General Teaching Council for England

Alternative curriculum provision at Key Stage 4

January 2005

Introduction

What difference can alternative curriculum programmes make to students at KS4?

A minority of 14-16 year old students feel that GCSE courses are inappropriate to them and the performance data show that there is a continuing minority of students who fail to achieve any A*-G GCSEs (5.4 per cent in 2002 – around 39,500 students). The reactions of such students to the KS4 experience range from lack of interest to disaffection, which in turn can lead to under-achievement and truancy. Consequently, many schools offer some kind of an alternative to the KS4 curriculum to at least some of their students. The alternatives include spending more time on developing key skills, spending part of the week at college, in training or with an employer learning vocational or pre-vocational skills, or attending community activities designed to promote personal and pro-social skills.

Student perceptions lie at the heart of disaffection and research evidence therefore tends to focus on them. But as well as exploring such students' views we wanted to know about the outcomes of strategies designed to change such perceptions . The study we have chosen this month looks at the views of staff in schools and partner organisations. And, unlike the other studies we found, it also explores evidence about the impact of the interventions in a small number of case study schools.

The researchers gathered data from 198 postal questionnaires completed by school staff from fourteen LEAs, seventy-five telephone interviews with staff in partner organisations and interviews with staff, students and parents from eight case study schools. The researchers asked about the different kinds of programmes schools offered, what the students did on them and whether the participants felt the programmes made any positive difference to the students' attitudes and learning. The study is:

Alternative education provision at Key Stage 4
Cullen, M.A., Fletcher-Campbell, F., Bowen, E., Osgood, J., and Kelleher, S., (2000)
National Foundation for Educational Research

The researchers report that the participants who took part in their study strongly believed that well planned, well run and well monitored alternative curriculum programmes helped to re-engage and re-motivate previously disaffected and disengaged young people. They also felt such programmes were beneficial to the students' families, the schools, the participating organisations and the local communities. In their report, the researchers explored a number of features underpinning alternative programmes including:

creating a supportive school context
making and sustaining collaborative partnerships
encouraging and acknowledging student achievement
monitoring, assessing and evaluating the outcomes.
We think teachers, leaders, careers advisors and college lecturers who are seeking to develop curriculum programmes for young people in their final two years of statutory education will all find the study's findings interesting. The study will also be of relevance to people concerned with the Tomlinson proposals. (Details of the Tomlinson report can be found in further reading).

Click on the links below to view each part of the study.

The study

Alternative curriculum provision at KS4

Cullen, M.A., Fletcher-Campbell, F., Bowen, E., Osgood, J., and Kelleher, S.
National Foundation for Educational Research (2000)

What aspects of alternative curriculum provision did the study focus upon?
The researchers set out to:

* find out the ways different agencies working in partnership planned, designed, monitored, evaluated and reviewed alternative education packages
* examine the curriculum of alternative programmes in relation to their aims and objectives, the National Curriculum, opportunities for accreditation and reintegration into post-16 education, training and/or employment
* find out a range of views about alternative provision

* consider the cost and resources involved in alternative curriculum provision.
In their report, the researchers identified seven main features underpinning alternative curriculum programmes which staff viewed as helpful in supporting students. They explored ways of addressing these features in considerable detail.

The features were:

* the school context
* the local context
* the selection of students
* how collaborative partnerships were made and sustained
* how the programmes were designed and resourced
* how student achievement was encouraged and acknowledged
* how the outcomes of the programmes were monitored, assessed and evaluated.
We have structured this summary around the elements we think leaders and teachers will find most useful to consider:

* the alternative curriculum approach and design
* the selection and encouragement of students who took part in the alternative programmes
* the support given to students by leaders and teachers
* ways of evaluating the programmes
* the effects of alternative programmes upon students and other stakeholders.

What kind of alternative curriculum approach helped?

The researchers reported that staff felt alternative curriculum programmes helped re-engage previously disengaged students, enabling them to move into progression routes post-16 when schools:

* located 'the problem' within the school rather than viewing the student as the problem – using data relating to disaffection, truancy, and underachievement as an indication of the need to reform the curriculum in order to meet the needs of all students
* recognised the need to extend or complement the KS4 curriculum through close relationships with external providers, whose approaches to engaging young people in learning were allowed to feed back to the school and influence the regular curriculum where appropriate
* were willing to learn from experience and regarded alternative provision as part of a developmental process. For example, some schools moved on from offering disaffected students separate provision to offering students individualised programmes, or they broadened the possibilities at KS4 for all students by drawing on the resources of other organisations.
The researchers suggested that schools moved along a continuum from an 'exclusion' approach (where disaffected students were rejected by the school) towards an 'inclusion' approach (where students were seen as the school's responsibility). We have summarised the developmental process identified by the researchers below.

Exclusion

Inclusion

View of the problem

The behaviour of individual students was deemed unacceptable within the school community and the student was asked to leave the school.

Adaptation of the curriculum

The school did not make any adaptations to its curriculum.

The school recognised that some students were not coping with what was on offer within the school and tried to find something more suited to their needs and interests externally.

A 'satellite' programme was implemented. Students stayed on the school roll, but their needs were mainly met outside the school. Apart from adaptations of those students' timetables, the rest of the school's curriculum remained unchanged.

The school recognised that not all students were thriving and sought to extend its own provision by drawing on the resources of external partners.

An 'extension' programme was implemented involving an individualised approach to meet the needs of particular students.

The school provided for its students mainly internally, but recognised that, where necessary, the complementary

expertise and facilities of external partners could also be used.

A 'complementary' programme was implemented giving all KS4 students the opportunity to follow externally-provided vocationally-oriented options that could not be offered in school.

Practitioners may like to read a case study of how one school developed a satellite programme into a complementary one when it saw its difficult students flourish. Practitioners may also find it useful to read the National Evaluation Report of the 'Lower attaining pupils programme' (LAPP). (See Further Reading)

What did the alternative programmes involve?

The schools involved in the study reported on programmes where teaching took place in both school and off-site locations. As well as basic skills, key skills and National Curriculum subjects (core, foundation and optional subjects), the programmes included personal, social and health education (PHSE), and work-related learning. Some programmes also included leisure activities.

Personal, social and health education (PHSE)

The range of topics covered during the PHSE components included assertiveness training, behaviour management techniques, citizenship rights and responsibilities, decision-making skills, opportunities awareness, personal presentation, relationships, team work skills, and time-keeping. These issues were tackled using a variety of teaching methods including: community service, counselling, group work/discussion, and team-building exercises (through, for example, residential experiences, sports and outdoor pursuits).

Work-related learning

Examples of generic work-related activities noted by the researchers included role-playing, mock interviews, filling in practice application forms, work on improving the presentation of the students' National Record of Achievement, similar work on students' curriculum vitae and organising a fund-raising 'enterprise'. Sector specific vocational areas studied or experienced by students reflected the students' particular interests and talents and included: agriculture, animal care, building, care assistance, catering, classroom assistance, design, car mechanics, health and beauty, office skills, painting and decorating, plastering, retail work and joinery.

Leisure activities

Leisure activities did not figure as strongly in the programmes as the researchers had expected. Where they did, they were regarded by school staff as an invaluable way of encouraging the development of students' personal and social strengths and of providing students with entry into constructive social activities and networks that would stand them in good stead on leaving school.

The range of off-site learning contexts

Off-site locations included further education colleges, training workshops, all types of workplaces, youth work centres, community centres, and residential and voluntary agency premises. Non-school tutors included further education lecturers, employers/employees, youth workers, voluntary agency workers and outdoor education workers.

What factors did schools consider when designing alternative programmes?

The researchers identified four key issues from participants' comments about designing their alternative programmes:

* providing coherent learning packages

* giving students an element of choice
* engaging parental support
* identifying the social needs of the participating students and providing appropriate support.

Coherent learning packages

The researchers reported that where the learning took place in different contexts (school, college, work placements etc) staff thought it was important that the learning was integrated. Schools and providers felt that they benefited from having discussions early on about how to link off-site and school-based learning. Most of the programmes were designed to take account of prior learning and/or interest, but some were kept distinct deliberately to give the students a 'fresh start'. Liaison between the provider and the school helped make the students aware of what to expect and ensure the off-site learning was pitched at the right level.

Involving students

Schools usually took the lead in deciding which curriculum areas and which learning contexts should be included in an alternative programme. However, staff felt that giving students an element of choice increased the potential for success of the programmes – where choice was lacking, success seemed to be more variable.

Engaging parental support

Parental support is a well-recognised factor in educational success and this also seemed to be true of the alternative curriculum programmes. It is a health and safety requirement that parental permission is obtained for students to attend off-site activities. Schools often made efforts to engage parents' support from the start. Not all parents wanted to be involved. Sometimes, this was because of problems in the home, but sometimes it was because the son or daughter was against parental involvement. Generally however, parents valued the chance to visit the school to have a positive discussion about their child's education – this often contrasted with a previous history of home-school discussions that had focused on problems.

Meeting students' social needs

Staff felt that programmes were more effective when some thought had been given to how students' social needs could be met in off-site locations. Many of the students involved had limited social experiences, which meant that access to the opportunities offered through off-site learning locations seemed to improve when appropriate support was also in place. For example, some students found travelling by bus into the town centre or entering a large college or noisy training workshop very challenging and threatening. Strategies designed to overcome these problems included teachers accompanying students on practice bus journeys, organising students to travel together, teachers accompanying students on induction visits and setting up a clear system for liaison with external providers.

Practitioners may like to read a case study of how an FE college helped pre-16 students gain access to education through providing the students with a fresh start, choice, and academic and pastoral support.

Which students were chosen to follow an alternative curriculum programme?

In some schools, the students seemed to almost select themselves by behaviour that brought them to the attention of staff, including 'really atrocious behaviour that has gone on for some time', a reluctance to work despite support, and truanting. Practitioners may be interested to read a case study about how a school that identified students who were quietly disaffected – students who were 'Really Here In Name Only' (RHINOS) which we featured in our Research of the Month summary 'Positive alternatives to exclusion'.

The researchers found that the students involved in alternative curriculum programmes tended to be white, working-class boys. They also found that relatively few girls were involved. They suggested that sometimes conditions militated against girls' interests, including where:

* programmes were designed for groups, as opposed to individuals, and the particular interests of the minority of girls included could be lost as provision was chosen to suit the male majority
* coordinators were male and there was no female teacher taking a friendly interest in them, making it harder for girls to be open about their problems, aspirations and interests
* schools found it harder to find organisations willing to sponsor options preferred by girls.

The researchers noticed that some schools demonstrated inequality of access to alternative programmes because of limited places being available for alternative curriculum options. For example, some schools deliberately excluded students on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register,

What kind of selection procedures helped?

The researchers identified a number of procedures that were seen to be helpful in relation to the selection of students for alternative curriculum programmes. These included:

* offering alternative programmes only after internal curriculum options and strategies had been tried with students, such as holding regular meetings with pastoral staff, and reducing the number of GCSE examinations to be taken by these students
* balancing the need for providing students with support as soon as problems were recognised with the need to give students opportunities to succeed within the socially valued mainstream
* being aware of the negative consequences of the potentially stigmatising labels sometimes applied to students (for example, 'special educational needs', 'disaffected', 'disruptive') and seeking to ensure equality of opportunity to access alternative programmes regardless of these labels
* taking steps to prevent students having negative attitudes towards alternative programmes, for example, by offering the alternative programme as an option, to help increase the students 'ownership' and therefore commitment to the choice (even if choices were 'steered' by teachers).
We look at approaches adopted by the schools to minimise negative attitudes towards alternative programmes in more detail on a later section of this summary.

How did schools match students to programmes?

The researchers reported that school staff felt the better the programme designers knew the students, the easier it was to design a programme tailored to their needs and the better the match of student to programme, the better the outcome.

Coordinators found out about the students through talking to:

* the students on a one-to-one basis about their interests, hobbies, hopes for the future etc
* the students' parents/carers (either face-to-face or by telephone)
their colleagues (year heads, form tutors etc)
* by gathering documentary evidence (e.g. attendance rates and rates of referral).
The researchers reported that no teachers or parents expressed an objection to being asked for their opinions by the programme coordinator, but some complained that they had not been consulted.

The researchers found the students and their parents appreciated the school showing:

* a willingness to listen to the students' views and acting on these even where students had expressed surprising interests
* flexibility – allowing students to try things out knowing that if, after giving an option a fair try, it turned out that they did not like it, the school would support them in changing to another option
* an awareness of family and community patterns of employment and a willingness for students to follow in these patterns if they wanted.

One mother explained how she felt the flexibility demonstrated by her son's school benefited her son:

"'As soon as they took him down into a garage Joseph said, 'I ain't going back there no more, I don't like it, I hate it.'. And when Mr Murray asked what had changed his mind he said, 'It's alright to do it for a couple of hours, but not like I've been doing it.' So that was a hobby then … So instead of going through college to do a mechanics course and this that and the other… that would have just been a complete waste. So he had that opportunity to find out."

This next student reported how he felt he had benefited from receiving encouragement from his school to follow in his family's pattern of employment:

"'The college course helps me in my hobby after school. I've got a lathe in my shed: I've had it for four years. My granddad was a joiner. I did my work experience at [local joinery firm] where he works. When I leave school, I'd like to get a job there, refurbishing old furniture."

How did schools encourage students to take part in alternative programmes?
Like all those singled out in some way in schools, there was potential for students participating in alternative curriculum programmes to be stigmatised. The researchers highlighted a number of measures taken by schools that, according to staff, helped to pre-empt or counter negative views and create a positive perception of alternative programmes:

* to offer equality of opportunity, the programme was included in a standard list of optional subjects to be taken during KS4 – although places were limited, everyone who was interested had the chance of applying
* to reduce the effects of stigmatisation (of both students and programme) due to students being labelled 'special educational needs' and 'disruptive' etc, the opportunity to take part in the programme was offered to students of all abilities
* to counter the view that the programmes were an unfair reward for poor behaviour etc, students who took part in the alternative programme undertook a 'bargain contract' that required improved attendance, behaviour and work ethic in return for the opportunity
* to overcome the view that the alternative programmes were less worthy because the content was very different to the National Curriculum subjects, students were encouraged to see vocational components as valuable ways of moving towards different, but desired futures
* to avoid students feeling their learning was of less worth because they were not on track to gain a GCSE or GNVQ, their achievement was recognised through alternative forms of accreditation and public celebrations of their success, such as awarding in-house certificates and articles in the local newspaper
* to prepare students for out-of-school learning contexts which they might find threatening, students were inducted, by for example teachers accompanying students on their first visit and arranging for students to travel together on a bus. The tutor in charge at a community college explained the difference putting an emphasis on hard work and on accredited achievement made to how the programme and its participants were viewed, in these words:

"We used to be regarded as a youth club for pupils who couldn't be bothered: now we are respected and seen as a worthwhile alternative to the National Curriculum for pupils who find an academic curriculum irrelevant."

How were students' achievements encouraged and acknowledged?

The researchers found that most alternative programmes aimed to give students some sort of nationally recognised accreditation, although there was recognition that they should not be exposed to another failure situation. Staff reported that schemes that gave students opportunities to progress and be credited at their own pace and level (modular courses, for example) seemed to be particularly welcomed.

National awards

GCSEs were chosen as at least part of an accreditation package for some students – getting students 'back on track' was satisfying to schools. Some schools suggested that some students dropped some GCSEs and concentrated on the core subjects, although not all staff felt it was the best option if this meant the student would struggle with the syllabus.

Schools reported that other national accreditation routes, such as the NVQ, were popular for their more vocational emphasis. For example, The City and Guilds' Number and Word Power were used as alternatives with students for whom GCSE maths and English were too daunting. Schools also valued short-term, practical courses accredited by an organisation that had national standing, such as the St. John Ambulance Association. These alternative forms of national accreditation provided proof that the alternative curriculum programmes were working to externally imposed standards.

Local awards

In-house certification, though it lacked external recognition, was seen by schools as a useful progression route. Sometimes it led to placement with an employer or college within a local area. Some colleges saw their provision as a 'taster' of what was available and that students might be encouraged by in-house awards to attempt mainstream courses they previously thought beyond them. Parents and students valued local alternatives that acknowledged what had been achieved, rather than labelling the students as failures.

Take-up of accreditation possibilities

The researchers found that the take-up of accreditation possibilities by students varied considerably between schools. The reasons for low take-up included the students' fear of failure, lack of basic skills and suspicion of new forms of accreditation. An awareness of the accreditation on offer combined with skill in matching student abilities to appropriate levels of entry resulted in greater take-up of opportunities. In some schools, alternative accreditation had resulted in all students being entered for a national qualification.

Practitioners may like to read about a case study designed to investigate the perceptions of achievement of disengaged Year 11 students attending a 'New Start' programme of study at a College of Further Education.

How was support for students managed and coordinated by schools?

The researchers examined the participants' views of the roles and responsibilities of senior and middle management, and the programme coordinator.

Senior and middle management

The researchers reported how staff felt that having supportive senior and middle management was important. They felt having support from senior and middle management helped ensure:

* a whole-school approach to teaching and learning was followed
* staff involved in implementing the alternative programme had the necessary status to implement change and were seen as contributing to whole school
* aims and objectives the students involved in alternative programmes were not stigmatised
* effective liaison with external organisations was enabled
* timetabling was sufficiently flexible to accommodate innovative provision
resourcing issues were addressed.

The programme coordinator

Schools were unanimous in believing that it was important to have a programme coordinator. Programme coordinators appreciated being given sufficient authority to carry out the role, including:

* liaising with senior staff in other organisations
* managing a budget and authorising spending
* negotiating with colleagues about changes to students' timetables.

Schools felt it was important that the programme coordinator had a particular interest in lower-achieving and under-achieving students and enjoyed interacting with them.

Students and parents appreciated coordinators who:

* did not 'talk down' to them
* maintained confidence in the student's ability to succeed and did not dwell on past negative experiences and incidents
* were 'kid whisperers' – they listened to the students and understood how to get the most positive response from them.

What external factors affected alternative curriculum programmes?

The researchers reported a number of external factors that affected alternative programmes. To enable practitioners to identify and harness such external resources, this page provides an outline of these factors, although we appreciate that these conditions are largely beyond the control of schools. They include having:

* a range of external organisations willing to work with schools
* local co-ordination of alternative provision
* links with national agencies
* an LEA willing to support and facilitate schools in making the most of what was available
* sufficient funding.

Organisations willing to work with schools

The researchers found a wide range of organisations were willing to work with schools to help address problems such as disaffection, truancy and underachievement, including FE colleges, LEAs, companies, voluntary organisations, local projects and local authority services, such as the youth service and the police.

Local coordination of alternative provision

Schools in some areas benefited from having a range of local agencies that understood the mutual benefit to the community to be derived from curriculum programmes that supported young people and enabled them to move into

positive progression routes after the end of compulsory education.

Support from national agencies
The researchers suggested that although local networks were crucial to the success of alternative curriculum programmes, having a supportive context at national level to energise local work and stimulate new programmes was helpful too. Participants in the study noted that a number of government policies (such as 'The New Start Programme' and the recommendation by Ron Dearing that schools should have a vocational input in Years 10 and 11) lent support to local efforts designed to help young people follow positive progression routes during their transition from school to the adult world.

Support from the LEA
Schools reported that LEAs played an important role in enabling schools to give some of their students access to alternative curriculum programmes at KS4, through acting as mediators of national and local policy initiatives, and local partnerships. Schools valued, for example, local networked meetings involving representatives from schools and interested providers.

Funding
Clearly, alternative programmes had budgetary implications including, administration costs, increased staffing, course fees, equipment (such as hard hats) and transport. Most of the schools funded the alternative programme from the school budget, supplemented by external sources of funding. Not surprisingly, the availability of alternative curriculum programmes increased with the availability of funding. Many funders required evidence that their money was contributing to improvements in students' outcomes, but measuring success was not necessarily straightforward. We look at how the participants of the study evaluated the programmes on the next page.

How were the alternative programmes monitored and evaluated?
The participants of the study reported that their monitoring and evaluation of the alternative curriculum programmes involved:

* determining criteria for judging success
* considering how different types of evidence could be collected to show the effects of the programme
* considering the timing and phases of evaluation
* using evaluation data to inform and develop future programmes.

Criteria for judging success
The researchers found that schools and partner organisations used similar markers of success. These included evidence that the students: attended; were aware of their own personal improvements (e.g. in motivation, interest and attitudes); completed the course or placement; gained certification and/or improved exam results. They also looked for evidence that the programme resulted in positive changes to the school curriculum, enabled the cohort to move on to positive progression routes, and was sustainable.

Collecting evidence
Programme managers collected a range of qualitative ('soft') and quantitative ('hard') evidence to evaluate the alternative curriculum programmes. They used the soft, qualitative data (the views of the participating students, their peers, parents and teachers) to help them assess the 'hard to measure', intangible gains, such as improvements in young people's self-esteem or confidence. Perceptions were often obtained verbally or through tick-box responses to

a list of option statements on an evaluation form. Hard, quantitative evidence included figures on attendance rates, attainment and post-16 destinations. Improvements were viewed as evidence of programme effectiveness.

The researchers cautioned that the 'soft' approach often used to evaluate the programmes could result in unrealistic perceptions about positive outcomes. The 'soft' approach often arose from an awareness of the low starting point of the students involved and the knowledge that, without the programme, the situation was likely to have worsened. For instance, a number of programmes aimed to improve accreditation and exam results, but the researchers indicated that the schools often used internal benchmarks such as reference to previous experiences or attainment rather than measuring achievement against local or national average GCSE/GNVQ results.

Timing and phases of evaluation
Programme evaluations tended to take place either at the end of the programme and/or some time after the programme had been completed. The longer-term evaluation tended to focus on the effects of a programme on one cohort and/or on the year-on-year outcomes of the programme itself. For example, one school noted a five-year pattern of year-on-year improvements in the number of participating students going on to Further Education College and rising exam results together with the fact that the attendance levels of the latest cohort had been maintained after the programme had ended.

Using evaluation data to develop future programmes
Some schools used the lessons learned from the evaluation gains made by one cohort on a programme to inform the continued development and refinement of the programme itself so that later cohorts could benefit from others' experiences. Practitioners may like to read a case study of how one school developed its alternative programme, which we highlighted on an earlier section ('What kind of alternative curriculum approach helped?').

How did alternative curriculum programmes benefit students?
The schools and providers offered many examples of individual successes, where the lives of individual young people had been turned round by involvement in the scheme. In all cases, they felt the most important feature was that a greater range of life chances had been made available to the student concerned. They believed that this was largely because his/her attention had been focused on what s/he could do within an environment that showed it had room for them. For example, their:

* attitudes towards core curriculum subjects and key skills became more positive once they saw for themselves the relevance of these subjects to the part of the world of work in which they were interested (for example, a student became motivated to take maths lessons once he had realised the importance of measurement for joinery)
* energy was redirected from behaviours associated with disaffection (truancy, disruption of lessons) into positive engagement in practical activities in an environment that had played no part in their previous failures
* negative attitudes towards education (previously held either through peer pressure, through family background or from repeated failure at school) changed to positive attitudes in a fresh environment and with support
* self-regard was enhanced by the fact that they were being trusted to go off-site to college or industrial placements. They were able to cast off the labels (such as 'troublemaker' or 'low ability') they had accrued at school.

These students explained the difference their programme had made to them:

"It helps me to organise my deadlines for coursework and for homework. It's helping me to prioritise ... It has made me take homework more seriously, I think. I didn't really used to do it or I left it to the last minute. Now I know how to sort out my time."

"I wanted to get into the Merchant Navy but I know now if my GCSE grades aren't good enough, then I can fall back on this [NVQ in Building and construction], do bricklaying or something."

Practitioners may like to read a case study that shows how a work-related alternative programme impacted on one 'at risk' young man called Daniel. It gives details of how and why he developed improved social relations and practical knowledge, enabling his learning to be enhanced.

Who else benefited from alternative programmes?

The researchers reported how schools, LEAs, parents and providers felt they benefited from alternative programmes.

The schools in the study suggested that alternative curriculum schemes resulted in:

* improvements in public accountability measures (attendance, exclusion, public examinations)
* more positive school ethos
* curriculum development - especially curriculum breadth
* staff development (staff gained skills in interacting with teenagers, and in extending the scope of differentiation of the curriculum, assessment and accreditation)
* more positive external image.

LEAs referred to the same public accountability measures as schools did (attendance, exclusion and public examinations), to reduced referrals with regard to special educational needs, to curriculum improvements in schools (especially by way of greater understanding about teaching and learning) and to enhanced staff morale as disaffection was addressed.

Parents pointed to an improved quality of relationship with their son or daughter, reduced worry and tension at home, and a sense of pride and relief at their son's or daughter's success.

Partner organisations indicated that they enjoyed an enhanced reputation in the community, considered that they had put something back into the community and had enhanced links with the community. In addition, they often welcomed schemes as providing valuable development opportunities for their own staff, as extending the pool of potential trainees, and enhancing local awareness of the company.

Why were alternative curriculum programmes unsuccessful with some students?

Not all programmes were effective in turning around the attitudes and behaviour of all participating students. Schools acknowledged a degree of failure where:

* some students did not attend the programme
* some students were not interested by the programme
* some students continued to be disruptive
* the benefits gained did not translate into the school context
* the programme failed to teach the vocational skills promised.

Staff suggested that such failures were the result of:

* flaws in the programme design and presentation
* placing students on programmes that did not match their interests or aptitudes and that were irrelevant to the young people's aspirations for their future
* the strength of the cultural context (which was, perhaps, characterised by a high level of inter-generational unemployment)
* lack of parental support for institutionalised education/training.

In the following extract from a student's interview, the researchers suggested that it appeared that neither adolescent concerns about being the odd one out (she was the only girl in an all-male group), nor identification of interests, nor the strength of peer culture ("others don't attend so I won't"'), or local culture ("painting is for boys") had been addressed sufficiently:

"I thought it was alright but we were separated into two groups and I was the only girl in one of the groups that ever used to turn up. After a while I stopped going too and just went home when it was time to go to college ... they make us do things we don't really want to do - like engineering: not everyone wants to do engineering. I would prefer it if I could do more girls' stuff ... painting and decorating is for boys. [The girls] just want to do childcare." (Female student)

In this next extract, it was clear that the student's mother condoned 'going home' during school hours. The researchers suggested either it had not been possible to engage the parents' interest or no attempt had been made to do this:

"I used to go to Beauty [taster course] but I've stopped going now. It was dead boring … they didn't do the things I was expecting … I expected to cut people's hair and stuff …I can go back and do the next lot [taster] if I want to but I don't … the teachers didn't want me to do another course [a different taster] so Mam just told me to go home after my dinner [i.e. not to go to college in the afternoon] … Mam wasn't that keen on me going anyway." (Female student)

How was the research designed?
Data was collected from 14 LEAs representing different geographical areas over two academic years (1997/98 and 1998/1999). Three methods were used:

* a postal survey of schools in selected LEAs
* telephone interviews with partner organisations
* school case studies.
School survey
Questionnaires were sent to every mainstream, special school and Pupil Referral Unit covering 14-16-year-olds in the fourteen LEAs (366 in all, of which 198 were returned). Of those 198, 82 schools participated in programmes that fitted all the following criteria:

* catered for KS4 students who had a history of poor attendance and/or were disruptive or disaffected
* engaged students in activities other than full-time study for GCSE/GNVQs
* the provision involved external intervention.
The schools supplied the following information:

* details of the scheme (focus, nature of external involvement, length)
* the target group(s)
* aims and objectives
* funding arrangements
* mechanisms for evaluating outcomes
* information about external agencies involved.

There was also an open-ended 'additional comments' question at the end of the questionnaire.

Interviews with partner organisations

Seventy-five semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with representatives of collaborating organisations suggested by the schools, to find out about:

* the organisation's involvement (e.g. funding, facilities, staffing)
* effective/problematic partnerships between schools and other organisations
* the organisation's aims for the scheme and the students
* the monitoring and evaluation of the scheme and its outcomes
* characteristics of effective practice.

Case study schools

Eight schools from seven LEAs were selected which represented a range of programmes, inter-area coordination, partner organisations and forms of accreditation. Twenty-six teachers (including senior managers, programme coordinators, pastoral staff and classroom teachers) were interviewed to find out about:

* how the programme was selected
* what they expected of the programme (what the students would gain etc)
* how the students were selected
* what guidance and support was offered to the students and how the students' needs were identified
* the implications of the programme for the teachers, the school and for the future of the scheme
* their evaluation of the programme's outcomes.

Sixty students and 18 parents were interviewed to find out their perceptions of the scheme and how it met their interests, needs and preferences.

What are the implications of the study?

Programme coordinators may find it helpful to consider the following implications.

Could you do more to:

* find out about your students' interests, perhaps by talking to the students, to colleagues and to parents, to help match students to a programme they are likely to enjoy?
* help students cope with new social situations associated with off-site locations by, for example, arranging an induction visit, suggesting students practice the journey, setting up a clear system for liaison with external providers and organising visits by school staff to students in their off-site locations?
* monitor students' attendance (at school and at other programme locations) and progress (including the students' views of how they feel they are progressing)?
* make sure equality of opportunity when selecting students to participate in alternative programmes?
* minimise students' potentially negative attitudes towards alternative provision by, for example, including the

programmes in a standard list of optional subjects to be taken during KS4 and allowing students some choice?

Leaders may like to consider the following implications.

Would it be helpful to:

* increase the range of information you collect about all students' interests and preferences, perhaps by involving them in researching the interests of students as a group? (This would help in building their capacity to express their present needs in a school context and enable you to match needs and programmes in partnership with students)
* share information with other schools in your area (via the internet for example) about external providers and local programme possibilities?
* collect evidence to evaluate your school's current programme (such as the views of students, parents and teachers, and figures on attendance, attainment and post-16 destinations) and use the results to identify ways of improving the programme?
* investigate external sources of funding to finance the extra costs involved when running alternative programmes, such as students' travel costs and specialist equipment required for placements etc?
* promote students' take-up of accreditation by offering alternative, but nationally recognised accreditation schemes?
* organise in-service training in your school designed to help staff support a wider curriculum and accreditation system (such as training to enable teachers to offer GNVQ courses)?

Filling in the gaps

Gaps that are uncovered in a piece of research also have a useful role in making sure that future research builds cumulatively on what is known. But research also needs to inform practice, so practitioners' interpretation of the gaps and follow-up questions are crucial. Some gaps in the research we noticed while preparing this RoM were:

* gender differences – since the study's findings relate largely to working-class boys and highlight concerns about how such programmes meet girls' needs, further research could investigate the kinds of alternative programmes that work for boys and girls
* instruments for evaluating 'soft' data (e.g. the views of students, parents and teachers) more rigorously. When exploring issues like disaffection, personal perceptions clearly matter. The researchers point to the need for tools for exploring such evidence systematically and clearly struggled with this issue in exploring the schools evaluation data. Perhaps some research and development could fund schools and teachers to experiment with a range of resources? Do you agree?
* how the researchers accumulated, read across and validated the schools' own data through cumulative analysis of 'soft' evidence from different schools. A particular problem for this kind of research is analysing evidence cumulatively that has been developed by and collected from a range of different settings. Do you think that schools and teachers would value the possibility of comparing perceptions about student disaffection from different schools sufficiently to agree to collect data in similar forms? Could clusters of networked learning community schools do this? Practitioners may find it helpful to look at 'Consulting pupils – a toolkit for teachers'. (See further reading)
* cohort studies identifying the points at when disaffection starts and ways of intervening earlier. One of the problems in securing and interpreting evidence about the causes and nature of disaffection, and strategies for addressing it, is that it seems to be important to work at the level of individual needs and histories. How easy is it to spot students for whom such programmes are the right solution in advance? If you think you can spot them how could researchers be sure that following such students' learning careers wouldn't create or simply record self-fulfilling prophecies? Are such dilemmas real or theoretical? If they are real perhaps we need studies that follow the learning careers and the

education experiences of specific, but wide ranging cohorts of students and their teachers and schools over time? Practitioners may find it helpful to look at a review of the literature on Strategies and Solutions for disadvantaged young people by M. Morris et al. (See further reading)

* although there are significant difficulties in exploring the outcomes of such diverse and individualised programmes, this study tried to explore outcomes in a range of ways for the case study schools. Would you link access to other kinds of outcome data? Could you describe these so that future researchers know more about the evidence that is credible or helpful to you as practitioners?

What is your experience?

Do you have action research or enquiry based development programmes running that explore these issues? We would like to hear about these and perhaps add to the case studies! For example, do you have examples of work to ensure that alternative opportunities reach girls as well as boys or programmes that try to intervene at the point at which disaffection starts? Or do you have tools to help assess and explore outcomes in relation to attendance, motivation, relevance, subsequent learning and career choices or internally or externally accredited assessments?

Since the study was published, the Government has introduced two initiatives designed to support demotivated and disaffected students at KS4 – the Increased Flexibilities Programme and vocational GCSEs. (Practitioners can find out about these initiatives in the further reading section. Perhaps you have evidence of the effect these initiatives have had on students in your school which you could share?

Your Feedback

Have you found this study to be useful? Have you used any aspect of this research in your own classroom teaching practice? We would like to hear your feedback on this study. Click on the link below to share your views with us. research@gtce.org.uk

Case studies

We have selected the following case studies to illustrate some aspects of alternative provision we reported in our summary of the NfER study. The first case study is concerned with school practice and was drawn from the study itself. The other case studies were the work of other researchers. They provide more insights into students' perspectives of alternative provision.

Case study 1: A 'satellite' programme that was developed into a 'complementary' one

We chose this case study because it is an example of how a school saw alternative provision as a developmental process. The case study was featured in the main study.

'Alder School' recognised that its KS4 curriculum was limited to GCSEs for all students. (The only exception was that students with significant special educational needs were offered courses in basic skills). As the students spanned a broad distribution of ability and socio-economic background, the staff realised that the standard curriculum contributed to disaffection at KS4. In response, the school accepted the chance to send some students part-time to the local college to take an NVQ in Building and Construction.

The school began by developing a 'satellite' type programme for a group of Year 10 students with identified problems. However, in the light of the progress made by students on the programme, and in the light of the difficulties encountered in working with external partners, the school reassessed the curriculum at KS4 so that the school could make appropriate provision for the needs of all its students.

As a result, a number of teachers were trained as assessors to enable the school to offer GNVQs. All departments were asked to investigate the possibility of introducing NVQ courses by the following year. In addition, the college-based option of an NVQ in building and construction was offered to the whole year group as part of the options available within the regular curriculum. A number of teachers became involved in delivering the theoretical part of this course in school, thus broadening their own repertoire of skills, reclaiming a sense of responsibility for the students and increasing the coherence of the school and college-based elements of the KS4 curriculum.

As its sense of responsibility for the students changed, the school moved from seeing its alternative curriculum programme as a 'satellite' option for some students to regarding it as a 'complementary' element of the curriculum open to all students. At the same time, the type of relationship the school had with partner organisations changed from being one where partners provided for students off-site, to one where the school and its partners worked together to offer appropriate provision.

Case study 2: Pre-16 students in a further education context: building and crossing bridges to adulthood
Offering disaffected students the opportunity to go to a further education (FE) college is a well-known strategy for keeping such students within the educational system. We chose this case study because it identified how being in a college environment helped re-engage and motivate previously disengaged and disaffected students. We think schools may find it helpful to reflect on why these students found college more motivating than school.

Twelve Year 11 students took part in a pilot project at an FE college. They attended 'Rudyard Kipling FE College' full-time (eighteen hours a week) as part of a group retaking GCSEs. They were all students who were either failing to attend school, were excluded from school or were at risk of exclusion. The students were selected by the LEA Student Support Service for the project because they were felt to be capable of undertaking the GCSE courses, had a desire and ability to make relationships with peers and others, and were likely (with support) to cope with the pressures and responsibilities of a college environment.

A 'home tutor', who was based at the college, was employed by the Student Support Service for fifteen hours a week to oversee this group of students. Her role was to provide pastoral and academic support to help the students manage both the learning and the social demands of the new setting.

The project was viewed as successful. Of the twelve students:

* six took their GCSE examinations and passed
* two did not take the examinations, but reapplied to college
* one completed a different course
* one dropped out due to family illness
* two failed to attend or 'dropped out' and were offered home tuition.
How did the college environment motivate these students?
The researchers conducted interviews with the students, their parents and college staff to find out what supported and what hindered their inclusion. They found the students felt that being given the choice to attend college was an important factor. The students also preferred the college environment to their previous school environment because

they felt they were treated as adults, ie respected and given more choice and responsibility. However, the college recognised that the students needed help in crossing this symbolically important bridge to adulthood. The home tutor's role was perceived by all parties as crucial to helping students manage both the learning and social demands of the college setting.

We present the researchers' findings in more detail below.

A fresh start

For the parents, it was important that the students were given a fresh start so that their sons' and daughters' previous histories could be discarded. For example, one parent commented that the student had been bullied and was always seen as different in school; another said that relationships had broken down between the school staff, the student and the parents. Staff had mixed feelings about what information they wanted about the students. They recognised the importance of allowing students to make a fresh start, but did want to know about particular behavioural difficulties and students' academic achievements.

Preparation and choice

The students commented on the importance of choosing this option from the many that the support service offered. They also valued being given information about their choices, such as where they would be based and what courses were available.

Being treated like an adult

Staff and students alike felt that the more adult environment was a motivating factor for the students. Differences between the college environment and that of school included students calling staff by their first name and being free of restrictions such as being in school all day. All the students saw the increased freedom and the adult environment as the biggest asset to going to college. However, some staff noted that some students found it difficult to cope with fewer boundaries. They felt the capacity to cope with the increased freedom was an important consideration in the selection of the students, who needed to be chosen on the basis of their readiness to deal with the social demands of college as well as the academic demands.

Academic support

Three of the students commented on how the lecturers assumed they had prior knowledge of the coursework because they were part of an older group retaking their GCSEs. The Home Tutor recognised this problem and offered all the students in-class support and support with homework. She felt that homework was a particular problem area and that giving help with homework was a key element in making the programme successful.

Gaining qualifications

All the students saw the gaining of academic qualifications and the planning of appropriate next steps as important to them. That six of the students did pass their GCSEs was seen as a measure of success, but not the only measure of success of the programme. Some college staff queried the relevance of undertaking GCSE courses by some of the students. They felt that in spite of the low status accorded to GNVQs by some parents and students, that this would be a more appropriate route.

Teaching strategies

Most of the staff reported they had difficulties in working with the students and said that they had had to adopt different approaches in their teaching. They identified a number of strategies that they found helpful. These included establishing clear boundaries, providing a clear structure, setting ground rules, having breaks during long stretches of time (lessons at the college were two hours long), varying activities, giving rewards, getting to know and build on students' strengths and needs, and allowing students to get to know the lecturer as a person not just as a teacher.

Pastoral support

The home tutor played a central support role in providing pastoral support. She monitored and assessed the students' academic progress through regular meetings with the programme coordinators and monitored attendance through meeting with the students' tutors and parents. All the students stressed how supportive they found the home tutor with their academic work, although they were less enthusiastic about her monitoring of their attendance. Many did not like being phoned at home, seeing it as an invasion of their privacy. The home tutor felt that she treated the students in the same way as she treated her own children – she often referred to herself as a mother to them. Students and staff alike felt her support and guidance acted as an effective bridge between the constraints of childhood and the relative freedom of adulthood.

Peer group support

Two of the students commented that the peer group was a source of support. Some of the students reported having unsuccessful peer relationships previously at school. As the pre-16 students were in different tutor groups for different lessons and were often unaware of who the other pre-16 students were, the peer group they referred to was the wider peer group of the college. This gave the students the opportunity to form a wider range of friendships than might have been possible in the Student Support Centre.

Reference:
Cooper, P., Drummond, M.J., Hart, S., Lovey, J. and McLaughlin, C. (2000) Positive alternatives to exclusion. Routledge Falmer: London. (pp.153-165)

Case study 3: The perceptions of disengaged Year 11 students in an FE college

We chose this case study because it gives an insight into the views held by disengaged students. This study set out to find out the views held by Year 11 students who were attending a year-long 'New Start' programme at a college of Further Education (FE). The students all had a history of truanting and exclusion from schools, but were regularly attending an FE college that was traditionally a centre for vocational qualifications.

The researcher distributed fifty-four questionnaires to disengaged Year 11 students attending an FE College to find out the students' perceptions of their likely achievements and ambitions for the future. The study did not describe or attempt to evaluate the course or programme of study. In addition, five students (who volunteered) were interviewed to find out their perceptions of both their disengagement from traditional schooling and their new environment.

The students' responses were assigned by the researcher to one of two categories: students who expressed no desire to stay on at college post-16 and students who planned to remain in college post-16.

The views of achievement held by students who did not wish to stay on at college post-16

Of the students who expressed no desire to stay at college upon completion of the course, 63 per cent of the boys and 8 per cent of the girls reported that they wished to gain employment at the end of the course. The nature of that employment for the boys was linked to physical labour – woodwork, engineering, the Army, scaffolding and bricklaying. These choices were influenced by family experiences and by the fact that they were physical. The girls mostly wanted to work with animals.

The need for qualifications and the level required for their chosen employment had not been considered by 50 per cent of the students who wished to leave the college at the end of the course. Those that were aware that they would need a qualification were prepared to attend a college for up to a year, but preferably less than six months. These students' long-term goals were to have security and to have a family. The security was expressed as the need to be employed, with a regular income. Family life figured prominently, with the aim of buying a house, getting married and

having a family important achievements over the next ten years.

The views of achievement held by students who planned to remain at college post-16
The students who expressed a desire to remain at college had given thought to their choice of course. Of these students, 79 per cent aimed to gain employment after completing the course. The remainder were split as to not knowing whether to gain employment or progress to Higher Education. The long-term goals of the students in this group were very different to the other group. 30 per cent wished to travel and see the world, live with a partner and enjoy life. Their ultimate aim was to be employed in ten years time, but the prospect of marriage was not perceived as an achievement as it was with the other group.

Students' views of their experiences of school compared with college
Three of the five students who were interviewed had been expelled from school for behaviour problems; the other two had been bullied. The bullying had led these students to attack other students and their teachers. These students had been experiencing difficulties as early as Year 5, with one student being expelled in Year 7. The students were not proud of being expelled. They pointed to their difficulty with keeping up with the pace of lessons and that lack of recognition of their problem and taunting from other students led to them feeling frustrated, and ultimately to violent behaviour. In all cases, the school or a social worker had been the driving force in ensuring they were 'picked up'.

These students enjoyed their experiences in the FE college. They were impressed with the smaller group size and the dedication of the teaching staff. They found the workshops exciting and looked forward to progressing into apprenticeships. They had not been bullied whilst at college, but were aware that it could be a possibility. None of the students mixed with the main college student body: they preferred to stay as a group in their own base room. Homelessness was a major issues in their lives: they had experienced family break-ups and their relationship with their family was generally poor. Their ambition was simply to gain confidence, make friends and gain security.

Case study 4: Daniel's story
We chose this study because it shows how a work-related alternative programme impacted on one 'at risk' young man called Daniel. It shows how and why he developed social relations and informal practical knowledge, which enabled his learning to be enhanced. Schools may find it useful to consider Daniel's experience when designing their own work-related alternative programmes.

Daniel was fifteen at the time of the study and was taking part in a work related programme called 'MPower', used in the Manchester area to try to re-engage and re-motivate disaffected young people at KS4. The young people's choice of training provider was based on the occupational area in which they wanted training and on their geographical location. Trainees were expected to spend one day each week over the lifetime of the programme with the employers. Every five to six weeks, on-the-job training was replaced by a day with the training provider to carry out underpinning work. Trainees worked towards NVQ Level 1 units in their own particular occupational choice, such as engineering, construction, retailing, catering, hair and beauty, care, and sport and leisure.

Daniel was interviewed many times over an 18-month period, in his work placement setting, at school and college. Each of his teachers, parents, tutors from the training providers and his employers were also interviewed a number of times, to give a holistic and developing understanding of Daniel as he experienced his alternative programme.

It was clear that Daniel did not always enjoy life at school. He explained:

"I do like school, but I just get depressed you know. One week I'm happy, one week I'm depressed."

In particular, he disliked PE lessons and struggled with Maths. However, his main problem was the peer network at school. He had few friends and was frequently drawn into fights. He saw himself as different to them:

"…there's a lot of you know disturbed kids there who are like mad and I didn't really fit in because I'm quite bright and sometimes you get to be like them and it pulls you down a bit 'cos like I've only got a few temper problems … like there's some mad kids that like tease you and tease you so I think, I've always had a temper problem, well I still have it but with me being in a more grown-up environment it don't cause any problems."

The problems that Daniel had with his peers resulted in him being involved in a fight and receiving a two-week suspension from school as a consequence. At this point, Daniel's parents decided to withdraw him from the school. Daniel went to an FE college where he followed a one-year course of 'Vocational Choices'. As part of his MPower programme, he spent a day per week on a work placement at a local council (Millport) in its gardens and landscape works department with his mentor Andy. Previously, at school, he had been placed with another horticulture training provider, a placement that had lasted only a few weeks.

In contrast to his experiences of school and his problematic peer network, his experiences of the MPower programme at Millport council and the more adult environment at college seemed to fit his school-to-work transition needs and also his emerging sense of adulthood:

"…I mean I have got bad temper problems but I've not had them since I've been here [the college] because the kids are different you see … 'cos they're dead adult here aren't they … being in a more grown-up environment it don't cause any problems."

Daniel's experience at Millport became central to his emerging views about his future. He was fearful of being involved in incidents that might jeopardise his participation in the programme. His fear was based on the potential loss of what he knew to be very important relationships that he had developed during his placement. These had enabled him to become embedded in a network of adults, develop a new sense of himself, have confidence to learn and take advantage of an environment that provided a more appropriate learning context. He constantly described Millport Council as a place with masses of potential for learning:

"I've learned loads of things. I've learned block paving … I've learned how to flag, I've learned how to make cement ... I've learned how to prune trees back."

Daniel felt his hopes and expectations were being fulfilled because they were teaching him these things. Where limits were put on Daniel's learning, he saw this was for the 'right' reason: "they couldn't let me [take trees down] because it's dangerous."

Daniel developed close contact with various workers and supervisors who took him through various procedures step by step. The reason why he had these close contacts with others at the council was because of the ever-developing trust they had in his attitude and approach to the placement and to them. Common phrases about Daniel included, 'fits in', 'works hard', 'has the right attitude', 'happy to help him', 'doesn't hold us back', 'he's like one of us', 'would give him a job'. It was clear that his work colleagues had become significant in his life and this was due to the care, support, protectiveness and attention that he felt he received. His mentor, Andy, explained:

"I mean I don't treat him as a kid … It's like I said 'if you can't manage it, you tell me'. Even if I have to stand back and watch him … I make sure that he doesn't go to a place where he could get lost, wander off … At night when I drop him off at the main gate for his parents, if they're not there I wait till they turn up."

The supportive and protective approaches that colleagues made towards Daniel helped him to become more trusting of others and to take more risks with areas of learning that he had, in the past, felt were his weakness, for example Maths. It also provided him with the foundations on which to be more open and communicative with others:

'When it comes to the maths they'll show you how to do it 'cos like if anybody mentions maths I just go stiff, I just get panicked but last week we were in the bottom of Vernon Park making room for some shrubs … There's this guy who's quite clever and he were measuring and I said 'will you show me how you're doing it?' And he showed me and I thought he explained it better than the teachers really, although I wouldn't tell them that'.

This relationship building, growing confidence and the learning of new skills and knowledge had a clear impact on how Daniel saw his school-to-work transition – he was now planning ahead and thinking about his options. For example, he was pleased that his boss at Millport had mentioned the possibility of a longer-term placement. Daniel's positive feelings about his second placement contrasted with the dissatisfied feelings he had held about his first placement, which had not worked out. His dissatisfaction with his first placement centred on, a feeling that he was not learning anything, and lack of care and attention, lack of organisation and a lack of trust in his mentors/tutors.

Reference:

Raffo, C. (2003) Disaffected young people and the work-related curriculum at Key Stage 4: issues of social capital development and learning as a form of cultural practice. Journal of Education and Work, Vol. 16, No.1

Your Feedback
Have you found this study to be useful? Have you used any aspect of this research in your own classroom teaching practice? We would like to hear your feedback on this study. Click on the link below to share your views with us.
research@gtce.org.uk

Appraisal

Robustness
Faced with continuing problems of truancy, demotivation and disaffection among the fourteen to sixteen years age group, there is growing interest in alternative curricula for this key age group on the part of schools and policy-makers. This study, one of the few carried out in this under-researched area, explored and described the characteristics of alternative curriculum provision for students at key stage 4 from the perspectives of LEAs and schools. It also explored its effectiveness in helping the students respond more favourably to opportunities for education, training and employment through case studies. The researchers collected data using a number of methods, including:

* questionnaire data from fourteen LEAs
* interview data from a range of staff in partner agencies, including careers services, training and enterprise councils,

business and industry
* interview data from staff students and parents from seven mainstream and one special school.

Drawing on both large-scale and case study data, the report identified a number of key factors which contributed to the effectiveness of alternative curricular schemes including:

* the school context
* programme design and resourcing
* making and sustaining collaborative partnerships
* encouraging and acknowledging achievement.

Whilst the researchers recognised the importance of measured achievement in terms of examination results, they also pointed out that these were not the only, nor always the most relevant, indicators of success, and that revived interest, improved behaviour, good effort and attendance, also indicated successful re-engagement of the formerly disaffected student with education. It is also the case that attainment data are not widely available for this group of students given the newness of most of the schemes.

Relevance

The report is relevant to all those interested in developing alternative curricula at key stage 4, including LEA staff, and teachers and senior managers in schools. Others who are involved in the design and implementation of these curricula, such as careers staff, local employers and college staff, will also find the good practice highlighted by the researchers helpful.

Applicability

School teachers and senior staff will be familiar with many of the contexts described in the report, which are illustrated with many examples and case studies highlighting the range of problems, and the ways in which professionals tackled them.

Writing

The report is written without jargon and in a way that makes it accessible to a variety of professionals in this key area, including teachers and other school staff. The content is divided up into helpful chapters through which the reader is guided with informative chapter headings. Summaries at the end of each chapter bring together the main points of the key themes emerging from the research.

Further reading

Alternative curriculum provision at KS4

What else might I enjoy reading?

Bibliographic references

Consulting Pupils: a toolkit for teachers

MacBeath, J., Demetriou, H., Rudduck, J., and Myers, K. ,(2003)

Cambridge: Pearson Publishing

Disadvantaged Youth: a Critical Review of the Literature on Scope, Strategies and Solutions (DfEE Research Report 169)

Morris, M., Nelson, J. and Stoney, S. with Benefield, P.,(1999)

London: DfEE

Disapplication of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 4: guidance for schools

null,(1998)

London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Learning from Work Experience: a Guide to Successful Practice

null,(1998)

London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Learning through Work-related Contexts: a Guide to Successful Practice

null,(1999)

London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Preparation for Working Life: Guidance for Schools on Managing a Coordinated Approach of Work-related Learning at Key Stage 4

null,(1999)

London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

The lower attaining pupils' programme (LAPP)1982-88

null,(1989)

Great Britain. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools; London: DfES

The education (national curriculum) (exceptions at key stage 4) regulations

null,(1998)

Great Britain. DfEE; London: Stationery Office

Online resources
Positive alternatives to exclusion
Practitioners can find out more about strategies used in secondary schools to promote inclusion and further links, in another of our RoM summaries.
http://www.gtce.org.uk/exclusionrom

Work experience – legal responsibility, and health and safety
Provides guidance on how to ensure pre-16 pupils have high quality, safe, work placements.
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/dfeepub/may99/090599/maintext.htm

Transforming lives: Re-engaging young people through community based projects
http://www.connexions.gov.uk/partnerships/documents/NSF.pdf

Vocational GCSE courses
http://www.edexcel-international.org/qualifications/QualificationFamily.aspx?id=50294

Promoting vocational qualifications
http://www.vocationallearning.org.uk/files/casestudies/pre16/NVQ_SouthEast.pdf

The impact of study support
The findings of the study summarised in the RoM showed that for students participating in study support there were improvements in performance, attitudes and attendance which were greater than for students who did not take part.
http://www.gtce.org.uk/studysupportROM

Implementing the Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 Year Olds Programme: the Experience of Partnerships and Students, (DfES Research Report 562)
Vocational GCSEs and the Increased Flexibility Programme were introduced in 2002. Preliminary evidence about their impact can be found here.
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR562.pdf

Developing new vocational pathways: Final report on the introduction of new GCSEs, No. 2051
http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3674

The Tomlinson Report
14-19 Curriculum And Qualifications Reform - Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform
http://www.14-19reform.gov.uk/

Alternative Curriculum Programmes at Key Stage 4 (14-16 Year-Olds): Evaluating Outcomes in Relation to Inclusion'

The chance to let their talents shine through
Good ideas from schools in England and Wales on alternative curriculum programmes for 14-16 year olds ('disaffected' and others)
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001225.doc

RHINOs
Details about a research project which identified students who were quietly disaffected 'Really Here In Name Only' (RHINOs) written by teachers at a secondary school in Norwich
http://www.triangle.co.uk/pdf/viewpdf.asp?j=cus&vol=10&issue=2&year=2002&article=6_Oakley_PCSO_10_2&id=195.92.168.163

My mates are dead jealous 'cause they don't get to come here!
An analysis of the provision of alternative, non-school-based learning activities for 14-16year olds in the East Midlands
http://www.lsda.org.uk/pubs/dbaseout/download.asp?code=1436