

# Out of the Box – Alternative Education Provision (AEP) in Northern Ireland

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with Tony Gallagher

No 45, 2007

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Education & Training

RESEARCH REPORT

ISBN 1 897592 08 6

**OUT OF THE BOX**

**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVISION**

**Rosemary Kilpatrick  
Claire McCartan  
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**With Tony Gallagher**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The research team would like to thank everyone who has taken time to share their views and experiences of AEP.

This report is for the young people who have been through the AEP experience and hopefully bears testament to those who did share with us their painful and enjoyable experiences of education and life with the aim of improving provision for those who perhaps the education system has failed.

We must also thank our team of peer researchers who experienced many set backs, some frustration and upset, but also the reward of working with the young people involved in the research. Without them, we would have been unable to really hear the voices of those 'on the road'.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction and Methodology

### 1.1 Background

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to young people who are at risk of being, or are actually, excluded from school, a group often referred to under the umbrella term of disaffected young people. These young people are likely not only to be excluded from school but also from society and, it has been argued, form part of an ever increasing underclass (MacDonald, 1997), living life on the margins of society. The growing concern regarding this group is reflected locally in recent reports such as Kilpatrick and Barr's (2002) follow-up study of multiply suspended pupils and the types of projects available to these pupils, as well as nationally (Daniels et al, 2003) and internationally (e.g. Croninger and Lee, 2003).

The Kilpatrick and Barr study (which was conducted in 1998-99) identified a variable range of provision which had developed on a somewhat ad hoc basis with wide variation in the policies and practices of the provision identified and this research was followed by that of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) which examined EOTAS/SSPPR<sup>1</sup> provision in greater detail and clearer profiles of the different types of schemes began to emerge. A common finding across both studies was that the young people attending these schemes, for the most part, benefited personally, socially and educationally from them. However, they also expressed strong views on their formal education and its inability to accept them or understand and provide for their needs. In order to address such issues the ETI (2002) developed a proposed flexible curriculum and indicators of quality for assessing EOTAS (and SSPPR) or Alternative Education Provision (AEP) as such provision has become commonly known.

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<sup>1</sup> EOTAS = Education other than at School and SSPPR = Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation

Alongside the development of these schemes came the introduction of the disapplication of the curriculum and what has become known as the KS4 Flexibility Initiative. This initiative aimed to develop a vocational element of the curriculum in mainstream schools and therefore differs from EOTAS/SSPPR schemes which were developed outside mainstream education. The success of the KS4 Flexibility Initiative has been documented in the recent ETI (2003), report and smaller scale research by Grew (2002) both of which indicate similar personal, social and educational benefits to those identified for EOTAS/SSPPR, as well as variability in the ability of the young people who were selected for the scheme.

Despite the differences in rationale for the different types of schemes (i.e. KS4 Flexibility Initiative, EOTAS and SSPPR), personal, social and educational benefits are similar. This perhaps is not surprising since all three are designed with the disaffected young person in mind to enable them to play a fuller and more active part in society rather than drifting into more extreme anti-social behaviour. However, the published research has paid little attention to documenting academic achievements, qualifications or economic benefits of the any of the schemes and there is little follow-up of these young people to discover if the benefits identified are maintained in the longer-term.

With this in mind the Department of Education commissioned research to provide

‘a greater understanding of the key factors determining the young people’s experiences and destinations and help to guide future planning of AEP provision in terms of in-school provision, school and community-based provision and out-of-school provision.’

This report describes that research which was conducted April 2003-March 2006 by a team of researchers based in Queen’s University of Belfast in collaboration with a group of peer researchers from the community.



## **1.2. Aim and Objectives**

The initial tender document specified the aim of the research as:

To examine the AEP experience of young people in terms of effective engagement with learning, re-integration into mainstream provision, accreditation achievement and transition to the labour market with a view to assessing the effectiveness of this means of intervention and help guide further planning of provision in each of the three types of AEP.

In order to achieve this aim the research traced the progress toward adult working life of a cohort of young people who were in their final year of compulsory education in 2002/03 or 2003/04 and engaged in alternative education provision.

The objectives of the research<sup>2</sup> were to:

- (i) track retrospectively, the education experience and achievements of a cohort of young people who have had a placement in one of three types of AEP (at least two nominated projects of each type) during their final year of compulsory education in 2002/03;
- (ii) track the destinations, subsequent training, vocational/academic qualifications and employment history of the cohort from the time they leave compulsory education in the summer of 2003 through to September 2005;
- (iii) identify the young people's family circumstances, their economic status, attitudes to education (mainstream and alternative) and formal training, and their hopes, and plans;

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<sup>2</sup> Which were revised from the original tender document in discussion with the Steering Group

- (iv) Compare the findings for the AEP cohort with a peer group of young people who are out of mainstream education and who have been referred for EOTAS in the form of home tuition for reasons other than ill-health;
- (v) Document the three types of alternative education provision provided, thus highlighting similarities and differences in purpose, referral criteria, curriculum, resources, staffing and other factors which may influence the effectiveness of each type of provision.

### **1.3 Research Design**

Initially six projects were identified by the Department of Education to take part in the research but unfortunately one of the KS Flexibility Initiative projects did not fully engage at the beginning of the research and was therefore replaced with an alternative project. Similarly, there were difficulties with one of the community-based projects and the sample for this type of provision was therefore supplemented by an additional scheme.

In June/July 2003 and April/May 2004 all those young people who were in their final year of compulsory schooling and attending one of the identified projects were invited to take part in the research. Staff in the participating projects identified the names and contact details of all those young people who met this criterion and contact was made with them either directly through the project or by means of a telephone call to invite them to a 'get-to-know-you' meeting. These meetings were to be held either at the project the young person had attended or where this was not possible at an alternative neutral venue. Incentives to come along (e.g. a free trip to the cinema) were also offered. While this technique worked reasonably well when the young people were still attending the project, unfortunately where initial contact was being made once the young people had left the project these meetings attracted a near-zero response.

At this initial meeting the research was described and the nature of participation in the study outlined. The fact that the study was longitudinal and that one of the research team would contact the young people again on three separate occasions to ask them to complete a telephone interview was also highlighted. Those who were willing to participate then completed the first questionnaire. Where young people who met the criterion did not attend this meeting they were followed up by a telephone call and the initial questionnaire was completed. This gave an initial sample of 318 young people. These young people were then followed up at 6, 12 and 18 months after they had left AEP by means of telephone interviews to ascertain their progress and destination. (Full details of the sample and the attrition rates may be found in Chapter 4.)

A sub-sample of the total cohort consisting of three young people from each of six of the projects was identified (giving a sample of six young people from each type of provision<sup>3</sup>). With the exception of three young people who were only interviewed once, each member of this group of 18 was interviewed on a one-to-one basis on two separate occasions throughout the duration of the project to allow for comprehensive and detailed tracking of their experiences. This approach provided rich in-depth material which allowed for the elaboration of the background information on the vocational and employment career of the group. (Full details of the case studies may be found in Chapter 5)

A comparison group of nine young people who had been referred for EOTAS in the form home tuition (though in reality they were attending group tuition) and three who had attended pre-vocational training were also interviewed and completed final destination questionnaires. (Full details of the sample and the comparison group may be found in Chapter 5)

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<sup>3</sup> In the end, the breakdown of participants by project type was community-based (n=7), TO/School Partnership (n=7) & KS4FI (n=4).

Information on each of the projects involved in the study and the staffs' perceptions and concerns was also collected by means of focus groups, individual interviews and documentary analysis. Additionally, relevant professionals also participated in the study either by means of focus groups or one-to-one interviews. (Full details of the numbers of staff interviewed from each of the projects may be found in Chapter 3)

#### **1.4 Maintaining the Young People's Involvement**

Previous research (as detailed in para. 1.1) focusing on similar target groups has indicated that, amongst other things, these young people are highly likely to be alienated from mainstream education, come from disadvantaged and sometimes dysfunctional family backgrounds and have poor literacy and social skills. Such a profile (and the research team's previous experiences) suggested that it was highly probable that it would be difficult to engage these young people in the research even at the initial stages let alone for its total duration. For these reasons considerable attention was paid as to how the young people could be encouraged to maintain participation in the study and thus keep attrition rates as low as possible. To this end several steps were taken all of which were underpinned by the involvement of peer researchers. Peer researchers have been used extremely successfully by a range of voluntary organisations, both locally and nationally<sup>4</sup> leading to a significant body of literature and the development of useful resource packs for the training of peer researchers. For example Kirby (1999) addresses a range of issues which need to be considered including whether to involve young people as researchers, ways in which they can participate and ethical issues specific to this methodology. (Further information on the involvement of the peer researchers may be found in Chapter 2 of this report.) In the current study two-three peer researchers were identified for each project (depending on size of sample associated with it). These individuals, who underwent thorough training, and who worked under the close supervision of the

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Save the Children (2000) No Choice: No Chance: Educational experiences of young people with disabilities. Belfast, Save the Children (NI)

research officer, conducted the initial focus groups, the follow-up telephone interviews and the case studies.

While it was hoped that the involvement of the peer researchers would encourage the young people in the sample to become involved in the research, given the well documented difficulties of working with this hard to reach group there were several other strategies used to try to ensure that they would engage with the study. Firstly, the title and logo for the project 'Out of the Box' were developed by the peer researchers as was a promotional leaflet which was circulated to all young people attending the pre-identified projects and who were eligible to participate in the research. In discussion with the project staff various possible incentives to help maintain the involvement of the young people were explored and it was decided to offer a £10 incentive for completing the follow-up questionnaires and a cash prize draw for those who agreed to participate. The project co-ordinators were anxious to help us make contact with their leavers and indeed some of them offered to help subsidise these incentive payments. Despite these concerted efforts response rates were low and ranged from 49% for the first data sweep to 45% for the second and 31% for the third. However, other studies with similar sample profiles have also recorded very similar difficulties in engaging participants. Daniels *et al* (2003)<sup>5</sup> outlines some of the problems of making contact with permanently school-excluded young people who "*were seriously disengaged from or refusing local services.*" As a result of such difficulties the team resorted to '*active detective work*' and home visits to try and engage participants but still response rates remained low, "*Conducting detailed interviews,..., proved impossible in relation to 77 young people [40%], given their disengagement from sites of provision and/or lack of availability for interviews in their own homes.*" The use of peer researchers in the current study precluded making contact with the young people in their own homes since several of the researchers were under 18 years of age.

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<sup>5</sup> Daniels, H. *et al.* (2003). Study of Young People Permanently Excluded From School. School of Education, University of Birmingham. *Department for Education & Skills Research Report RR405*

## **1.5 Reasons for Low Response Rate**

An on-going record of reasons why the young people did not participate in the study was maintained by the peer researchers and on the basis of this the main factors were identified as the following:

- looked after children – a small number of the sample have left residential care and we did not have access to their new domicile;
- telephone numbers/mobile numbers – almost 25% of the sample had changed telephone or mobile numbers, or numbers were listed as ex-directory or unobtainable;
- disengaged – a number of young people did not wish to discuss their education with anybody as they viewed it with negativity. ‘Education has done nothing for me – why should I want to talk about it?’;
- parental barriers – some peer researchers reported back that some parents had blocked contact and did not wish their children to be included in the study; and,
- some young people had left Northern Ireland to seek work elsewhere or had left the family home with no forwarding address.

## **1.6 The Case Studies**

In contrast to the high attrition rate with the main cohort of the study those young people who engaged in the case studies tended to remain with the research with only three people not wishing to engage in the final interview. This, it was felt, was due to the fact that a good relationship had been built up with the peer researchers who conducted these case studies. (Details of the process followed for the case studies may be found in Chapter 5)

## **1.7 The Project Staff and Stakeholder Participants**

Interviews and focus groups with project staff and stakeholders (education welfare officers, board officers and careers officers) were held in the project offices. The sessions generally lasted 1-2 hours and were tape-recorded with the participants' permission. The audio tapes were then transcribed and themes identified. These themes tended to differ by type of project (see Chapter 3).

### **KEY POINTS**

- AEP has well documented social, personal and educational benefits however little is known about the longer term benefits and outcomes for those on all types of AEP.
- The research design incorporated postal/telephone questionnaires and in depth case study interviews with a sub sample of the total cohort of 318 young people drawn from three different types of AEP.
- Additional information was gathered from project staff and other stakeholders.
- Peer researchers were employed in an attempt to maintain involvement with this sample of hard-to-reach young people as well as cash incentives for participation. Despite these efforts, response rate was low and attrition rose over the duration of the project.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **The Peer Researchers**

#### **2.1 Why Peer Researchers Were Used**

Increasingly young people are being consulted in research both as participants and as designers and contributors to research studies. Alderson (Kirby, 1999) outlines three different types of involvement, ranging from students using research methods in formal education to young people contributing to adult-led research, whether this is a means of gathering better data by communicating more effectively with the subject, accessing 'hard to reach' young people or by approaching the research and the findings from a 'youth perspective', distinctive from that of an adult.

Much of this increase in youth participation has been attributed to the political climate generated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it must be acknowledged that funders are also encouraging the input of young people as seen with the ESRC research programme on children 5-16 and the significant children's charities, including Barnardo's and Save the Children, are contributing to the debate (Curtis *et al*, 2004). We must also consider the governmental drive for active citizenship as seen with the introduction of citizenship education into the National Curriculum.

There has also been much discussion of the exploitation of young people used for adult researchers ends. It was clear from the outset of this research that the relationship with the peer researchers must have mutual benefits and that the project would be developed on the understanding that the peer researchers would potentially benefit from their involvement.

Elliott *et al* (2001) considers this dimension, 'It must be emphasized, however, that the benefits of involving people in research who have privileged access to



hard-to-reach groups....are only realised if there is some investment in developing their roles in the first place.’ (pp. 176).

To counteract exploitation, Edwards and Alldred (1999) stress the importance of involving peer researchers in the design and the delivery of the research, ‘Nevertheless, empowerment is not simply a matter of transferring power from one group (researchers/adults) to another (research subjects/children), where the group with the power perceives this as beneficial.’ (pp. 276).

Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) establish a number of reasons as to the value of involving youth participation in research. It can be a legitimate way of developing knowledge for social action, it can enable young people to exercise their political rights and allow them to share in the ‘democratisation of knowledge’ and can prepare them to be active citizens and strengthen their social development.

In addition to the social benefits the research offered the peer researchers, we also outlined in advance the skills and experience we hoped they would gain from their involvement. It was also important from the outset to give the team of peer researchers every opportunity to shape and design the methods and instruments to help create ownership and hopefully a more refined and communicative model which was more meaningful for all involved. ‘Adult-youth partnerships go beyond consultation to provide a greater measure of intergenerational involvement in which parties may be equal or unequal in their levels of participation. If both parties share interpersonal and institutional power, they take a step toward quality participation. If the power remains largely in adult hands, however, they do not.’ (Arnstein, 1969 and Hart, 1997 in Checkoway and Richards-Schuster, 2003: 15).

## **2.2 Participatory Research versus Traditional Research**

There is a substantial body of literature emerging reporting successful projects engaging young people and the debate between participatory research and traditional research continues. Boyden and Ennew (1997) illustrate this difficulty, 'No research is inherently participatory: it is largely through its application that research becomes participatory; even methods that are defined as participatory can be disempowering and excluding for respondents if used with the wrong group, in the wrong situation or the wrong way.' (pp.83).

There were two additional considerations for the research team. By attempting to engage with 'hard to reach' young people, many of the teenagers in the sample were completely disengaged from education and it was felt that it would be difficult for a team of adult researchers from a university to make a connection and encourage participation with the young people from the projects. Another dimension to consider was the geographical spread of our sample and it became important that the researchers making contact with the sample could display some sense of affinity and belonging with their locality. It placed a sense of importance to the research that the members of the team had a local identity and avoided the assumption and resentment that everything is led from Belfast.

## **2.3 The Process**

### **2.3.1 Recruitment**

As the recruitment and training of high quality peer researchers was pivotal to the success and meaningfulness of the project, resources were focused on this area at the outset. It proved much more difficult than anticipated to enthuse and interest young people in becoming involved in the project.

A variety of different recruitment approaches was adopted, some with limited success. Each of the AEP projects was initially asked to identify 2 past students who might be interested in becoming involved. Only two names were put

forward. Approaches were then made to a number of different agencies and advertisements placed with the University's student 'Jobshop' to try and attract students looking for part-time work which also offered an opportunity to gain relevant work experience. In the event, the approaches made to the agencies proved to be the most fruitful, with personal recommendations on the suitability of a young person drawing the most success. The advertisement with the 'Jobshop' merely attracted students anxious to earn money without considering the necessary requirements for the post. The range of agencies approached successfully include: volunteer bureaux; youth organisations (Children's Express, Opportunity Youth, Public Achievement, Prince's Trust Volunteers, Children's Law Centre). An additional number of researchers were recruited through the Youth & Community Work Diploma course at the University of Ulster and through local schools. The profile of a typical peer researcher emerged as someone who was either employed in some form of youth work or was engaged actively in local community involvement and/or volunteering. The school students recruited were, in the most part, considering either a career in law, teaching or youth work.

A detailed job description was drawn up for the recruitment process. Only applicants through the student Jobshop process were screened (85 students applied and provided a supporting written statement) of which only 3 were invited to proceed to the first training day (of whom none turned up on the day). It was difficult to recruit the required numbers (n=22) and all recommendations were accepted through to the first day of induction training. No interview procedure was adopted and in hindsight this was an area that we may consider including in any future peer researcher project.

Alongside the job description, peer researchers were required to sign a contract which included a 3-month probationary period and requested to try to commit for the full life of the project (2½ years). Each peer researcher also consented to a criminal records check in line with standard child protection procedures.

### **2.3.2 Training**

In addition to the research team, an experienced youth worker was drafted to coordinate the training to concentrate on building the team dynamic. The Kirby manual (1999) and accompanying Save the Children (2000) training resource provided clear and useful exercises for the team. It was important that the training programme was flexible to allow trainers to concentrate on areas which the peer researchers raised as important during the day and areas not covered on the first day were picked up at later sessions. The sessions were quite intense and at times exhausting so subsequent training sessions were shortened to try and maintain motivation and concentration levels for the duration of the session.

The involvement of a youth worker in the training design and delivery was not planned at the outset, but formed an incredibly important aspect to the training. With experience of motivating and communicating effectively with young people (which the research team was not necessarily experienced at), he concentrated on developing a team dynamic and sense of ownership of the project. Peer support and motivation is a vital aspect of the group's whole success and the identification of this at an early stage was crucial. The research team (most of whom had extensive experience with the Graduate School of Education at QUB and teaching the Post Graduate Certificate of Education) was confident in the delivery of research methods and the ethical considerations of the research however it may be fair to say that the involvement of a youth work professional enhanced the training delivery and the impact of the learning experience for the entire research team.

We also placed importance on the design of a logo for the project. The task was carried out in separate teams, giving the peer researchers the opportunity to consider carefully the concept and aims of the research and by creating a logo and brand it helped us to ascertain their understanding of the project and where they had prioritised their focus.

The draft first interview schedule gave the peer researchers an opportunity to experience the type of work they would be expected to carry out and a number of useful comments about the design of the schedule were adopted.

As well as incorporating evaluation feedback from their first training session into the second programme, we presented the peer researchers with a professionally produced logo based on their design. By placing importance on their views and their contribution, the research logo and the amended first interview schedule helped to create a sense of ownership of the project.

The dreaded role play was also felt to be an important learning experience for the peer researchers, both by helping to shape the schedules appropriately, but also assisting them to develop the necessary skills and confidence to produce a successful interview which was both rewarding for participant and peer researcher.

It would be important to add that a crucial part of the training was the inclusion of child protection procedures. This had to be carefully managed so as not to unnerve or frighten the peer researchers, but equip them with some skills and knowledge as how best to manage a disclosure and provide a clear reporting mechanism with professional support for them if an issue was raised by a participant during the course of the research. With a number of the peer researchers also being under-18, the recognised protocols of interviewing, locations and personal safety were stressed.

A range of materials was produced to act as a prop for each peer researcher, including introduction scripts, the rights of an interviewee, checklist of items they needed before starting the interview, child protection guidelines and a peer researcher log/diary. All the material was contained within an official QUB document case to encourage them to keep their materials filed together and also instil a sense of importance in their role as peer researcher. The importance of maintaining confidentiality was also stressed.

In many ways, the research brief was restrictive in as much as the projects had already been identified by the Department of Education and in that respect neither the peer researchers nor other members of the research team could influence this but we did aim to include and involve the peer researchers in the subsequent design and delivery of the research aims.

It was important that the peer researchers met the young people at the start of the research and this was facilitated by organising ‘getting to know you’ sessions but unfortunately the uptake from the sample was sometimes very poor which in turn created disappointment and some reduction of confidence from the outset. For example one peer researcher organised free tickets to the local cinema to encourage the young people in his cohort to participate in the research, but no-one turned up.

Four peer researchers were elected to represent their team on the Steering Group and they have provided a valuable contribution. They have been able to reflect and represent their frustrations and explain experiences of setbacks more powerfully to the funders with a greater level of acceptance than perhaps the academics on the research team may have achieved. They have also been able to inject a sense of realism with their personal experiences of fieldwork, highlighting the considerations of working with ‘hard to reach’ groups. They also enjoyed being able to participate at this level of the research and being able to make contact and discuss their views and opinions with decision-makers in the commissioning Departments.

### **2.3.3 Ongoing Support and Motivation of Peer Researchers**

At the outset, it was assumed that the relationship would be reasonably straightforward to manage, with everyone agreeing to the job description, the probationary period and a clear understanding of the workload and deadlines expected along the way. As many of the young people were at particular transitions in their lives (GCSE, ‘A’ Level, undergraduate) it was anticipated that

there would be some flexibility as to training session attendance and deadlines and a small level of attrition was indeed expected as the project developed over time.

The projects included in the research were located throughout Northern Ireland creating four geographical pockets of both peer researchers and participants. Organising a central meeting location and organising 25 diaries proved to be difficult and it was therefore agreed that each member of the research team would take responsibility for a geographical area and provide mentoring support to one of the four peer researcher teams. Despite this organisation, it still proved difficult to co-ordinate these regional groupings.

#### **2.3.4 Methods of Communication**

Meetings were organised by letter, telephone, e-mail and text, yet in most cases some or all of the peer researchers did not turn up, either cancelling at the last minute or not informing the team mentor at all. Letters were accompanied with detachable reply slips and freepost envelopes but still did not retrieve a great response. Telephone calls to home addresses were used, but there was often only a small window in which to contact the young people as they were often late home from school/college or indeed in part-time work during normal working hours. In our experience, only those in full-time employment or higher education could be reliably and consistently contacted through e-mail. The younger peer researchers, although they had an e-mail address, did not use it regularly and it was not a reliable way to contact them. Text messaging was the most effective way of communicating, though, in some cases this did not yield a response because phone credits were too low to reply.

When meeting up with the peer researchers and talking to them by phone, their enthusiasm and interest was always infectious. A number subsequently reviewed their involvement due to academic and work commitments and were therefore no longer interested (n=12), but they wished the project well and some expressed a desire to be kept informed of progress. Rather than a lack of commitment, it

would appear that some of the peer researchers did not place importance on protocols or the need for effective communication in the workplace. The most successful peer researcher relationship with the research team was based on the young person being proactive and making an effort to keep in touch with the team and responding promptly to requests for meetings or information from the researcher. Clearly acting on their initiative and benefiting from their experience of the independence of working or university life was an important aspect to their success and enjoyment of the project.

### **2.3.5 Accreditation**

Although not labour intensive (about 30 hours work per year), peer researchers were paid £10 per hour for their time, in the hope that this would act as an incentive. The rate of pay was very competitive and coupled with an opportunity to gather real research experience we felt that we also had something to offer the peer researchers. At the outset the research team did consider accrediting their involvement, perhaps through the Open College Network or NVQs but after some research it was felt that in order to offer the peer researchers a ‘worthwhile’ qualification, a lot more work and commitment would be required from them to develop a portfolio worthy of external examination. On reflection, whilst coming towards the end of the project, the team reviewed the options to accredit the peer researchers involvement and has developed a programme ‘*Becoming a peer researcher*’ through the Institute of Lifelong Learning at QUB which will attract up to 20 CATS Points. Increasingly, peer researchers are being used in research projects and we felt that it was important for the commitment and achievement of those in our team to be acknowledged formally. Many of the peer researchers are keen to work towards this qualification.

## **2.4 Young People’s Responses to Peer Researchers**

This is not an area that we have looked at measuring in detail other than recording participation rates and peer researcher feedback during the life of the



project. However, observational data from introductory peer researcher/participant meetings has produced some anecdotal evidence of the rapport some of the peer researchers were able to establish with the young people in the sample. Clearly language and local accents are important and dress code, hobbies and hairstyles have proved to be effective ice breakers that the 'older' researchers would not be as confident or qualified to use. The data collected appeared to be open and honest and not doctored for adult ears.

## **2.5 Research Team's View: Strengths and Difficulties**

### **2.5.1 Strengths**

The peer researchers were an animated, enthusiastic group with an energy and willingness to be involved. We also found them to be innovative and able to generate good ideas as to how to improve some of the methods used. It is also important to recognise the true 'peer' dimension that some of the young people brought, particularly a knowledge of local area and issues and shared experiences. A good number of the peer researchers in our team had good communication skills, with some very experienced in working with young people. As stated before, a strong local identity, including a local accent, helped to create a geographical bond helping to avoid the fear and alienation of a Belfast-centred approach.

### **2.5.2 Difficulties**

One of the strengths of geographic diversity created an additional problem in trying to bond the group. It was difficult to co-ordinate team meetings, due to transport difficulties (some of the peer researchers were at least 1½ -2 hours travel time from Belfast and relying on public transport) and part-time jobs.

We also found it incredibly difficult to develop a really effective means of communication with the peer researcher team. Deadlines were not met and it was difficult to encourage the team to respond to requests (whether these were invitations to meetings, check meeting availability, or requests for data) either by

phone, text or freepost letter. These experiences were not confined to our project, lessons learned from the Real Deal Project identified that the nature of the client group meant group workers had to be flexible about people's attendance, punctuality and level of commitment. Young people tend to be in transition, be it through eviction, prison or moving onto work, education and independent living. Thus roles within groups have to be flexible, giving young people the opportunity to decide for themselves how they want to participate. (Kirby *et al* in Clark *et al.* 2001).

A smaller number of the group lacked some confidence and particularly with dealing with 'hard to reach' young people they were demotivated at times. This was also demonstrated through some uncertainties in using the telephone for interviews, and a failure to question if they did not fully understand something or to share information with their fellow team members. It was important for the research team to continually encourage and motivate the peer researchers and help them to develop the necessary skills effectively. This consideration was also made more complex in that we were dealing with young people who were in a transitional period in their lives (e.g. GCSE, 'A' levels, undergraduate) and maintaining momentum over the 2½ year life of the project proved difficult.

Some of the data collected was not detailed enough which in turn identified further training needs for the peer researchers. Time had been set aside for recruiting and training the peer interviewers but the level of on-going support and supervision required was underestimated. Elliott (2001) also refers to the problem of the distance from raw data, 'Our own experience of working with peer interviewers presented a number of challenges to us as researchers....These included ongoing support we needed to provide for the interviewers, our sense of distance from the raw data they collected...the..distance...was a source of anxiety' (pp. 175).

A useful suggestion arising from the research that Elliott *et al* (2001) carried out was to debrief the interviewers after every second or third interview, 'both to

ensure that as much information as possible had been recorded in their notes and to allow the interviewers to raise any problems or concerns. These debriefing sessions had advantages for both sides: they acted as a support mechanism for the interviewers and helped them to feel more involved in the project, and they gave us a chance to develop relationship of trust with the interviewers and reflect on the data as the research progressed.' (pp. 174).

## **2.6 Strategies For Overcoming Difficulties**

We have considered a number of ways of overcoming the difficulties we faced including the appointment of team leaders to facilitate each geographical team; identifying peer researcher team leaders to co-ordinate group responsibilities, regular monthly meetings and concentrating communication via text messaging as opposed to phone calls, e-mail and letters. The three-month probationary period we established at the outset was also invoked on two occasions.

## **2.7 Things We Would Do Differently**

Members of the team were anxious to start the project and keen to recruit a large number of peer researchers to carry out the necessary work, however, if time had allowed, more resources could have been concentrated on the application process. The requirement to complete an application form and attend an interview might have helped some of the peer researchers to consider their involvement more carefully and also helped us to prepare more fully for the whole experience and, rather than being preoccupied with the numbers of peer researchers, make sure that all of those appointed would be able to undertake research of high quality.

Clearly, maintaining interest and commitment over the 2½ year period was a challenge and accreditation can be used as a motivating factor. We consider that

it would also be useful to produce a monthly work plan and timetable where possible to outline the requirements and deadlines from the outset.

The research team also felt that the training offered to the peer researchers was an investment in their skills development and as such, a decision was made not to pay for their attendance at training sessions and update meetings. However, travel was paid for and if the young person was losing wages as a result of attending a training session they were reimbursed. Perhaps if payment had been available for attendance it might have increased participation rates.

Other projects involving peer researchers have placed a high value on the involvement of a youth worker and their ability to motivate and encourage young people to maximise their involvement (Kirby *et al* in Clark *et al*, 2001).

It may also be advisable to consider Elliott's (2001) recommendation to debrief interviewers after interviews to ensure quality of data is achieved, encourage peer researchers and avoid distancing the research team from the data.

In future projects, it may also be recommended that the difficulties associated with the longitudinal nature of this research may affect using peer researchers.

## **2.8 The Peer Researchers' Perspective**

### **2.8.1 Overview**

After the first year, we canvassed the opinions of the team of peer researchers to try and ascertain their views and feelings about their involvement, with the added hope that this might improve the interface between project leaders and peer researchers, so as to enhance the experience for everyone.

#### *Why did they sign up/expectations?*

Most cited an interest in gaining a greater understanding of the young people in the sample and hoped to gain an insight into AEP. They also perceived it as an opportunity to enhance their interpersonal skills, communication and time

management and ultimately their employability. Meeting new people was also seen as an important area.

*Have they learnt anything over the last year?*

Many had achieved a deeper understanding of AEP and the issues facing the young people engaged in alternative education, but there were plenty of personal learning opportunities also identified.

*Good points*

All of the respondents had enjoyed the experience, meeting new people and felt that in some way being involved in the research had had a greater impact on their social cognitive responses.

*Bad points*

The bad points about the research were rather self-deprecating rather than finding fault with the processes established by the research team. Some felt guilty or frustrated about levels of commitment. Others did find the journey time to meetings difficult and it was also difficult to meet deadlines.

**2.8.2 Points for Improvement**

Practical advice was offered as to how we could improve things and pivoted mainly on increasing the effectiveness of communication.

These included the importance of knowing how others were succeeding with their task; the feeling of isolation for some in the absence of full team meetings was raised and the idea of a newsletter or regular postal update was suggested so as not to lose sight of other people's experiences and indeed frustrations.

Finally, the need for additional training and mentoring was clearly stated.

In summary, it would appear that the peer researchers gained some benefits from their involvement and had no regrets about being involved despite some of the

frustrations. However, there were a number of areas of improvement implemented in order to build the team dynamic more effectively.

At the end of the project, we asked two of the peer researchers to record their reflections about being involved in the research.

**JASON**

*I became involved in the AEP research project through my work with Opportunity Youth. Overall I found the whole experience very enjoyable. One of the high points for me was having the opportunity to meet so many different types of people from the “people in suits”, the trainers/facilitators, peer researchers and above all the young people, who shared their experiences with me about the AEP project which they attended (some of whom were hard to reach at times).*

*One of the issues which was brought to my attention by the young people during this research project was the environment that the AEP project created for them i.e. some found the environment difficult because of the lack of control in the “class”, this was distracting for them when they were trying to work, on the other hand this type of environment suited some young people because it felt more relaxed and informal unlike their experiences of school. I feel that my own awareness of the importance of AEP provision was heightened throughout this research project, no more so when [project B1] closed its doors. In the past I had worked with this project and had built up good positive relationships with both staff and young people. It felt to me like this created a significant void in the provision of AEP in the area, and left me asking question such as: “What are these young people going to do now?”, “Where are they going to go?” “What will they be doing with all their spare time?” “What does the future hold for these young people?” etc (Maybe we could do some more research on these questions in the future).*

*I learnt a lot from this research project, which I have been able to apply practically in my own job as I usually engage and consult with around 50 young people per week. I also had the privilege of working with and being trained by people who were very skilled, knowledgeable, friendly, supportive, and professional and person centred. They were always willing to pass on information and kept me “in the picture” at all times. I really enjoyed this experience and I felt that contributing to this research was worthwhile and valuable for both young people and me. In finishing I feel that having a good AEP project that meets the needs of the young person is paramount and could have so many positive outcomes for them in the future.*

***MIA***

*I first heard about peer research through my peer group. As a struggling Law student I was lured into the false pretence that all I would have to do would be make a few phone calls and do a few questionnaires for some easy cash to pay the electricity bill! Having no knowledge of the project I attended the first training and information session where I was enlightened further and gently reminded that this was not simply the case. I already had a keen interest in the youth sector and this particular target group for the research appealed to me as I wanted to challenge my own skills. If I am brutally honest research has never appealed to me having been reminded by my history teacher during my A-level studies, ‘there are lies, damned lies and statistics’! This has been something that has followed me through my university education when reading articles and newspaper reports. However through this project I can confidently say that my opinion has definitely changed as without valuable research how can we accurately decide where money and resources are needed in the community and advise local and national government of the gaps in service provision? Having joined the project I have actively taken part in additional research both within the Institute of Child Care Research and the Children’s Law Centre, an organisation I also have strong links with. However this is not the only thing that I have learnt from this project.*

*At our first training session we were greeted by a friendly team from Queen's University who explained the purpose of the research, the time commitment and our target group. Once we signed up we attended further sessions and were allocated a cohort of young people from different projects.*

*Myself and a fellow peer researcher Cathy met the leaders of the two projects. We discussed their work and the young people involved. On one particular project I was shocked and saddened by the lack of services for the young people and the resources available to them. After one meeting in particular, Cathy and I discussed the youth sector and the massive overlap in service provision in certain areas yet there were clearly conflicting gaps in service and resource provision which Alternative Education Provision is undoubtedly a casualty of. Through our own work with the Children's Law Centre we attempted to raise the profile of AEP and the research project through meetings and other projects that we worked on.*

*I enjoyed meeting with the young people directly. I was extremely apprehensive at the beginning and questioned my lack of experience with this particular target group of young people, which is widely accepted as 'hard to reach'. This was heightened further when at the training sessions it became apparent that one or two of the other researchers were qualified and experienced youth workers. However the support and training available enabled me to tackle this fear head on and is an accomplishment that I am extremely proud of.*

*At my first face to face meeting I was probably more nervous than my interviewee! However her ability to open up to me and discuss her situation and experiences frankly and express trust in myself heartened me. I was intrigued why a seemingly bubbly 17 year old had been dealt this rough card in life and why she had ended up on this particular path. At this initial*



*interview this was not something I felt I could examine closer as we had just met so I arranged to meet with her again to complete a case study. This is when my commitment and dedication to the project was challenged the most. I had arranged to meet her at the City Hall on a cold and rainy Thursday morning and was dismayed to find that she had not turned up. I rang her mobile and received no answer. I was cautious as I did not want to come across as angry and was keen to facilitate her circumstances and reasons for not attending. I texted her on her mobile and explained that I was not angry or cross but was keen to have her on board and meet whenever it suited her and at a destination of her choice. I received no reply. Over the following weeks I attempted to contact her on a number of occasions and only ever spoke to her boyfriend who was rude, hung up and explained that she was not there. Eventually I reconciled that she was no longer willing to take part. At a recent meeting with a member of the research team I was informed that she had filled out a few of the postal questionnaires that were sent to her parents' address and that the most recent was disturbing. It had become apparent that her boyfriend had been abusing her. The girl has since returned to her parents but was heavily abusing alcohol. I was asked if I knew anything of her background or had any indication that this was occurring. At the time I had a hunch that he was controlling her but she was 17 years of age and made no indication of wanting any help from me. This clearly challenged my role as an independent researcher as opposed to a mentor and I had no conclusive evidence to prove my mere gut feeling that something wasn't right. On reflection this is a hard thing for me to accept. After a lengthy discussion with my fellow peer researcher Cathy I accept that I could have done nothing more if she had not disclosed any information, how can I act upon it? This situation personally has challenged my role and has given me an insight into the situations that social workers and youth workers must face. It has been a challenge for me to step back from the situation and look at it from this impartial and distanced stance.*

*Another of my 2 young people were two males. In interview they were bright and bubbly and fascinated that I was only 20 with my youthful looks! This clearly broke the ice and enabled us to tackle seriousness of the situation and we received some honest responses. However it has been difficult to maintain contact and their participation on the research project over the two year project as they have lost touch and effectively disappeared without a trace. This is clearly a danger once young people have left AEP and are left to tackle the world on their own. One of these males in particular was living independently and receives little support from his family and now had lost contact with our project, one of the few links he had to some sort of support.*

*On one occasion we went to a project in North Belfast to try and get further young people signed up due to the lack of numbers on the research project. Cathy and I had arranged to discuss the project and what was involved. We were led to room full of 7 young people eager to be the centre of attention and challenge our authority as outsiders. They were all chatting away and messing about and not listening until I raised my voice... Cathy sitting beside me even jumped to attention. All those years in my teens as part of the Air Training Corps trying to control 30 hormonal young males obviously taught me something! Clearly we proved to them that we were no pushover and got an enthusiastic enough response. After this meeting I did not envy the work of the teaching staff trying to maintain their attention and concentration levels.*

*I met another young girl in her home; she was now a young mum. She had left the project 2 years, it was reassuring for me when she reflected on her past and could pinpoint her departure from school and the reasons behind it. She clearly had regrets with hindsight and was keen to get back into education. She was finding it difficult looking after a toddler who was bright, alert, extremely advanced for her age, dancing away to Tony Christie, 'Show me the way to Amarillo' on the TV as we conducted the interview. This particular young person was keen to get more GCSEs and get back to college*

*but the support and childcare isn't available for a young person with minimal education qualifications. Again I left this meeting disheartened at the allocation of service provision as this girl was clearly intelligent, astute, enthusiastic and committed to return to education to make a better future for herself and her daughter. After the interview, I contacted my mentor and then as had been suggested in my training I listed a few agencies and organisations that she should make contact with and advised her to talk to her social worker. This again challenged my role as an independent researcher and trying to remember not to get too caught up in the distress of the people you interview. After leaving the supportive learning environment of AEP and being in the real world alone and with little support, personally if I could not offer some form of reassurance I feel that this would have been a great failing on my part.*

*Generally I found that the young people were eager to talk and have someone to listen to them and take their opinions on board in a serious and constructive way. I have an active interest in human rights and especially children's rights. To me, the decision of the government to close and reduce funding in these projects is evidently an infringement on their basic right to education.*

*Whilst reading this one may think that this has been a disappointing experience but this is not the case. I often was in awe of the young people, especially of what they have achieved in their circumstances facing so many obstacles. On the whole this has been a positive experience for me, the support available from the Institute of Child Care Research was excellent and I would like to thank them for their time and commitment, support and ears! My only regret is that I could have not committed more time and perhaps done more research than I had.*

*'Out of the Box' has challenged my strengths as an aspiring amateur youth worker and my commitment to my career path in more ways that I can imagine. It is only with hindsight and reflecting on this that I can appreciate this.*

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In our experience of the last years, clearly there are benefits for everyone in the involvement of peer researchers; however, it has to be a clearly planned and managed process in order to maximise the potential of peer researchers in researching disaffected young people.

Although frustrating and hard to manage at times, the young people recruited and trained as peer researchers were a vital part of the research team and encouraged innovation and reflection in the research process. The peer researchers also felt that they gained much from their involvement in the process; not merely a clearer understanding of research methods and the enhancement of their employability skills, but a greater affinity with the young people they were researching. There is also the collective learning that they were part of a group of young people who are socially active and may help to enact social change for their peers.

The young people in the sample have, in the most, responded positively to their peers and it is clear that the data collected to date has retained a 'youthful' quality enabling their 'voices' to emerge. Many of our peer researchers felt they are positive role models for the participants and this relationship between researcher/interviewee may be a positive experience also for the young people in the sample.

Lastly, the research team has learnt much from our adoption of this strategy of using peer researchers. By taking a fresh look at the methods and approaches adopted, and by involving the peer researchers in the design and management of the research process we have been able to connect with the disaffected young people in the sample. We have also learned much about how best to manage the peer researcher experience and hopefully can share our experiences with other researchers.

In many ways it might have been easier not to involve peer researchers in the process. On the other hand it empowered and enabled young people keen to participate in society and to action change an opportunity to do so. Their involvement in the research process, has arguably made it a more meaningful experience for everyone.

## **KEY POINTS**

- Increasingly young people are being involved directly in research and, in this project, considerable thought was given to help avoid exploitation of the peer researchers. Methods of involving the young people in a meaningful way included designing some of the instrumentation and methods and co-opting representatives on to the steering group.
- The peer researchers made a useful contribution to the research on many levels particularly in terms of geographic representation and youth culture.
- There were difficulties recruiting and maintaining their involvement over the two and half year project duration.
- While there are a number of useful peer researcher training materials available involving a youth worker in the training was extremely beneficial.
- Text messaging was the most reliable way of communicating with the peer researcher team.
- Working with peer researchers had its difficulties including co-ordinating meetings, meeting deadlines and maintaining their involvement over the two and a half years.
- A range of strategies was developed in order to counteract some of the difficulties associated with working with peer researchers (and aims to maximize their input and enjoyment of their involvement).
- On reflection, the peer researchers felt that their contribution had been personally rewarding, though often challenging but had led to further social action.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **The Participating Projects**

#### **3.1 Background**

The projects involved in this study were determined by the Department of Education in advance of the commencement of the research. Three different types of provision were specified (KS4 Flexibility Initiative, Training Organisation/School Partnerships and Community-based Alternative Education Provision), and initially there were two different projects identified under each type of provision. However, at the outset of the research it became apparent that it would be necessary to supplement or replace the projects originally identified for two reasons. Firstly, in the case of community based projects one of the schemes had such low numbers that it was necessary to approach another scheme in the same locality to boost the sample. Secondly, in the case of one of the KS4 Flexibility Initiatives identified, the school in question appeared reluctant to engage with the research team. Additionally, during the study one of the Training Organisation/School Partnerships made a decision to close due to lack of security of funding and the stress this placed on the management board.

This chapter will provide an overview of the three different types of alternative education provision that were involved in the study based on the information collected from the projects visited and other documentation where available. Additionally, under each type of provision the views of the providers alongside the emerging issues for them will be explored as will the perspective of the young people attending each type of provision. Where available the general perspective of stakeholders including board officers, careers officers and education welfare officers also will be considered under each theme. A summary overview of the projects is provided in Tables 3a and b at the end of the chapter. Similarly,

details of who was interviewed and the other data on which the chapter is based can be found in Table 3c.

### **3.2 COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS**

In recent years a range of community-based alternative education projects funded by statutory and voluntary bodies, has developed in local communities. This provision has traditionally provided for those young people who are out of school either by their own volition or as a result of the formal exclusion process. Over the past five-six years there has been growing recognition of the need for such provision and the contribution made by the voluntary and community sector in this respect.

There were three community-based projects involved in the study each with its own distinctive ethos, approach and structure. Project A1 was established as a pilot by one of the ELBs to support students who had been excluded from school, were at risk of exclusion or had been refusing to attend school. A generalised programme of study was offered to each student though this was differentiated by student ability and individual pace. In contrast Project A2 was established by members of the local community who were concerned at the number of young people of compulsory school age in their area who were not attending school and becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and petty offending. While the Project has now been recognised by the DE this has required extreme dedication and commitment on the part of those involved in its development. Finally, Project A3 offers an alternative, full-time education and training programme for young people in Year 12 (age 15-16) who are at risk of educational and social exclusion. This project is fairly unusual in terms of community-based provision in that it runs three schemes which cater for controlled, maintained and integrated schools in catchment areas where there is high social deprivation. Staff members make an effort to return to headquarters at the end of each day to debrief, share experiences and unload with their team. This appears to work very effectively and staff expressed the view that they were less likely to bring

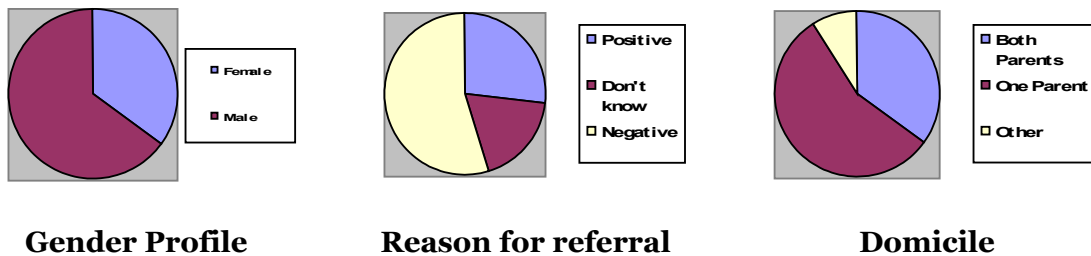


problems or worries about the young people home because they had this outlet. Close partnerships are maintained with the feeder schools from where students are referred.

### 3.2.1 Profile of the Young People

The nature of the target group for community-based AEP is very clearly reflected in the pie-charts. The majority of young people attending the projects were male (65%) and where the reason for referral was known this was mainly because of negative reasons such as disengagement from school (55%) as opposed to positive reasons such as the vocational training available(27%). Just over half of these young people (56%) live with one parent, 35% live with both parents but 9% are either living alone, with a partner or in care.

**Figure 3.1 Student profile Project Type A**



The difficulties that these young people have presented to their mainstream schools is reflected in the following quote from one of the project workers:

*Most of the schools have a very good pastoral care system, they (the young people) don't just come to us out of nowhere, they've already been through a lot..... .. you know they maybe had a special timetable in school, they've already been through a lot of processes within the school and it's maybe luck that they have this option, because if they didn't they would just drop out like a lot of others. (Youth worker: Project A3)*

The education and life experiences of these young people determine to a great extent the aims of the three projects as well as the content of the provision. Thus,

for example Project A1 aims to offer disaffected young people an opportunity to re-engage with learning and often supports students experiencing complex behavioural issues. The educational emphasis is on personal and social development leading to limited academic attainment. Such aims also capture those of Projects A2 and A3.

Funding for the three projects comes from different sources. Project A1 was supported by the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (EUSSPPR) while Project A2 was funded by the Department of Education through the one of the ELBs and funding for A3 was from a variety of different sources including YESIP (Youth Education Social Inclusion Partnership) and one of the ELBs.

Similarly staffing differs by project with Project A1 being staffed by a full-time teacher and youth worker. They are supported by an education welfare officer (EWO) and an educational psychologist who co-ordinates the provision. In Project A2 staffing consists of a full-time manager/principal (a qualified teacher), four teaching staff (two qualified teachers, one IT tutor and one Essential Skills tutor) and a secretary/finance manager. One member of staff is dedicated to facilitating the links with the local FE to ensure the smooth operation of placement arrangements and this has worked well in terms of standards of behaviour and educational outcomes. Finally, each unit in Project A3 has one full-time and three part-time staff: a full-time project worker who has a background in youth work; a part-time youth worker and two part-time Essential Skills tutors.

Each project also has a management committee or steering group, these being made up of a range of representatives from a variety of bodies including for example, the referring schools, ELBs, Behaviour Support Teams, the Education Welfare Service, and the Youth Justice Agency, as well as the organisations funding the projects.

### **3.2.2 Admissions Criteria/Referral Process**

Students placed with Project A1 have either been expelled from school or are considered unsuitable for attendance at mainstream schools and as such have no strong affiliation with any of the local mainstream schools. Students are referred by both Education Welfare and the most recent school they have attended. They must meet a series of referral criteria as set out by the ELB's Head of Alternative Education before they are offered a place. Total capacity is 10 and the number of referrals exceeds available places by 100%. Students do not appear to participate actively in the referral process nor do they chose to attend the Project.

Project A2 initially catered for students aged 14-17 years old who were not attending mainstream schools for a variety of reasons however, from September 2003, the intake age was reduced to 13 years in an attempt to avert serious difficulties and ultimately allow the young person to have a realistic chance of reintegration. On average 20 young people are involved at one time; the majority live in the surrounding housing estates while a minority being drawn from the wider catchment areas. Approximately 90% of all referrals are long-term school refusers. Students are referred through Education Welfare and Social Services. The centre has a respected profile and staff are well known within the community which helps to create an accessible environment for those young people totally disengaged from education. Although referrals are received from the statutory agencies, the Project requires the willingness of the student to attend. The project accommodates approximately 15-20 students per year but, as with other projects, there are many more applicants than there are places available.

Young people are referred to Project A3 from the grouping of local schools. These referrals can be for a variety of reasons including: failure at Key Stage 3; poor attendance; likelihood of not achieving formal qualifications; or facing complete withdrawal from education and subsequent employment or further education or training. Referrals come directly from schools, usually the pastoral team and the senior staff within each sponsoring school identify those students they believe to

meet the criteria. After consultation with their parents, the students are selected for participation in the Project as an alternative to the normal Year 12, in-school provision. The Project co-ordinator carries out a number of home visits with the young person and their family to explain the process and build up a profile of the young person who has been referred and a joint contract is then drawn up prior to the placement starting. Each of the three facilities in Project A3 has a capacity for 10 students however, it is heavily oversubscribed and this may be stretched by 10% each year.

### **3.2.3 Structure of Programme**

In Project A1, primarily due to staffing and accommodation limitations, Year 12 students attend a morning session and Year 11 students attend the afternoon session. Each session lasts two and half hours and the young people are split into two groups with the teacher taking one group with the youth worker supervising the other group. The EWO and the educational psychologist meet each student on a weekly basis.

In Project A2 students attend the project from 9:30am – 1:30pm every day with each year group educated separately. There is also ability streaming within each year group. The number and constitution of each year group depends on the abilities presented by the students. This project has a special educational needs tutor on the staff who can give specialist help on an individual or small group basis. The students are also split by gender because staff felt that they did not mix as well socially or academically as a mixed group. They found that the females had a greater tendency towards an academic route and therefore pursued a GCSE programme. The boys are usually divided into two groups according to ability. This further streaming does not happen until the end of the first term in Year 12 to enable staff to target exam preparation appropriately.

Project A3 operates from Monday to Friday each week with one day's work-placement for all students. The programme focuses on developing the personal

and social skills of the young people while also helping them to prepare for further training and the world of work. This is supported with individual and group work activities along with home visits to encourage family support for the young person's involvement in the project. Project C3 also offers weekly visits based on leisure, educational and work-based themes and at least two residential programmes.

### **3.2.4 Access to the Northern Ireland Curriculum**

Project A1 offers examinations at entry level in Maths, English and IT as well as the Prince's Trust Excel Award (Personal & Social Development and Careers). Students also have the opportunity in participating in a 'sampling' course week at the local FE College towards the end of the year. Year 11 students moving into Year 12 often progress to a tailored course in the local FE colleges including: BTEC; Progressions Course and Restart. The breadth of the curriculum which can be offered is limited. The teacher's main focus is on English and mathematics, and a topic approach is used which includes aspects of history and geography. Practical activities contextualise topic learning and in mathematics, there is an emphasis on applying learning to real-life situations. In the youth programme, there is a focus on the development of personal and social skills which includes relevant aspects of health education and careers education leading to work experience placement. These experiences are accredited through OCR National Skills Profile. Each Friday, the Year 11 and Year 12 groups join together for aspects of physical education (PE) such as outdoor pursuits or football skills.

In Project A2 those who are academically capable are given the opportunity to pursue GCSEs but general uptake is poor and course completion low. Generally, the young people are provided with a curriculum which includes literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), art, personal and social education (PSE) and leisure/recreational activities. They are also provided with opportunities to gain practical workplace experience and to develop their basic skills through a vocational programme. Although the curriculum coverage

is narrower than in mainstream schools (in part because of limited resources), they concentrate on Maths, English (Entry level qualification through OCR), Art, Computers (CLAIT or ECDL) and PSE. They also cover Nature Study through the use of a local forest park in a bid to help the students earn an appreciation for their environment. In liaison with the local College of Further Education, the Year 12 group participates in a 'taster' programme. This allows students to attend the College and sample a variety of job types including joinery, catering, hairdressing, childcare, fabrication and welding and office applications. The options available are not gendered and their uptake reflects a willingness to sample non-traditional roles. This vocational experience creates an insight into the world of work, helps students to identify an appropriate post-16 training or Job Skills programme and full attendance receives £5 'wages' per day. ICT also forms an important aspect in this learning. Students learn to open a bank account and attendance at the College widens their social circle, mixing with older students and creating a cross-community element. Students spend one day per week in the Project experiencing IT and job searching and 4 days in the College of Further Education. In the final term of the final year they are hosted in the Institute 5 days a week. A good relationship has been established with the local careers advisor and a meaningful careers programme has helped to develop students' aspirations.

Project A2 was the only project in the entire sample that offered a non-gendered subject choice and as a result a range of non-traditional roles had been explored by students, some of whom had taken these to a higher level of study (including one female welder).

Project A3 offers each young person a tailored individual education plan which is monitored on a 6-weekly basis and reviewed termly. A range of specialist subjects are offered to help develop students' creative, social, physical and technological skills including art, sport, citizenship, cookery, drama and photography and ICT. Students also have the opportunity to attend at least 10

days work experience or vocational training a year. Additionally, a range of qualifications can be studied for.

Additionally, two of the projects have placed emphasis on developing inter-agency connections and have engaged with external agencies and particularly NGOs to deliver aspects of their PSE programme. This has been successful with young people particularly reflected in their feedback to drugs education and sexual health programmes.

### **3.2.5 Resources and Learning Environment**

Within all three projects resources generally are insufficient; there is a limited range of books and materials to support the work planned. For example in Project A1 teaching is contained within one small room which can be restricting if a student is being disruptive. One computer station is available for both staff and student use. At the time of interview, the workstation was broken and had been for some weeks. The ELB had chosen not to dispatch a computer technician to investigate the possibility of repair because the Project was not classified as a school. The centre does not have secretarial support. The provision is hosted within a community centre in a large housing estate and provides a non-threatening, accessible and relaxed atmosphere. As teaching is confined mostly to one room, this limits the range of opportunities and experiences students can offer e.g. practical access to Science, Art and ICT learning.

Similarly, in Project A2 resources and funding are extremely stretched though the team try and maximise the use of whatever is available to them. The learning environment is a relaxed and accessible unit within the heart of the local community. All the staff are well known in that community and are treated with respect and create a supportive learning environment for students.

Project A3 is also limited by funding which is again extremely limited and currently the Project is receiving less money per capita than three years ago, this

figure has dropped year on year. As a result, the learning environment is not resourced well and staff report they are working exceptionally hard to overcome the difficulties this presents. Each of the three units is housed within old buildings and are desperately in need of refurbishment. Indeed the premises are unacceptable and it is unlikely that they would pass health and safety regulations. Students and staff report that the facilities available are not adequate to deal with the number of young people attending. The main office, which hosts the main administration activities and acts as a hub and debriefing centre for staff after the end of lessons each day, is inadequately resourced especially in terms of basic facilities such as heat and light for the staff based here.

### **3.2.6 Staff Views and Issues**

#### ***The perceived status and promotion potential of staff***

Drawing from the interviews conducted with staff from the range of projects, all of the educators indicated that they enjoyed teaching in the sector but many felt that working in this area would be time bound because of the difficulties encountered in the sector. These included lack of stability in funding, low status and statutory-led restrictions on growth, promotion and development.

One teacher expressed concern over this lack of status and spoke of the frustrations of working in AEP. Although a qualified teacher, the staff member was not classified by the ELB as such because they did not work in a recognised school (despite being employed by the ELB in an ELB funded project). This led to lack of recognition from the Department of Education in the guise of being unable to gain a teacher number. This created further difficulties in accessing In Service Training (INSET) and ultimately, the teacher felt, this would damage longer term career prospects. The staff member thoroughly enjoyed teaching in this challenging but rewarding environment but felt that they would be confined to this specialist area for a short time due to such limitations.



Reports of a lack of status among the statutory sector were not confined to teaching staff but also included those project workers trained in Youth and Community Work and for all staff this feeling of lower status compounded the problems created by funding instability and led to difficulties in retaining staff.

One staff member comments on staff turnover,

*Alright, we're all here because we enjoy working with young people but at the end of the day, people have mortgages and the uncertainty of this project funded from year to year is incredible, it's terrible. You know, we had a senior manager, we had her sit here almost offering us redundancy it was last May or something and right up until August, we thought we were a goner, didn't we like Sandra? You know, [Manager] was very optimistic and you know that she would try everything to keep us going but it shouldn't be like that. So I think that staff just got fed up, I can't live like this anymore. (Youth worker: Project A3)*

A recent inspection report also identifies these difficulties, 'low levels of funding and the implications for planning on a year-to-year basis make long-term development difficult and can create instability in staffing'.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside the teaching staff, respondents felt that the whole environment lacked status and even those projects fully funded by the ELB were not able to access key services including ICT support, Education Psychology, the Curriculum Advisory and Support Services, work experience programmes or transport funds.

### ***The stigma of community-based AEP***

Additionally there are the issues faced by staff regarding the status was the associated difficulty of the stigma attached to the community-based projects.

*The difficulty is, well there are two things really,...when you phone up and say would you be interested in taking a student on work placement? What school are they from? Well, actually, it's not a school, we're the .....*

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<sup>6</sup> DE/ETI (2003) *Lagan Valley Education Project Alternative Education Provision Belfast Inspection Report*. Bangor: DE.

... project and we go on to explain what we are and what we do and you might just get a blunt 'no, not interested', or you'll maybe get a silly question like 'well, can I trust them?' you know or 'can I have 2 references?', 'what's wrong with them, why are they with you?'. 'are they stupid?', you know stuff like that. (Deputy Manager – Project A3)

### ***Access to work-related learning***

This stigma associated with the community-based projects also limits the capacity of each of the community-based projects to deliver a wide range of vocational opportunities. This was particularly true when it came to securing work placements and job sampling opportunities because of the reputation of the young people on the projects who as described in the above quote are frequently as 'having a problem' or 'being stupid'. Such access to work-related learning is further hindered by the fact that many of these projects are geographically based in areas with higher levels of unemployment and the young people were more likely to come from families experiencing intergenerational long-term unemployment whereby the ability to rely on friends and family to secure work placements may be reduced. This is exacerbated by the fact that the young people are reluctant to travel outside their own community.

*The other problem, the big problem I think is the young people don't want to leave their local area, so for young people on this side of the town they mightn't even go into the centre. There's no way they will travel to their work placement - so we have to rely on some of the kinda good placements that we've had over the years and repeat those. And there's also, sometimes the young person will go out and stay for a day or two and not show a great deal of interest and the employer may be a bit peeved and say well you know what next year I don't really want anyone so that's maybe spoilt a good placement. (Deputy Manager – Project A3)*

### ***Delivery of the curriculum***

The limited number and professional range of staff that work in the community-based projects means that some projects have a youth work team delivering the majority of teaching as opposed to a qualified teaching staff and some difficulties have been encountered. Thus, for example a youth worker has been required to teach GCSE 'Learning for Life and Work', a two-year academic course condensed into a one year timetable comments:

*I enjoy it. I think that I've just got my head round it now, you know, I probably was where Sandra, you know how Sandra feels now but that's sort of where I was last year. I was feeling deflated and demotivated and I just felt really stretched, you know like the skills that I had were just being pulled apart in trying to deliver something. I just felt out of my depth, but now I think I've just adapted my own method of delivery with it, although, we are using a textbook because we're afraid of not meeting the conditions of what we're supposed to be delivering. (Youth worker, Project A3)*

The problems associated with delivering a new qualification are probably similar to those faced by other teachers, however, the inability to access support from either a CASS team or more experienced colleagues that would be found in a school, for example, limit the expertise that the staff can draw on, nor might they expect to deliver a two-year programme in one year.

The environment can also inhibit the potential to give students valuable experiences of subject areas including Art, Science and ICT because of the physical limits of both the small team of teaching staff and the physical environment. Links with mainstream schools and access to their resources were seen as one possible way of overcoming such physical difficulties:

*I think closer links with schools. Resource wise, pool, PE hall, you know Science Lab, they've everything at their feet. (Teacher, Project A1)*

Though, in relation to this there was some debate as to whether closer links with schools could be managed to their advantage without alienating their students.

Another inspection report by the Education and Training Inspectorate illustrates this point,

*'The young people would benefit from a further broadening of the learning programme, particularly through a greater emphasis on vocational education, work-placement, and creative and expressive activities.'*<sup>7</sup>

### ***Financial Constraints***

Year on year, funding is unstable with some project staff facing 90 day notices of redundancy until money is found to continue the project. This financial pressure creates a difficult environment to plan for the future and retain staff. It also impacts on what kind of programme can be offered,

*Well, we try and develop a wee bit as each year goes by, what was particularly useful that I found was that when the Department came in, they obviously had some suggestions for us to develop and mature and just grow as a programme and some of those were just really around Art and Technology and stuff and we've tried to include that this year particularly around Art...so, we try to, we do our best but obviously with the money that we have... (Deputy Manager – Project A3)*

### ***Management***

There was some debate around how effective the management committees were and the extent of their role. Often respondents felt that they did not draw on the expertise of the members represented and/or that committee members did not truly represent their sponsoring employer. The view was also expressed that project staff looked to the day-to-day managers for leadership and guidance and did not see that management committee as fulfilling this role.

*I don't think they set the standards for [project] and I don't think it's even their role, I think that because we're obviously accountable to funders and we're accountable to the school, the staff, the statutory authority that refer the young people to us so we have to be accountable in some way and that [management committee] allows for us to do it. And we get feedback, but they certainly don't set the standard for our project. I think, very much, that the unit, the full-time staff do that and we all do that. (Project Worker – Project A3)*

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<sup>7</sup> DE/ETI (2004). *Report of an Inspection. Alternative Education Provision (AEP). The Pathways Project, Belfast.* Bangor: DE.

Some project workers felt that it would be useful for all staff members to be given the opportunity to interface with the management committee, as they felt they could bring particular insight to the young people in their ward,

*they're talking about the young people that we're working with and the relationships that we've built with young people and we're not part of that. It just doesn't seem very democratic to me, now, I don't really know what anyone's motives is, I just know that I've never been asked to attend a Management Committee meeting. (Youth Worker, Project A3).*

### ***Team dynamic/vision***

One clear factor that emerges from talking to the different groups of staff is that there is generally a clear sense of collective working, team goals in the most part with strong, motivating leadership. Given that this is a particularly challenging aspect of work with limited financial rewards it would seem that staff in this field are vocationally led and demonstrate high levels of motivation. There is a good ethos of team work which provides an effective network of support whenever required, this approach can also be expressed through how the project workers identify their role.

### ***Post-16 Support***

The general view of staff interviewed was regret that contact was not maintained once students left their provision. The commitment of one project to support young people post-16 was such that they had piloted some provision of aftercare but the resources to offer this service were just not available and it had to be abandoned. If funding was not an issue, it was felt that this was something projects would definitely wish to offer.

### ***Capacity***

All of the projects reported that they were operating over their recommended capacity and each year, throughout the year, demand through referrals could not be met. While the following statement was made by one of the project workers in

Project A1 the same sentiment was reflected by all those providers of community-based AEP who participated in the research.

*We are actually pushed to our limits, we keep getting pushed every year.*  
(Teacher, Project A1)

### **3.2.7 The Student's Perspective**

Though the students' stories will be told in Chapter 5 selected statements from the paper questionnaires are included here to give a brief flavour of the types of comments that were being made about the community-based provision that they attended.

#### **What did you think about the project?**

*Good for people who can't stay at school. The people who work in it, you get to know them, they're really helpful. Work didn't help – was too easy.* (Female – Project A1)

*If you want to do something you have to work hard to achieve it.*(Male- Project A1)

*It was powerful and I would like to go again.* (Male – Project A3)

*I learnt about computers and how to use them. They help me learn how to read and spell. I think the project was brilliant and I think it should be kept open so other people can benefit from it.* (Male – Project A3)

*Catering was the most important thing I learnt – I know how to cook. All done me good. Before I came, at school, I had no interest. You learn at your own pace, they make you comfortable.* (Male – Project A2)

#### **What is the most important thing you have learnt at the project?**

*How to respect people. I enjoyed it because nobody shouts at you like a teacher.* (Male – Project A3)

*It better than school as you get more attention and help with work.* (Female – Project A3)

*That you have to work hard and be careful with drugs. (Male – Project A3)*

**Is there anything you would change about the project?**

*I didn't enjoy the project, because they did not teach me shit. Don't come here.  
(Male Project A1)*

### **3.3 TRAINING ORGANISATION/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP**

There were two Training Organisation/School Partnership Projects (Project B1 and Project B2) in this study. Such partnerships have emerged as a local response to the needs of the area and tend to have developed from programmes such as the Youth Training Programme of the early eighties. Project B1 was established in 1982 under the Youth Training Programme (YTP) to work with young unemployed people and has continued to provide youth training through JobSkills and New Deal. From 1995/96 to 2004, Project B1 offered alternative education provision for KS4 students experiencing difficulties in mainstream education. Unfortunately, at the end of 2004, Project B1 was closed by the management committee, the main reason cited being fatigue over instability of funding.

The origins of Project B2 are similar to those of Project B1. It offers an alternative, primarily vocational programme to mainstream school to students in Year 12 who do not wish to proceed with GCSEs, five days per week for one entire academic year. Both projects offer approximately 30 places to Year 12 students.

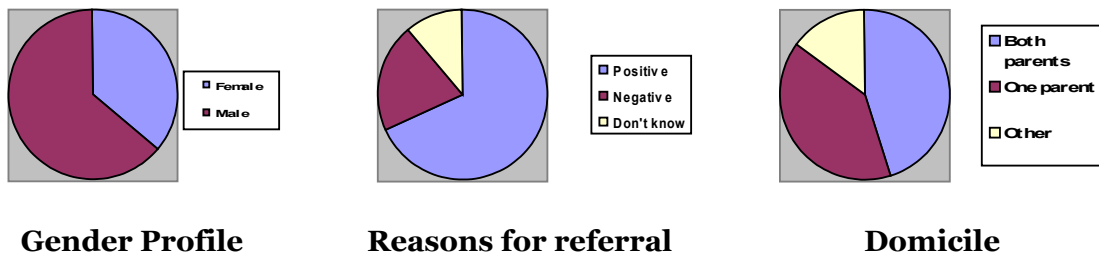
Staff teams in both projects included a number of qualified teachers and essential skills tutors. Project B1 was directed by an experienced teacher who had spent a significant part of his career dealing with disaffected young people. In Project B2, teaching staff had a training or essential skills background and students also had a link teacher from their school whose role it was to maintain the contact with the school, though the students did not attend the school for any activities.

The young people who attend such a scheme are based full-time in the Training Organisation and have little contact with their mainstream school, despite the fact that they remain on the roll of that school and any funding associated with them therefore formally remains with the school. However, Project B2 is funded by the ELB who are invoiced directly by the Project. The day is usually 9:30am – 2:30pm. ■

### 3.3.1 Profile of the Young People

As may be seen from the pie charts below there are more males (64%) than females (36%) attending these schemes. Reasons for referral tended to be positive (i.e. for the training aspect) with 68% of the young people being in this category while 21% were for negative reasons such as behaviour or attendance problems. In terms of home background the majority lived with both parents (45%) while 40 per cent lived with one parent and the remainder in other settings including in care, on their own or with a partner.

**Figure 3.3 Project Type B profile of young people**



Project B1 initially worked with students who had already been excluded or were close to becoming so. With an expansion of provision, they were able to offer placements to students whose achievement potential was deemed to be low. Most students had poor attendance and/or discipline records with problems often dating back to Year 8 and 9.



In Project B2 there was close liaison with the school where Year 11 tutors and senior staff identified those students who they believe are in danger of disengaging from formal education or who are unlikely to gain any formal qualification before leaving school and suggested that a referral to the Project would be appropriate. While not all participating young people had poor records of attendance a significant minority of students attended school less than 75% in year 11.

When talking to the staff regarding the young people attending their projects there was a general feeling that:

*Definitely many of the young people do bring baggage, hold onto the baggage .. and very often in the baggage is the way they've been treated.*  
(Principal – ELB Response Project)

Given such statements it may well be that the profile presented in the pie charts does not really reflect the difficulties that some of these young people may have faced in their lives.

### **3.3.2 Admissions Criteria/Referral Process**

The admissions process and referral criteria differed quite significantly between these two projects. For Project B1 students were referred directly by the school. The local schools identified candidates who may have experienced problems with discipline, poor or non-attendance and risk of non-achievement at Key Stage 4. In most cases the education welfare officer would have been involved in the referral. Students were streamed on the basis of literacy and numeracy and as a result were placed into one of two groups, one following a GCSE programme and the other an Entry Level programme although in some cases there was an overlap.

In Project B2 the students may have heard about such a programme through friends or other students who have already availed of such a facility or they may have been referred by their teachers. The project runs a two-week induction programme in June each year, where the prospective students can experience the programme for a week, as they could expect to experience it in September. If a student is interested then s/he fills out an application form in the hope of being selected. If selected, they are interviewed along with their parents in their schools demonstrating that the project is run in partnership with the school. At this time the parents are made aware that this programme does not involve the continuation of the GCSE route. The programme is often over-subscribed with more males than females applying for entry. This programme is not streamed, but in the past students' literacy, numeracy and self-confidence were assessed by the Education and Library Board Behaviour Support Team when they entered and on completion of the programme. The project staff also assess the students on entry and throughout the year. Based on these assessments students are split into two ability groups for literacy and numeracy. Thus, the group composition changes as the students progress throughout the year.

### **3.2.3 Access to Northern Ireland Curriculum**

Students attending Project B1 are offered a curriculum including literacy, numeracy, ICT, PSE, art, leisure and recreational activities including a digital media programme. Some students are entered for GCSE English and Maths and have the opportunity to study other subjects where they demonstrate potential and interest. In contrast Project B2 offers a much more vocationally orientated programme which involves the achievement of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) modules. These are in an area of the students' choice, however, from September to half-term they are required to sample all activities and then each student is supported to develop a personal education plan. In recent years the project has also offered Key Skills – Application of Number and Communications (Level 1) and an IT Certificate. Those students unlikely to achieve NVQ Level 1 are entered for Achievement Tests in English and Maths (low level). Every

student leaves the training programme with an English and Maths Certificate, with at least three NVQ units in vocational training and an IT qualification. Students cannot study for GCSEs on this programme. A personal development programme is offered to students as well through the Open College Network.

In Project B2 the programme on offer tends to be gendered with females being given the opportunity of trying Business Administration or Childcare while the males are given the opportunity of trying a Building Class Certificate (involving bricklaying, tiling and joinery) or Mechanics. Male students also had the opportunity to attain the NVQ Foundation IT Award with the females pursuing the Open College 1 CLAIT – Stage 1 (Computer Literacy and Information Technology).

#### **3.3.4 Resources and Learning Environment**

As with the nature of the training programme, the resources and learning environment for the two projects are also in sharp contrast. Project B1 is housed within a dilapidated and ageing building, and resources on offer were limited. There was access to computer workstations, but facilities for other curricular areas were limited. Funding again was stretched to the limit.

Project B2 was at the end of the scale with a well resourced learning environment. Indeed this project offers many of the advantages of a Further Education College in terms of facilities, but on a much more intimate scale. Additionally, the project is located within an industrial business park giving the students a real sense of a workplace environment.

#### **3.3.5 Staff Perceptions and Issues**

Across both of these projects staff were particularly anxious to point out that their approach was one where the young people were treated with respect and that their work was:

*Totally centred, totally centred towards the kids at whatever level...the youngsters always came first, no matter what. (Essential Skills Tutor – Project B1)*

Staff also referred to their accessibility to both students and parents where a parent may have not had the confidence to approach school, AEP presented a less threatening environment,

*parents or a parent could at any time which happened regularly, sort of came to the window and waved in, can we see you a minute. So we always said yes, came in had a cup of tea and a chat. There was never, you couldn't adopt this attitude where you must have an appointment because again we were alternative and we had to be alternative so it worked. (Essential Skills Tutor – Project B1)*

In Project B2 there was a feeling that once the programme became established, the sense of community grew with it,

*It got so easy in the second, third and fourth year, you would have the older ones encouraging the younger ones and all of a sudden you had this community building and the young ones were growing up into this community, realising what they can achieve and would achieve, the older ones they took get pride in telling the younger ones to wise up and don't be doing that, don't be drawing on the walls, cursing and it became so easy that our jobs didn't diminish but became much easier when you had these mentors from the other groups, it worked. (Programme Manager – Project B2)*

Project B2 had taken the decision to be more selective as to who joins the programme and students had to identify a real interest in a vocational area to be enrolled on the programme,

*But I think the first year the school actually seen it as a dumping ground, you know, the boys that they wanted to get rid of were put down, I honestly believe in the three years that I've worked as ...we are being more selective ourselves, we do an induction programme and we try and*

*select people that are suitable to the programme. They are angels during induction as you would imagine, they all behave according to the rules etc but we try and choose people that are interested in training in trades that we offer. Now I know that this year I could pick out three people that we went wrong with, I know that at interview stage that this young person and parent convinced that no, no that won't happen he will do it but I knew we weren't for him as we weren't offering what he wanted but ...I think we are being more selective now and I think the boys themselves see themselves going onto a trade and they're not very negative about it.*  
(Programme Manager – Project B2)

### ***Transitory Nature of Funding***

Funding to sustain these responses has been sourced from European special status structural funds including SSPPR which has a limited time span and is therefore not factored into capital spend. Thus these projects face an ongoing cycle of identifying potential funders, applying for funding and administering the monies in line with the funding requirements which all detracts from the delivery of the education programme. The short-term nature of funding can also have a negative impact on staff retention, and this, combined with the fact that some staff members are only paid for term time work can also affect the ability to recruit and retain staff. It is for these and other associated reasons that Project B1 closed during the research leaving the area in question without any alternative provision for young people over and above an EOTAS scheme based in the local hospital and 3 off site locations which does not meet demand.

### ***Relationship with School Partners***

It is felt that relationships with school partners work well, with schools appreciating the service provided by the programmes but also, the various link teachers working effectively with AEP. It was felt that this relationship could be built on more, getting a fuller profile of the student before they joined and greater interaction with staff during the school year was mentioned by one project which was limited by time restraints. Finding the right balance of contact would be a consideration.

### ***Reintegration***

As stated, it was very much developed on small scale pilots, initially trying to develop individual packages to reintegrate some young people, however it became increasingly clear that reintegration back to school was not going to be appropriate for some young people coming towards the end of their period of compulsory schooling.

Reintegration is universally seen as a goal at Key Stage 4 but very much concentrated on delivering young people a better chance of engaging at post-16 level, whether this is in education, training or employment or societal.

*I don't use the language of reintegration because I think it becomes counterproductive when the reality is that the young people for the most part do not see mainstream school as part of their future (Principal – ELB Response)*

One teacher alludes to why AEP is a success story for many young people,

*I think when they come into us...even coming into us at Year 11, ... they can't compare it to anything within school in terms of what they have experienced and what they would experience again, and therefore for the most part reintegration [back to school] is very unlikely. Principal – ELB Response*

One example, where it was possible to reintegrate a student, centred around his strong sports ability and this in turn may reveal part of the limitation which the AEP learning environment can offer. This particular student had an extremely negative view of school, however, the young person initiated dialogue in an attempt to explore the possibility of joining the school football team. The school received the idea of his involvement favourably and the AEP project brokered a meeting between the young person and the Project Tutor in the school and they negotiated a partial timetable around the Year 11 or Year 12 PE Programme, that allowed him to get in, do some of the PE Programme and become involved with the football team. This presented initial logistical problems for transport and insurance among others, but the school and AEP were able to overcome these on behalf of the student.

With the small numbers of students and staff members and lack of access to facilities, this opportunity could not have been provided to the same level in AEP. Access to not only sports facilities, but Art, Science, ICT, languages are often restricted within the AEP environment.

One practitioner prefers to use the term inclusion rather than reintegration,

*that's what our focus is about reintegration in that sense about inclusion and a sense of inclusion and that's what we try and get rather than try and keep the focus with reintegration structure into mainstream, which would be doomed to fail in most cases and therefore defeat what you're trying to do. (Principal – ELB Response)*

### ***Stigma of AEP***

*We fight very hard to make young people proud of what they're doing within the Project, and it is difficult enough at times because once they are out of the norm, out of the mainstream in that clear sense then there's a bit of labelling that goes on. Now most of our young people are quite happy and proud of being involved in the Project, but there would still be that sense of labelling, that we have to fight against. (Principal – ELB Response)*

### ***Full service schools***

One view is the importance the role of full service schools could play in the development of a response to the needs of disengaged young people with some practitioners excited by the potential it could advent.

*a model... integrating some of the social services functions and child care functions and so on, the child and adolescent mental health programme and so on into a broader umbrella of service provision and therefore we would have less of the sort of culture of segregation and exclusion or somebody else being the answer. (Principal – ELB Response)*

### ***Success/Distance Traveled***

Much discussion centres around the need to measure the successes of individuals engaged on the programme, many of which cannot be illustrated by qualification attainment.

One practitioner offers his experience,

*when you're talking about specific individuals and so on you need to have a very, very clear picture of the complex mix of you know the present situation and the past experiences of that young person to be able then to say this is what they're doing now* (Principal – ELB Response)

### ***Future***

There is a debate as to where AEP should be positioned in the future. There is some strong opinion that it must remain separate and independent from mainstream education as therein lie its strengths, however, some Training Organisation/School partnerships do demonstrate a provision which has a level of independence to have status and kudos with the young people but can also retain some channel, which could be built upon, to benefit both staff and students in both AEP and mainstream. The underlying consideration compels that inclusion and avoidance of further disengagement has to be avoided.

Some staff members feel that AEP must remain a separate provision,

*Yes, no question. If it's within the confines...I've seen so many of the kids with the venom they displayed having to go into the school for the smallest of matters, collecting an hour away or some information from the school, they loathed that. The mere conversation about the school and whatever happened them before but they didn't want anything to do with it, provision must happen outside the school.* (Essential Skills Tutor – Project B1)

Recruitment of young people onto the programme is not difficult as they are always oversubscribed but one staff member spoke of the preparation required for teachers coming into this area of education,



*There's no specific training for it, you're either for example classroom teaching, it's not going to be the same as a school so there's going to be a challenge there as in you don't want to be as strict as a school, yet you don't want to be too liberal or too lenient so where do you find your own line. There's no specific training course, there's no specific training for alternative education programme, its either school orientated or not. So that's probably where you could improve the provision there.*  
(Construction Tutor – Project B2)

Another staff member also referred to parents' expectations not being met, as they still assume that their children are working towards GCSE qualifications and not alternative accreditation.

### ***Interagency working***

Project workers also expressed views of the importance of interagency working and how best to effect that. Importance was placed upon the support that a designated Education Welfare Officer can provide. Not necessarily personnel designated in terms of great amount of time but designated in terms of focus so that he or she gets more intimately engaged and aware of the young people involved even though they might come from different schools and although they may not deal with all the issues arising with those students, they are at least a good conduit in relation to making sure that they're not lost out of the system.

The programme on offer in both organisations is very clearly supported by external agencies that deliver complimentary programmes or provide facilities to build on personal development e.g. Opportunity Youth and Playhouse. Additionally both organisations also talked of a good relationship established with other interested organisations, including the Probation Board, Education Welfare, Educational Psychology, Social Services and local employers.

Staff felt that, although their ELB colleagues may have been progressive in their approach, they were given some degree of flexibility and independence to try things out. This led to some frustration, when positive results were achieved and projects were evaluated favourably, because these pilot schemes did not feature

in any sort of developmental planning. This has led to some sense that all AEP in the area has developed from a bottom up approach which has very much relied on individuals who have drive and vision.

One provider reported difficulties engaging with the Education and Library Board accounted for by their lack of school status; when applying for classroom resources to support their English curriculum they were refused because they were not classed as a school. They also had a similar experience when seeking assistance for transport costs,

*The library, new books, videos, programmes for English programmes but they declined it. They said it wasn't a school even though these were school children connected to a school. So they've no real involvement. They probably don't recognise us as a school. You know, it's the same with bus tickets, anything like that, we're not recognised (Project Manager – Project B2)*

### **Post-16 Support**

Many staff members report the frustration of 'losing' the young people once they leave AEP. Attempts have been made in the past to sustain some level of contact as it had been recognised as important, particularly as many of the young people are vulnerable. Brendan explains,

*Some of them don't have full looked after status but were in that type of situation where their family situation had broken down and at the point of breaking down and would end up maybe living independently. We've had a couple of situations where they had just turned 16 and basically in a bed and breakfast or sheltered accommodation, or whatever you know, and it's about that support. Now the whole thing about the model for the Leaving and After Care Team for example, I think it's a very good model but again it's very specific in where it is focused and there are a lot of youngsters who miss out on the type of support that they could offer...But it's broader than that I think it's about what's in place to support them in making those transitions, for some it's more straightforward and they move on, for others they can't do without possibly having the support of continued back ups and type of ear that they would have had and the nature of support that they had to do that stuff (Principal – ELB Response)*

### **Careers Support**

Projects have an assigned careers officer which has also helped facilitate the post-16 transition, as they have established a relationship with a careers officer and have some confidence to link in with that individual once they leave full-time education.

Projects have also been able to link into the Careers Service Target Initiative Fund, where funding between £1000-£3000 is available to run additional careers related activities that would service some of the objectives of the Careers Service. Some have found this to be a very useful, additional type of resource which keeps them linked in directly with the Careers Service.

### **3.3.6 Young People's Perspective**

The young people's comments taken from the questionnaires were very positive about their experiences in the Training Organisation/School Partnership projects that they had attended. The follow statements are taken directly from the questionnaires.

#### **What did you think about the project?**

*I have great support at the group. Education doesn't have to be hard. Best and most special experience ever. (Female – Project B1)*

*I wasted my time, all everyone done was smoke and eat and I don't smoke. I wouldn't advise anyone to do this project. Its for people who don't have a interest in getting anywere in life. (Female – Project B1)*

*How to mix with other people and how to try and get something out of life even if you have to work hard for it and keep trying no matter what. Every one I was with and tought me inspired me to work hard and get everything you can get out of life if you work hard. (Male – Project B2)*

*If you dont learn you wont go enywhere in life. (Male – Project B2)*

#### **Is there anything you would change about the project?**

*Have more opertunites for work icksperients. (Male Project B2)*

#### **Anything else you would say about your experience?**

*I hope that I can get a decent job later in life.* (Male Project B2)

*It's cool because I'll leave with hopefully some GCSEs.* (Male – Project B1)

### **3.4 KS4 FLEXIBILITY INITIATIVE**

This initiative was introduced in April 2000 by the Department of Education (DE) and evaluated by ETI in 2003. The initiative encouraged schools to explore new ways of approaching the curriculum at KS4 (i.e. Years 11 and 12 when the young people are 14-16 years of age) to allow those students who did not wish to follow an academic route greater flexibility and choice and to engage in a more work-related learning programme. This was made possible by the disapplication of aspects of the statutory curriculum. Since this is a DE initiative the schools have a budget for the scheme and therefore funding should not be an issue. The young people who participate in the initiative are all on the rolls of a mainstream school, and the structure of the programme follows the normal school hours and day. For the most part such schemes have made links with a further education college or training organisation and the young people in Year 11 attend such provision on one day a week while Year 12 students will usually spend one day a week in college and one day a week in work placement.

The two projects in the current study followed a similar pattern to that outlined. Project C1 was a partnership between three schools and the local College of Further Education and had been developed into a well-managed town-wide partnership delivering vocational training to students aged 14-16 years and offering a wide range of vocational opportunities at the time of the research. Each term the staff team at the College produce progress reports on each young person attending their KS4 initiative for the school. Project C2 was based in a large all male secondary school on the outskirts of a large town and was run in partnership with a local college of further education where a link programme had been developed for those students who were not considered suitable for GCSE study.

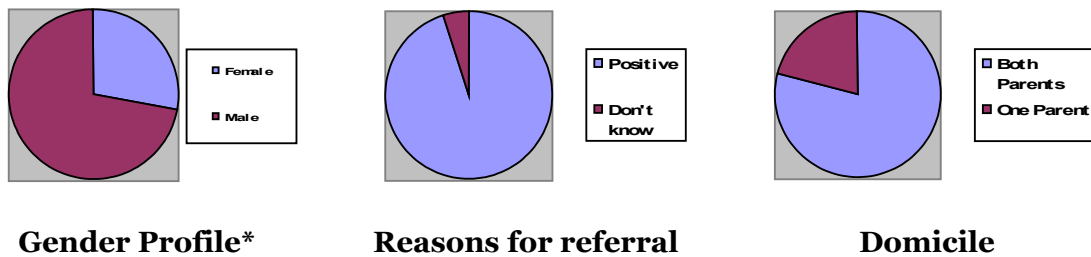
In project C1 each school had different levels of staff input which was dictated by funding limitations however, senior staff were involved at either Principal or Vice Principal level and Heads of Department all had a proactive role in the development of the programme. Additionally, the College had appointed a designated school liaison officer (or project officer) to co-ordinate the programme which helped ensure the smooth running of the partnership and enabled an extra level of support for these young people in the more mature learning environment of the College. This project officer who was jointly funded by the consortium of schools, reported on a weekly basis to each school and if there was an urgent issue, they contacted the school immediately. This relationship worked well by encouraging group homogeneity among the three participating schools and allowing for a central point of contact within the College. Additional support in one of the participating schools meant that the careers teachers had been timetabled to be available in the school on a Friday to cater for any students facing difficulties in the flexibility programme, should they arise.

In Project C2, the KS4 Flexibility Curriculum was seen as part of the mainstream provision and therefore those school staff with teaching responsibilities for Years 11 and 12 were involved in its delivery. A link course with the local College of Further Education meant that there was a degree of liaison between the College and the School which was the responsibility of the form tutor and Head of Careers.

### **3.4.1 Profile of Students**

As may be seen from the pie charts below the majority of young people in the KS4 Flexibility Initiative sample were males, though this is a due to the fact that one of the projects was an all male school. For the sample for whom we had details there were none who were referred due to behaviour or attendance problems and the vast majority came from two-parent families.

**Figure 3.4 Project Type C Student Profile**



\* The sample includes one all boy school which skews the gender breakdown

### 3.4.2 Selection and Referral Criteria

Selection to participate in the KS4 Flexibility Initiative varied by school and in the case of two of the three schools in Project C1 this was done in consultation with parents and the young people themselves with the possibility of the careers officer also being involved. Students and parents were briefed on the two alternative routes, the traditional GCSE route or the Flexibility programme. However, in two (?) of the schools the programme was only available to the lower-ability students. Numbers on the programme range from 25-35 across the three schools.

In project C2 the KS4 Flexibility Initiative was offered to all students in years 11 and 12 and thus no specific referral or selection criteria were implemented. Most students followed a GCSE course and for all students their record of achievement included reports on all courses followed in school, work experience, employers, out of school projects and residential and shorter outings. However, for the small number of students for whom GCSEs were considered inappropriate a restricted external examination entry certificate course had been introduced. This was

made available via a link course offered in partnership with the local college of FE.

### **3.4.3 Curriculum/Qualifications Offered**

Each school in Project C1 offered a slightly different suite of qualifications but generally this included Entry Level Qualifications, Key Skills and a possibility of GCSEs (mainly in Child Care and Resistant Materials). Some young people took Foundation Level GCSE in Communication and Application of Number, but they would probably be expected to achieve Grade D at best. Additionally, students could undertake NVQ level 1 if they so wished.

In Project C2 GCSEs were on offer for most students. For those who did not follow this pathway there was the link course with the local College of Further Education for which there were clear criteria including the opportunity (where appropriate) to gain external qualifications such as RSA, City and Guilds, Certificate of Education, DIDA, Entry Level Qualifications and Occupational Skills GCSE. Other criteria for the course included having some tangible record of achievement which students feel represents them and their progress in full and meaningful way.

### **3.4.4 Resources and Learning Environment**

For the two projects in the sample resources were those that mainstream students had access to and were, for the most part, good. Both of the Colleges of Further Education also had good resources and provided a learning environment that was particularly conducive to vocational training and development. Students enrol on a Friday morning in school and they are bused to the Colleges of FE campuses. The coach collects them again and returns them to school where on arrival they can pick up their transport home. The roll call is checked once again when they arrive at school to begin their journey home. The Project Officer also

checks attendance mid-morning to make sure that the students are attending the full day at the College. Schools did not report any concerns about attendance management and felt that most absences were for genuine reasons.

### **3.4.5 Staff Perceptions and Issues**

One of the first issues staff were keen to raise was their difficulty with the term AEP being applied to the Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative and explained further that they interpreted the term as,

*Alternative Education is where a child has not fitted into school, has been troublesome in school and has difficulties being part of the school ethos and climate and is therefore removed from that. (Vice Principal – Project C1)*

Respondents felt it was inappropriate that the term was applied to the flexibility programme and that it should be reserved for EOTAS. Staff interviewed felt that the Flexibility Initiative should be seen as an extension of what is provided in school and not as an alternative. It was much more seen as an enhancement of the curriculum with its relevance to vocational aspirations. Those interviewed felt that because the young people are still predominantly educated within school and the FE programme is funded by the school that those students are considered to be very much a part of the school community, receiving their education entitlement in a slightly different way.

### ***Range of Courses and Accreditation***

Breadth of choice was reported as being restricted by student numbers selecting courses, if there are too few interested it is not cost effective to offer a course. For example, every year Media and Digital Design has been on offer, but each year the uptake has been so low that they have been unable to deliver a module. The staff also reported that the young people choose traditional courses. Furthermore



while all courses are available to both boys and girls in reality choices made reflected a clear gender bias. One senior teacher explained,

*They are given the opportunity, whether they take the opportunity or not is another issue. Quite honestly, the courses are heavily gender biased. You will have the occasional girl who is keen to be a motor mechanic, a joiner and a plumber. You will have the occasional boy who is keen on entering the catering/hospitality but they are unusual. (Vice Principal – Project C1)*

Another related concern here was CCEA's Occupational Studies Levels 1 and 2 (Single and Double Award) & First Skills Certificate (Single and Double Award) qualifications. Single Award requires 2 units, with Double Award requiring 4 units. In general the teachers felt positive about the qualification in many ways because the assessment and structure is effective but, despite this, they complained that it lacked parity of esteem with a GCSE award as it is not instantly clear where it fits in the qualification framework,

*The fact that it doesn't have a GCSE equivalent is doing it no good because people are saying well what is this exam, where does it fit in? (Vice Principal – Project C1)*

Whilst many of the students leaving school at 16 years do transfer to Further Education and carry a qualification that the FE College understands and will accept, those students entering the labour market may experience greater difficulties as it is not recognisable to many employers,

*With parents, with employers, whenever these kids leave school and bring their certificates to employers, employers don't know what these mean and they are ringing up and saying look is this a GCSE or not and I think that there needs to be a lot of education in there too with employers. (Head of Careers – Project C1)*

Furthermore, teachers identified the limited capacity the timetable offers for the delivery of both vocational and academic subjects. For those students with less academic ability, staff was restricted with the time available to help them achieve their potential and grades were likely to be low.

In relation to the environment in which they were teaching concerns were raised regarding the health and safety of the learning environment in terms of adequate ventilation and air extraction for students.

### ***Reducing Disaffection***

Staff members did report positive benefits of the programme including increased attendance and student participation in learning,

*I suppose it may be a bit of cliché, but you are helping the students to come back and participate instead of just being inactive and switching off..., I think as well, those individuals are mixing with a different clientele, there's a different social environment outside the school and so also they're not only developing academically also but from a social perspective they're gaining academically also but from a social perspective they're gaining additional skills. (Principal – Project C1)*

One school felt that the learning culture did much to raise self-esteem and considered that the cross-community environment was successful in reducing community tensions, while another reported a definite reduction in suspensions and expulsions since the programme had been introduced.

One teacher did allude to difficulties that some students did find adjusting to the different environment that FE provided whether in terms of different schools, religions, backgrounds and experiencing these differences in a less cosseted environment than school. As a response to this, the school enrolled an external organisation to deliver a personal development programme prior to their entry on the 14+ programme and help to develop skills to cope with the changing environment.

Some schools had experienced difficulties with the cross-community aspect of the classes but felt that they were dealt with quickly and effectively. This was also supported by a cultural awareness day hosted through YESIP.

### ***Recruitment/Referrals/Meeting Demand***

Those applying for the flexibility programme have halved this year. One reason that the Deputy Head attributes this is to the development of CCEA's Occupational Studies qualification which does not seem to have the same kudos as a traditional GCSE. So many of the vocational progression routes now require four or five GCSEs and it is difficult to promote flexibility when the accompanying qualification is not at this level. Students who clearly aspire to a vocational qualification are increasingly following a GCSE only route in the attempt to gain entry to a post-16 vocational course of their choice in FE.

*Flexibility is ruled out for them because Occupational Studies is no longer an exam where, hand on heart, we stand up to parents and say that this is a GCSE equivalent. (Vice-Principal – Project C1)*

Although numbers have dropped this year, by half, the school found that offering the total year group (n=60) the option of flexibility would have created too big a strain on the school's finances. They have explored a number of options including the transfer of the per capita allowance to the FE College, however, the discovery of additional hidden costs, for example, daily transport, restricts the expansion of the programme in the longer term. They do wish to retain the principle of open choice to the whole year group and one solution mooted has been the possibility of offering aspects of curriculum in house in attempt to reduce costs, but the current staffing complement would not allow for this.

### ***Careers Support***

Staff in Project C1 (and associated stakeholders) suggested that the Flexibility programme also enhances the delivery of careers support by offering practical experience. Additionally, it was seen as facilitating the relationship between the

Head of Careers and the students by providing greater access to the staff team over and above the careers period assigned to the Key Stage 4 timetable. Along with regular access to the Careers Officer from the Department of Employment and Learning, staff felt that access to careers advice was much greater than for those students not involved in the programme.

### ***Challenges***

The future of secondary education in Northern Ireland was identified as a general concern in light of the changes to the transfer to post-primary education. Some schools do feel that they are anticipating successfully the changes that the Entitlement Framework will bring, giving their school a head start in delivering the curriculum in a new way. However, some schools do see their future threatened within the context of a declining school population and an inability to compete with the grammar school sector once academic selection ends.

One school also identified a need for developing a greater synergy between the delivery of the programme in school and at the Institute brought about the organisational and cultural differences between the school and FE. It was felt that this could best be facilitated by having a dedicated member of school staff to develop alternative education provision. This could also be seen as a mechanism for updating other teaching staff, not directly involved in the programme, on how and what is delivered in FE. It was also felt that resources could be directed to developing links at post-16 provision.

Although there is a high level of satisfaction with the partnership with the Institute, it was felt that because of the limits of funding, numbers, facilities and conflicting pressures to deliver for their main post-16 target market the range of occupational areas on offer to the Key Stage 4 students was limited. Schools had also experienced courses being dropped at short notice as there was not quorum

to run it or the teaching staff had to be diverted elsewhere and that this should be avoided where possible in the future.

### **3.4.6 Young People's Perspective**

The young people's perspective of the KS4 Flexibility Initiative was very positive as the following statements from the questionnaires reflect.

#### **What did you think about the project?**

*Just it was good, it was better than school and it give you an indication about what you want to do. (Male – Project C1)*

*I really enjoyed the project at da time, I wish I appreciated it more at the time. (Male – Project C1)*

*It has built up my confident. Learnt a lot in the course got my NVQ Level 1. Helped me find my job what I wanted to do. I really enjoyed it and made a lot of new friends. (Female – Project C1)*

*I thing that the most important thing was even thow I want to do joinery I now know how to do some other thing like plumbing, building and plastering. (Male – Project C1)*

*I've found that I'm good at working with others. I would like a lot of other people too take this course. (Male – Project C1)*

### **3.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

In summary it would appear that those young people who were most disengaged from their mainstream schooling attended Training Organisation/School Partnership provision or community-based projects. These young people tended to come from less stable family backgrounds in that there were greater percentages of them living with single parents or on their own. Regardless of the nature of provision that they attended the vast majority of the young people felt that they had had a good experience.

Many of the staff on the community-based projects and Training Organisation/School Partnerships spoke of the leadership and qualities of an individual in the project whose creativity, persistence and passion has eked out a future for AEP in adversity. Where this individual does not appear, the delivery of provision seems stifled. The power of this role is seen by some as essential and it would appear that individual AEP projects would not have emerged without these drivers.

Not surprisingly, from the staff's perspective those who worked in Training Organisation/School Partnership or community-based provision reported greater challenges. This was particularly true in relation to the stigma and lack of status attached to these two types of provision which tended not to be valued but especially the community-based provision. Such perceptions impacted on the projects' ability to offer the students access to a wide range of work placements or employment opportunities. Furthermore, the extremely poorly resourced facilities, very limited learning environments and difficult working conditions identified in certain of the projects unquestionably presented cause for a high degree concern.

Also common to both Training Organisation/School Partnership and community-based provision was the disquiet expressed regarding post-16 support and access to careers services. Additionally, the necessity to further engage in and develop inter-agency working and links with the mainstream schools was frequently raised and the view that extended schools might be the way forward here was expressed.

Limited access to a curriculum was something that was referred to by staff in all three types of provision but regardless of the level and type of challenges and difficulties faced all those interviewed spoke of their commitment to these sometimes very difficult young people was abundantly apparent.

Given the range of experience and skills that this body of staff present, especially in the community based and training organisation/school partnerships schemes, it is perhaps surprising that this resource remains untapped by mainstream provision especially given that calls for closer links here have repeatedly been made by various reports from statutory agencies such as the ETI. Despite such calls, the barriers still appear to remain as illustrated in the following quote:

*I would like to say that there is but if I was being honest I would have to say that anything that would transfer back would be something of a drip feed level you know. I mean some schools have actually listened and taken on board some ideas from the [name] model and that and have expressed interest. Whether in general terms schools have seen it as a potential two way I would be fairly doubtful..... ... some schools are extremely surprised that we've got them and that they are there and they're attending on a regular basis. (Essential Skills Tutor – Project B1)*

To acknowledge the difficulties is no excuse for allowing them to continue and a much more concerted and proactive effort should be made by the policy makers to ensure that their recommendations are actually implemented.

## **Key Points**

### *General*

- There are 3 types of AEP in operation in Northern Ireland, catering for the wide spectrum of pupil profile and needs. All types have some success in engaging learners, offering accreditation and building on the social and personal development of the young people in their ward.
- There is no funding formula for AEP and resources are unevenly spread across the sector. There appears to be neither transparency nor logic as to which, how and to what level projects are funded.
- There are no clear procedures to access support services for young people.
- The nature of funding, resourcing, teaching and professional support services differs acutely across the sector with very few resources available to those in both the community-based and training organisation/school partnership sectors.
- Key Stage 4 FI is not considered to be alternative education by either the schools involved or students enrolled.
- There are lessons for mainstream schools to be drawn from the teaching method and styles in AEP and those delivering 14-16 programmes in FE.

### *Staff Related Factors*

- There is no common standard of staffing profile or basic student entitlement to resources in the community-based or training organisation/school partnership AEP.
- Staff feel that the necessity to secure funding detracts from their main business of educating young people.
- Teachers in AEP do not have the same access to in-service training, progression potential, financial reward or job security as those teachers working in mainstream schools.
- Teachers in AEP report high levels of personal reward despite the low levels of satisfaction with working conditions.
- Project staff would like to maintain some level of contact with young people post-16 but are currently unable to offer this service because of funding constraints.



### *Provision*

- Courses available to young people tend to be gendered.
- Community-based AEP provides an important vehicle for re-engaging some of the most disaffected young people in learning and does so in part because it is viewed as independent, 'non-statutory' provision in the community. This is particularly achieved through personal and social development, but with limited qualifications on offer.
- All projects report a high demand for their programme.
- The opportunity for vocational and work-related learning is restricted particularly in some community-based AEP.

### *Young People*

- There is a stigma attached to students attending AEP in community-based and training organisation/school partnership projects.
- There are some examples of where schools and projects have worked together effectively to support a students learning or specific area of interest.
- A typical young person engaged in community-based AEP lives with a lone parent, has a negative view of the mainstream education system and often has been subjected to a raft of social related problems which may include mental ill-health.
- Young people in AEP are not receiving their full entitlement to education.
- The focus of reintegration of the most disaffected students is geared towards post-16.

**Table 3a Participating Projects by Type of Provision, Background, Aims, Funding Source and Number of Places Offered**

<b>TYPE OF PROVISION</b>	<b>BACKGROUND AND AIMS</b>	<b>FUNDING SOURCE</b>	<b>No. OF PLACES</b>
<b>COMMUNITY BASED</b>	Projects tend to be driven by the community in response to concerns regarding young people who are out of mainstream education.		
<b>Project A1</b>	Offer opportunity for disaffected young people to re-engage with learning; Educational emphasis on personal and social development leading to limited academic attainment.	EU Peace & Reconciliation money	02/03 six students of school leaving age
<b>Project A2</b>	Offer a 2-year programme for young people who do not attend mainstream schools for a variety of reasons including extreme bullying, looked after children, have been expelled, have come out of Criminal Justice etc.	DE via ELB (previously various sources)	Approx 15-20 students per year
<b>Project A3</b>	Programme to develop personal and social skills and help prepare young people for further training and world of work (3 centres in BELB)	Variety of sources	Each centre can cater for 10 students
<b>TO/SCHOOL P'SHIP</b>	Tend to have developed from schemes such as the Youth Training Programme; similar ethos.		
<b>Project B1</b>	Offers students who do not wish to proceed to GCSEs an alternative to school provision for one academic year.	YESIP	30 students each year
<b>Project B2</b>	Offered opportunity for disaffected young people for a group of schools in a particular city area. Educational emphasis on personal development as well as offering GCSE maths and English.	DE via ELB & EU Peace & Reconciliation money	30 students from Yrs 11 and 12
<b>KS4 FLEXIBILITY INITIATIVE</b>	Allows schools to disapply aspects of the statutory curriculum with the aim of introducing Yr 11 and Y12 students to work-related learning programmes.		
<b>Project C1</b>	Three schools partnering with a FE College/Institute to offer Yr 11 and Yr 12 students an alternative vocationally based learning package.	DE via ELB since students are on the school rolls	25-35 depending on the school
<b>Project C2</b>	Delivers KS4FI in partnership with local FE College.	DE via ELB since students are on the school rolls	20-30 depending on school roll

**Table 3 (b): Participating Projects by Type of Provision, Admission Criteria, Referral Process, Structure and Access to NI Curriculum**

<b>TYPE OF PROVISION</b>	<b>Admission Criteria/Referral Process</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Access to NI Curriculum</b>
<b>COMMUNITY BASED</b>			
<b>Project A1</b>	Provision for students considered unsuitable for mainstream schooling or expelled. Referred by EWO and/or most recent school attended. Must meet set criteria. (Age range 14-16 yrs).	2½ hr session per day	Focus on English and Maths. IT plus PSE.
<b>Project A2</b>	Provision for students who do not attend mainstream school for a variety of reasons. Referred via EWO and/or Social Services but students themselves must be willing to attend. (Age range 13-17 years.)	9.30am-1.30pm each day. Yr groups taught separately. Streaming by ability.	Can pursue GCSE but up-take low. Emphasis on literacy, numeracy, IT and PSE plus opportunity for some workplace experience.
<b>Project A3</b>	Young people at risk of disengaging from education referred through cluster of sponsoring schools for a variety of reasons. Family visits and joint contract between young person and project prior to commencement of placement. (Age 15-16)	Mon-Fri (9:30am-2:00pm) One day work placement	Tailored IEP monitored on a 6 weekly basis. Range of specialist subjects, plus work experience and possibly GCSE for some
<b>TO/SCHOOL P'SHIP</b>			
<b>Project B1</b>	Students who are at risk or have been excluded from mainstream school. Referred directly by school. EWO generally involved	9.30am-2.30pm each day.	Offered literacy, numeracy, ICT, PSE, art and leisure activities. May be entered for GCSE.
<b>Project B2</b>	Self-referral. Two-week induction programme followed by application form and interview with parents. (Age 15-16)	9.30am-2.30pm each day.	Leads to NVQs and/or Key Skills. (Does not offer GCSEs)
<b>KS4 FLEXIBILITY INITIATIVE</b>			
<b>Project C1</b>	Generally students (and parents) offered the choice of GCSE or Flexible Curriculum route. Some streaming occurs. (Age range 14-16 yrs)	Normal school hours and day. (3-4 days in school, one in FE, one in work placement depending on Yr Gp and School)	Can do GCSE but disapplication of NI Curriculum.
<b>Project C2</b>	Choice of GCSE or Flexible Curriculum based on ability. Available to all Year 11 & 12 students (Age 14-16).	Normal school hours and day (3-4 days in school, one in FE, one in work placement depending on Yr Gp & School)	Can do GCSE but disapplication of NI Curriculum.

**Table 3c: Interview Data Collected**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Preliminary Staff Interview</b>	<b>Staff Interview</b>	<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>Stakeholder</b>
<b>A1</b>	Class Teacher Youth Worker	-	2 Male	Education Welfare Team
<b>A2</b>	Principal 2 staff team	-	-	
<b>A3</b>	3 project workers Manager	3 project workers Manager Deputy Manager	2 Male 3 Female	3 focus groups with students
<b>B1</b>	Principal Class Teacher Administrator	Essential Skills Tutor	2 Male 1 Female	ELB Response Principal (involved in establishment of project)
<b>B2</b>	Project Manager Essential Skills Tutor	Project Manager Construction Tutor IT Tutor	2 Male 2 Female	
<b>C1</b>	Vice-Principal	Vice-Principal Head of Careers Head of ICT	3 Female 1 Male	Project Officer for Consortium
<b>C2</b>	Principal	Principal	-	
<b>C3</b>	Principal	Principal Head of Careers	-	
<b>Stakeholders</b>		-	-	Careers Officer

## CHAPTER 4

### Statistical Analysis

#### 4.1 Identification of sample

The projects participating in the research were identified by the Department of Education as representative of the range of provision across the spectrum of Alternative Education Provision in Northern Ireland. It is therefore important to reiterate that the projects (and thus the young people), were not randomly selected.

Out of the three types of provision (community-based AEP, Training Organisation/School Partnerships and Key Stage 4 Flexibility), there were three community-based projects, two Training Organisation/School Partnerships and two KS4 Flexibility Initiative projects that participated. From each of these projects, all those young people who were in their final year of compulsory education in 2002/03 and 2003/04 were invited to take part in the study with the total initial sample being 318 (see Table 4a).

**Table 4a Sample by Project Type**

<b>Project Type</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>
Community-based AEP	Project A1	10
	Project A2	23
	Project A3	53
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>86</b>
School/Training Organisation Partnership	Project B1	60
	Project B2	59
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>119</b>
KS4 Flexibility	Project C1	33 ( <i>School 1</i> )
		23 ( <i>School 2</i> )
		43 ( <i>School 3</i> )
	Project C2	14
<b>Sub Total</b>		<b>113</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>318</b>

Unfortunately despite all attempts at maintaining the sample (see Chapter 1), but perhaps not unexpectedly, the attrition rate was high with the response

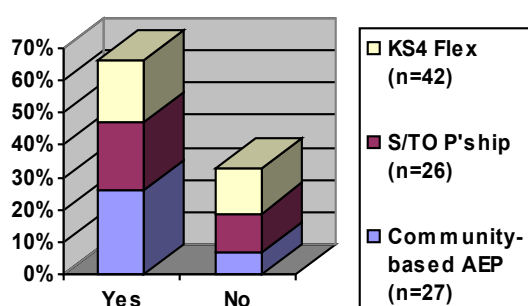
rate at Sweep 1 being 49%, dropping to 45% at Sweep 2 and falling further to 31% at Sweep 3.

Furthermore, there were difficulties in accessing data from some of the projects, including the limited records routinely collected by some of the provision, thus, the background data that it had been intended to gather was not always available. It therefore has only been possible to provide a profile of the sample on the basis of gender, type of originating school, type of project attended and qualifications on leaving AEP.

### **Pupil Profiles**

The figures illustrated below give some background information on the young people. Most of the respondents did leave the project with a qualification (ranging from Entry Level Qualifications to GCSE Grade A-C), however, those in community-based AEP were more likely to leave with a qualification. Seventy-eight per cent of young people left community-based AEP with a qualification, while only fifty-seven percent of Key Stage 4 Flexibility students achieved some level of certification on leaving AEP. Those who did leave KS4 Flexibility with a qualification were much more likely to achieve a Level 2 accreditation.

**Figure 4a Qualifications gained by project type**



We also considered the pattern of domicile of those interviewed. Those in KS4 Flexibility did have a greater chance of living with both parents (65%), with a higher percentage of young people in community-based AEP living with either one parent, alone or with a partner or other family member (71%).

Respondents were also asked to reflect on the reason as to why they joined AEP with the majority of KS4 Flexibility Initiative (80%) and Training Organisation/School Partnership (68%) students citing positive reasons for their referral including: gaining new skills and working towards more GCSEs. Those from community-based AEP felt negative experiences of school were the main reasons why they had been referred to AEP (55%).

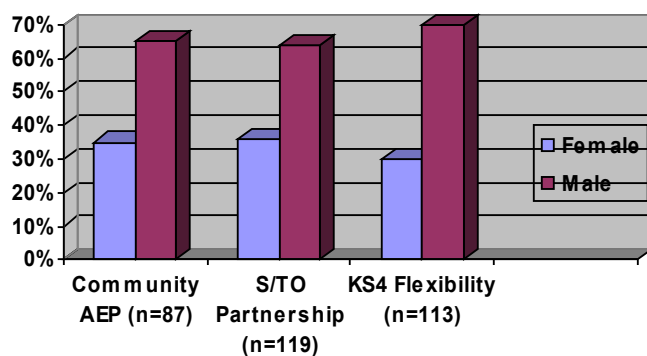
Participants at each stage were asked about their domicile, current educational or economic status, plans for the future but they were also asked to provide information about their spare time, their peer group and if they had had any contact with police, probation, social services or the careers service. Respondents were also asked to reflect about their experience in AEP at each time point.

## **4.2 Description of Cohort**

### **Gender**

Of the total cohort (n=318), the gender breakdown reflects a much higher instance of boys than girls with 211 (66%) males in the cohort and 107 (34%) females. As may be seen in Figure 4c, this male/female percentage split is reasonably consistent across project type and reflects local and national trends where boys are more likely to disengage from mainstream education than girls (e.g. Kilpatrick and Barr, 1999, Kendall et al. 2003).

### **Figure 4b Gender breakdown by project type**



### Originating School

Almost without exception, young people in both community-based and Training Organisation/School Partnership AEP are drawn from the secondary school sector and the KS4 Flexibility Initiatives involved in the research were all from within the secondary sector. Only one student originates from the grammar sector and a total of eight young people (3%) of the sample have previously attended a special school.

The sample reflects a greater number of young people from the maintained school sector but this is due to the skewed nature of the identified projects.

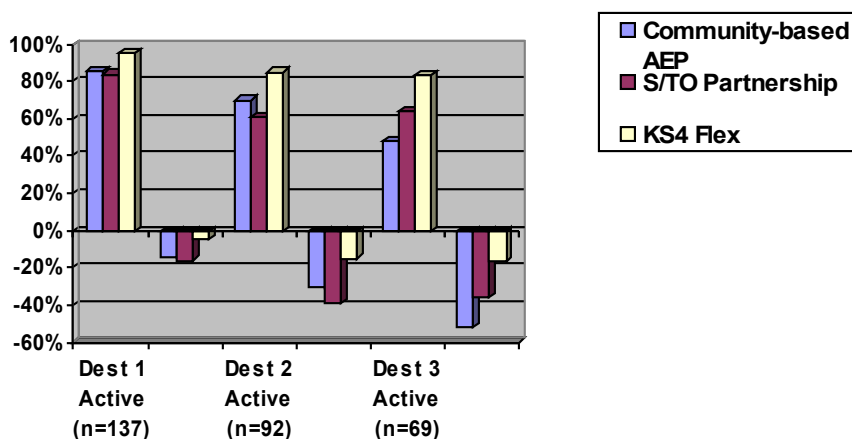
### 4.3 Destination of cohort

Data was collected at 6, 12 and 18 months post AEP. The following analysis reflects the destination of the respondents at each of these time points. For the purposes of this analysis, destination has been collapsed into two categories, Active (in education, training or employment) and Inactive (unemployed, full-time parent).

Six months after leaving AEP, well over three quarters of respondents were engaged in employment, training or further education. To illustrate destination to full effect, the Inactive category has been expressed as a negative value.

**Figure 4c Comparison of Destination 1, 2 & 3 by project type**





### Destination 1

Six months post AEP (see Figure 4c) those in KS4 Flexibility fare slightly better on outcome than their counterparts in both community-based AEP and Training Organisation/School Partnerships (see Figure 4g). However, it is important to restate that those in KS4 Flexibility are less likely to be disengaged from education (as measured by level of risk of exclusion) and also tend to come from more stable family structures that may be able to offer more family support.

The males and females in our sample have equal chance of being unemployed. There was a higher percentage of girls in education or training (49%), with a higher incidence of young men engaged in employment (47%).

### Destination 2

At Sweep 2, there has been an increase in those who are inactive (n=21), a percentage rise of 12 per cent.

At Destination 2 those young people who attended KS4 Flexibility continue to do best, and those emerging from Training Organisation/School Partnership AEP are more likely to be inactive 12 months post-AEP than those educated in community-based AEP.

The girls in the sample are still more likely to be inactive, 12 months after leaving AEP and this figure has now reached significance using a chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 10.974$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.004$ ). Again consideration must be given to

those young women who have become parents and may be unavailable for work.

### Destination 3

After 18 months of leaving AEP, there is a rise in young people's unemployment from 27 per cent to 32 per cent.

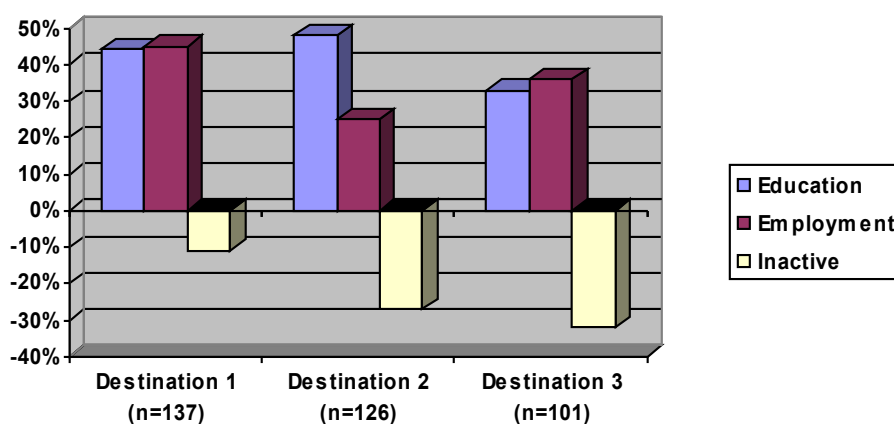
There is an increased chance of being active if the young person attended a School/Training Organisation Partnership.

By the final destination, there has been a slight increase in both young men and women in the sample being inactive (3 per cent increase in men, 5 per cent increase in women).

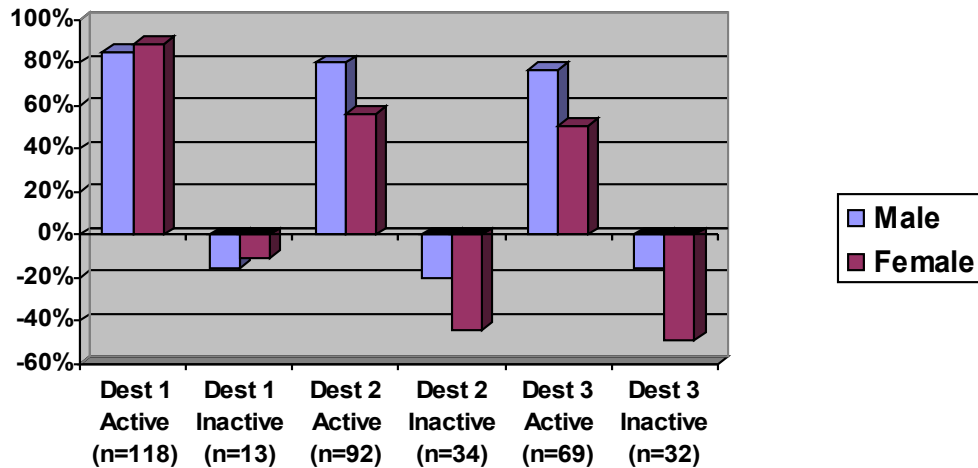
### Comparisons Across Three Destinations

Looking across the three destinations in Figure 4d it can be seen that there is an increase in inactivity at destination 3. However, when this is examined by gender (see Figure 4e) a different pattern for males and females can be identified. Over the three time points there is a substantial rise in inactivity for young women between destination 1 and 2, whereas, with the young men in the sample there is a small but gradual decrease in the number engaged in either employment, education or training.

**Figure 4d Comparison of Destination 1, 2 & 3**



**Figure 4e Comparison of Destination 1, 2 & 3 by gender**

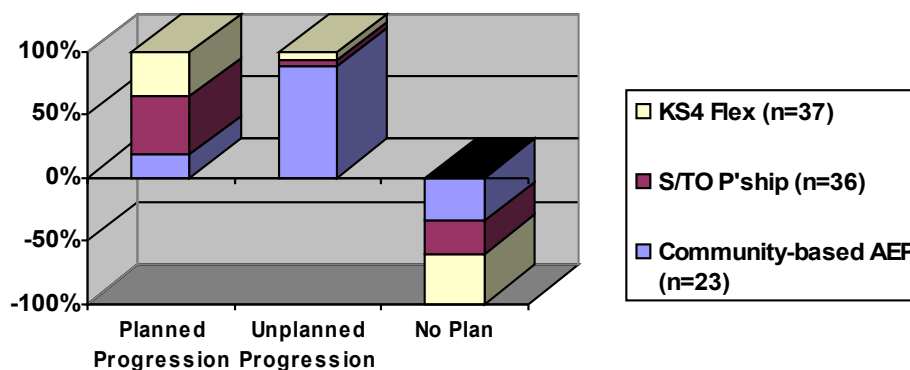


Finally, from Figure 4c it can be seen that across the three destination points there is a gradual increase in unemployment for those who attended either KS4 Flexibility or Community-based AEP projects. In contrast for those who attended Training Organisation/School Partnerships there is a slight reduction in unemployment between destination points 2 and 3.

### Hopes, Aspirations and Personal Agency

At the final contact point, respondents were asked to share their plans for the following six months and these were categorised for analysis as follows: *planned progression* (are continuing on their current career/education pathway and have a clear identified goal); *unplanned progression* (have decided to work towards entering FE, employment or training but are yet to select a course/job) and; *no plan* (have no plans or clear identified goal for the following 6 months). From Figure 4f, those from School/TO Partnerships appear to have a stronger notion of their career plan (67%), with Key Stage 4 faring less well (51% no plans). Those from community-based AEP appear to have a relatively positive approach and although have not formulated a clear route retain some level of optimism about working towards employment, education or further training (35% unplanned progression).

**Figure 4f Aspirations & plans by project type**



### Multivariate model

In addition to the bivariate analysis, we also examined the relationship between variables within a multivariate statistical model using a logistic regression technique. The statistical appendix at the end of the report gives details of the modelling undertaken.

This logistic regression model found that only one of the predictor variables was associated with a change in the odds of being inactive at destination 2/3. That variable was family support opinion. This finding suggests that outcome (i.e. inactive or active) is more dependent on the individual and the support they receive from family members than the different types of AEP provision provided. There was no significant difference between the different project types in terms of their impact on the young people's destination once individual characteristics and family support were controlled for.

Additional information provided by the descriptive statistics helps to illustrate further the findings of the logistic regression.

### Destination 3 by family support

Those young people who remained at home with both parents were more likely to be in education or employment than those who lived with one parent, other family members or had left the family home testing the significance with chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 14.044$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

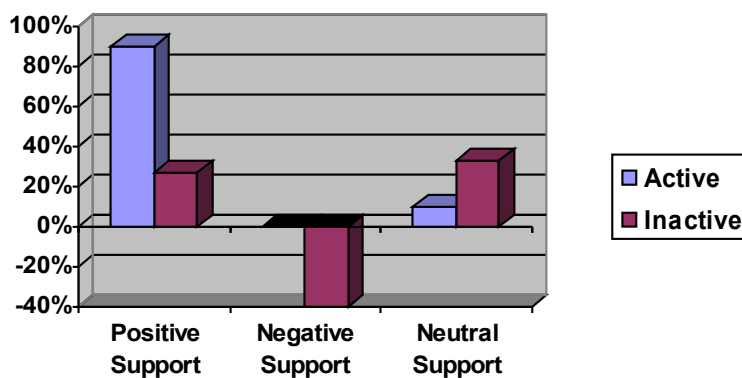
**Table 4c Destination 3 by family support domicile measure**

Destination	Domicile Both	Domicile Other	Total

	<b>parents</b>		
<b>Active</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Inactive</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>101</b>

Those young people who felt that their family supported their current position and had also offered them support since leaving AEP were also more likely to be active than inactive.

**Figure 4h Destination 3 by family support opinion measure**



### Key Points

- The type of AEP project attended is less important than the kind of family support (or replacement support) a young person feels is available to them.
- Evidence of personal agency enables a young person to develop a career pathway and may assist them to deal with barriers or obstacles along this personal journey.
- Young women's chances of being inactive increase with time which may be attributable to teenage pregnancy.
- Most young people leave AEP with a qualification but there is a question as to the value of non-GCSE qualifications upon labour market entry (See Chapter 3).
- Young people from community-based AEP are more likely to come from a dysfunctional family, with over 70% either living with a lone parent, other family member or in care.
- 18 months post-AEP, those from training organisation/school partnerships are more likely to have planned their career progression.

However, over half of those from Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative do not have any plans 18 months after leaving compulsory schooling.

- Perhaps unsurprisingly, Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative students report positive reasons for their referral onto the programme, whereas, most of those in community-based AEP had negative experiences of school which led to their entry in AEP.
- The chances of being inactive increase over time with 32% either unemployed or being a full-time parent after leaving AEP. Girls are significantly more likely to become inactive than the boys in the sample.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **The Case Studies**

#### **ON THE ROAD – Personal Journeys**

##### **5.1 Introduction to Case Studies**

This data collection technique was used to try and develop a deeper understanding of the profile and pathways of a sub-section of young people included in the study. The selection of respondents for the case study aspect of the research was made to attempt to reflect the range of provision in this study, i.e. community-based, school/training organisation partnership, and KS4 Flexibility Initiative. Invitations to participate were offered to those individuals who had successfully completed two telephone questionnaires, on the assumption that they were more likely to agree to take part than others who had not completed questionnaires. The peer researchers made telephone contact to those selected, and the details of those who agreed to participate (18 in total) have been recorded below later in this Chapter.

##### **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews for the case studies were held in a neutral venue mutually agreed with the participant and the peer researcher and lasted around one hour. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

Peer researchers were advised of contact telephone numbers of both the research team and agency support in case any areas of concern for them might be raised during the interviews, and an option of a debriefing was made available, following any such interview. Such contacts were made on a limited number of occasions to discuss points that the peer researcher found distressing.

##### **5.2 The Comparison Group**

Data gathered from the case study interviews was compared with data from a comparison group of respondents (n=12), identified following advice from the project Steering Group (see Chapter 1). Twelve young people were identified

for comparison. Nine of these attended Project D1, an ELB-provided facility for EOTAS; the other three had completed compulsory education and were attending a Pre-vocational Access Pilot programme (PVA) (identified where necessary as the D2 group).

Those attending the ELB-provided facility were invited to complete three questionnaires, and two of them were interviewed. The PVA group completed one questionnaire, face to face with the researcher.

### 5.3 Comparative Overview of Key Themes

We have made a comparison initially of the two groups according to the aspects of respondent domicile, qualifications obtained during AEP and status at the time of the final questionnaire, as the analysis reported in Chapter Four have found these to be important.

**Table 5a Comparative Overview**

NB We do not have full data for all respondents.

	<b>CASE STUDY GROUP</b>	<b>COMPARISON GROUP</b>
<b>DOMICILE</b>	<b>N = 18</b>	<b>N = 11</b>
Both Parents	6	2
One parent/other family member	7	6
Alone or with own child	4	3
Other (e.g. partner)	1	0
<b>QUALIFICATIONS GAINED AT AEP</b>	<b>N = 12</b>	<b>N = 7</b>
No Qualifications	1	3
Entry Level Qualification	0	1
Level 1	7	1
Level 2	4	2
<b>STATUS AT END OF RESEARCH</b>	<b>N = 15</b>	<b>N = 7</b>
In Education or Training	7	6
Employed	3	1
Unemployed	5	4



#### 5.4 Categorisation of the Case Study and Comparison Groups

In order to highlight the complexities of these young people's transitions out of school, the research team has chosen to categorise the case study and comparison group respondents by the nature of their pathway from school, through AEP, into their eventual destination, rather than by the type of AEP attended. We have grouped the respondents into three main pathways and we have named these:

1. ***'the Steady Pathway'***. This is the transition which, although not always smooth, demonstrates a productive progression from AEP, through the three questionnaire time points into adult life;
2. ***'the Bumpy Road'***. We have grouped into this pathway those young people whose transition has been more uneven in nature. While there have been periods of considerable difficulty, other more positive experiences were also evident and there is some evidence of the possibility of eventual success<sup>8</sup>. ; and,
3. ***'Too Steep to Climb'***. For this group of young people, outcomes have been almost universally negative. The obstacles with which they have been confronted have so far prevented them from moving forward into a productive adult life. To a considerable extent, they are already socially excluded.

This method for structuring the chapter was taken so as to highlight key themes identified through the statistical analysis of the whole cohort (see Chapter 4). These themes will be used as the basis of the structure for the analysis of case study and comparison group data. They include:

- the stability of domicile and the extent and nature of family support for the young person;
- the level of qualifications obtained during AEP, and for some, subsequently;
- the extent to which the young person has demonstrated either personal agency in their attitude, aspirations, motivation or exercise of choices

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<sup>8</sup> Success in the context of this research was used to define how much progress on a personal and/or career basis the young person has made during the time period of the research. This is not an easily quantifiable measure but nonetheless attempts to evaluate the level and range of progress an individual has made over the 18-month or 2-year period has been made and includes personal development as well as meeting goals and finding employment or training.

during transition, or resilience in the face of obstacles which have confronted them during this period; and,

- the final destination of the young person, approximately eighteen months after leaving their AEP project. For this theme, the subdivision used has been whether they were in education or training, in employment or unemployed.

Although largely separated from each other for the purposes of discussion and analysis, clearly these themes are closely interlinked in the real lives of the respondents.

The data obtained are very rich and clearly illuminate many of the difficulties which the respondents have had to address, often with little support from family or the wider system. Within each pathway of the groups, we have provided a brief vignette of each of the research participants, so as to give some overview of their development, and to give some sense of their varying baselines, circumstances and transitions. However, we do not feel that these convey enough of the power of their stories, including their attitudes, motivations, successes and the personal tragedies which some have had to confront. In order to give voice to these, we have, following the individual stories for each pathway, created a composite but fictional individual, using transcript material from different individuals within that pathway. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

## 5.5 Comparing the Pathways

**Table 5b The Case Study Group**

'STEADY PATHWAY'	'BUMPY ROAD'	'TOO STEEP TO CLIMB'
Case Study Respondents	Case Study Respondents	Case Study Respondents
Susan – KS4	Florence-CB	Michael-CB
Joanne-KS4	Darren-CB	Jon-CB
Catherine- KS4	James-CB	Heather-STO
Nathan – KS4	Chris-STO	
Caroline-CB	Eve-STO	
Niamh-CB		
Dominic- STO		
Nick-STO		
Kelly-STO		
Neville-STO		

KS4 Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative  
 CB Community-Based AEP Provision  
 STO School/Training Organisation AEP Provision

**Table 5c The Comparison Group**

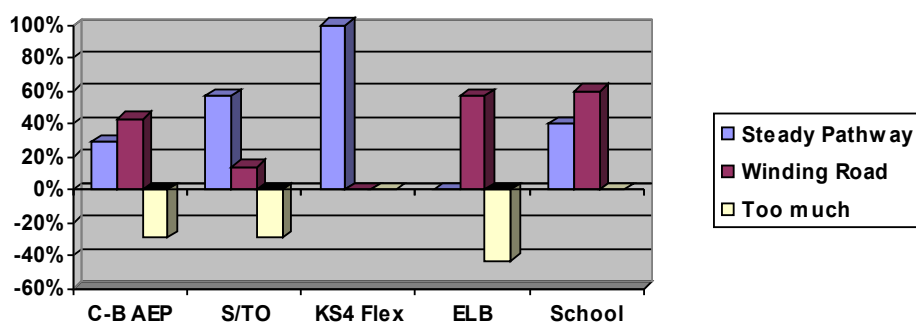
'STEADY PATHWAY'	'BUMPY ROAD'	'TOO STEEP TO CLIMB'
William (completed school)	Terri (EOTAS)	Sophie (EOTAS)
Tom (completed school)	Patrick (EOTAS)	Mary (EOTAS)
	Fleur (EOTAS)	Gerard (EOTAS)
	Jess (EOTAS)	Andy (EOTAS)
	Peter (EOTAS)	
	Kevin (completed school)	

All participants, except William, Tom and Kevin, attended an ELB-provided EOTAS facility. These other three were involved in PVA training, having completed compulsory education.

**Table 5d Pathways by project type**

Pathway	C-B AEP ( <i>case Studies</i> )	S/TO ( <i>case Studies</i> )	KS4 Flex ( <i>case Studies</i> )	ELB Resp ( <i>compariso n group</i> )	Completed compulsory schooling ( <i>compariso n group</i> )	Total - n
Steady Pathway	2	4	4	0	2	12
Bumpy Road	3	2	0	5	1	11
Too steep to climb	2	1	0	4	0	7
Total	7	7	4	9	3	18

**Figure 5a Pathways by project type**



Some analysis was also carried out comparing the pathways of those young people included in the case studies and the comparison group. Using a Kruskal Wallis non-parametric test, the pathways varied significantly between each type of AEP provision ( $\chi^2 = 9.836$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < 0.043$ ). Those included in the control group educated in the Education and Library Board's AEP response were more likely to be on the Bumpy Road pathway or that which is found to be 'Too Steep to Climb'.

## 5.6 THE RESPONDENTS

### 5.6.1 The 'Steady Pathway'

Within this group, certain similarities occur. A greater percentage of these participants, compared with those on the other two pathways, live in a fairly stable family situation and have had family support for their choices. Many have a reasonably positive view of their compulsory schooling although some complained about teacher inflexibility and being bullied. Most also valued their AEP provision (where appropriate), and more than ninety percent of those for whom there is data achieved Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications within AEP. While there is some variation in their degree of choice about entering AEP (except William and Tom), most also have made positive choices about their transitions. None was unemployed at the time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> questionnaire and all have a clear idea about their desired futures.

#### Susan

Susan lives at home with her parents, both of whom are unemployed. She participated in the 14+ programme, obtaining 1 GCSE and three WJEC

qualifications, while attending the local FE College 2 days a week in Year 11 and Year 12. She is now in FE, studying beauty and hairdressing in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year, having completed NVQ Level 2 in June 05. Susan intends to stay at College for another year to NVQ Level 3 and is committed to this career pathway.

### **Joanne**

Joanne lives in a lone parent family, with her mother and her younger sister. She undertook the KS4 Flexibility Initiative (KS4FI), and has followed her chosen option of Catering ever since. She has obtained City & Guilds qualifications and is currently an FE student, studying for an NVQ Level 2 in Catering and Hospitality. She intends to pursue this career, preferably within the company in which she is undertaking work experience.

### **Catherine**

Catherine lives at home with her mother, who works full-time. In KS4FI, she pursued the health and beauty course and achieved Level 1 accreditation. She felt that it was worthwhile and helped her to identify a career area. She is now studying in FE at Level 3 Hairdressing, directly as a result of her 14+ programme and is clear about her intention to pursue this career, preferably in the short-term in the company where she is undertaking her placement. Her ambition is to have her own salon within five years.

### **Nathan**

Nathan lives at home with his father, mother and brothers. Both parents are employed; his father is a farmer and his mother works in a nursing home. He undertook a KS4FI and has continued to follow the same vocational option in Joinery since leaving school. His younger brothers are in Year 10 at present, and are considering whether to join the Flexibility Programme. He expects his long-term career to be in farming, but is clear about the value of his vocational qualifications, both in supporting his farm work, but also as a fall-back career, if required.

### **Caroline**

Caroline lives with her mother who is unemployed. She self-excluded from school and was referred to a community-based project with limited support from her school. She is currently working towards NVQ Level 1 in Hairdressing at a local FE College and intends to pursue this career.

### **Niamh**

Niamh now lives alone. She self-excluded from school. She gained a Level 1 qualification at community-based AEP and has been working full-time since then. She has enjoyed her job and has now been awarded some level of responsibility.

**Dominic** lives with parents who are both employed. He has continued down the vocational path he sampled whilst on School/Training Organisation (STO) AEP. He has reached his goals and has achieved NVQ Level 2 in Joinery and is now working towards Level 3.

**Nick** lives with both parents (mother employed). He was introduced to Joinery at his STO AEP, and has been studying and working in the construction industry since leaving AEP. He enjoys his job and hopes to have his own business in 5 years time.

**Kelly** lives with both parents, who are full-time carers. She was in and out of school with periods of ill health and as a result was placed in AEP. She didn't fit in and found it of little value to her, preferring instead to concentrate on her part-time job in a local pharmacy which gave her much satisfaction. She chose to leave AEP early to work full-time, and has continued in this employment throughout the period of research.

**Neville's** resilience has enabled him to surmount enormous obstacles to reach his present situation. He spent some time in both residential care and assisted living. He has a difficult relationship with his parents, has attempted suicide a number of times but has now managed to move from unemployment in the immediate post- STO AEP back to study in FE for a First Diploma in IT.

**William** (comparison group member) lives with his mother who is unemployed. He completed compulsory school, was subsequently in several training programmes (IT and Catering). He is now involved in the Pre-vocational Access Pilot programme (PVA), working towards a Literacy and Numeracy ELQ, with the encouragement of his mother.

**Tom** (comparison group member) lives with his mother who is unemployed. He completed compulsory schooling, where he achieved 1 GCSE at grade A\*-C, and 5 at grades D-G. He subsequently started a plumbing course in FE, but left when unable to obtain a placement. He was then unemployed before joining the PVA pilot scheme, working towards Literacy and Numeracy. He hopes to begin a joinery placement in the near future and obtain relevant qualifications.

### **The Composite ‘Steady Pathway’ Respondent**

#### **Marion**

Marion continued to attend school until aged 16, but during KS4 took part in the Flexibility Initiative. No stigma was considered to attach to this, nor did she view it as alternative education; the option to take part was presented by school staff as providing a more appropriate curriculum, with extended opportunities to study for some GCSEs alongside vocational training two days a week at the local FE college. Following discussions with her parents and school staff, she chose to study for a Level 1 qualification in Childcare. This was not her first choice; she had hoped to work at mechanics, but as a girl was not allowed to do so.

On the whole, Marion enjoyed school,

*I got on well with them there so I did.*

However, she felt that certain teachers were unwilling to provide her with necessary individualised learning support, especially in Maths.

*They didn't explain nothing hardly, yet half the time you just read stuff and were supposed to do it and then if you asked, sometimes it was a rowing match or something because you've already been told what to do, but sometimes I need extra help and shown specifically what to do and that.*

At the FE college, relationships with staff were generally much more relaxed and more positive. Marion reported experiencing a renewed interest in learning at the FE College and considered the teachers in FE to be more stimulating, approachable and able. The FE teaching environment was interpreted as being less based around negative discipline. She found teachers to be more supportive, and approachable,

*'No, the teachers tried to make it as easy as possible as they could, so they could, the easiest way to get around it you know.' 'They showed you it and if you were ever getting stuck or anything you could ask them for any help, or they would have come and helped you*

She enjoyed the learning experience more than she had at school, and explained,

*it was different kind of atmosphere and kind of things about it, the teachers nearly wanted to be in on it too kind of thing you know, so if there was any fun or anything the teachers were in on it too. School wasn't really that... teachers would have stepped in and put you on detention or something*

While in AEP, Marion also took 4 GCSEs and '*done brave 'n' well at them*'.

Marion feels that she has gained a lot from the programme, she has a clear idea of which career she wants and she has developed a range of practical skills as well. Her parents are very supportive of her choice to follow 14+,



*My mum thinks I have done very well, I've passed my Level 1 and I only have a couple of months to pass my Level 2. The book work, I am doing very well in it and she thinks I have done very well.*

In retrospect, she now has some regrets about joining the KS4FI programme as she feels that it did limit her potential to achieve more GCSEs,

*I wish I did stay at school to do all my subjects because I have only got 4 GCSEs and I would need the other ones to get a better job and better grades in here and all.*

She has a clear sense of what she aspires to. She is still in FE, has completed NVQ Level 2 in Childcare and is now working towards Level 3. In addition, she does plan to take night classes and study for more GCSEs,

*But I will get them in here (in FE). They do night classes, they do maths and English GCSEs, if you didn't get at school or that.*

The attendance at College has obviously opened up the potential for her to explore learning post-16 and consider her achievement to date. In addition to her formal qualifications, Marion regards her KS4FI as fostering her personal development perspective.

*I think I got a lot more confidence out of it because I'm not really a positive person and it helped me choose which course and GCSEs and that, that I wanted to go on and do.*

### **5.6.2 The 'Bumpy Road'**

The young people grouped under this heading exhibit some positive characteristics and most have had some experience of education, training or working life. Many have good relations with their families, and enjoy some family support although others have lived in care. However they are less likely to have achieved formal qualifications while in AEP, and in spite of exhibiting

some resilience at times, have not always been able to follow a clear progression into adult and working life. Three of the young women have abandoned study or work as a result of pregnancy, although not all intend to remain as full-time mothers in the long-term. Many are still hopeful of gaining qualifications and achieving careers in their chosen field, although some are not sure of how to go about this and seem to lack personal agency. Few have had any formal careers guidance since leaving school/AEP and it is not clear that all will move successfully into adult life and work.

**Darren** lives with both parents, who are both employed. He was excluded from school and attended CB AEP. Post-16 he undertook a web design course, then studied for a Level 2 qualification in FE. However, most recently he has been unemployed.

**James** now lives with his girlfriend after spending some time in care with a relative. He self-excluded from school and achieved a Level 1 qualification in CB AEP. He has aspirations to become a social worker, perhaps with young offenders and undertook a course in Business Administration in attempt to gain entry to a relevant university course of study. However, most recently, he was unemployed.

**Florence** lives with her mother who is unemployed. She self-excluded from school and gained a Level 2 qualification in CB AEP. She is a talented sportswoman and enjoys volunteering at her local sports club. A year after leaving AEP she was enrolled on a Sports Diploma course in FE, but is now unemployed.

**Chris** is living alone in assisted accommodation after living in care for some time. His attendance at STO AEP was mandated by court order. He has experienced periods of depression, drug use and mental ill health. He was enrolled on Level 1 Horticulture programme post-16 and had a period of extended occupation through a volunteer programme but he terminated this after feeling bullied. He is currently unemployed but would like to obtain further employment in horticulture.

**Eve** now lives with her mother and her own child. She joined an STO AEP course and studied for a Level 1 qualification in Administration, but left early as she wanted to study Childcare. She continued these studies post-16, but then left to be a full-time mum. Her aspiration is to return to FE, with the eventual goal of qualifying as a beauty therapist. With her mother's support, she has been exploring the possibility of enrolling on an FE night class.

**Terri** (comparison group member) now lives with her child. She attended ELB provision at D1, and is now in full-time employment, although she has not undertaken any qualifications since leaving school. She does not enjoy her job, but has not had any careers advice and has no aspirations for the short, or longer term. Her family would like her to 'do better'.

**Fleur** (comparison group member) now lives alone with her child. She attended ELB provision at D1 and gained 1 GCSE. Early work experience as a nurse which helped her to decide that it was not a suitable career. Although initially unemployed, she started an NVQ in Painting & Decorating through JobSkills, and would like eventually to be a qualified interior designer. Her family is very supportive of her ambitions. There is no information about her status at the time of the third questionnaire.

**Jess** (comparison group member) lives with her mother, who is supportive. She attended ELB provision at D1 and was unemployed post-16 and has been on a probation order for 9 months. However, she is now enrolled on an NVQ Level 1 in IT. She would like to complete her Level 1 and progress to Level 2 and hopes for a good job subsequently.

**Peter** (comparison group member) lives with his mother who is unemployed, but supportive of him. He was suspended from his grammar school a number of times in 3<sup>rd</sup> year before being excluded. He was referred to D1 but did not attend until obliged to by a court order 2 weeks before the end of compulsory schooling (almost 2 years after expulsion). He left school without any qualifications. Immediately post-16, he was in a young offenders centre

serving a 4 month sentence for burglary and was then unemployed. However he is now in the PVA pilot scheme and is working towards entry level qualifications in Literacy & Numeracy. He then wants to take exams in forklift operation & find a job but has no specific long-term plans.

**Kevin** (comparison group member) lives with his grandparents who are both retired and supportive of his activities. He enjoyed school & completed compulsory schooling, where he achieved 3 GCSEs grade D-G, CLAIT & RE Diocese Exam. He thought it would be easy to find a job on leaving school, but was unemployed for some time before starting on the PVA pilot where he feels that he is working hard. He would like to progress to NVQ Level 2 in Catering and be either a chef in 5 years time.

**Patrick** (comparison group member) lives with mother and 7 siblings. His mother is a full-time home-maker. He was excluded from school 3 times, then had some group tuition in Literacy and Numeracy. Initially he worked with his uncle in a family business. Currently he is involved in the PVA pilot, which he enjoys and hopes will help him to get work as a mechanic eventually. There is friction with his mother who does not support his PVA involvement, but would like him to look for work immediately.

### **The Composite ‘Bumpy Road’ Respondent**

#### **Ciaran**

Ciaran’s father died as a result of an accident when Ciaran and his siblings were very young. His mother subsequently remarried but the children were removed from the family home by Social Services amid accusations that his stepfather had assaulted his sister. They then lived with their grandmother, and Ciaran has recently moved in with his girlfriend. Ciaran regards his grandmother as his primary carer, and has a strong relationship with her.

Secondary school proved to be a challenging time for Ciaran. His school had an unhappy environment, created, he believed, as a result of demographic decline. Teachers seemed to have very low expectations of the pupils and relationships were very poor.

*they wanted rid of us and they knew they couldn't get rid of us, they treated us like dirt from the start*

He had a history of multiple suspensions, with 22 suspensions before he was finally excluded. Although then placed in another school, he was soon excluded from there as well. Although a regular attender when not suspended, he was unable to control his behaviour in class. He did also feel, however, that this was exacerbated by the attitude of some teachers, who seemed to have expectations of him as a trouble-maker,

*if you do something wrong once, you always get the blame of it, no matter what. Mud sticks.*

He also felt that his school made little effort to help him resolve his behaviour problems, but simply resorted to suspension.

*they used to just suspend you .... rather than sit down and find out what the problem was.*

Following exclusion from school, he was referred to a community-based AEP project, where he settled in well. His grandmother supported his move into AEP,

*She thought it suited me because I work better in a smaller close group. She thought it was just brilliant ... and saw a big change in me when I started (there).*

He valued the staff there and respected their approach to classroom management,

*there were times when we would all take the piss, we were all troubled kids, we would all want our own way, you know what I*

*mean, it was difficult at the start. They would be strict until we settled down and once we did, like, it was great.*

He felt that the staff really listened to, and respected, the young people who attended the project and he enjoyed the more relaxed atmosphere generated there. He felt that they worked and played hard.

*It wasn't the work, just more help with the work. If it was put down in front of you, if the same work was put down in front of you in school you probably wouldn't do it, well I know I wouldn't. But with them ones there they talk you through it and they give you the help*

In addition, the project he attended places great importance on assisting young people to progress to employment or training post-compulsory schooling and staff often accompany young people to assist them to enrol on a course where possible. Ciaran enjoyed a productive work placement whilst still on AEP, and hoped, on leaving that he would be able to continue this placement in parallel with a course in plumbing which would allow him eventually to be self-employed.

He spoke glowingly of the positive nature of his placement.

*I loved it there and I was trusted, I was trusted there. They give me the keys to their shop and I opened and closed and I was trusted there, if there was any money I was trusted and it doesn't matter whether people's looking over your shoulder. Because I was there and I opened the shop and all and sorted their customers out...*

However, his long-term placement came to an end and he was not offered employment. Rather depressed, he dropped out of his FE course and he has not worked since. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and made a suicide attempt earlier this year by taking an overdose. Ciaran chose not to participate in the final interview perhaps because he has had a further setback since he last spoke to us.

Until these setbacks, Ciaran showed a focus for a particular career area and had taken some positive, practical steps towards achieving his goals, both through his placement and enrolment on his FE course. He was also very clear about the value of his community-based AEP, and its positive effects on his life and prospects,

*I have gained a lot...If this hadn't happened me a couple of years ago I wouldn't be where I am now. You learn a lot, it really calms you down...like if you have a problem, you try and sort it out, you know what I mean. Definitely it has changed me, it has changed everything.*

However, in spite of his grandmother's support, he does not seem to have enjoyed a level of resilience which would have enabled him to confront the setbacks which he has had to deal with. At present, as far as is known, he has not been able to find a way through these, in spite of having a reasonably focused aspiration and an understanding of what will be required of him in order to achieve this.

### **5.6.3 'Too Steep to Climb'**

The young people grouped under this heading have had largely negative experiences in their lives to date. Few have had informed family support, and some have almost no positive relationship with family members. Their school careers were unsuccessful and none was able to reverse this trend while in AEP/EOTAS. Few enjoyed or felt that they benefited from AEP and none achieved any qualification higher than Entry Level. All three of the young women in this group have either suffered accidents or become pregnant, leaving them unable or unwilling to undertake further training. Following AEP, without advice from families or from the Careers service, most members of the group have been unemployed throughout the period of the research and cannot aspire to a better future. Without personal and system support they

seem lost, unaware of how to seek help and lacking any personal agency to pursue this.

### **Michael**

Michael has been living alone in Housing Executive accommodation from the age of 16. Both his parents and his older sister are unemployed. He attended CB AEP, was subsequently unemployed, but more recently obtained employment in a fast food outlet. He likes motorcycles and cars. There is no information about his status at the time of the third questionnaire.

### **Jon**

Jon lives with his mother, who is unemployed, and his siblings. His mother insisted that he attend CB AEP, but he did not obtain any qualifications. He has been unemployed on the occasions when contact was made and he has not expressed any clear career ambitions.

**Heather** lives with her mother, who has employment in the NHS. She was referred to an STO AEP by an EWO and was working towards a Level 1 qualification. Post-16 she had been working part-time and had enrolled on a Hairdressing training programme when she was injured in a car accident. She has been unable to work on grounds of ill health since. She intends to return to her training course once she is declared fit for work, hopefully in a year's time.

**Sophie** (comparison group member) now lives with her child. She was unsettled at school and was suspended frequently. She attended D1 AEP and gained an Entry Level Qualification there. Work experience in hairdressing has made her wish to continue in a career as a beautician, however she has been unemployed since leaving school, looking after her child. Her family is disappointed that she is not in employment.

**Mary** (comparison group member) lives alone. She attended D1 AEP and studied for an ELQ, but has been unemployed since leaving AEP. She is



unaware of her family's views about her situation, and has had no Careers advice but hopes for a career in IT. She is currently pregnant.

**Gerard** (comparison group member) lives with one of his parents. He attended D1 AEP, but is still illiterate and has been unable to obtain employment since leaving AEP. He has had no Careers advice, and does not expect to progress into work.

**Andy** (comparison group member) lives with both parents. He attended ELB provision at D1, and took a course in bartending but is now unemployed. He would like bar work, but cannot find a job without experience. Although he had some advice from a Careers Officer, his family has little interest in his activities or choices.

### **The Composite 'Too Steep to Climb' Respondent**

#### **Anthony**

Anthony has been living alone since the age of sixteen. Although he has contact with his mother and younger siblings, his father abandoned the family when Anthony was very young. His dad has since re-married and there is now some contact between father and son, but Anthony has been deeply affected by the break down of his parents' marriage and the subsequent separation from his father. He dislikes his stepmother, although he is now attempting to understand his father's situation.

*(nobody can) take the pain, the hurt away that it caused me, it's still there like it's never goin' to go away...at primary school too they used to go making cars with their da and I was just sitting there thinking what the hell am I sitting here*

*I hate her...Because I think she stouled my daddy away from me like. But that's me being stupid as well. Daddy married her because he likes her and...But I, I don't like hating people.*

Anthony was diagnosed with dyslexia in primary school and was supposed to receive further support once reaching secondary school but despite enquiries made by his mother, this was never received. He was a victim of bullying at secondary school from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year. One day he physically retaliated against his bully and was suspended for fighting. He did not discuss the bullying with his teachers and experienced some difficulty with authority at school and received subsequent suspensions. He started to truant in 3<sup>rd</sup> year with most of his friends and was excluded from school and felt that the teachers at school were 'assholes'. He had a satisfactory relationship with his classmates at school but he did not attend school on a regular basis, around 50% attendance rate. His main difficulty in mainstream school was fighting with the teachers.

He was eventually referred to community-based AEP although he wasn't sure how his family felt about him participating on the programme – it was not something that he had ever discussed with them. Nor was he consulted by his social worker; he was simply instructed to attend the following week. He did feel that there was some stigma attached to attending the programme,

*Everyone wanted to know why I was going there like, they were like, most of the people did think that you were stupid because you were put down there.*

Anthony has extremely unhappy memories of his time in alternative education

*A waste of time, I didn't learn nothing, it was a doss...Everybody just sat about, it was awful...you weren't asked to do anything, they let you make the choice, the teacher didn't say 'sit you down there and get that done.*

He also disliked the environment and fabric of the building,

*Another thing too, everyone smoked and I hate smoking. I cannae stand it and in the breaks, every 15 minutes people were going down for a fag break.*

*...it was dirty, see the classrooms and everything was stinkin', and there were rats in the office.*

He felt that each day's activities were a waste of time, with no focus on learning

*We didn't do nothin', see we didn't open a file or anything, it would just be empty, we didn't do nothin', all they done was, there was a pool table downstairs where the kitchen was and you were allowed to go down and play pool. And we would just get up and go down and play pool and the wee girls just sat about and talked, nobody never done anything.*

*I was never even once asked to bring a pen with me, not even that, a file, a pen, paper, never once was I asked, nothin' or even go to the house to study for something because there was nothin' to study for because you were learning nothin'*

Anthony did not have good relations with the staff in AEP. He did however have some empathy with the difficulties that the teachers faced,

*I know it was hard on the teachers as well, that's why [teacher] did start to crack up and curse because it's hard on him, what do you expect, you're going to crack up and if you did try to teach us something, some of the fellas were like 'F off, we're away to do this' and just walked out. You just couldn't stop them.*

*Good? No good stuff here. Bad? Everything. Tell them not to go near it.*

Anthony felt as negative towards AEP as he had done about school.

*Both the same; shi'*

In his mid-teens, after attempting suicide, he was admitted for a short period to a mental health unit and was placed with male adults which he found very frightening,

*I was scared like, cos there was big grown men around me. I was only about 15. When you see people around you of that age, you'd just, you'd be worried. You know at night, I couldn't sleep because I thought one of these'uns is going to come in and attack me. It was scary.*

Anthony has been unemployed since leaving AEP. At interviews he was unable to specify any aspirations at all for his future career, employment or lifestyle. Partly, this may have been due to lack of access to work experience and vocational sampling while attending his community-based project. Many of the AEP projects do report difficulty in securing work experience placements for their students, attributed to employers' stigmatization of these young people, or to restrictions on staff time. Nor does Anthony know where to access careers advice to assist him with moving forward. He continues to live alone.

Reflecting on AEP, Anthony doesn't think that it has helped him because he does not have any GCSE qualifications,

*Don't think it has done anything, I don't think I got anything out of it to be honest...cos everywhere you might go to today, they ask for GCSEs and we didn't do them down there.*

## **5.7 DISCUSSION**

This description and analysis of the case study and comparison groups does, we believe, highlight very powerfully the complexity of the issues around creating effective provision for young people who opt out of, or are excluded from school before the compulsory leaving age. All of our research participants had had, at an early age, to deal with failure in their lives, sometimes failure in family relations, as well as failure at school. None of these young people, for a variety of reasons, has had a really good start, although the experiences of those case study young people who attended KS4 Flexibility Initiative, suggests that, for them, development was perceived as relatively straightforward, and no stigma was attached to such provision. Also, they seem to have benefited from the security of remaining in their school, among existing friends. It seems notable that half of those grouped in the 'Steady Pathway', continued in their own school until aged 16; only one such young person did not display some characteristics of a relatively straightforward transition. It is striking that none of the five girls who have withdrawn from education/training or and labour market due to pregnancy are grouped in this first pathway. Retention within school does therefore appear to convey considerable benefit to young people. However, it is also clear that, for the respondents grouped elsewhere, aspects of school life seem to exert a considerable 'push' factor in their move into AEP, and there is little coordination between the services which are supposed to support young people to remain in school.

For most of the others, however, failure in some aspect of their connection with school seems to have rendered them much more vulnerable, especially those whose family connections were absent, or negative in some way. While most who attended community-based and school/training organisation partnership AEP enjoyed this better than school, and gained some qualifications, it is clear from their stories that some understood the implications of the lack of access to a full range of GCSEs, as well as the limitations put on their experiences due to the lack of facilities, staff expertise and limited curriculum opportunities in their projects. These are issues which

need to be addressed. However, although the community-based projects are resourced most uncertainly, have the most restricted curricula and facilities, and include some of the most vulnerable young people, it seems, from the transitions of the seven young respondents who attended these, that the projects' emphasis on personal development and life skills can have some very beneficial effects, in that only two of this group fell into our category of 'Too Steep to Climb', exhibiting little progress into adult life. It also seems noteworthy to us that of the comparison group of twelve, two of the three who remained in school until compulsory leaving age, could be categorised as being in the 'Steady Pathway'.

It is also a cause for concern that there seems to be little or no coherent external programme of support for these young people in dealing with the setbacks which seemed to be almost routine in many of their lives. For some, a good relationship with a teacher or lecturer could be productive in accessing some guidance, and for others family support was available. However, much of this family support seems to have been reasonably uninformed; given the instability of some of the families it is unlikely that there will have much social or cultural capital on which families can draw when trying to deal with schools, colleges, social services and the like. It may be unrealistic to expect that family support, where it exists, will on its own be adequate to ease the transitions for these vulnerable young people. This too is a factor which needs to be addressed. Most striking too is the almost complete absence of any formal support from Careers advisors, or other agencies once the young people have left AEP, even in the face of extreme difficulties. It is evident that a much greater coherence is needed in the provision of support from schools, colleges, counselling, employment and social services.

### **Key points**

- Using case studies as a data collection technique was a valuable method of drawing rich material for analysis. It gave the peer researchers an opportunity to gain trust and understanding thus enabling the participants to share their experiences.

- The case studies were an important tool in order to extract the complexity and at times tragic nature of the experiences which had led to disengagement from learning in mainstream education for many of the young people.
- Schools do not appear to be informed of or equipped to deal with the range of problems some young people are presenting in post-primary education resulting in some students feeling pushed out and deliberately excluded.
- Many young people leaving AEP do not have any additional support to assist them to reintegrate into education or vocational training. This may result in further isolation.
- Students are often disappointed with the quality of qualifications obtained while on AEP which they believe are not rated by employers.

## Case Study Respondents: Summary of Trajectories:

Source: Questionnaire and Interview Data

<i>Name</i>	<i>Pattern of Domicile</i>	<i>Parental Employment Status</i>	<i>School type*</i>	<i>Referral Reason</i>	<i>Project Type Referred</i>	<i>Qualification level** gained on AEP</i>	<i>Destination 1</i>	<i>Destination 2</i>	<i>Destination 3</i>
<b>James</b>	Grandparent ↓ Partner	Father <i>Deceased</i>	SM	Self excluding from school	Community-based AEP	Level 1	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Business Administration</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Business Administration</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT
<b>Niamh</b>	Alone	Father <i>Taxi Driver</i>  Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SC	Self excluding from school	Community-based AEP	Level 1	EMPLOYMENT	EMPLOYMENT	EMPLOYMENT
<b>Caroline</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SM	Self excluding from school	Community-based AEP	-	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Hairdressing</i>		EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Hairdressing</i>
<b>Florence</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SM	Self excluding from school	Community-based AEP	Level 2		EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Diploma in Sport &amp; part-time work</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT
<b>Chris</b>	Residential care ↓ Alone	Father <i>Prison</i>	SM	Court order	School/TO Partnership	Don't know	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Horticulture</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Horticulture</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT
<b>Kelly</b>	Both parents	Father & Mother <i>Full time carers for</i>	SM	Ill health	School/TO Partnership	None	EMPLOYMENT <i>Pharmacy Assistant</i>	EMPLOYMENT <i>Pharmacy Assistant</i>	EMPLOYMENT <i>Pharmacy Assistant</i>



		<i>dependent</i>							
<b>Neville</b>	Residential care ↓ One parent ↓ Alone	Mother <i>Full-time employment</i>	SM	Self excluding from school	School/TO Partnership	Level 1	UNEMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 IT</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>First Diploma in IT</i>
<b>Susan</b>	Both parents	Father <i>Unemployed</i>  Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SC	Self referral from information provided by school	KS4	Level 2	EMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Catering</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L3 Catering</i>
<b>Catherine</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Full-time employment</i>	SC	Referred by school	KS4	Level 1	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Hairdressing</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L3 Hairdressing</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L3 Hairdressing</i>
<b>Joanne</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Food processing plant operative</i>	SC	Gain new skills	KS4	Level 2	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2Catering</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2Catering</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Catering</i>
<b>Jon</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SC	Parent made me	Community-based AEP	-	UNEMPLOYMENT	UNEMPLOYMENT	MISSING
<b>Michael</b>	Alone	Father <i>Unemployed</i>  Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SI	Don't know	Community-based AEP	-	UNEMPLOYMENT	EMPLOYMENT <i>Fast Food Outlet</i>	MISSING
<b>Dominic</b>	Both parents	Father <i>Barman</i>  Mother <i>Cleaner</i>	SM		School/TO Partnership	-		EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Joinery</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L3 joinery</i>
<b>Darren</b>	Both parents	Father <i>Civil servant</i>	SC	Excluded from school	Community-based AEP	-	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Web design course</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 IT</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT

		Mother <i>Civil servant</i>							
<b>Eve</b>	One parent ↓ One parent & own child	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SM	Gain new skills	School/T O Partnershi p	Level 1	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Childcare</i>	UNEMPLOYM ENT <i>Full-time Parent</i>	UNEMPLOYMEN T <i>Full-time Parent</i>
<b>Heather</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Hospital employee</i>	SM	Referred by EWO	School/T O Partnershi p	Level 1	UNEMPLOYMEN T <i>Unavailable for work on grounds of ill health</i>	UNEMPLOYM ENT <i>Unavailable for work on grounds of ill health</i>	UNEMPLOYMEN T <i>Unavailable for work on grounds of ill health</i>
<b>Nathan</b>	Both parents	Father <i>Farmer</i>  Mother <i>Care assistant</i>	SC	Gain new skills	KS4	Level 2	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Joinery</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Joinery</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Joinery</i>
<b>Nick</b>	Both parents	Father <i>Unemployed (ill health)</i>  Mother <i>Nurse</i>	SM	Gain new skills	School/T O Partnershi p	Level 1	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L1 Joinery</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ L2 Joinery</i>	EMPLOYMENT <i>Joiner</i>

\* **School type** SM *Secondary Maintained*  
CM *Secondary Controlled*

*Grades D-G)*  
*Framework*

*Grades A\*-C)*

SI *Secondary Integrated*

\*\* **Qualification level** Level 1 *Level 1 in National Qualification Framework*

*(equivalent to Level 1 Certificate, NVQ Level 1 or GCSE*

Level 2 *Level 2 in National Qualification*

*(equivalent to Level 2 Diploma, NVQ Level 2 or GCSE*

## COMPARISON GROUP: SUMMARY OF TRAJECTORIES:

Source: Questionnaire and Interview Data

<i>Name</i>	<i>Pattern of Domicile</i>	<i>Parental Employment Status</i>	<i>School type*</i>	<i>Referral Reason</i>	<i>Project Type Referred</i>	<i>Qualification level** gained on AEP</i>	<i>Destination 1</i>	<i>Destination 2</i>	<i>Destination 3</i>
<i>Sophie</i>	Both Parents ↓ with child	Father <i>Unemployed</i>  Mother <i>Employed</i>	SM	Excluded from school	ELB Provision	Entry Level	INACTIVE <i>Full-time Parent</i>	INACTIVE <i>Full-time Parent</i>	INACTIVE <i>Full-time Parent</i>
<i>Terri</i>	With child	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	ELB Provision	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	EMPLOYMENT <i>Not specified</i>
<i>Mary</i>	Alone	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	ELB Provision	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT
<i>Andy</i>	Both parents	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	ELB Provision	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Bar Tending Course</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT
<i>Gerard</i>	One parent	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	ELB Provision	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT
<i>Fleur</i>			Integrated		ELB Provision	Level 2	INACTIVE <i>Full-time parent</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ Level ? Painting &amp; Decorating</i>	<i>Missing</i>
<i>Jess</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	ELB Provision	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Missing</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ LEVEL 1 IT</i>
<i>Peter</i>	One parent	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	Grammar	Excluded from	Referred to ELB	None	INACTIVE <i>Serving sentence in</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION & TRAINING

				School	Provision but did not attend		Young Offenders Centre		Pre-vocational Access Pilot
<b>William</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SM	N/A Completed compulsory schooling	-	None	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>IT</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Catering</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Pre-vocational Access Pilot</i>
<b>Tom</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SM	N/A Completed compulsory schooling	-	Level 2	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ LEVEL 1 Plumbing</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>NVQ LEVEL 1 Plumbing</i>	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Pre-vocational Access Pilot</i>
<b>Kevin</b>	Grandparents	Grandfather <i>Retired</i>  Grandmother <i>Retired</i>	SM	N/A Completed compulsory schooling		Level 1	UNEMPLOYMENT	UNEMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Pre-vocational Access Pilot</i>
<b>Patrick</b>	One parent	Mother <i>Unemployed</i>	SM	Excluded from school	Group tuition	None	EMPLOYMENT <i>Family business</i>	UNEMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION & TRAINING <i>Pre-vocational Access Pilot</i>

**\* School type**

SM *Secondary Maintained*  
 CM *Secondary Controlled*  
 SI *Secondary Integrated*

*Grades D-G)*  
*Framework*

*Grades A\*-C)*

**\*\* Qualification level**

Level 1 *Level 1 in National Qualification Framework*  
*(equivalent to Level 1 Certificate, NVQ Level 1 or GCSE)*  
 Level 2 *Level 2 in National Qualification*

*(equivalent to Level 2 Diploma, NVQ Level 2 or GCSE)*



## CHAPTER SIX

### **Implications of the Research Findings for Policy and Practice**

In this chapter, we have grouped the areas for discussion into four main sections. These are:

- Issues relating to the compulsory schooling of disengaged young people;
- Issues relating to providing additional support for AEP providers; and,
- Issues arising from post-16 experiences.

#### **6.1 Issues For Mainstream Schooling**

##### *The Complexity of Issues Facing Young People*

Many of the young people who eventually participate in AEP are at risk of social exclusion and face a raft of complex and difficult experiences which impacts on their ability to engage in school. These include issues relating to mental health, as well as the impact of family breakdown. Schools require more support and knowledge to help them to support students through such issues.

##### *The Need for Earlier Intervention and More Prevention Work*

Throughout our data collection, we have heard calls from all sectors for the earlier identification of children's problems and more preventative work in primary schools, including support for children with special needs. The changes in the process for referrals to Education Welfare have lengthened the process for referral and schools just are not currently equipped to deal with and reroute difficult behaviour. By the time some of these young people are 'in' the system, it becomes extremely difficult to reverse the trend.

##### *AEP Teaching Methods Applied in Mainstream*

Evidence from the research suggests that students experiencing AEP across the range of providers respond very positively to the teaching style, method and learning environment. A challenge for the education system is the transfer of such understanding, skill and expertise from alternative education into mainstream schooling. The Department of Education should consider ways of inculcating teaching successes in alternative provision within the mainstream sector.

### *Young People's Participation in the Referral Process*

Many of the young people interviewed did not understand why they had been placed in AEP or had little or no information about the project before they joined. It could be considered a children's rights issue for young people to be allowed to participate more fully in the process. Current good practice includes home visits by project staff to engage family support for the programme but this practice is by no means universal. Some respondents were simply instructed to attend. Students should also be provided with clear information on the range of qualifications available to them on AEP. AEP providers should also be given a more detailed profile on the young person once referred.

## **6.2 Providing Additional Support for AEP Providers**

### *The Learning/Working Environment in Some Projects*

Concern was raised over the standards of the learning environments available to some young people on AEP. The importance of young people learning in an appropriate environment and the fact that a poor environment impedes performance has been demonstrated in both the UK and US (Clark, 2002). Consideration should also be given to the resource and physical environment and the potential to share and access mainstream resources with a view to improving the quality and range of activities and subjects available. This would need to be achieved in a sensitive manner to avoid any alienation of the young people and staff concerned.

### *Status of staff in AEP*

Although delivering elements of the Common Curriculum to young people, there are severe problems for staff attempting to do this. Except in the Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative, AEP staff have no teacher number, no access to INSET, no opportunities for career progression or any job security. Successful AEP often relies on the efforts of highly motivated and committed individuals, however, it seems that there is little except personal satisfaction for them in terms of reward. Nor, it appears have they any systematic or coherent support from the wider system, even though they are dealing with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people in our society. These issues need to be addressed with a high degree of urgency before the AEP community becomes completely alienated and excluded from the mainstream education system.

### *Collaboration between Schools and AEP, and Access to Support Agencies*

It appears that, even in some School/Training Organisation partnerships, there is little transfer of information about the young person to the AEP project. Further, there seem to be some unresolved issues around the transfer to the projects of AWPU and supplementary funding associated with the young people. AEP providers have emphasised that the introduction of the Entitlement Framework will only compound the problems described above. There is also almost no access to various educational support service agencies for staff or students in the community-based projects. This includes a refusal of support from curriculum advisory services, behaviour support services, CCEA, and Educational Psychology services. It seems puzzling that there is least educational support for those young people whose needs appear to be greatest.

### *Funding for AEP*

Funding for AEP should be reviewed to include an economic formula based on educational entitlement of the young person as opposed to the ad hoc nature and inequalities associated with the current system.



### *Curriculum Available*

Although most respondents found their experiences in AEP better than those in mainstream school, they also reported subsequent problems in relation to the value, in the labour market, of the curriculum and qualifications on offer. A particular problem appears to be the currency of Entry Level Qualifications with employers. Several of the young people in the sample, including those in KS4 Flexibility Initiative, would like to have had the opportunity to study for a greater number of GCSEs. Teachers in schools also are disappointed at the alternative suite of vocational related qualifications developed to augment the disapplication curriculum and find that many employers do not understand or rate the alternatives on offer.

### *Gendered nature of AEP*

These restrictions on the available curriculum are compounded for many young people by the gendered nature of provision in most projects. Our evidence suggests that for almost all, vocational opportunities are limited to traditional roles, and any request for access to courses outside these is refused. Only in Project A2 are both girls and boys actively encouraged to participate beyond traditional roles, so that, for example, boys engage in Childcare training.

### *Work-related and Vocational Learning*

Those in community-based AEP do not have the same access to work related learning as their counterparts in KS4 Flex or S/TO partnerships, where, for example, students in KS4FI had the support of a project officer employed specifically to support them while in FE.

In part, this is attributed by some project staff to the stigmatization by employers of the young people, and by refusal by at least one ELB to allow projects to access the ELB work experience data base. Pressure on project staff times makes it difficult to overcome this difficulty. These problems are compounded by the higher incidence in parental unemployment of young people in this sector which in turn impacts on the young people through intergenerational transmission.

There are additional limiting factors associated with AEP including reluctance to travel (Green, Shuttleworth & Lavery, 2003).

#### *Role of community-based AEP*

However, it is important to emphasize the valued role that community-based projects play in their local communities. They are perceived to re-engage local learners in a respectful environment, and as a result have considerable status within that community with parents, young people and wider groups.

### **6.3 Issues Arising From Post-16 Experiences**

#### *Preparation and support for reintegration post-16*

Many of these young people have been isolated for a substantial part of their adolescence and require additional support to assist them in the reintegration process post-16. Further work on personal and social development is required to help these young people maintain the benefits gained from AEP. As young adults entering the world of further training and employment, they will need support in making decisions about competing pathways and qualifications, how to obtain and sustain employment and how to ground their aspirations in their achievements to date. Unfortunately, young people leaving AEP often do not access the relevant careers support. The Careers Service should consider ways to promote the visibility of their services to this client group.

#### *Gender Issues*

Issues in relation to the availability of curriculum have been identified above. We have also referred earlier in the Report to the greater number of boys in AEP, compared to girls. However, the paradox of our research seems to be that, overall, boys seem to be achieving better outcomes two years after leaving AEP. One explanation may lie in the numbers of girls who drop out from education, training or employment due to teenage pregnancy, but other explanations need, in our view, to be sought and discovered.

### *Statutory support available to young adults post-16*

One of the most disturbing aspects of our findings has been the very great difficulty for young people, post-AEP, of accessing statutory services, unless they had been referred to Social Services before the age of 16. No agency has responsibility for them, so if services are needed, they must self-refer. Even if support is then forthcoming, it may not be specific to young people under 18, so that for example, a 17-year-old may be referred as an in-patient to an unsuitable adult mental health facility. In particular, the identification of a 'significant' adult, to monitor progress, and who can intervene where appropriate, in discussion with the young person when support is needed. Such a system has now been developed for young people leaving care, and should be extended to this other group of very vulnerable young people. If resourced properly, this is a service which could be provided by the current network of AEP.

### *Effective Interagency Working*

It is frequently assumed that interagency work will simply 'happen' but effort and time must be spent on learning how to engage in such collaboration and ways of overcoming barriers to such work need to be identified. In order to improve interconnected, interagency work within AEP, further staff training and development is required to offer vulnerable young people tailored post-16 support. A way to share information appropriately about young people's backgrounds and experiences should be considered to effect real interagency working.

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## Appendices

- 1 Information leaflets
- 2 Data collection tools
- 3 Summary tables of sample
- 4 Multivariate model used for logistic regression





## Appendix 2

### Data collection tools

**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVISION SURVEY  
QUESTIONNAIRE 1 SECOND COHORT**

---

**Section 1 – About You**

1. **Case ID**   
*Please leave this blank.*
  2. **What is your name?**
  3. **Sex**
  4. **What is your date of birth?**
  5. **Telephone Number**
  6. **E-mail Address**
  7. **Who do you live with?**
- 

**Please write your home address here:**

**Can we access your records from the last school you attended?**

Yes       No

**Section 2 – About Your Project**

8. What project did you attend?

9. What school did you last attend?

10. Which subjects have you been studying?

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11. Which subjects have you enjoyed learning most?

---

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12. Which subjects have you enjoyed least?

---

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13. Do you hope to leave with any qualifications?

Yes  No

If Yes, go to Question 13a. If No, go to Question 14.

13a. Can you tell me which qualifications you are working towards?

Please list type of qualification (e.g. Certificate, GCSE) & Subject (e.g. Health & Safety, Maths etc.)

**Qualification**

**Subject**

Qualification	Subject
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

14. Did you enjoy the project? Yes  No

14a. If yes, why?

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14b. If no, why not?

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15. Why did you join the project?

---

---

16. How do you feel about leaving the project/scheme?

Would like to stay on

Ready to leave

Other

---

---

17. Have you talked to anyone about what job you would like to do in the future?

Yes

No

17a. If yes, who?

Careers Advisor

Teacher

Social Worker

Youth Worker

Friend/Classmate

Parent/Carer

Someone else? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Did you go on work experience or sample any jobs as part of your project?

Yes

No

18a. If Yes, what job types did you get to try?

18b. Did work experience help you to decide what job you would like to do in the future?

Yes

No

18c. What jobs you would have liked to try but didn't get the opportunity to?

---

---

### Section 3 – Your Choices Now

19. What do you plan to do after June 04? *(you may tick more than one option)*

Full-time Job

Part-time Job

Further Education Course

6<sup>th</sup> Form Course

Training Programme

Unemployed

Other \_\_\_\_\_

19a. If you want a job, which job would you like to do?

19b. If studying/training, which course would you like to do?

19c. Where is the course held?

20. Have you any other goals or plans for the next six months?

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21. What would you like to do in five years time?

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22. Do you know where to go for careers advice once you leave the project?

Yes   
No

22a. If yes, who? 

Careers Advisor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Youth Worker	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	Friend/Classmate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent/Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Someone else?	_____		

23. What was the most important thing you learnt at the project?

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---

---

24. Is there anything you would change about the project?

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---

---

25. Is there anything else you want to say about the project or your experiences of the past year?

---

---

---

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME

Signature  
Date

---

---

**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVISION SURVEY  
QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

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**Dear Past Student**

You may remember a questionnaire we asked you to complete around 6 months ago. The questionnaire asked for your views and thoughts of your last year of full-time education. We are keen to know how you are getting on, what you are doing now and also ask you again about your last year of education.

Your views and honest opinions are very important to us. We will use your comments and the information you provide us to try and influence policy makers to improve the education experience for other young people. Anything you tell us will remain anonymous and your name will not be used anywhere in the report.

Once you complete the questionnaire and return it to us in the freepost envelope enclosed, we will send a cheque for £10 as soon as possible. If you participate in all 4 questionnaires, you will be entered into a prize draw of 1<sup>st</sup> prize £300, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £100 and 3<sup>rd</sup> prize £100.

Thank you for your time; I hope you can help us by sending back a completed questionnaire.

---

**Section 1 – General Information**

1. **Case ID** (*please leave blank*)
2. **Name**
3. **Telephone Number**
4. **E-mail Address**
5. **Address**
6. **Who do you live with?**

**Section 2 – About You**

7. Did you leave your Year 12 education programme with any qualifications?  
Yes  No

If Yes, please go to Question 7a. If No, please go to Question 8.

- 7a. Can you tell me what qualifications you gained?  
(e.g. Entry Level Qualification in Literacy, Key Skills Communication,  
NVQ Level 1 Mechanical Engineering, GCSE English Grade C etc.)

Please list type of qualification (e.g. Certificate, GCSE) & Subject (e.g. Health & Safety, Maths etc.) & Grade

Qualification	Subject	Grade
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

8. What are you doing now? (If you are working or are on a training programme, for example, please specify the job type or course)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Are you enjoying it?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Are you working towards any new qualifications?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



11. Do you have any plans for the next 6 months?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
12. What do you think you will be doing in 5 years time?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
13. Have you received any careers advice in the last 6 months?  
 Yes   
 No
- 13a. If yes, from whom?  
 Careers Advisor  Teacher   
 Social Worker  Youth Worker   
 Friend/Classmate  Parent/Carer   
 Someone else? \_\_\_\_\_
14. How do your family members/carers feel about what you are doing now?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
15. Have you had any contact with the following people in the last 6 months?  
 Social Worker Yes  No  If yes, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Probation Officer Yes  No  If yes, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Careers Officer Yes  No  If yes, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Police Yes  No  If yes, why? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Have you had any contact with your Year 12 education programme in the last 6 months?  
 Yes   
 No
- 16a. If Yes, with whom?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
17. What do you do in your spare time? Have you any hobbies/interests?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
18. Are most of your friends from school or from your Year 12 education programme?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**19. Looking back, what would you say are the most useful things you learnt at your Year 12 education programme?**

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---

**20. Is there any way it could have helped you more?**

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---

---

**21. Since leaving the Year 12 programme,**  
**a. what has been the worst thing that's happened to you?**

---

---

**b. what has been the best thing that's happened to you?**

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---

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROVISION SURVEY  
QUESTIONNAIRE 3**

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Once you complete the questionnaire and return it to us in the freepost envelope enclosed, we will send you a cheque for £10 as soon as possible. You will also have a chance to win a prize draw of 1<sup>st</sup> prize £300, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £100 and 3<sup>rd</sup> prize £100.

Thank you for your time; I hope you can help us by sending back a completed questionnaire.

---

**Section 1 - General Information**

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_
3. E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_
4. Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Who do you live with? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Year 12 Education Programme attended \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2 – About You**

7. What are you doing now? (If unemployed answer questions 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.) (If employed answer questions 13, 14 and 15.)

Unemployed:

8. Have you been employed or in a training programme since leaving AEP?

Yes  No

If yes, please specify the type or course:

\_\_\_\_\_

9. If so, why did you stop?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. What kind of job would you like to do?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Is there anything in particular that is stopping you from doing this?

---

---

12. How do you spend your time during the day?

---

---

**(Please continue to question 16)**

Employed:

13. Why did you choose this career?

---

---

14. Are you working towards any new qualifications?

---

---

15. Are you enjoying it?

---

---

**(Please continue to question 16)**

16. Have you received any careers advice in the last 6 months?

Yes  No

16a. If yes, from whom?

Careers Advisor

Social Worker

Friend/Classmate

Teacher

Youth Worker

Parent/Carer

Someone else

17. Have you asked anyone for any careers help or advice in the last 6 months?

---

---

18. Do you have any work, education or training plans for the next 6 months?

---

---

19. What do you think you will be doing in 5 years time?

---

---

20. How do your family members/carers feel about what you are doing now?

---

---

21. Have you had any contact with the following people in the last 6 months?

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>If yes, why?</b>
Social Worker			
Probation Officer			
Careers Officer			
Police			

22. Have you had any contact with your Year 12 education programme in the last 6 months?

Yes  No

22a. If yes, with whom?

---

23. This is a question about what you do in your spare-time. What are your hobbies/What do you do in your spare time?

	Yes	No
Do you play any sport?		
Do you attend a youth club?		
Stay at home and watch TV?		
Read books or magazines?		
Keep fit/attend a leisure centre or gym?		
Go to church or other place of worship?		
Baby-sit?		
Do you do any voluntary work?		
Go Shopping?		
Socialise with friends eg. pub, disco etc?		

If you don't do anything from the above list then please specify what you do in your spare-time:

---

24. Are most of your friends from school or from your Year 12 education programme?

---

25. Are most of your friends working or not?

---

26. Looking back, did your Year 12 education programme help you get where you are now?

---

26(a) If so, how?

---

27. What do you think you would be doing now if your hadn't gone to your Year 12 education programme?

---



---

28. Since leaving the Year 12 Programme,  
(a) What has been the worst thing that's happened to you?

---



---

(b) What has been the best thing that's happened to you?

---



---

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Table 3a**

Nominated providers & Number of Young People & Staff  
Interviewed from each Provider

<b>Type of AEP</b>	<b>Provider</b>	<b>Students Sweep 1</b>	<b>Students Sweep 2</b>	<b>Students Sweep 3</b>	<b>Staff</b>
Community-based AEP	A1	5	5	2	2
	A2	16	6	5	3
	A3	27	22	17	4
<b>Sub Total</b>		<b>48</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>9</b>
Training Organisation/School Partnership	B1	21	27	12	4
	B2	31	22	24	3
<b>Sub Total</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>
KS4 FI	C1	50	59	38	7
	C2	6	3	1	1
<b>Sub Total</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>156</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>24</b>

## Logistic Regression Model

There were several steps involved in this process. Firstly, the outcome ‘destination’ was recoded into 2 categories, active = education or training, and inactive = unemployed or full-time parent. As much of the information on individual destination was missing, a technique known as ‘carry forward last score’ was used to fill in as many of the gaps as possible. In practice this meant that where the final destination score (Destination 3) was missing but there was a valid score at Destination 2, this value was carried forward to the final destination. Given the time difference between Destination 1 and Destination 3 the carry forward procedure was not extended to this time period. If Destination 2 and Destination 3 were both missing the outcome was set to missing.

A number of different interview questions were then selected from the questionnaire as predictor variables for inclusion in the model. These predictor variables were drawn from the following questions:

**Table 4a Questions used for logistic regression**

Predictor Variable	Question
<b>Gender</b>	
<b>Project Type</b>	
<b>Family Structure</b>	Who do you live with? (All 3 questionnaires)
<b>Family Support Advice Measure</b>	Do you ask your parents for careers advice? Have you had careers advice from a parent? (All 3 questionnaires)
<b>Family Support Opinion Measure</b>	What do your family/carers think about what you are doing now? (All 3 questionnaires)
<b>Personal Agency Attitude Measure</b>	Did you enjoy AEP? Is there anything you would change about AEP? Are you enjoying what you are doing now? Do you have any hobbies? (2 questionnaires) Looking back, what was the most useful thing you learnt at AEP?
<b>Personal Agency Motivation Measure</b>	Have you had careers advice since leaving AEP? (All 3 questionnaires) Do you know where to find careers advice? Have you been on work experience?



<b>Personal Agency Ambition Measure</b>	What are your plans for the next 6 months? (All 3 questionnaires) What do you think you will be doing in 5 years? (All 3 questionnaires) What job would you like to have in 5 years? (All 3 questionnaires) Are you working towards any new qualifications? (All 3 questionnaires)
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Each case included in the sample was given a mean score indicating positive, negative or neutral responses to the variables (excluding gender and project type).

These predictor variables were either binomial (i.e has only two categories) or were recoded as a series of binomial dummy variables. To overcome the substantial missing data on the predictor variables a further technique known as multiple imputation was used to estimate likely scores for the missing data points. For example, if a case has a missing score on the agency attitude measure, multiple imputation uses the scores from those who did reply to these items and the respondent's scores on those items they did complete to estimate a potential response for the missing value. We repeated this imputation procedure 10 times, creating ten different data sets, each one with a different set of imputed scores in place of the missing scores. The statistical analysis is repeated independently on each of the 10 data sets and the results averaged across the 10 sets of results. While multiple imputation has been criticised for effectively guessing people answers, numerous statistical tests have shown that this method produces less biased results than ignoring those cases with missing values (known as 'listwise' or 'casewise' deletion methods) because missing values rarely occur completely at random.

**Table 4b Predictors of educational destination (logistic regression).**

Variable	Estimates		OR	OR Confidence Intervals				Sig
	<i>B</i>	SE( <i>B</i> )		95% lower	95% upper	99% lower	99% upper	
<b>Gender</b>								

<i>Females</i>	0.000	-	1.00	-	-	-	-	
<i>Male</i>	0.044	0.508	1.04	0.39	2.83	0.28	3.87	
<b>Project</b>								
<i>PRJ1</i>	0.000	-	1.00	-	-	-	-	
<i>PRJ2</i>	-0.792	0.563	0.45	0.15	1.37	0.11	1.93	
<i>PRJ3</i>	-0.542	0.591	0.58	0.18	1.85	0.13	2.67	
<b>Family structure</b>								
<i>Both parents</i>	0.000	-	1.00	-	-	-	-	
<i>Other</i>	0.803	0.460	2.23	0.91	5.50	0.68	7.30	
<b>Family support opinion</b>								
<i>Positive</i>	0.000	-	1.00	-	-	-	-	
<i>Neutral</i>	1.712	0.587	5.54	1.75	17.51	1.22	25.13	**
<i>Negative</i>	2.634	0.761	13.93	3.13	61.90	1.96	98.92	**
<b>Family support advice</b>								
<i>Yes</i>	0.000	-	1.00	-	-	-	-	
<i>No</i>	0.867	1.143	2.38	0.25	22.36	0.13	45.21	
<i>Sometimes</i>	1.368	1.193	3.93	0.38	40.70	0.18	84.87	
<b>Personal agency</b>								
<i>Positive</i>	0.000	-	1.00	-	-	-	-	
<i>Neutral</i>	0.413	0.928	1.51	0.25	9.32	0.14	16.50	
<i>Negative</i>	2.683	1.430	14.6 3	0.89	241.2 4	0.37	582.1 2	
<b>Qualifications gained</b>								
<i>Entry level</i>	0.000	-	1.00	-	-	-	-	
<i>Level 1</i>	0.740	0.628	2.10	0.61	7.18	0.42	10.57	
<i>Level 2</i>	0.291	1.071	1.34	0.16	10.92	0.08	21.11	
<i>DK</i>	-0.132	0.634	0.88	0.25	3.04	0.17	4.49	

Notes B = beta regression coefficient; SE(B) Standard error

of the regression coefficient; OR = odds ratio ( $expB$ ). \*

p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01.

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