

**NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**



New Deal for Communities (NDC) National Evaluation

**Domain Review of Major Policy Developments
in Education and the Evidence Base**

DAVID SIMS and SHEILA STONEY

January 2002

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Executive Summary

Background

The aims of this domain review in education were to describe new policy developments relevant to area-based regeneration initiatives and to draw out key messages for New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnerships.

The review examined major educational policies and initiatives in the following four areas which are relevant to improving the learning outcomes and skills development in local communities:

- ◆ raising educational standards and achievement
- ◆ providing advice, guidance and support for young people
- ◆ meeting the needs of disadvantaged, disaffected and disengaged young people
- ◆ widening adults' participation in learning.

Drawing on existing research and evaluation, the review attempted to identify evidence of the impact of policies and initiatives, and to identify the features and strategies accounting for effective local educational interventions.

Messages for Partnerships

The review found that most of the evidence of the outcomes of educational interventions was aggregated at national level. There was a dearth of evidence of the impact of interventions on local areas or communities.

A second key message is that there was no single model of effective intervention across all the educational policies and initiatives examined. Evaluations concluded that there was no simple recipe for success and indicated that successful interventions were grounded in, and responded to, local context and circumstances. Nevertheless, it was possible to identify a range of characteristics of effective interventions. Education policies, initiatives and interventions were found to be more effective where they:

- ◆ engaged local organisations and providers without overburdening them with unnecessary administration
- ◆ worked with local representatives to identify needs and priorities
- ◆ agreed and set clear and feasible objectives, targets and goals which reflected local needs
- ◆ consulted with young people and adults, families and practitioners about planning and implementing change
- ◆ helped to build the capacity of local organisations and develop the skills of their staff to enhance the quality of the services that they provided
- ◆ developed provision on the basis of identified needs
- ◆ ensured that services and provision were flexible enough to meet changing needs and circumstances

- ♦ adopted an informal approach to gain the trust of adults and young people who were to varying degrees outside learning
- ♦ helped to build the self-esteem, confidence and motivation of young people and adults which are pre-requisites for re-engagement in learning, achievement and progression
- ♦ provided appropriate levels of personal and practical support to help young people and adults negotiate critical transitions and sustain their involvement
- ♦ forged links with other local educational improvements and innovations
- ♦ included ongoing evaluation of what was working, how and why
- ♦ helped to develop procedures that ensured that the users were fully involved in evaluating the services and provision provided
- ♦ actively disseminated progress and outcomes to participants and others in the local community.

The evidence reviewed indicates that any one policy or initiative tends to be contributory, rather than the sole provider, to developing local educational strategies aimed at meeting local need.

The message for NDC partnerships is that they can play a pivotal role by working out how best to help to draw together different interventions into a coherent and effective response to meeting local learning needs and skills priorities. In addition, they can facilitate the sharing of experience and skills, and the dissemination of evaluation evidence of what works, to build and enhance local provision. Finally, they can investigate the extent to which consultation mechanisms are available to ensure that the 'voice' and interests of local people are fully heard, and incorporated into, interventions and the management of change in the education domain.

1. INTRODUCTION

A key component of the scoping phase of the national evaluation of New Deal for Communities (NDC) was the undertaking of reviews of major policy developments in each of the domains, including an examination of the evidence on the outcomes and impact of policy. The reviews were required to:

- ◆ identify the policy context of the new developments in the domains relevant to area-based regeneration initiatives
- ◆ examine and comment on the nature and scope of the current evidence base
- ◆ identify what the evidence base reveals, particularly in terms of what has worked, for whom and in what circumstances
- ◆ draw out the main messages for NDC partnerships.

The scope of the education domain review reported in this paper covers the following four main areas of policy development which are likely to be instrumental in the regeneration of local communities:

- ◆ raising educational standards and achievement
- ◆ providing advice, guidance and support for young people
- ◆ meeting the needs of disadvantaged, disaffected and disengaged young people
- ◆ widening adults' participation in learning.

The policy developments covered include Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities which are major area-focused initiatives aimed at transforming education in some of the most deprived communities.

The paper presents the context for the major policy initiatives in each of these areas, reports the results of the main evaluations that have been undertaken and, where possible, identifies the features and strategies that explain what works and why. The paper concludes by drawing out some messages for NDC partnerships.

2. POLICIES AND INITIATIVES TO RAISE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT

2.1 Overarching Policy Context

Successive governments have introduced various policies and initiatives to raise educational standards and improve achievement, especially amongst young people from deprived and disadvantaged communities. The White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), was a key document which set out a strategy for increasing learning opportunities, improving the performance of schools and their pupils, and addressing social exclusion. It highlighted the intention to create ‘*inclusive schooling that provides a broad, flexible and motivating education that recognises the different talents of all children and delivers excellence for everyone*’. *Excellence in Schools* also announced a range of measures designed to initiate and drive change at area and institutional level, including Education Action Zones (EAZs), Early Excellence Centres (EECs), and Specialist Schools.

2.2 Early Excellence Centres

Policy context

The EEC pilot programme was introduced in 1997 to develop and promote models of high quality, integrated, early years services for young children and families. Bertram and Pascal (2000) state that the 29 ‘*EECs offer ‘one-stop shop’ support within communities, linking education, health and social services. They also provide training to early years practitioners ...*’ The authors stated that the EECs were expected to provide:

- ◆ excellence in integrated education and care services
- ◆ access to extended day and holiday childcare for children from birth
- ◆ support for families, links to other key services like community health services and the enhancement of parenting skills
- ◆ accessible and affordable adult training opportunities
- ◆ outreach through local partnerships to improve the quality of other early years services through training and practical example.

Evaluation and evidence

Commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the three-year national evaluation of the EEC pilot programme commenced in September 1999. As outlined by Bertram and Pascal (2001), the four aims of the evaluation are to:

- ♦ document how different forms of integrated early childhood services work in different contexts
- ♦ identify and disseminate good practice in the delivery of quality childhood services
- ♦ identify the impact and effectiveness of integrated services for children and families
- ♦ identify the costs and cost benefits of the EEC programme.

The national evaluators go on to explain that the design is based on a three-layered model which comprises self-evaluation by EEC practitioners, local evaluation, and national evaluation whose team train the EEC staff and local evaluators in the evaluation methodology and agree local annual evaluation plans with the EEC. The national evaluation is using a variety of methods and data sources to collect quantitative and qualitative evidence, gathered from primary sources (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, and cost analysis) and secondary sources (e.g. national and local education data sets and socio-economic datasets).

Bertram and Pascal (2001) note that, although EEC is not a targeted programme, **their catchments are in areas of greatest need**. They found evidence that EECs had developed links with other programmes. For example, they reported that all responding EECs (24 out of 29) indicated that they were linked into other major government initiatives such as the National Childcare Strategy and Quality Protects, and suggested that they were aware of, and participating in, elements of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy. Most (20 out of 25) EECs were linked to Sure Start (a national evaluation of the 260 Sure Start programmes is currently underway), which is a major government programme aimed at tackling child poverty and social exclusion by improving services for children up to age four, their families and their communities. Sure Start programmes are concentrated in neighbourhoods where a high proportion of children are living in poverty.

As regards evidence of impact, Bertram and Pascal (2001) concluded that:

Although it is early days in the development of the Programme, there is clear emerging evidence that the EECs are impacting positively on the children, families and practitioners who benefit from their services.

Drawing on the evidence of EEC assessments and school Baseline Assessments in addition to case-study evidence, the evaluation reported a range of outcomes including the following:

- ♦ EEC children have enhanced levels of cognitive development, develop positive attitudes and dispositions towards learning, and have enhanced social skills and emotional wellbeing.
- ♦ EECs are reducing the number of children at risk in their communities, with some reporting significant reductions in the number of children on the Child protection Register.
- ♦ The early identification of, and support for, children with special needs by EECs facilitates their inclusion into mainstream schools.
- ♦ EEC families are accessing an increasing range of support services which are enhancing confidence, improving family stability and enhancing parenting skills.
- ♦ EEC families have easy local access to training with crèche facilities and improved employment opportunities.
- ♦ EEC staff are demonstrating an increased professionalism in their approach to integration.

The evaluators pointed out that getting evidence of costs was difficult owing to EECs having diverse budgets, often involving multiple income streams. They considered that there was more robust evidence of **good practice and innovation**, concluding that:

There is substantial evidence of EEC success in the development and dissemination of quality early educational practice. EECs are developing effective integrated service delivery. They have been successful in identifying and mapping the complex needs of children and families in their communities. They are also developing strategies for including the 'hard to reach' in their services, and those from ethnic minorities and in involving more men in working and caring for young children.

What works: features and strategies

The evaluation identifies several aspects of good practice in integrated service delivery. These include the following in relation to the development and dissemination of quality early educational practice:

- ♦ a strong emphasis on planning, assessment and record keeping
- ♦ a commitment of resources to an ongoing institutional development which involves external experts working closely with Centre staff over an extended period of time to enhance the quality of their service provision
- ♦ the establishment of whole-Centre systems for evaluating and improving the quality of their services
- ♦ the development of effective procedures to ensure that the users of their services are fully involved in the evaluation process
- ♦ the active dissemination of high quality early educational practice both nationally and locally.

The evaluation report provides illustrations of good practice in the form of cameo examples from particular EECs.

2.3 Education Action Zones

Policy context

The Education Action Zone (EAZ) policy is a key component of the improving educational standards agenda outlined in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The purpose of EAZs, which are partnerships of schools and other local organisations including businesses, is to help drive up educational standards by developing and running programmes to address underachievement in disadvantaged areas. They are expected to devise innovative approaches and establish new patterns of working. The first 25 EAZs were funded for a five-year period. A very recent government announcement indicated that funding for EAZs will not be renewed and that their work will be incorporated by Excellence in Cities.

Evaluation and evidence

As a national evaluation of EAZs has not been carried out, this section draws mainly on an Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, 2001) commentary on the findings of inspections of six first-round EAZs (preliminary visits were made to all first-round EAZs) which reported that they had made '*reasonable progress*' during the first two years, adding that: '*Commitment and energy have been in good supply and participation by schools and the support offered by partners are now generally at a high level*'. However, the commentary stated that the EAZs inspected had '*not often been test-beds for genuinely innovative action*', but had enhanced existing interventions linked to national strategies for improving numeracy and literacy and ICT. Impact was reported as being greater in primary than secondary schools. Other OFSTED (2001) inspection findings are presented below.

The effectiveness of EAZ management

Planning, ways of working and use of resources

EAZs had benefited from business participation in zone management. Some action forums were too large and cumbersome for decision making. Headteachers did not always have sufficient representation in zone management structures. All of the EAZs had set overall targets for attainment and some had done this for attendance and exclusions. In some cases, these were incorporated in individual school targets. The more successful of the EAZs inspected had spent less of their annual budget on

management and administration which enabled them to allocate more funding to activities.

Partnerships

All the EAZs had established useful partnerships, particularly with local businesses and with education providers. In the more effective zones, there were clearly defined links with the LEA at the strategic level and, usually, also at the level of individual activities. The relationships between the EAZs and nearly all of their schools were good. However, the links between schools in the zones were weaker.

Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring of EAZ activities was variable at zone level and often weak at school level. At school level, monitoring was *‘most effective where an initiative focuses on a small, specified group of pupils, where a baseline is established at the start of the work and where measurement of progress and feedback on the quality of the provision are integral parts of the activity’*. The evaluation of zone programmes was not rigorous enough.

Dissemination

Dissemination had not been a major aspect of EAZs which had not exploited their communication systems to share experiences with partners. It was found that *‘the lack of knowledge about which activities are having an impact has made it hard for the zone to know what to disseminate’*.

The Impact of EAZ Activities

Match with objectives

Overall, a good match was found between activities and objectives in half of the zones. The most effective activities were linked directly to schools’ and teachers’ needs. All of the zones inspected had **activities aimed at raising standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schools**. OFSTED (2001) reported that: *‘These activities are having a beneficial impact in most cases, with specialist teachers adding to classroom teachers’ skills and giving them more confidence in using the national strategies’*.

Another common theme was **working with parents** to increase their involvement in their children’s education. It was noted that: *‘Parents’ aspirations are raised where the zone provides them with good, accredited training’*.

In all of the EAZs inspected, schools' **ICT provision** had been enhanced, often from a very low base. Most had provided more ICT resources, including interactive learning systems, and had provided expert ICT staff to improve teachers' capability. However, OFSTED (2001) observed that *'most zones have not yet focused on using ICT as a tool to support more effective teaching and learning'*.

Connections with other improvement work

It was found that most EAZs had established good links with LEAs and national improvement work. OFSTED (2001) reported that: *'In the best practice, zone literacy and numeracy expert teachers are able to liaise with LEA coordinators and to train alongside them, ensuring consistency in their work'*.

Contribution to raising standards and promoting inclusion

The OFSTED inspections indicated that the work of EAZs was supporting the improvement of attainment in literacy and numeracy in zone primary schools which had generally increased at least as fast as, and sometimes at well above, the national rate. It was noted that this picture was not generally reflected in zone secondary schools.

Although most EAZs had introduced **activities to help tackle disaffection** amongst older pupils, OFSTED (2001) judged that *'whilst there are benefits for the individuals concerned, there are few instances of significant zone-wide improvements in pupils' attendance'*.

An evaluation of the role of teachers in EAZs undertaken by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2000) for the National Union of Teachers drew the following conclusion:

Both government and the profession should be encouraged by the positive responses to the EAZ programme, both in terms of its early indications of impact, and in terms of the goodwill and positive climate the programme is encouraging.

The evaluation considered that **professional development** was one of the most successful achievements of EAZs. It also noted that some teachers wanted to be consulted more about the work of zones and their involvement. Interestingly, Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2000) drew attention to the challenge of differentiating the impact of the zones:

Several respondents noted the difficulty of identifying the EAZ effect compared to other initiatives. Moreover, many of the investments and improvements being made by EAZs are long term in their impact.

What works: features and strategies

OFSTED (2001) identified several features which it said accounted for successful work undertaken by some EAZs. These included the following:

- ♦ *‘Planning that is based on a commitment to shared action by schools and other partners, but also on an understanding of individual schools’ needs and a capacity to respond quickly to those needs when required.*
- ♦ *Good communication and consultation, ensuring that teachers, as well as representatives of other agencies, have a role in the development and implementation of policy.*
- ♦ *Good links with other improvement work, especially that sponsored by the LEA, for example through its data service, literacy and numeracy consultants and advisers.*
- ♦ *Programmes focusing on a small number of well-targeted, practical activities with a straightforward connection with clear, agreed objectives and with a realistic prospect of impact beyond the life of the zone’.*

OFSTED (2001) reported that these features were ‘*not demonstrated consistently well by the zones inspected*’.

Another perspective on what works is offered by the PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2000) evaluation which identified several **successful approaches** to implementing EAZ programmes, including the following:

- ♦ An accessible and enthusiastic project director, with adequate administrative support.
- ♦ The full involvement of headteachers.
- ♦ Secondment of teachers to the zone ‘centre’ to lead projects.
- ♦ Teacher involvement in task- or programme-oriented groups.
- ♦ Specific funding for teacher-led innovation.

2.4 Specialist Schools

Policy context

The Government White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) announced that diversity and different models of schooling were required to assist the drive to

improve educational standards. Specialist schools were identified as having the potential to play a key role in this approach:

Specialist schools – focusing on technology, languages, sports or arts – should be a resource for local people and neighbouring schools to draw on. They will be expected to develop their specialism in partnership with local schools and business and to share their expertise with others. Their influence on raising standards will extend well beyond each school's boundary: we will encourage them to work together in local 'families' to help share the benefits across a number of schools.

Specialist schools aim to raise the standards of teaching and learning of their specialist subjects and benefit other schools in the local area by sharing their expertise and facilities which they are required to enhance through securing sponsorship from business or charitable organisations. There has been a steady growth in specialist schools which currently number 685.

Evaluation and evidence

The DfEE commissioned the London School of Economics to conduct a research project examining the impact of the specialist schools programme. Undertaken in 1998 and 1999, the project comprised a survey of all (238) specialist schools that were operational in September 1997 and an exploration of the costs and effectiveness of the programme. Questionnaires were sent to headteachers, heads of specialism and chairs of governors.

The main findings of the research reported by West (2000) were as follows:

- ♦ In nine out of ten schools, new specialist subjects or courses had been introduced. These included GNVQs, GCSEs and A levels.
- ♦ In nearly nine out of ten cases, there had been initiatives within the specialist area attempting to address underachievement.
- ♦ Innovative teaching strategies were reported by eight out of ten heads of specialism. In six out of ten cases these strategies had been extended to other departments, and in nearly eight out of ten cases there had been cross-curricular initiatives involving the specialist subject and others.
- ♦ In nearly two-thirds of cases, heads of specialism indicated that there had been innovative forms of involvement by sponsors in the school.
- ♦ Comparison of the examination results of specialist schools and non-specialist schools showed that average annual improvement in the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C was greater in specialist schools.

The academic achievements reported above are confirmed by a recent study undertaken by Jesson (2000) provided evidence from a year-on-year value-added analysis which showed that specialist schools achieved considerably better examination results than was predicted from their Key Stage 3 results and that specialist schools were improving their results at a higher rate than for all other comprehensive schools.

West et al (2000) concluded that: *'Our research findings suggest that the Specialist Schools Programme has delivered improvements in examination results over and above the improvements seen in other schools during the same period'*. The most frequently reported disadvantages were additional workload and the inequitable distribution of resources between departments.

2.5 Beacon Schools

Policy context

The launch of the Beacon School initiative was announced in the summer of 1998. The aim of Beacon Schools was to play a formative role for other schools in identifying, celebrating, disseminating and promoting good practice. The initiative is now one of seven major strands within the Excellence in Cities (EiC) policy (see Section 2.6 below). The first 75 Beacon schools began operating in September 1998 and currently there are 250. Fifty participating schools are in EiC areas. Each of these schools receives additional funding, usually for a minimum period of three years, to support an agreed programme of activities that enable them to collaborate with and help raise standards in other schools. The purpose of the programmes of activities, which are based on the identified strengths of the Beacon School, is to spread good practice to, and promote new ideas in, a number of partner institutions.

Evaluation and evidence

The DfEE commissioned NFER to undertake a national evaluation of pilot Beacon Schools in 1999-2000 and to carry out a further study in 2000-2001. The aims of the latter evaluation included assessing:

- ♦ the range and quality of Beacon School activities
- ♦ the impact of Beacon activities in partner schools and on Beacon Schools themselves
- ♦ the extent, nature and quality of relationships between Beacon Schools and their partner institutions.

The research methods used comprised a survey of 229 Beacon Schools located in 105 different LEAs, and qualitative case studies of 16 Beacon Schools and their partner institutions.

According to Rudd *et al* (2001), staff in Beacon Schools identified five main areas of benefit for their schools:

- ♦ improving practice and, in some cases, raising standards
- ♦ staff development
- ♦ enhanced external links and local profile
- ♦ increased teacher and pupil morale
- ♦ equipment and resources.

Interviews with staff in case-study schools and their partners suggested three areas of positive impact in the partner institutions:

- ♦ improving practice and, in a few cases, raising standards
- ♦ staff confidence
- ♦ enhanced external links.

Interestingly, Rudd *et al* (2001) reported that: ‘... *staff in Beacon Schools that were working with partner schools in special measures reported that Beacon activities were a major factor in enabling these schools to come out of special measures*’. They also noted that many of the impacts achieved by Beacon Schools depended on partners being open to change, adding that ‘*this highlights the complex and necessarily interactive nature of sharing effective educational practices between institutions*’.

The most frequently identified difficulties by Beacon Schools reported by the evaluation included developing relationships with partner schools, time management and maintaining standards whilst disseminating good practice.

What works: features and strategies

The evaluation declared that there was no simple recipe for success. Indeed, Rudd *et al* (2001) drew the following conclusion based on the evidence collected: ‘*There is no single model of best practice for Beacon activities and partnerships ...*’ The three main models were summarised as follows:

- ♦ **Dissemination** – this model tended to be product-oriented, with an emphasis on written or electronic materials.

- ♦ **Consultancy: a customised approach to an identified problem** – this model was process-oriented and focused on the policy or practice of the receiving school.
- ♦ **Improving together: creating a network of mutual support for excellence** – this model focused on a group of schools and was premised on the notion of reciprocal learning and capacity building, rather than reacting to individual, one-off requests.

The evaluation offered an ideal type of Beacon work which it characterised as a spiral of activities, including:

- ♦ **Preparation:** the Beacon School has to identify what it is good at and can use school self-evaluation to inform this.
- ♦ **Visits/transactions:** the Beacon School must be able to transfer this process or activity (i.e. what it is good at) to other teachers and to other schools. There must be some transaction or transfer of information, skills or ideas, from the Beacon School to its partner institutions.
- ♦ **Implementation:** the partner institutions must act upon the information or ideas received: *‘It is no good just visiting a Beacon School and ‘having a look’, admiring the scenery – this is educational tourism – rather, there must be implementation and an enacting of the new ideas, there must be consequences from the Beacon visit – this is the move towards transformation’.*
- ♦ **Evaluation:** there must be ongoing evaluation of whether or not the new ideas are working, and of whether or not standards, however they are defined, are improving.

Further evidence on the work and outcomes from the Beacon School initiative will become available as the national evaluation continues and findings are disseminated.

2.6 Excellence in Cities

Policy context

Announced in 1999, the goal of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) policy was *‘to raise standards in inner city schools and to change both the reality and perception of what is possible’* (GB. DfEE, 1999). The policy re-emphasised the government’s commitment to raising educational standards, promoting educational partnerships and disseminating good practice.

Excellence in Cities is targeted on some of the major urban areas of England that face severe difficulties related to socio-economic disadvantage. In attempting to respond to the wide range of needs in city schools, EiC adopts a multi-strand approach to extend learning opportunities and tackle barriers to learning. It aims to support improvements to the quality of education through seven strands which cover the

following policy areas: City Learning Centres, Specialist Schools, Gifted and Talented, Beacon Schools, Learning Mentors, Learning Support Units, and EAZs. Whilst a number of the initiatives that comprise the strands are not in themselves completely new in concept, what is new is the way in which the policy is being delivered and organised. This reflects a central aim of the policy which is '*diversity of provision within a coherent framework*'.

EiC was introduced in 24 Phase 1 partnerships from September 1999, and in 23 Phase 2 partnerships from September 2000. Phase 3 partnerships have also been established.

Excellence Clusters have been introduced to promote education standards in areas of disadvantage outside the major inner cities. Excellence Challenge has been established to encourage more young people to take up learning opportunities in higher education. Both of these policy developments are being evaluated by the consortium that is evaluating EiC but no results are yet available.

Evaluation and evidence

The DfEE commissioned a consortium of the following organisations to undertake a national evaluation of the impact of EiC: the NFER (lead contractor), the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics (LSE), the Centre for Educational Research at LSE, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The evaluation commenced in summer 2000 and will last until December 2003.

The overall aims of the evaluation are to establish the effectiveness of EiC in terms of inputs, processes and outputs and outcomes, and to identify and evaluate additionality. The evaluation also aims to identify best practice and explore the extent to which EiC is furthering the inclusion of under-represented and disadvantaged young people.

Following agreed strategies and practices, the evaluation comprises the following:

- ◆ Large-scale surveys of pupils, teachers, and schools in EiC partnerships and in comparison areas, in addition to surveys of EiC managers, parents, employers and training providers.
- ◆ Secondary analysis of national datasets.
- ◆ Strand-related, thematic studies using qualitative methods.
- ◆ Ongoing funding, cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses.
- ◆ Managed outputs from EiC local evaluations.

Early findings from the evaluation are promising. Evaluation reports produced by the consortium will be available from 2002 onwards.

2.7 Study Support

Policy context

Study support aims to assist pupils' learning, raise achievement, and/or promote positive personal and social development.

Study support activities share certain characteristics. They are:

- ◆ targeted at children of school age
- ◆ mainly based in schools but take place outside of normal school hours
- ◆ open to groups of pupils on a voluntary basis.

The range of provision includes after-school clubs and societies, homework clubs, summer literacy and numeracy schools, sporting and arts activities, residential courses, mentoring schemes, and outward bound courses.

Evaluation and evidence

A review of opinion and research on the benefits of study support conducted by Sharp *et al* (1998) examined 62 project descriptions and research studies published in the last ten years. The research studies ranged from small-scale evaluations of specific initiatives to large-scale quantitative studies and meta-analyses. In addition, the reviewers carried out interviews with ten experts, including representatives from organisations with a national brief for the development of study support and individuals who had experience of evaluating study support projects.

The experts interviewed identified a variety of benefits from study support which they considered:

- ◆ can help young people to develop their personal and social skills
- ◆ can bring about improvements in young people's self-esteem and motivation to learn
- ◆ contributes to improvements in pupils' academic achievement and progress at school
- ◆ provides pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with opportunities to study in a safe environment and gives them access to resources not available at home
- ◆ offers teachers opportunities to pursue a wide range of interests and develop better relationships with pupils

- ♦ can improve communication between parents and schools.

Sharp *et al* (1998) reported the benefits from four different types of study support activity that may be used alone or in combination:

- ♦ **Curriculum extension** activities were defined as those most directly related to academic study such as homework clubs, study skills revision schemes. The studies reviewed indicated that pupils reported gains in self-esteem, confidence and motivation, and that relationships with teachers had improved. There was evidence from two studies that pupils who attended revision classes achieved better GCSE grades than those who did not attend. A study of secondary schools and colleges found a correlation between participation in extra-curricular science activities and a student's desire to study science or engineering at higher education level.
- ♦ **Curriculum enrichment** was defined as activities such as arts, sports, community service, cultural visits and outward bound courses. The review reported that a meta-analysis of 96 studies on outward bound courses found evidence of significant immediate and longer-term effects leading to improvements in personal qualities such as leadership, independence emotional stability and assertiveness.
- ♦ **Summer schools** may be used to provide a range of learning opportunities. The review examined two evaluations of the pilot Summer Literacy Schools initiative which aimed to improve the literacy skills of pupils in Year 6 who had not met the national standards in English. A total of 50 centres were established in secondary schools, each providing 50 hours of tuition during the summer holidays. The two evaluations were found to offer contradictory results: whilst one reported that pupils had made progress in reading and spelling during the scheme, the other reported a general decline pre- to post-test and concluded that pupils who attended the summer schools did not make better progress than those who had not attended.
- ♦ **Mentoring schemes** were defined as programmes offering young people advice and support through adults other than teachers. The review found that a study of mentoring schemes in seven secondary schools indicated that mentored pupils performed slightly better at GCSE (relative to predicted scores) than did a similar group of pupils who had not participated in the mentoring schemes.

The authors of the review concluded that:

The review has found a consistently positive picture of study support. Study support is considered to offer a range of benefits to young people in relation to social, personal and academic development ...The research evidence tends to confirm that study support is achieving its aims and is helpful for a range of target audiences. However, it must be said that most of the research evidence for the positive effects of study support is suggestive, rather than conclusive.

They noted that, whilst there were positive associations between participation in study support and the development of academic, personal and social skills, it was not clear

to what extent these gains could be attributed solely to the influence of the programmes or to pupil and/or school characteristics.

The most recent research findings on the impact of study support are presented in MacBeath *et al* (2001) who report on a three-year longitudinal evaluation. The Study Support National Evaluation and Development Programme was set up by the DfEE and the Prince's Trust in autumn 1997.

Evaluation and evidence

The evaluation was undertaken by the Quality in Education Centre at the University of Strathclyde between autumn 1997 and summer 2000. It tracked two cohorts, totalling over 8000 pupils, from 52 schools (44 in England, six in Wales and two in Scotland). One cohort was tracked from Year 9 through to their GCSEs and the other cohort from Year 7 through to their KS3 SATs. A statistical analysis of academic attainment, attitudes and school attendance was supplemented by qualitative research undertaken by NFER and Create Consultants in the form of 12 case studies.

The main research findings reported by MacBeath *et al* (2001) were as follows:

- ♦ In all the schools studied, pupils who participated in study support did better than would have been predicted from baseline measures, in academic attainment, attitudes to school and attendance at school than pupils who did not participate.
- ♦ Pupils who participated scored on average three and a half grades on best five or one more A-C pass at GCSE than did pupils of equal ability who did not participate.
- ♦ Study support improved attainment in maths and English GCSE by half a grade.
- ♦ Study support was especially effective for pupils from minority ethnic communities and, to a lesser extent, for pupils eligible for free school meals.

What works: features and strategies

Macbeath *et al* (2001) identified several reasons why study support benefits participants:

- It is voluntary and learner-centred.
- Pupils and teachers experience a greater sense of control.
- There is an ethos of achievement.
- There is a more relaxed and informal relationship between teachers and pupils.
- It fosters independent, self-regulated learning.

The authors noted that study support was strengthened where it was seen as having a vital part to play in a whole school approach to raising achievement and where it had the active support of the headteacher and senior management.

2.8 Playing for Success

Policy context

The provision of study support was augmented by the launch of *Playing for Success* in 1997 by the Government in partnership with the Premier and Football Leagues and their clubs. The initiative aimed to contribute to raising educational standards and increase pupils' motivation to learn, especially in urban areas, through the establishment of Study Support Centres in professional football clubs. The Centres, which are managed by experienced teachers, use the medium and environment of football to support work in literacy, numeracy, and ICT and provide facilities for pupils to complete homework.

Targeting underachieving pupils in Years 6 to 9, the initiative places emphasis on improving attitudes and motivation to learn. In their evaluation carried out between September 1999 and October 2000, Sharp *et al* (2001) noted that 55 per cent of the pupils attending the Centres were boys and 15 per cent were from ethnic minority backgrounds. Just under a quarter had special educational needs and a similar proportion was eligible for free school meals.

Evaluation and evidence

The aim of the evaluation was to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of *Playing for Success* and to identify and describe those features leading to success in terms of participation, gains in motivation, positive attitudes towards learning and enhanced learning outcomes.

Focusing on the 12 Centres that were taking the largest numbers of pupils, the evaluation comprised:

- ♦ interviews with Centre managers about their aims, staffing, liaison with schools and learning programmes
- ♦ assessment of pupils' academic progress using nationally standardised tests of reading comprehension and numeracy
- ♦ assessment of pupils' development of computer skills using a self-report checklist
- ♦ measurement of attitudinal change using questionnaires to gather data from pupils and parents

- ♦ a control group of pupils as used to enable comparisons to be made between the progress of pupils attending the Centres and that of similar pupils who had not taken part in *Playing for Success*.

Over 1,200 pupils, 450 parents and 70 teachers took part in the evaluation.

The evaluation found that **the initiative had proved popular with pupils, parents and schools**; in particular:

- ♦ *Playing for Success* had lived up to the expectations of pupils who enjoyed attending the Centres – few could identify anything that could be improved.
- ♦ Although sessions were held after school, most pupils attended over 80 per cent of the course, with almost half attending all available sessions.
- ♦ Parents had very positive views about their children's participation in the initiative.
- ♦ Teachers considered that the attendance at the Centres had had a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and skills.

Moreover, the evaluation found that **the initiative had contributed to improved achievement** as follows:

- ♦ Pupils had made substantial and significant progress in numeracy. On average, primary pupils improved their numeracy scores by about 21 months and secondary schools by about eight months.
- ♦ Performance in reading comprehension improved during pupils' time at the Centres, although the progress of primary pupils did not quite reach statistical significance when compared with the control group. Secondary pupils' scores improved significantly, by the equivalent of about six months.
- ♦ Pupils' ICT skills improved significantly during their time at the Centres. They made progress in basic computer skills, word processing, email and Internet skills.
- ♦ Teachers identified particular improvements in pupils' self-confidence and ICT skills.

What works: features and strategies

Sharp *et al* (2001) reported that:

The football setting proved attractive to all pupils, regardless of gender or ethnicity. It was a strong element in motivating pupils to become involved in Playing for Success.

The evaluators observed that pupils responded positively, especially to the opportunities to use computers and the Internet, and to meet people and make new

friends. They also pointed out that *‘attending an educational setting other than school gave underachieving youngsters the opportunity to make a ‘fresh start’*’.

Other factors identified as contributing to the success of the Centres were the support provided by **student mentors**, and the high ratio of staff to pupils which gave pupils access to immediate help.

Sharp *et al* (2001) noted that the Centres provided some of the **key elements in supporting self-regulated learning**:

- ◆ Pupils volunteered to attend and were offered individual support.
- ◆ Pupils were given tasks at their level and were able to see for themselves the progress that they had made.
- ◆ Pupils were given opportunities to make choices and to develop independent study skills.
- ◆ Centre staff and mentors encouraged pupils to become more self-reliant and to try out things for themselves.

The evaluators concluded that *‘all these elements contributed to pupils’ progress and sense of achievement’*.

2.9 Out-of-School-Hours Learning Activities

Policy context

The DfEE funded 50 pilot study support schemes in 1998-99 to set up out-of-school-hours learning projects or extend existing provision. Over 200 primary schools, secondary schools and special schools participated in 67 projects. Some involved single schools, while others included several schools working together in partnership. Many projects involved partners from the public or private sector, including Education Business Partnerships (EBPs), Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and businesses, or community organisations.

Aims

The projects typically aimed to raise levels of achievement, extend and enrich the school curriculum, provide specialist facilities and a safe learning environment, and raise confidence and self-esteem. The target groups were children and young people who were:

- ◆ identified as having particular learning needs

- ♦ from disadvantaged communities
- ♦ disaffected
- ♦ below average in educational achievement or not fulfilling their potential
- ♦ unable to access support, resources and an environment conducive to study.

Evaluation and evidence

The DfEE commissioned NFER to undertake an evaluation of 50 pilot study support schemes. The main findings reported in Mason *et al* (1999) are outlined below.

All projects had a coordinator whose role was primarily managerial. Coordinators included head teachers, senior teachers, LEA officers and partnership organisation officers. A range of other adults contributed to organising and providing learning activities, including teachers, playworkers, school assistants, librarians, and youth workers. Adult and pupil mentors also helped to support the children and young people.

The projects were located mainly in schools but other venues included playcentres, youth centres, libraries and community centres. Most sessions took place after school. These were often supplemented by breakfast and/or lunchtime sessions and/or holiday or week end provision. Some projects ran sessions on Saturday mornings.

Learning activities

The learning activities provided varied according to the perceived needs of participants. Many projects focused on ICT work or included ICT within a wider programme of activities. Many provided learning activities designed to develop participants' literacy and numeracy skills. Homework clubs were common at secondary schools. A majority of primary/secondary partnership projects provided 'taster' activities for Year 6 children to aid their transfer to secondary school.

Outcomes and impact

The evidence base on the outcomes and impact of out-of-hours learning activities comprises local monitoring and evaluation undertaken by project participants, and the national evaluation carried out by NFER (Mason, 1999).

The national evaluation included the following:

- ♦ more than 300 interviews with key personnel managing and/or providing schemes or projects within schemes, children and young people participating in the activities, and parents

- ♦ observation of schemes and projects in action
- ♦ in-depth case studies of ten schemes.

Outcomes and impact were evaluated at the local level through steering group meetings, informal staff meetings, analysis of GCSE and standardised test results, participant questionnaires and interviews, log books and assessment booklets, and the assessment of end products from music and arts projects.

The **qualitative** data collected by the national evaluation indicated that:

- ♦ overall the recruitment of staff had not been difficult, although some projects had experienced problems in finding enough staff or those with the right skills
- ♦ operational difficulties apparent in a few projects were often related to poor organisation, weak planning and uneasy staff relations
- ♦ projects that supported children's transfer from primary to secondary school were particularly successful
- ♦ most projects were successful in having a positive effect on participants' behaviour with regard to raising self-esteem, confidence and motivation
- ♦ attendance levels were fairly good in most projects, though there were some fluctuations related to preparing for examinations, doing homework, dark evenings, and religious festivals.

Local evaluations provided 'soft' evidence of the benefits gained from involvement in the schemes, projects and activities. These included the following:

- ♦ improvements in school work of pupils attending an after-school club and a positive impact on the literacy of attendees (as measured by a reading test) compared with those of non-attendees
- ♦ improvements in the computer skills and physical skills of pupils with special needs attending a computer club
- ♦ improvements in motivation and behaviour of pupils attending an after-school club
- ♦ increased enthusiasm for learning and personal confidence in pupils attending a project offering peer mentoring and workshops on English, French and German in addition to drama work on bullying and drugs awareness.

It should be noted that the New Opportunities (NOF) of the National Lottery has provided major funding for learning activities outside normal school hours since 1999. This programme is currently being evaluated by NFER.

3. ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

3.1 Connexions

Policy context

The main policy development in the area of advice, guidance and support for young people has been the introduction of Connexions in 2000. According to *Connexions* (DfEE, 2000), the strategy sets out to:

... ensure that more and more young people access the services that they need, follow appropriate and high-quality learning opportunities and make a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood and working life ...

The **Connexions strategy** aims to achieve a more coherent and less fragmented provision of support for young people aged 13 to 19. One of the main themes of the strategy, which aims to provide *'targeted systems of support, for those who need it, when they need it, linking all aspects of young people's lives'*, is outreach, information, advice, support and guidance, including Millennium Volunteers, the Neighbourhood Support Fund and the **Connexions Service**.

The key principles of the Connexions Service, as noted by Dickinson (2001), embrace:

- ◆ raising the aspirations of each young person by setting high expectations
- ◆ meeting individual need and overcoming barriers to learning
- ◆ taking account of the views of young people
- ◆ inclusion, including preventing young people *'moving to the margins of their community'*
- ◆ partnership and collaboration between different agencies working with young people
- ◆ community involvement and neighbourhood renewal
- ◆ extending opportunity and equality of opportunity
- ◆ evidence based practice, including *'ensuring that new interventions are based on rigorous research and evaluation into 'what works''*.

The role of **Personal Advisers**, who are integral to the delivery of the Connexions Service, includes providing one-to-one support and information, advice and guidance for young people, working with schools, colleges and training providers to help them

better meet the needs of young learners, and brokering young people's access to services such as housing, health, and social services.

Thirteen Connexions pilots commenced in 2000. Twelve Connexions Partnerships started delivering the Connexions Service in April 2001 followed by three more in September 2001.

Evaluation and evidence

According to Dickinson (2001), the evaluation of the Connexions pilots undertaken by GHK Economics and Management found that, although a Connexions infrastructure was developing, there '*was some confusion over what the objectives of the Connexions Service were*'. The evaluation also found that the majority of the 64 services piloted involved multi-agency and multi-site working.

Dickinson (2001) concluded that '*on a wide range of measures the Connexions Service can be rated a success*'. The evidence for this was based on an analysis of reports from the pilots and local evaluators and on interviews undertaken with the Pilot Coordinators, 181 partners from a range of organisations, 81 Personal Advisers and 80 clients.

The impacts of the Connexions Service on clients included the following:

- ◆ 96 per cent said that they found their sessions with a Personal Adviser – '*someone who listens to their problems and understands them*' - to be useful
- ◆ nearly nine in ten rated access to the service and the usefulness of the information and support provided as 'god' or 'very good'
- ◆ 79 per cent said that they were now more interested in education and training as a result of the service
- ◆ 70 per cent said that they felt more confident about getting a 'good' job
- ◆ 75 per cent said that it helped them to cope with other problems.

The evaluation also reported that the majority of partners were very positive about the structures that were being developed through Connexions and a majority of Personal Advisers were satisfied with the progress and delivery of service delivery. Although the Connexions Service is stated to be universal and differentiated, to meet the needs of all young people, the evaluation found that Personal Advisers were working mostly with disaffected clients.

Dickinson (2001) identified several **areas for development**, including the need to:

- ♦ give more ownership to partner organisations and ensure that their identity is not lost
- ♦ clarify who retains control of funds
- ♦ improve the marketing of the Connexions Service to young people, parents and staff
- ♦ ensure that the way of involving young people was appropriate in terms of location, and the methods and language used
- ♦ communicate effectively the role and responsibilities of Personal Advisers based in schools and colleges
- ♦ ensure that services had to be flexible to deliver tailored provision for targeted young people with specific or multiple barriers
- ♦ provide particular additional support mechanisms such as the development of alternative curricula for disaffected young people
- ♦ develop common instruments for assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

The evaluation made several **recommendations**, including the need to:

- ♦ provide clearer and more consistent national guidance, for example on frameworks for action and boundaries for decision-making
- ♦ develop mechanisms to enhance the dissemination of good practice and learning points relating to strategic partnerships
- ♦ provide more guidelines and good practice examples on the wider, non-core role of the Personal Adviser and on the recruitment of Personal Advisers
- ♦ provide more effective supervision for Personal Advisers, especially those working with hard-to-help clients
- ♦ develop a resource bank of materials and software that can be used to engage young people in interesting and creative ways
- ♦ link the involvement of young people with monitoring and evaluation and with the auditing of services.

Interestingly, Dickinson (2001) observed that '*the concept and use of evidence based practice is not very well understood. If it is to be a core principle of Connexions Services then it needs to be communicated more effectively*'. He recommended that resource banks of materials and techniques should be developed in evidence based practice.

4. POLICY AND PROVISION FOR DISADVANTAGED, DISAFFECTED AND DISENGAGED YOUNG PEOPLE

4.1 Overarching Policy Context

Since the late 1990s, several educational policy developments have focused on the needs of disadvantaged, disaffected and disengaged young people. These included the following:

- ♦ The **Investing in Young People Initiative** comprising ten measures to designed to help young people to improve achievement and qualification levels and increase their participation in learning after age 16. A key measure was the introduction of **New Start** which provided a range of local learning and development activities for disaffected young people aged 14 to 17.
- ♦ The **Learning Gateway** offers young people aged 16 and 17 advice, guidance and support, through Personal Advisers, and learning and development opportunities through Life Skills provision.
- ♦ The **Neighbourhood Support Fund** aims to engage disengaged young people aged 13 to 19 through learning and development activities provided in over community-based 600 projects.

The **Social Exclusion Unit** was established to examine the reasons for, and help to develop responses to, the problem of young people not fully participating in society, including education, training and employment. The scale of the problem was reported by the Social exclusion Unit (1999):

... every year some 161,000 young people between 16 and 18 are not involved in any education, training or employment. For the majority these are wasted and frustrating years that lead, inexorably, to lower pay and worse job prospects in later life.

The barriers to participation in education, training and employment were explored by Stone *et al* (2000) who carried out a study of 50 young people. The in-depth interviews with young people aged 16 to 19, who had experienced extended periods outside learning or work, revealed that there were many factors which affected their participation in education, training and employment. These included adverse family circumstances, traumatic events (including bereavement), personality and behavioural difficulties, and disaffection with school.

4.2 Literature Review

Morris *et al* (1999a) reviewed the **literature on the strategies and solutions for disadvantaged young people** who ‘*constitute a priority group for national concern*

and action'. Whist the focus of the review, which was commissioned by the DfES, was on disadvantaged teenagers, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, it also assessed the evidence on earlier promoting factors and on strategies for preventing disadvantage at an earlier age. Disadvantaged young people were defined as those who are:

- ♦ not in any form of education, training or employment
- ♦ at risk of leaving education, training or employment or being excluded from it
- ♦ in low pay, low status or unstable jobs with few prospects for training or promotion.

The review covered mainly published research but also included a range of other material such as policy papers, consultative documents and informed commentaries.

A major conclusion of the review was that *'despite a great deal of material being written on the subject of youth disadvantage, there is a dearth of reliable evidence on it'*. Reporting that much research had shown that poor educational performance at school – a common manifestation of disadvantage – was strongly associated with lower participation in education and training post-16 and poor performance in the labour market, Morris *et al* (1999a) stated that:

There is, however, often a confusion or ambiguity in the literature between what constitutes a symptom and what a cause. Arguably, there has been too much emphasis on dealing with symptoms and not enough on identifying and tackling the underlying causes, and on what pushes young people to become de-motivated, become disaffected and disengaged.

In addition, the authors found that there was a deficit in evidence on *'the impact, outcomes and effectiveness of interventions designed to deal with disadvantage and disaffection'*. This was explained by the vogue for process-based evaluations of national programmes from the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s and to one-off studies at the local level which were often small-scale and lacked rigour. Morris *et al* (1999a) also observed that *'even if good outcome data has been collected (nationally or locally), the evaluations have not always been able to provide explanations of why success or failure has been achieved'*.

What works: features and strategies

The review made the following observation:

There is reasonably good evidence to suggest that clearly targeted, multi-strand initiatives, which are devised and delivered through partnership and inter-agency

approaches, can have a demonstrable immediate and medium-term impacts across a range of educational, economic, social and psychological outcomes.

The authors emphasised that achieving the ‘*right mix*’ of programme elements and identifying who was best placed to deliver them were the main keys to success. Other important factors included:

- ♦ *ensuring well coordinated and integrated partnership working, in which partners play clearly identified and complementary roles*
- ♦ *having clear, feasible targets and goals for the programme as a whole, for individual partners and for the young people who participate*
- ♦ *integrating new or enhanced strategies/provision with mainstream curriculum or provision, and providing young people with a clear progressive approach*
- ♦ *designing effective support, monitoring, tracking and self-evaluation systems from the outset*
- ♦ *providing good staff training in diagnostic techniques and how to communicate and work with hard-to-help young people*
- ♦ *gaining the commitment of local employers and other contacts giving them real roles, not just using them in an advisory capacity*
- ♦ *involving parents, families and communities effectively.*

Morris *et al* (1999a) also identified approaches, often cited in the literature, which they considered to be replicable and sustainable in a range of contexts:

- ♦ sponsoring **targeted outreach work** to identify those in need and to help bring them into the system
- ♦ having a **focus on the individual** through individual target-setting and goal-setting, action planning and progress reviewing, and having a stable mentor or adviser who can support, and negotiate for, the individual
- ♦ being clear about the **order of priorities** for action by dealing with major life problems (e.g. relating to housing, health and welfare) first in order to bring security and stability to the individual before addressing education and employment issues
- ♦ giving a priority to **building self-esteem, confidence and motivation** before dealing with improving the young person's education and employment prospects.

A review of the literature on young people’s attitudes towards education, training and employment by Morris *et al* (1999b) identified a number of levers that were successful in developing positive attitudes. They concluded that:

- ♦ ***The mode and mechanisms of curriculum delivery are critical:*** ...the institutions (both pre- and post-16) that used strategies that helped young people to see the

relevance of their work, were interactive and/or collaborative, and that were implemented by staff who were skilled and supportive communicators appeared to have more success in encouraging young people to extend themselves ...

- ♦ **Structures need to be in place to support young people through transition:** ... in addition to sound pre-transition guidance (as evidenced in careers education and guidance programmes), there appears to be a need for ongoing academic, vocational and personal guidance in post-16 institutions.
- ♦ **Systems at post-16 need to be flexible:** ... the research suggests that flexibility of access, which may be assisted through the use of open resource-based learning or modular course structures, would present fewer barriers to post-16 education and training for those young people who decide to enter post-16 courses at a later stage.

Constraints on success

Morris *et al* (1999a) identified several constraints on the success of initiatives and strategies aimed at assisting disadvantaged young people. These were:

- ♦ **inflexibility** in processes, procedures and structures, including in the school context, a rigid curriculum with an overemphasis on academic achievement through exam performance which was considered to deter disadvantaged and disaffected young people
- ♦ **short-termism**, usually owing to funding regimes, which meant that initiatives were not long-term enough to overcome the problem fully
- ♦ adoption of a **partial approach** such as addressing one strand of a problem when it became evident that a more holistic and multi-faceted approach was required
- ♦ **inadequate dissemination strategies** which limited opportunities for the sharing of effective practice and mutual learning
- ♦ **a lack of consultation with disadvantaged young people** whose ‘voice’ was often missing from programme materials and whose ideas had not been elicited on what would most help them to become re-engaged and active participants in society.

A further observation on the last point was offered by Morris *et al* (1999b) who concluded from their review of the literature on young people’s attitudes to education, training and employment that:

... it is evident that the in-depth testimony of young people has much to contribute to the design and implementation of successful strategies to raise attainment, aspirations and motivation towards education, training and employment.

4.3 New Start

Policy context

New Start was launched in November 1997 with the aim of motivating and re-engaging in learning young people aged 14 to 17 who had dropped out of education or training or were at risk of doing so. New Start supported local partnerships to develop a more strategic and coordinated approach to identifying and tackling disaffection. Partnerships comprised statutory and voluntary organisations, including Local Authorities, Training and Enterprise Councils, Careers Services, Youth Services, colleges and schools.

The first round funded 17 partnerships (autumn 1997-summer 1999) and the second round, which focused on meeting the needs of 16 and 17 year olds in the most deprived areas, funded 43 partnerships (spring 1999-spring 2000). The partnerships were expected to develop new ways of improving access to mainstream learning for young people who had lost, or were losing, interest in education and training.

Evaluation and evidence: New Start Round One

The objectives of the national evaluation undertaken by GHK Economics and Management of New Start round one partnerships included the:

- ♦ assessment of the effectiveness of individual partnership projects
- ♦ development of knowledge about the client group
- ♦ assessment of the impact of action taken to help disaffected young people
- ♦ assessment of the effectiveness of the partnership approach to tackling disaffection.

The evaluation methodology comprised desk research, including analysis of project documentation, interviews with key partners, and observation of project steering group meetings and regional network meetings.

The evaluation report (Mackie, 1998) indicated that most of the New Start partnerships had undertaken research into the scale and nature of disaffection among young people in their area. It was found that disaffection was commonly associated with:

- ♦ teacher-pupil relations
- ♦ curriculum content and delivery

- ◆ behaviour management
- ◆ the role and influence of parents and peers
- ◆ the transition from Key Stage 4 to post-16
- ◆ experiences of post-16 provision
- ◆ societal and economic pressures.

New Start partnerships carried out audits of local initiatives aimed at the target group. Reporting that this work had revealed a wide range of provision, Mackie (1998) commented: *'This has underlined the need for coordination and has led to a number of initiatives within partnerships' action plans such as quality frameworks, directories/databases and tracking mechanisms'.*

New Start partnerships themselves offered a variety of provision, including extended work experience, training tasters, and residential experience.

Drawing on project information, Mackie (1998) identified common principles in developing strategies for dealing with disaffection among young people:

- ◆ whole-school policies to tackle disengagement and exclusion
- ◆ mainstreaming flexible approaches to delivering the curriculum at Key Stage 4, including enhanced work experience and work-related learning
- ◆ appropriate use of alternative curricula for excluded pupils
- ◆ better links between schools, colleges and training providers to ease transitions to post-16 opportunities
- ◆ greater responsiveness of post-16 provision to the needs of disaffected young people
- ◆ the need to include Youth Services, Careers Services and Social Services in tracking, mentoring and counselling young people.

Although the evaluation did not report on the effectiveness or impact of New Start projects, it stressed the importance of multi-agency working for tackling disaffection, concluding that: *'New Start can add value through the process of collaboration, synergy and shared practices'.*

Evaluation and evidence: New Start Round Two

The evaluation attempted to identify whether New Start projects had increased young people's participation in learning and whether there was more consistency and coordination of effort among existing and new partners, agencies and voluntary organisations.

The evaluators collected evidence through visits to Government Offices, a postal survey of Round Two projects (36 out of 43 responded), and case studies of 14 examples of good or interesting practice.

The **main evaluation findings and examples of what works** reported by Morgan and Hughes (1999) are outlined below.

The nature of multi-agency links: eight out of ten New Start respondents indicated that new links had been formed with a variety of agencies. However, as many projects had received short-term funding, *'new working relationships with other partners were difficult to sustain in a climate of uncertainty'*. Although good practice was identified in terms of joint activities between Careers and Youth Services, in some areas collaboration had been constrained by *'differences in philosophy and culture, and contrasting ways of working within such services'*. A general weakness was reported in working relations with Social Services.

Young people: good practice in contacting and recruiting young people included:

- ◆ a clear rationale for the identification of young people
- ◆ a specific target group
- ◆ a clear strategy to find young people agreed by all project staff
- ◆ written referral procedures for partner agencies
- ◆ outreach work which involved meeting young people 'on their ground'
- ◆ adopting an informal approach to gain young people's trust
- ◆ a high level of personal skills of the project workers
- ◆ working to the young person's agenda.

The evaluation noted that the location of projects was an important factor in their success: access and financial support for travel helped to get and keep young people involved. Furthermore, Morgan and Hughes (1999) found that: *'The quality of the relationship between the project worker and the young person has been the key to engaging them on the project'*. They noted that young people *'expressed their enthusiasm for the projects and demonstrated that they had made progress'* when interviewed during the case studies.

Provision: good practice in organising and delivering provision for the target groups of young people was identified as follows:

- ◆ high levels of skills of project workers
- ◆ team work to develop group cohesion
- ◆ productive relationships built between the young people and project workers
- ◆ use of different methods to assess young people's needs
- ◆ varied, action-based learning activities
- ◆ use of Individual Development Plans to record soft and hard targets
- ◆ balance of basic skills development, education and employability elements
- ◆ feedback from young people included in project evaluation.

Morgan and Hughes (1999) reported that project workers were concerned that '*formal assessment might intrude upon the early relationship that they were seeking to develop with the young person*'. They identified the following good practice in assessment:

- ◆ clear definition of its purpose
- ◆ early clarification of the different perceptions held by agencies
- ◆ non-judgemental approaches
- ◆ recording and sharing the assessment with the young person.

The evaluation found little evidence of different agencies sharing good practice on how to assess the needs of these clients.

Progression: project staff emphasised to the evaluators that the progress made by these young people was by small steps and that achievement could take a long time. Acknowledging that targets have to be challenging yet attainable, Morgan and Hughes (1999) observed that '*some young people needed personal targets such as attending the project regularly; others needed more stretching targets in terms of vocational attainment*'. They explained why the outcomes of New Start were difficult to obtain:

As the projects were in their early stages, it was not possible to confirm the extent to which these outcomes would be reached ...project workers had concluded that for many of these young people their basic needs of survival and social adjustment needed to be addressed before placing them into training or employment. They also believe that they could not succeed with everyone in the target groups, as some young people were too difficult to help.

The evaluation found that there was considerable variation in the tracking systems being used which '*has implications for the long-term follow-up of young people*'.

The evaluation report concluded by presenting **key recommendations**, including the following:

- ◆ Multi-agency working should involve partners in joint training and development activities.
- ◆ All projects should keep accurate and up-to-date records of participants, including gender, disability, and ethnic group information.
- ◆ The views of young people should be taken into consideration at all stages of programme development, marketing and delivery.
- ◆ A central framework is required for evaluation purposes in order to make explicit the added-value requirements for projects.

4.4 Learning Gateway

Policy context

The Learning Gateway was introduced in September 1999 to provide individually-tailored support to help re-engage in learning young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, training or employment. 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.

Evaluation and evidence

The study undertaken in 2000 by the DfEE's Quality and Performance Improvement Dissemination (QPID) examined the role of TECs in delivering the Learning Gateway, investigated barriers to the delivery of responsive and flexible provision, and aimed to identify good practice.

Face-to-face interviews were carried out with staff in 15 TECs and 14 Careers Services in seven regions. Interviews were also conducted with training providers and young people involved in Life Skills.

A selection of the **key findings** reported by QPID (2000) is presented below.

Development and delivery of the Learning Gateway: partnerships required considerable development, especially at practitioner level where there was often a lack of awareness of initiatives in place to address social exclusion. Most partnerships had not set up systems for sharing information and data. Quality assurance arrangements and standards were largely underdeveloped.

Delivery of Life Skills: examples of innovative approaches using outdoor activity and sport, arts and media, and environment projects were found in some areas. Less formal learning and training locations such as youth centres were considered to be a good context to deliver Life Skills. Finding meaningful work experience placements was difficult in many areas. There was a lack of clarity in the purpose of the Individual Development Plan. The majority of young people interviewed were content with the provision offered and thought that they were receiving the necessary support and help.

Monitoring and review arrangements: all organisations involved in the study agreed that measuring outcomes and assessing distance travelled was extremely difficult. Arrangements for tracking young people as they progress post-16 were found to be generally underdeveloped.

The DfEE commissioned NFER to carry out a study of young people's experiences of the Learning Gateway. The study, which was undertaken between October 2000 and March 2001, involved interviews with 152 young people, 17 PAs and eight senior careers service managers across eight careers service areas. The key findings presented by Sims *et al* (2001) were as follows:

- ♦ The young people's backgrounds and lifestyles revealed that many faced major challenges linked to multiple disadvantage.
- ♦ The main motives for joining included a need to get some money, find a job, gain qualifications, change lifestyle or as a response to family pressure.
- ♦ Young people valued the personal and practical support provided by PAs on a one-to-one basis.
- ♦ Young people involved in Life Skills were particularly appreciative of courses that were individually tailored to meet their needs and interests, including work experience or outward bound activities.
- ♦ Young people felt that the Learning Gateway had helped them develop a more positive attitude, enhanced their self-confidence, improved communication and social skills and increased their motivation to organise their lives more productively.

4.5 Neighbourhood Support Fund

Policy context

The Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) was introduced in 1999 with the aim of re-engaging disengaged young people aged 13 to 19 back into education, training and employment. The DfEE has allocated £60 million over three years to over 600

projects located in 40 target areas in England. Three Managing Agents – the Community Development Foundation in partnership with the Community Education Development Centre, the Learning Alliance and the National Youth Agency – manage the application of NSF which is delivered by local voluntary and community-based organisations.

Evaluation and evidence

Stage 1 of the NSF was evaluated by GHK Economics and Management (2001) between July 2000 and January 2001. The evaluation ‘mapped’ projects supported by NSF and examined the extent to which projects addressed the objectives of the Fund. The methods included desk based research of project application forms, interviews with the Managing Agents, and visits to a small sample of projects.

The evaluation revealed that:

- ♦ most of the 627 projects were planning to target a wide range of young people considered to be disengaged, disaffected and socially excluded
- ♦ a quarter of the projects intended to focus on young people from particular ethnic groups, and a few were planning to target young people leaving care, young people with mental health issues, and young refugees, asylum seekers and travellers
- ♦ most projects were planning to deliver their activities at a physical base within the local area, in combination with outreach and detached youth work
- ♦ projects were planning to provide a wide range of activities for young people, including job-related skills development, outdoor pursuits, and advice, information and guidance
- ♦ there was evidence and practical examples of linkage between the projects and both the Learning Gateway and Connexions pilots.

The evaluation noted that although the support systems provided by the Managing Agents for projects varied, they included training programmes, briefing sheets and telephone hotlines.

5. WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING FOR ADULTS

5.1 Overarching Policy Context

Encouraging more adults to take up learning opportunities and gain or enhance knowledge and skills is considered vital for regenerating communities. The Government's consultation paper, *The Learning Age* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 1998) emphasised the social and economic role of continuing education:

Learning is the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century.

Acknowledging that 'those who are disadvantaged educationally are also disadvantaged economically and socially', Kennedy (1997) made the case for widening as well as increasing participation in learning on the grounds that significant groups of people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with few qualifications, were under-represented in post-16 education.

This section of the review examines two key policy initiatives: Information, Advice and Guidance, and the Adult and Community Learning Fund.

5.2 Information, Advice and Guidance

Policy context

In its new framework for post-16 learning, announced in the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed* (1999), the DfEE set its strategic aim of establishing information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults as a public service. It drew attention to the important role that good quality IAG can play in widening participation and reducing barriers to learning. Funding was made available over a three-year period to partnerships for local adult IAG services. Six pathfinder partnerships and a range of development (non-pathfinder) partnerships were funded.

Evaluation and evidence

The DfES commissioned NFER to undertake an evaluation of the first year of the IAG programme. This qualitative study comprised case-study visits to 12 IAG partnerships where strategic-level interviews were carried out with senior managers and operational-level interviews were carried out with IAG providers in the statutory and voluntary sectors. Interviews were also conducted with 50 clients who had used the IAG services.

The main findings, reported by Sims *et al* (2000), indicated that the IAG programme was:

- ♦ helping to develop a more strategic approach to the provision of services to adults through a more concentrated and collaborative identification of priority groups and their needs
- ♦ enhancing contact between providers and helping them to gain a clearer and more informed understanding of the range of services provided in the local area
- ♦ helping to stimulate outreach activity focused on disadvantaged groups
- ♦ supporting organisations to work towards the Guidance Council quality standards through funding briefing and training sessions for providers.

The clients interviewed were largely satisfied with the IAG services provided and suggested that they should be marketed more vigorously.

What works: features and strategies

A key message from the IAG pathfinders was that partnerships were more likely to be sustained if participants were not overburdened by unnecessary administration. This was said to be particularly important in keeping small voluntary and community providers involved in partnerships. The role of partnership coordinator was also identified as crucial to the successful formation and operation of IAG partnerships.

5.3 Adult and Community Learning Fund

Policy context

Widening participation and improving basic skills for adults who have difficulty with them are two of the aims of the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) which supports *‘learning opportunities provided through grassroots, community-based activities which are familiar and relevant to people’s everyday lives’*. Many ACLF projects are delivered side-by side with existing community provision relating to health, crime prevention, and family welfare.

Evaluation and evidence

The DfEE commissioned the University of Warwick to undertake an evaluation of the first four rounds of the ACLF between August 1998 and May 2000. The aims of the evaluation were to:

- ♦ provide a summative evaluation of the Fund’s effectiveness

- ♦ provide formative feedback that could sharpen the focus of new projects, inform any further generation of funding and provide examples of best practice.

The research comprised an analysis of ACLF information and case studies of projects.

The main findings reported by Field *et al* (2001) were as follows:

- ♦ The Fund had widened individual participation as was intended.
- ♦ The Fund had contributed towards new ways of improving basic skills.
- ♦ A wide range of organisations had got involved promoting a variety of non-standard approaches to learning.
- ♦ The projects had generated a wide range of learning gains including in basic skills, personal development, growing confidence and self-respect, motivation and life planning, social learning and citizenship skills, and the ability to continue learning.

What works: features and strategies

Field *et al* (2001) identified several strategies that were effective in making contact with excluded individuals and groups, and involving them actively in organised learning. These included:

- ♦ The importance of direct person-to-person recruitment, drawing on existing networks and contacts.
- ♦ Building the curriculum on the basis of identified needs.
- ♦ Flexible and adaptive teaching approaches which combine serious learning with a bit of fun.
- ♦ Learning by stealth so that learning is a natural extension of other activities.
- ♦ Building group cohesion and mutual peer group support as a way of shoring up fragile learning identity and maximising retention.

The evaluation found that provision could be blocked or disrupted where there were changes to key project personnel, changes in location or restructuring in larger partner bodies.

An evaluation of Round 5 of the ACLF, currently being undertaken by NFER, will report in 2002.

6. MESSAGES FOR PARTNERSHIPS

6.1 Observations on Evidence

The examination of evidence on key education policy developments undertaken for this review reveals that it has both strengths and limitations. A strength is that the evidence is often based on the operation of a whole initiative or programme, and covers its various parts, aspects and strands. Another strength is that some of the evidence is informed by the experiences and views of a wide range of programme participants based in different settings, institutions and geographical areas which enables ‘the bigger picture’ to be seen and portrayed. A further strength is that most of the evaluation reports do identify some of the characteristics of effective interventions (what works) though these tend to be based on professional judgement rather than being properly tested strategies.

In the main the evidence on educational interventions is aggregated at initiative or programme level. This could be considered to be a limitation in that it is difficult to find evidence of educational developments at area or institutional level. This does not necessarily mean that evidence from local evaluations is not available; rather, that this is unlikely to be published and in the public domain.

Another limitation is that the evidence is generally stronger on process, i.e. the implementation of policies, than it is on measuring outcomes and impact. This may be explained in some cases by the methodological difficulties involved measuring ‘soft’ outcomes, such as impact on young people’s self-confidence and self-esteem, which several educational interventions aim to achieve. The evidence on ‘distance travelled’ tends to rely on self-reported outcomes gained through client feedback surveys.

Few evaluations use more elaborate experimental designs based on the comparison of impact on a target group and on a control group not exposed to the particular intervention or on a comparison of ‘before’ and ‘after’ measures. Consequently, the robustness of some evaluation findings may be questioned in that it is difficult to determine, with any rigour, to what factors change can be attributed.

Other limitations to, or gaps in, the evidence base are as follows:

- ◆ evaluations of some key policies such as EiC and Sure Start are at an early stage and have not provided substantial evidence of outcomes

- ♦ there are few explicit examples of what does not work and what should not be replicated
- ♦ there are very few longitudinal studies which examine the longer-term impact of policies;
- ♦ there are very few studies which measure the cost-effectiveness and value for money of different interventions
- ♦ there are no studies which examine the relative impact of a range of policies or interventions.

Despite these limitations and gaps, the evidence reported in this paper provides some useful insights into the methodologies of different educational interventions and what they have achieved to date.

6.2 Implications for the Work of NDC Partnerships

The first implication of the review of the findings is that any one policy initiative is going to be contributory, rather than ground breaking, in terms of developing local educational strategies to meet local need. A key challenge facing the NDC partnerships involves working out how best to help in drawing together different initiatives into a coherent and effective response to area-based learning and skills requirements.

The second implication of the review findings concerns the **use of evaluation evidence**. The NDC partnerships can play a pivotal role at the area level in using and disseminating the learning points from the evidence from national evaluations of educational initiatives. This continuing process would help to inform the investment of NDC resources. The evidence available suggests that partnerships may wish to consider, as part of their educational portfolio, the merits of (further) supporting out-of-hours study support, the work of Early Excellence Centres and specialist schools.

The NDC partnerships can also play a significant role in drawing together the evidence from local evaluations of educational initiatives and extracting the main messages and examples of good practice. There is an issue of how this information is used, by which local organisations and for what purpose. This may require some mapping and investigation of confidentiality protocols on the use and sharing of data between different organisations.

The third implication of the review findings concerns the **management of innovation and change**. The evidence suggested that this process was enriched through consultation with, and the involvement of, practitioners, teachers and learners. Their

participation in the development of initiatives and interventions was considered to be vital. NDC partnerships may wish to examine the extent to which the 'voice' and interests of learners are represented in the design of local educational interventions.

The final implication of the review concerns **capacity building**. In any area it is likely that many educational strategies and interventions are being used to raise standards, enhance achievement and widen participation in learning. NDC partnerships may wish to consider what role they can play in supporting the sharing of experience and skills which already exist in both the voluntary and statutory sectors.

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