managed to kick a drug habit claimed that the Gateway had not assisted her very much and had regretted that no work or training placements had been arranged for her. In her judgement, *'they could have helped me out a lot more. Now I still don't know what I want to do, I'm still looking for a job. The Learning Gateway's kept me unemployed'*.

For some interviewees, progression meant the potential to develop and put themselves into a position where they could take appropriate opportunities as they arose. This was amply illustrated by a young woman working in retailing who declared:

I've started my NVQ level 2. That's quite important to me as well because with me having low GCSEs, they're all passes but they're all low because I'm dyslexic. If I get a qualification, it's just a bit higher than a GCSE, so if I go for another job and they want someone with an NVQ level 2, I could be in with a chance of getting that job because I've got that qualification.

Similarly, an interviewee who was doing a desktop publishing course said that he was committed to achieving a level 2 award and was considering doing a more advanced course in this in higher education:

There's a university course actually that one of the trainers runs at university and he says it's just my kind of thing. I've had a look at some of the work they want you to do and it's not stuff I couldn't do, so why not just do it, that's what I'm thinking, so I'll do just that.

It should be noted that a few of the interviewees said that their main priority was to get a job to earn money and to become more independent. They were not particularly interested in getting training. This point was raised by some of the careers staff interviewed, who considered that the definition of what constituted an outcome from the Learning Gateway – progressing to further education or a job with training – was too narrow and did not recognise the range of gains made by this client group, many of whom had multiple problems. One senior manager, for instance, criticised official categories of positive outcomes from the Gateway, claiming that *'they don't reflect the way these young people are developing'*. She explained that, for some clients, the main outcomes involved overcoming personal problems such as eating disorders and drug dependency. The issue of Gateway outcomes is revisited in the final chapter.

An analysis of the research data suggests that the Learning Gateway assisted young people by:

- ◆ Offering them a second chance and to some extent a fresh start where they were not judged adversely on what they had done previously or on their current lifestyles.
- ◆ Providing a 'breathing space' where clients, who were often confused, apprehensive and uncertain, could begin to think about and sort out their lives, supported by staff who gave them one-to-one help and advice – *'if they know we're bothered, there is a positive response'*, as one PA succinctly expressed it.
- ◆ Giving them a focus and a structure in their lives which was sometimes not available from other sources such as the family or colleagues at college or work.

Through these provisions, the Gateway helped to re-engage some clients in reflecting on what was important in their lives and what they wanted to change, in beginning to make decisions about their future, and in learning new skills.

Key Findings

- ◆ The Learning Gateway was found to have helped young people to develop a more positive attitude about themselves and what they could achieve, and to change behaviour, enabling them to handle stress and anger more effectively.
- ◆ Other personal gains included greater self-confidence and improved communication and social skills, increased motivation to organise their lives more productively, a greater awareness of what was expected of them in education and employment, and raised aspirations.
- ◆ Whilst a few young people indicated that their basic skills in literacy and numeracy had improved as a result of the Learning Gateway, others were disappointed with Life Skills provision, saying that it had not improved these skills and was delivered at too low a level. This highlights the importance of targeting provision to meet young people's varying needs.
- ◆ Through Life Skills or support from their PA, some young people had enhanced their career-related skills such as job search strategies, CV preparation, and interview techniques.
- ◆ Some young people had developed occupational skills through Life Skills and work placements organised by the Learning Gateway. In addition to IT skills, young people had gained skills relating to specific occupational areas such as business administration, catering and retailing. A few had learned teamwork skills, problem-solving skills, first aid, and health and safety which are relevant to employment.
- ◆ Learning Gateway clients' progression to training and employment was not necessarily linear as some sampled opportunities and returned to their PA, who helped them to find more appropriate options.
- ◆ Most leavers had moved on to full-time training courses or full-time jobs with training. Many acknowledged that the Learning Gateway, including the experience of doing work placements and support given in identifying suitable courses or jobs, had helped them.
- ◆ Leavers who were still seeking training or employment identified particular barriers, such as lack of appropriate qualifications and pregnancy, as the main reasons for not moving on.
- ◆ Training was less important than a job to some young people, whose main priority was to earn money and increase their independence.
- ◆ The Learning Gateway helped young people by offering them a second chance to achieve, by providing them with a 'breathing space' to sort out their lives, and by giving them a focus and structure which was not always available from elsewhere.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The report concludes by summarising the key findings from the research and drawing out the implications for future policy and practice. These are presented for consideration in relation to the continuing improvement of the Learning Gateway and the future development of the Connexions strategy.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

Learning Gateway clients and their characteristics

The research found that the lives of Learning Gateway clients were characterised by a complex range of personal problems, such as low self-esteem and self-confidence, and multiple disadvantage, including poverty, unstable accommodation, and a lack of basic skills. The anxiety caused by attempting to deal with the challenges they faced in their often turbulent lives had distracted many from concentrating on gaining qualifications whilst at school and from finding appropriate education, training and employment opportunities after they left school. The conditions and difficulties they encountered in their unsettled existence sometimes led to frustration and anger in addition to a feeling of worthlessness and decreasing motivation.

The negative outlook and limited horizons which resulted were major barriers to the young people making progress and moving forward into further education courses, training programmes and jobs. Comparable barriers were found amongst Learning Gateway clients in each of the careers services included in the research. Furthermore, the progress and achievement of both males and females and of clients from different ethnic communities were inhibited by similar barriers.

Joining the Learning Gateway

Young people became involved in the Learning Gateway through different routes including dropping in at a local careers office, being referred by other agencies such as a school, Job Centre or care home, and through a friend. Often joining the Gateway was not a goal that young people initially had in their sights. Instead, it was suggested to them by careers staff when they were dealing with young people's requests to help them look for jobs.

Interviewees gave a variety of reasons for deciding to join the Gateway. These included the following: to access money, to get a job, to gain qualifications, to change their lifestyle, and to respond to family pressure. There were mixed views on the extent to which bonuses were an incentive to

join the Gateway. Whilst some said that bonuses were an attraction, others indicated that they would have joined anyway to meet their perceived needs.

Young people were usually vague about what the Learning Gateway was – it was often associated with Life skills or training courses – and were uncertain about what information they had received about it. Some recalled that they had been informed about financial aspects and others said that they had been told the Gateway involved attending courses.

Many young people did not have clear expectations of the Learning Gateway or what they might get out of it. Those interviewees who felt able to comment said that they expected to get a job and/or skills and qualifications out of it, and help with some of their personal lives such as finding accommodation.

Experiences of the front end

Young people on the front end of the Learning Gateway for a significant period of time (over four months) had two main experiences: working with a PA to deal with social, economic and personal problems whilst at the same time starting to think about employment and training options; and undertaking short training courses aimed at preparing them for Life Skills training or job search. PAs provided support and guidance on employment and training, including how to look for jobs. The main barriers to young people moving off the front end were dealing with complex personal issues followed by a lack of motivation, unsuitable Life Skills provision, and a lack of relevant jobs or training provision.

Experiences of Life Skills

Most of the interviewees had experienced Life Skills provision. There were mixed views on how useful this provision was. All young people who had been involved in the following agreed that the most beneficial aspects were Outward Bound activities, training in practical tasks, such as first aid or health and safety, help with finding placements, and a good working environment. Views on the value of teamwork, discussions, and confidence-building games were more mixed. All young people said that they disliked too much written work. Some noted that Life Skills provision was not differentiated enough to meet the different needs of clients.

Leaving the Learning Gateway

Young people's experiences of leaving the Gateway differed according to whether they were leavers who had progressed to mainstream options or not. Those who had not tended to feel that they had gained very little from the Gateway and that it had not helped them to progress. Where these young people expressed their expectations, most wanted to progress to jobs without

training that offered immediate financial rewards. These interviews indicated a potential mismatch between these young people's aspirations and what the Gateway was set up to achieve – education or work-based training.

Leavers who had progressed to mainstream options were more likely to feel that the Gateway had helped them to progress, and most were happy with their choices. Specifically, young people who had been through Life Skills commented favourably on the practical help they had received from their Life Skills providers in securing placements, and those who had progressed directly from the front end made similar comments about the help received from their PAs.

Although few leavers had experienced a break in time before embarking on their mainstream options, some felt that their transitions had not been as swift and direct as they would have liked. There was a perception amongst some that they had been kept '*hanging around*' on Life Skills or other training programmes longer than they would have wished.

Rejoining the Learning Gateway

The research found that many clients were unaware that they had left and rejoined the Learning Gateway, and tended to perceive that they had been involved in a series of ongoing support and training activities. They were often confused about which of the activities that they had been engaged in were part of the Gateway. Those clients whose experience of the front end involved mainly meetings with a PA and searching for jobs or training places were most likely to have left owing to lack of interest or motivation to move on to Life Skills or a training option. Those clients who had undertaken Life Skills programmes were found to have left for different reasons, including taking a job without training, which, for the young people concerned, was a positive outcome.

Young people rejoined the Learning Gateway for a variety of reasons such as a need to find something to do, moving on to Life Skills, and progressing to further education, training or employment.

Views on the role of Personal Advisers

The service and support provided by PAs were widely valued by young people. No difficulties in gaining access were reported. They found the personal and practical support offered to be useful in attempting to reorganise their lives and identify a way forward. As some clients had no one else to talk to about their problems, the help provided by their PA was a critical source of support. Many interviewees particularly valued having one-to-one support from one person whom they could get to know and develop a rapport with. Owing to the confidential nature of the relationship, they felt that they could trust their PAs and, as a result, felt secure in confiding their concerns to them.

Most clients said that their PAs listened to them and understood their needs. The practical support provided by PAs, such as assistance in sorting out accommodation and social benefit difficulties and in searching for courses and jobs, was also appreciated by the clients. Apart from a few leavers who wanted continuing help with finding a job, clients did not indicate that they required further assistance.

Individual Development Plans

Some of the interviewees were not familiar with IDPs and could not remember whether they had been involved in developing one. Others said that they had not found the process very useful and thought that its completion was more for the benefit of the careers service or training provider than the individual. For some young people, the IDP was a 'live' document which was used to support their progress through the Gateway.

Consultation

Not all Learning Gateway clients said that they had been asked about what they thought of the provision and support offered, though this did not appear to concern them. Whilst some clients said that they had been consulted in group sessions, they rarely knew whether any changes had been made as a result. Others indicated that they had been invited to give feedback but declined the opportunity to do so. When asked what changes, if any, they would make to the Learning Gateway, some of the interviewees said that they would leave it as it is, and some suggested more practical activities or more differentiated Life Skills provision to meet the different needs of young people.

Outcomes from the Learning Gateway

The research found that the main outcomes from the Learning Gateway for young people were personal development gains, learning and skills development, and help with progressing to training and employment.

The experience of being on the Gateway had helped some clients to develop a more positive attitude and to be more proactive in seeking and taking opportunities. Some reported that their behaviour had changed and that they had become calmer and more able to deal with frustration, anger and disappointment. Increased confidence was another outcome which some clients attributed to the social interaction with other young people they had met on Life Skills. They felt that their ability to communicate and get on with others had been enhanced. Some said that their organisational skills had improved and, as a result, they were more able to keep appointments and establish routines for going to training or work placements. According to

interviewees, they were more aware of what was expected of them in getting on a further education course, finding training and gaining employment.

The research found that whilst some interviewees considered the Gateway useful in terms of improving their basic skills (literacy and numeracy), a few thought that the provision did not meet their needs, claiming that it was of too low a standard. Clients reported that they had learned a range of career-related skills such as job search strategies, preparing CVs and interview techniques. In addition, through training and work placements, many had developed specific skills in occupational areas, including business administration, IT, retailing and childcare. Most clients said that they got the type of placement that interested them.

The majority of leavers secured a positive outcome in terms of entering training or employment. They were working towards NVQs at level 1 or 2. Most were enjoying what they were doing and said that the Learning Gateway had played some part in helping them to get to where they were now. Whilst some of the leavers who remained unemployed criticised the Gateway for not supporting them adequately, it was also noticeable that some of them were still struggling to deal with personal problems.

6.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

6.2.1 Promotion of the Learning Gateway

The research found that some interviewees thought that the Learning Gateway should be promoted more vigorously and some had recommended it to their friends. Furthermore, there were mixed views from young people on whether the bonuses offered were an incentive to join the Gateway.

The implication of these findings is that there is a need to consider how best to promote the support and provision offered through the Gateway. Consideration of the research evidence suggests that it would be better to keep the bonuses as they act as an incentive and encourage some young people to join the Gateway who might otherwise miss out on the positive outcomes that some young people experience.

6.2.2 Professional development of Personal Advisers

The Learning Gateway clientele includes young people who have complex needs and who are struggling with serious personal and social problems. As a result, they often lead disorganised and unstable lives characterised by acute vulnerability.

The implications of these findings are that PAs need to have or develop a range of skills and strategies to provide an effective service for Gateway clients, and need continuing support from colleagues and managers to help them fulfil their particularly challenging roles.

6.2.3 Managing access to Personal Advisers

The clients interviewed realised that they could not always have instant access to their PA and were happy to use an appointment system, although large numbers reported that they often ‘dropped in’ to see their PA. The research found that leavers in all areas still liked having access to their PA on an occasional basis.

The implication of these findings is to consider how best to manage clients’ access to PAs in such a way that young people gain the support they want without overstressing PAs who are attempting to meet the needs of a very demanding client group.

6.2.4 Individual Development Plans

The research found that IDPs did not have much meaning for some of the young people interviewed. Often they could not remember whether they had been involved in the process. In addition, some regarded the aim of the process as producing information for the careers service or training providers rather than for themselves.

The implications of these findings are that it is important to review how IDPs are being used and for whose benefit. The processes of completing and reviewing IDPs could be explored with a view to maximising their use for gaining feedback from clients.

6.2.5 Life Skills provision

Some of the young people said that Life Skills was boring and could be covered in less time and complained that the tasters offered were not sufficiently in-depth or that there was limited choice. Furthermore, some reported that they were on courses with young people who had special educational needs, which they did not think was appropriate, or were involved in courses that sought to develop skills for which they did not perceive a need.

The implications of these findings are that Gateway managers need to examine the extent to which Life Skills provision is meeting the needs of all clients who use it and, if not, seek more innovative and flexible provision. There may be a need for provision that is more bespoke or tailored to the needs of the individual.

6.2.6 Improving placements for young people

The research found that some young people had experienced problems with their training and employment placements organised through the Gateway. In some cases, they felt that the placement failed to meet their needs, and in others, they considered that they had not been treated fairly.

The implications of these findings are that the providers of placements require a thorough briefing on the characteristics of Gateway clients, including their needs and the challenges that they are likely to present, so that they can better meet their requirements.

6.2.7 Consultation with young people

Young people were in regular contact with their PAs and felt able to discuss a wide range of matters with them. Some indicated that they had been asked for their views on the Learning Gateway, usually through group sessions. Those who had not been consulted did not appear to be unduly concerned. Others said that they had been given the opportunity to provide feedback but had declined to do so.

The implication of these findings involves finding the most effective and efficient way of gaining feedback from young people, both during and at the end of the Learning Gateway, and deciding how best to use such information for the future development of the Gateway.

6.2.8 Defining outcomes

Some young people and their PAs were disappointed that a positive outcome from the Learning Gateway was that eligibility for the £50 bonus was officially defined as progression to further education and training courses and jobs with accredited training leading to NVQ level 2 or equivalent. They considered that this was too limited a definition, which failed to capture adequately the various gains made by Gateway clients, including overcoming personal problems and changing behaviour.

The implication of this finding is that it would be worthwhile reviewing how the 'softer' and less formal outcomes from the Learning Gateway can be given recognition in order to reflect both the efforts made by young people and staff and the progress achieved.