

EVALUATION OF 'FRONT END' OF THE LEARNING GATEWAY IN THE EAST MIDLANDS

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report has been written by the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) for Government Office East Midlands (GOEM). It is based on research CeGS was commissioned to undertake by GOEM between September - December 2001 into the quality of the 'front-end' of the Learning Gateway within the East Midlands region.

Aim

The aim of the research was to explore the quality of the 'front-end' of the Learning Gateway in the East Midlands. This has involved benchmarking the activities of the four East Midlands Careers Services, and Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland and an analysis of their systems and procedures for supporting their clients and Personal Advisers (PAs). Feedback was gathered from Managers, PAs, young people and key delivery partners. In addition, the linkages between the 'front-end' and the destinations of the Learning Gateway clients were considered through an analysis of Regional and Head Office Management Information System (RHOMIS) data.

Methodology

The research has been undertaken in four stages:

- **Stage One: Preparation and Desk Research.**
- **Stage Two: Fieldwork.** The fieldwork took place in November 2001. Researchers undertook a planned programme of fieldwork visits, of approximately 2.5 days in length, in each area. The visits involved meetings with staff in the Careers Services and a Connexions Partnership, Learning and Skills Council staff, and young people (a total of 72 against a target of 50).
- **Stage Three: Postal Survey.** A total of 137 key delivery and referral partners, nominated by Careers Services/Connexions Partnerships, were surveyed and 57 responded (42%).
- **Stage Four: Reporting.** A verbal presentation, and workshop-style discussion of the preliminary findings, was delivered to the Steering Group on 7 January 2002. A regional summary report was produced at the end of January 2002, which has been followed-up by the production of area reports, and action-planning workshops.

Key Findings

The Learning Gateway was introduced nationally in September 1999. The target group was identified as those young people who are disengaged from learning, and/or at risk of dropping out of learning. Its key purpose was described in the specification as being a

vital component of the 'Investing in Young People Strategy', and as being required to, 'ensure that all young people continue in education and training until they are 19 and reach at least Level 2'.

A range of research and evaluation studies has been undertaken into the operation of the Learning Gateway. However, they have differed considerably in their depth, focus and timescale. There is a lack of national research into the operation of the programme as a whole. It is therefore difficult to build a picture of the overall impact and effectiveness of the Learning Gateway since its launch.

Our research identified three main models of the delivery of the 'front-end':

- **Model A:** The Careers Service/Connexions Partnership delivers 'front-end' provision and, working with partner agencies, also holds a contract with the LSC to deliver Life Skills provision alongside other learning providers;
- **Model B:** The Careers Service/Connexions Partnership delivers 'front-end' provision, and also has a contract to manage Life Skills provision, which is delivered by agreed learning providers and other local partners;
- **Model C:** The Careers Service/Connexions Partnership delivers 'front-end' provision, and the LSC contracts with a range of learning providers to deliver Life Skills.

A review of available evidence in the existing research literature on the Learning Gateway would suggest that Model C is the predominant model nationally. In the East Midlands, three out of the five areas deliver the Learning Gateway in this way.

A total of 1,626 young people joined the Learning Gateway in the East Midlands between April 2000 and March 2001 (RHOMIS data, 2002). The number of starters in the five sub-regions was: 576 (35.4%) GuideLine Career Services; 328 (20.2%) Derbyshire Career Services Ltd (DCS Ltd); 321 (19.7%) CareerPath (Northamptonshire) Ltd; 218 (13.4%) Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland; and 183 (11.3%) Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services (LCGS).

An analysis of the 2000/1 East Midlands data shows that 3,226 young people left the Learning Gateway, and of them, 1,144 (35%) are recorded as entering 'into learning' through further education, work-based training, or other training routes. A mixed picture emerges in terms of those entering into learning leading directly to Level 2. The situation here is complicated by the need to make judgements about equivalencies in a situation when provision is not being delivered in the context of the NVQ Framework, or National Occupational Standards (NOS).

Of those who did not enter learning, over a quarter (543 - 26%) went into employment, which, as many staff were keen to indicate, may represent a significant achievement for

some of the young people concerned, a proportion of whom will have been suffering from multiple-disadvantaged.

The available RHOMIS data on the Learning Gateway has severe limitations in terms of its ability to evidence or inform the planning, management and development of the Learning Gateway. Critically, it provides no insights into the progression of target groups, or on issues such as 'distance travelled' (a necessary dimension identified in the original specification).

A range of concerns were raised in the research concerning the operation of the Learning Gateway.

- The current arrangements place Personal Advisers in the role of 'gatekeepers' to Life Skills provision. This can, and does, cause inter-organisational tensions, particularly in the case of Model A, where conflicts of interest also arise.
- The lack of financial support for young people who are not eligible for benefits means that there are pressures to foreshorten the 'front-end' to enable them to access the training allowance available while on Life Skills.
- Different approaches adopted by LSCs in relation to the length of time young people can spend on Life Skills can affect the nature of those being encouraged to enter the programme.
- There is uncertainty, and some confusion, about the respective roles of Preparatory Training and the Learning Gateway.

There are concerns in some areas about the availability and/or quality of Life Skills provision in the region.

The organisation of PA work and caseloading varies across the region and, in some cases, across sub-regions. Many PAs fulfil a dual role as a Careers Adviser and a PA. No particular pattern of case loading can be linked to a particular delivery model, except that in Model A, some PAs are also involved in the delivery of Life Skills provision.

Most PAs seen during the fieldwork showed considerable interest in their work, and spoke with enthusiasm about what they were seeking to achieve with young people on the Learning Gateway. However, it is clear that not all staff are happy or settled in their roles. There are tensions in some areas regarding models of practice, in particular, the issue of 'professional autonomy versus centralised control'. This manifests itself in areas such as data collection and views on meeting targets.

All the PAs seen during the fieldwork stressed the critical importance of developing effective relationships with young people. Discussion and interview-based work is the predominant model of assessment in the region. There is limited evidence of the use of formal assessment tools, although this is being addressed in some areas. A key difficulty here is that, without a proven baseline, it is very difficult to assess 'distance travelled'.

A postal survey of 137 delivery and referral partners, nominated by the Careers Services/Connexions Partnership was undertaken. A total of 57 responded (42%). In terms of their profile, 47% were training providers, 14% Youth Services, 12% Further Education Colleges, and 7% voluntary and community groups. The majority of respondents (57%) assessed the operation of the Learning Gateway in their area as effective or very effective. Just under half (48%) gave similar ratings of the effectiveness of transition arrangements from the 'front-end' to Life Skills, and/or other options. However, 15% indicated that the transition arrangements were not effective, and over a third (37%) were unsure. Just under two-thirds of respondents (65%) rated the work of PAs as effective or very effective in assessing young people's overall support needs. Only 4% reported they were ineffective, and around a third (31%) were unsure.

A total of 72 young people were interviewed individually, in pairs or in small groups as part of the research. The young people were very positive about the personal and practical support they received from their PAs. They seemed most appreciative of personal, tailored and varied provision.

Overview

The aim of the research was to explore the quality of the 'front-end' and to benchmark and model delivery activities. The quality of the programme has to be first considered in relation to its 'fitness for purpose'. The key purpose of the Learning Gateway is to enable young people to achieve Level 2 (as defined in the National Learning Targets). In the 2000/1 operational year in the East Midlands, only 35% of leavers entered learning from the Learning Gateway. In this context, the overall effectiveness, and value for money of current arrangements must be called in to question.

The research identified and examined delivery models in order to provide a method of benchmarking. The findings show that there is no marked variation between the effectiveness of the models in increasing outcomes, despite very differing practices. However, critically, the available RHOMIS data fails to describe what is actually happening in relation to progression within, and outside, the programme. As a result, it is not possible to clearly identify the distinctive contribution of 'front-end' providers in achieving the desired learning outcomes.

The main body of available evidence currently resides with young people, practitioners and key delivery partners who have provided their own accounts of what constitutes effective policies and practices. They indicate that practice is more effective than the limited intelligence that RHOMIS provides would suggest. In particular they highlighted work in engaging previously disengaged young people, some with multiple-disadvantage, and helping them achieve outcomes such as personal/social development and employment, as well as learning outcomes. Clearly there is some good practice in this regard. However, consideration needs to be given to whether the current operation of the Learning Gateway is fit for purpose, and if not, how best to meet agreed policy objectives.

Recommendations

In the light of these findings, CeGS has put forward the following recommendations:

1. Action Plans

- a. Following on from this research, and related follow-up activities, the Careers Services and/or Connexions Partnership in each sub-region should review issues arising and undertake necessary work, within available resources, to address these issues.

In particular, the work, roles and current experience of Personal Advisers need to be reviewed. Appropriate support should be provided where required to enable them to fulfil agreed tasks and responsibilities. The role of the PA must be clarified and agreed, particularly in relation to critical issues such, as assessment. Areas for targeted training and development could include:

- recording work with young people (in the context of enhancing evidence-based and evaluation practice);
 - managing and supporting PAs (including developing robust professional supervision systems);
 - developing outreach activities in connection with referral and delivery partners;
 - undertaking management development training, particularly for staff line managing PAs.
- b. There should be a review involving relevant parties (including GOEM, the Careers Services/Connexions Partnership, Learning Partnership and LSC) of the role and current effectiveness of the Learning Gateway in their sub-region, and of the 'learning infrastructure' available to deliver tailored and individualised provision. This should include:
- consideration of the role and relationship of the Learning Gateway to Preparatory Training;
 - the question of arbitration in the case of dispute between 'front-end' and Life Skills providers;
 - the adequacy of provision of specialist support services (e.g. in regard to mental health);
 - the relationship of the Learning Gateway to the area's wider workforce development and lifelong learning plans.

2. Review the Learning Gateway Model

The 'fitness for purpose' of the Learning Gateway should be reviewed, and 'pilots' developed to test out new forms of integrated provision. This could include:

- joint planning between the necessary bodies to develop new integrated models of provision to meet identified needs in the sub-regions (based on best existing evidence and practice);
- piloting and enhancing methods of monitoring and recording 'distance travelled', including building on work already undertaken through the introduction of the Distance to the Labour Market (DLM) initiative in Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland;
- undertaking necessary tracking work to ascertain whether a sustainable outcome had been achieved;
- sharing effective practices in developing Individual Development Plans on a regional basis;
- considering links between the Connexions Framework (APIR), DLM, and RHOMIS to ensure data can be collected once and used many times;
- increasing employer involvement (including using available 'Time off for Study' legislation).

3. Development of a Performance Management, Evaluation and Inspection Strategy for the Learning Gateway

- Relevant bodies (notably DfES and the LSC) must consider the lack of reliable research evidence covering the current operation and future potential of the Learning Gateway and how best to address it.
- A robust performance management and related management information system is developed for the Learning Gateway (and successor provision).
- GOEM must work with Careers Services/Connexions Partnerships to review enhanced performance data so the benefits of provision can be effectively managed and assessed.
- The purpose and impact of bonus payments should be reviewed.
- Lessons learned from the work of the PAs in the Learning Gateway is used to inform the development of the Connexions PA role.

Our findings from the East Midlands, linked to similar findings in existing research, would suggest that a review of the Learning Gateway is required to ensure that the considerable investment it represents yields proportionate results. The recommendations above are designed to help and inform such a regional and national review. However, it is crucial if the need for such a review is agreed, that subsequent developments are planned on a progressive basis, and in close co-operation with those in the field, so that experience gained can be effectively built on.

Preface

'It was such a change. I'd been told I was useless, but now I'm treated like I'm worthwhile, like I have something to offer.....'

'So much has happened to me since May. I've now got my own flat. I do work experience four days a week, and I'm on Life Skills....I'm more confident and ambitious....He (my PA) arranged for me to have counselling, he helped me sort out my benefits and my flat, arranged my work experience and my course. I couldn't have done any of this without him'.

Young person on the Learning Gateway in Leicestershire

This project was led by Simon Bysshe, Senior Associate, and supported by Deirdre Hughes, CeGS Centre Director. The members of the research were: Lindsey Bowes, CeGS Researcher; Tas Gooden, CeGS Associate, Ian Popham, CeGS Senior Associate; and Sue Westwood, CeGS Associate. The project was supported at all stages by the CeGS administrative team, with particular thanks to Sam Baldwin, Administrative Assistant.

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- Government Office East Midlands for funding the study, to Neil Weightman for his management of the project and support, and to Rosie Watt for supplying the necessary data from the RHOMIS database quoted in the study.
- The Project Steering Group (listed in Annex A) for their co-operation and support, both within the Steering Group and for taking such an active role in planning and organising fieldwork programmes in their respective areas.
- Managers, Team Leaders, PAs and staff in the companies for sharing their views and experiences.
- Representatives in partner bodies (referral and delivery) who responded to the postal survey.

Finally we are indebted to all of the 72 young people who participated in focus groups and individual interviews.

Chapter One: Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been written by the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) for Government Office East Midlands (GOEM). It is based on research undertaken between September - December 2001 into the quality of the 'front-end' of the Learning Gateway within the East Midlands region.
- 1.2 The report is based on experience of - and has been written primarily to inform - the development and operation of the Learning Gateway in the East Midlands. However, it is hoped that it will be of use in a wider national context, particularly in informing the strategic and operational development of the Learning Gateway and related provision in the Connexions service and strategy.

Aim

- 1.3 The aim of the research was to explore the quality of the 'front-end' of the Learning Gateway in the East Midlands. This has involved benchmarking the activities of the four East Midlands Careers Services, and Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland, and an analysis of their systems and procedures for supporting their clients and Personal Advisers (PAs). Feedback was gathered from Managers, PAs, young people and key delivery partners. In addition, the linkages between the 'front-end' and the destinations of the Learning Gateway clients were considered through an analysis of Regional and Head Office Management Information System (RHOMIS) data.

Objectives

- 1.4 Specific objectives for the project included identifying:
- areas of current delivery that would benefit from improvement;
 - good practice in the delivery of the 'front-end' of the Learning Gateway;
 - how the 'front-end' does, and can, move clients on most effectively into a learning outcome.
- 1.5 Areas to explore within the methodology included:
- the size and nature of PA caseloads;
 - the mechanisms and systems in the 'front-end' in order to identify good practice (in particular client referral, assessment, support for clients, personal supervision and support for PAs, data sharing and progression).

Methodology

1.6 The research was undertaken in four stages.

Stage One: Preparation and Desk Research. This stage involved:

- discussing and agreeing the project brief with the Steering Group (undertaken during consultation meetings in July and September 2001);
- extensive desk research on national and regional research into the operation of the Learning Gateway (including the 'front-end');
- drafting and finalising the research instruments, including a postal questionnaire and semi-structured discussion guides for different professional groups and young people;
- agreeing the fieldwork plans with managers, PAs and others in the five operational areas;
- briefing the research team.

Stage Two: Fieldwork. The fieldwork took place in November 2001. Researchers undertook a planned programme of fieldwork visits, of approximately 2.5 days in length, in each area. The visits involved meetings with:

- **Careers Service/Connexions Partnerships staff.** To ensure appropriate coverage fieldwork programmes were agreed with, and arranged by, each organisation to reflect different operational practices. Interviews were conducted, as appropriate, with chief executives/senior operational managers, middle managers and team-leaders, specialist Learning Gateway staff (including Co-ordinators and Managers), and PAs (who were seen individually or in small groups).
- **Learning and Skills Council.** To ensure that the team had an understanding of the work and role of the LSC in the Learning Gateway, and their perspectives on the quality and effectiveness of 'front-end' provision, meetings were conducted with the appropriate contract manager in each of the LSCs in the region.
- **Young People.** It was agreed a sample of the Learning Gateway clients should be interviewed in each area. A total of 72 young people (against a target of 50) were interviewed individually, in pairs, or in small focus groups. A number of the meetings were held on the premises of Life Skills providers, and this provided an opportunity to chat informally to tutors and managers. In one area, the programme of work actually included two visits to Life Skills providers. However, the primary method of gaining the views of delivery partners was the work undertaken through the postal survey.

Stage Three: Postal Survey. The Steering Group agreed that it would be helpful to gain the views of other organisations involved in the Learning Gateway, on the operation of the 'front-end', and more generally on the support needs of young people in optimising learning and other outcomes.

Each of the Careers companies/Connexions Partnerships was requested to provide details of up to 15 organisations who were representative of the delivery and referral partners they worked with in the delivery of the Learning Gateway. The survey was distributed in November, and responses were received in early December. A total of 137 organisations were surveyed and 57 responded, giving a response rate of 42%.

Stage Four: Reporting. Alongside regular liaison with the GOEM contract manager, a verbal presentation and workshop style discussion of preliminary findings was undertaken with the Steering Group on 7th January. A regional summary report was produced at the end of January 2002.

Area Reports and Action Planning

1.7 The Steering Group also approved (and GOEM have funded):

- The production of **area reports** based on the fieldwork undertaken in each sub-region highlighting: strengths in current provision and examples of good practice; a review of current performance based on RHOMIS; and development areas.
- A follow-up programme of **action-planning workshops** which will be undertaken in all areas (except Nottinghamshire) in February and March 2002. The workshops will be targeted at operational staff (and in some cases) delivery partners, to consider the regional and area findings, and ways forward. In Nottinghamshire, CeGS is undertaking additional work with GuideLine Career Services (and local partners) to consider the results of this, and other research which GuideLine has led on, into progression from Life Skills/Learning Gateway into mainstream options.

Report Structure

1.8 Following this introduction the report is set out in four further chapters:

- **Chapter Two: Management and Progression** identifies and reviews the different Learning Gateway delivery models in the region; provides an overview of 'front-end' delivery systems in each area; and reviews available performance data and key issues raised in the fieldwork about management and progression.
- **Chapter Three: Personal Advisers - Work and Role in the Learning Gateway** identifies and reviews the different PA management models being used in the region. It also considers the work and role of PAs in the 'front-end', and in ongoing personal/learner support in the Learning Gateway.
- **Chapter Four - Partner and Young People's Views** provides details of partners' and clients' views of key issues, including their assessment of the overall effectiveness of the Learning Gateway, and the work of PAs in the context of the delivery of 'front- end' and ongoing support.
- **Chapter Five - Conclusions and Recommendations** provides key conclusions from the research and recommendations for Careers Service companies/Connexions Partnerships, Learning and Skills Councils, GOEM, and national policy makers.

1.9 There are three annexes containing the following information:

- **Annex One:** Lists of: attendees/members of the project Steering Group (chaired by Neil Weightman of GOEM); all the staff within the Careers Services/Connexions Partnerships, LSCs, and GOEM, who provided input, individually and/or in focus groups, to the research.
- **Annex Two:** Good practice exemplars in the management and delivery of the 'front-end', and related activities identified during fieldwork and key development questions arising.
- **Annex Three:** The research team's presentation of DfES Regional and Head Office Management Information System (RHOMIS) data on the Learning Gateway provision provided by GOEM for analysis:

- Figure 1:** East Midlands Region
- Figure 2:** Derbyshire
- Figure 3:** Leicester & Leicestershire
- Figure 4:** Lincolnshire & Rutland
- Figure 5:** Northamptonshire
- Figure 6:** Nottinghamshire

Background

Policy

- 1.10 The Government set out its vision for enhancing participation in learning for both adults and young people in its 1999 White Paper *Learning to Succeed*¹. The White Paper argued that too many young people stop learning at, or before, 16 and that this significantly affects their chances of making a success of their lives. The Paper, building on the Social Exclusion Unit's influential report *Bridging the Gap*², proposed a new set of arrangements as part of the developing Connexions strategy, to provide support and guidance to young people.
- 1.11 The national analysis at the time, through what became known as the 'focusing agenda', concluded that what was required was a major shift of Careers Service emphasis and resources³ from the Pre-16 to the Post-16 sector, with a particular emphasis on working with disengaged and unemployed young people⁴. The Learning Gateway specification⁵ issued by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in May 1999 set out the planning framework for the delivery of the programme to be targeted at 16-18 year olds. Its key purpose was described in the specification as a being a vital component of the 'Investing in Young People Strategy' - to, 'ensure that all young people continue in education and training until they are 19 and reach at least Level 2'⁶.
- 1.12 The key planning principles set out in the original Learning Gateway specification included:
- (i) The Learning Gateway was to be delivered through a **multi-agency approach**, though it gave key accountabilities to the Careers Service for the 'front-end', and to Training and Enterprise Councils (CTE/TECs) for the '*customised Life Skills option*'.
 - (ii) The priority target group for the Learning Gateway was those who are **disengaged from learning**. However, it was indicated that it should also aim to help those who are '*in danger of dropping out of learning*'; and

¹ Department for Education and Employment (1999) *Learning to Succeed: A New Framework for Post-16 Learning*. London: Stationery Office.

² Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-19 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training*. London: Stationery Office.

³ Gross spending on Learning Gateway in 1999-2000 was estimated to be £33.2 million, of which £29.8 million was from the statutory careers service budget (Source: Careers Service National Association (2000) *The Impact of Learning Gateway on Careers Service Providers* (A Report by Sheila Wooliscroft for CSNA on behalf of DfEE)).

⁴ One company in the region indicated in their 2001/2 business plan that work planned in their Learning Gateway Policy has involved, '*transferring 40% of Company resources from education-based work into more pro-active work with registrants; the provision of Gateway Personal Advisers ; appointing a senior manager to be responsible for the Learning Gateway; making use of possible New Start funding*'.

⁵ Department for Education and Employment (1999) *Learning Gateway Specification*. Sheffield: DfEE (mimeo).

⁶ Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Investing in Young People: A Strategy for the Education and Training of 16-18 Year Olds*. Sheffield : DfEE.

added that *'the precise eligibility of an individual young person will be a discretionary matter'*.

- (iii) **Personal Advisers** were envisaged as *'perhaps the single most important feature of the Learning Gateway'*, and were given the role to *'bind together the front-end and menu options, providing seamless support for an individual'*.
 - (iv) A thorough **client-centred assessment process** was deemed an essential component of the Learning Gateway, and it was indicated that a variety of approaches should be used.
 - (v) No fixed duration for the **'front-end'** was set. The aim was to enable an effective transition to subsequent options at an *'appropriate pace'*.
 - (vi) The Learning Gateway programme was to be: **negotiated** between the learner and the personal adviser; **customised** (*'to meet the choices, needs and aspirations of each individual'*); **flexible** (*'in regard to mode of attendance and length of time'*); **supported**; and **monitored** (*'to ensure continuous review of progress'*).
 - (vii) The focus of much of the **learning activity** was to be on *'developing employability, active citizenship and personal development with a view to progression to mainstream learning'*, although it was stressed that *'qualifications (except in basic skills) are not the principal outcomes'*.
 - (viii) It was recognised that in the Learning Gateway it will *'be difficult - but **still necessary** - to measure outcomes which arise from supporting and recognising change in the young person and their progress in re-engagement ('distance travelled')*.
 - (ix) Providers were expected to give *'some account of the **added value** that they have provided at different points in the young person's **journey through the Learning Gateway'***.
- 1.13 Subsequent to the initial guidance, further advice was set out in DfEE planning guidance to both Careers Service and TECs (from July 1999 onwards). Amongst other supporting information provided, DfEE issued a supplementary *'Guide to Relevant Practice in the Learning Gateway for 16-17 Year olds'* which highlighted experience from a range of predecessor programmes and initiatives in early 2000. Later in 2000 *'Guidance on Assessment in the Learning Gateway for 16-17 year olds'* was issued, although regrettably, this has not been updated, and nor is there evidence (in this or other research) of much practice being based on it.

Evaluation Evidence

- 1.14 A range of research has been undertaken into the operation of the Learning Gateway. However, the depth, focus and timescale of the studies have differed considerably. Most of the studies are locally or regionally based, and/or focus on a specific aspect of the operation of the Learning Gateway (e.g. Life Skills), rather than viewing the Gateway holistically and in the context of other related initiatives and developments. Many suffer also from being based on a limited sample of activity, and/or from having been undertaken in the first operational year of the programme.
- 1.15 The lack of national research into the operation of the Learning Gateway causes difficulties when attempting to build a picture of the overall impact, effectiveness and outcome of the Learning Gateway since its national launch in September 1999. Relevant bodies (notably DfES and the LSC) should consider the lack of robust research evidence covering the current operation, and future potential, of the Learning Gateway and how best to address it.
- 1.16 For clarity, key findings from available studies - which are relevant to this research - have been grouped under three main headings.
- (i) **Careers service role and work in the Learning Gateway**
A national study⁷ (May 2000) into the early implementation of the Learning Gateway by the Careers Service found that:
- areas where previous partnership-based approaches to tackle youth disaffection existed were at an advantage in developing the Learning Gateway;
 - the Learning Gateway management was predominantly undertaken by Careers Service staff on a part-time basis (raising issues of the initiative being an additional burden for management staff, with implications for other areas of operation);
 - at the time, the duration of the 'front-end' ranged from a minimum of 45 minutes to a maximum of 16 weeks, and was determined by individual need and the funding available to the Careers Service to offer a range of options and activities;
 - the use of '*distance travelled*'⁸ as opposed to '*hard outcome measures*' emerged as a key principle, and it was felt that only

⁷ GHK Economics and Management (2000) *The Early Implementation of the Learning Gateway by the Careers Service*, Research Report 203. Sheffield: Department for Education and Employment.

⁸ This point was also highlighted in QPID (2000) research, where measuring outcomes and '*distance travelled*' was felt to be extremely difficult, '*and is clearly an area where considerable research and development is required*'. (Source: Quality and Performance Improvement Division (2000) *TEC/CCTEs and the Learning Gateway*, QPID Study Report No. 87. Sheffield: Department for Education and Employment.)

effective longitudinal tracking of young people could provide information on whether a sustainable outcome had been achieved.

A study into the operation of the Learning Gateway (2000) in London⁹ highlighted that:

- London careers services have adopted a range of approaches to the organisation and management of staff to deliver Learning Gateway support.
- There is '*substantial variation*' between services in the interpretation of young people's eligibility for the Learning Gateway, with some taking a far broader definition than others. This was evidenced by the considerable differences that exist in the numbers of young people on the Gateway, as a percentage of the total numbers on the live register.
- There are '*considerable variations*' in levels of staff resources, which seem to reflect both different approaches to eligibility and levels of funding available.
- Some services in London have produced criteria to assess the levels of support young people require. The lack of such criteria makes it very difficult to compare the relative performances of careers companies across the city.
- Targets for entry into Life Skills were reported to have been '*over optimistic*', with concerns expressed about varying - though improving - quality of provision.

The wider implications of the changes initiated as a result of the 'focusing agenda', and the impact it had on wider Careers Service work, has been considered in a recent DfEE study¹⁰. This highlighted that '*positive outcomes*' were reported (by one third of careers companies surveyed) to include fewer students '*lost to the system*', and more '*at risk*' students moving on to further education and training. The main '*negative outcomes*' reported by careers companies were summarised as representing:

- '*a significant deterioration in Careers Service inputs to clients in education, particularly to those who might be seen as of average ability or the most able*';

⁹ Mc Gregor D., (2000) *The Learning Gateway in London*. London Careers Service Association (mimeo)

¹⁰ National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), (2001), Survey of the Delivery of Careers Education and Guidance in Schools. www.nfer.ac.uk

- a 'great deal of careers adviser time spent tracking down young people who were 'hard to reach', with levels of success not commensurate with the effort involved'.

(ii) **The management and delivery of the Life Skills Option**

A national overview of Life Skills provision¹¹ was undertaken in 2000 and draws on 25 Training Standards Council (TSC) reports on Life Skills provision, and on area wide inspections of education and training for 16-19 year olds. Some key findings were that:

- the number of Life Skills Learners in any organisation / training provider was generally low (with 28% having 10 learners or less, and 52% having 11-25 learners);
- the extent of overall participation in some parts of the country is 'low' (and well below Government Office targets), but there are also shortages of provision (particularly in some rural areas);
- the length of time learners may remain on Life Skills varies considerably, 'ranging from 10 to 52 weeks'. Regional reports provide examples of where Life Skills is operated to 'fixed timetables', and is not seen as flexible and tailored to the needs of individuals;
- the quality of information gathered during initial assessment within the 'front-end' of the Learning Gateway was assessed as being in need of improvement;
- the quality of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) was questioned in a number of reports and concerns included that little evidence of assessment appeared in them, and that they were insufficiently individual (e.g. in regard to specific targets or areas for improvement);
- TSC reports provide limited information about progression.

Research¹² (January 2001) undertaken for CTE/TECs in the South-East echoed these findings, and additionally raised issues pertaining to the relationship between the 'front-end' and Life Skills provision, including that:

¹¹ Clough L., (2001) *Review of Life Skills Provision*. Connexions Service National Unit (mimeo)

¹² Berry-Lound, D.B., Bysshe S., and Rowe V (2001) *South-East Region Review of Life Skills*, South East Region TECs (mimeo).

- some Life Skills providers were concerned that young people spend *'too much time'* on the 'front-end', leading to reduced occupancy on their programmes¹³;
- there was a lack of a common definition and shared understanding of *'readiness'* in regard to transitions, with understanding being greatly enhanced between PAs and providers when there were planned training and development activities between the two groups.

(iii) **Young people's perspectives on the Learning Gateway**

Recent national research¹⁴ (July 2001) into young people's experience of the Learning Gateway (based a sample of 152 young people in 8 careers service areas) revealed that:

- young people's backgrounds and lifestyles indicated that many faced major challenges linked to multiple-disadvantage;
- the main motive for joining the Learning Gateway included a need to get some money, find a job, gain some qualifications, change lifestyle or as a response to family pressure;
- those who had been on the 'front-end' for a significant period of time were often grappling with a range of complex problems;
- young people valued the personal help and practical support provided by PAs on a one to one basis;
- young people involved in Life Skills were particularly appreciative of courses that were individually tailored to meet their interests and needs, including work placements and/or outward bound activities;
- young people felt that the Learning Gateway had helped them develop a more positive attitude, enhanced their self-confidence, improved communication and social skills, and increased their motivation to organise their lives more productively.

¹³ This concern was echoed in the QPID 2000 research, which added that, 'low occupancy levels, linked with low levels of funding, restricted the ability of providers to deliver the more personalised programme that this particular client group needed'.

¹⁴ Sims D., Nelson J., Golden S., Spielhofer T. (2001) *Young People's Experience of the Learning Gateway*, Research Report 277. Sheffield : Department for Education and Skills.

Feedback

CeGS would be happy to receive feedback on the report, and hope the findings prove useful to respective parties in planning future developments;

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Chapter Two: Management and Delivery of the ‘Front-End’

Introduction

2.1 In this chapter we:

- identify different models of delivery for the Learning Gateway being operated in the East Midlands;
- provide an overview of the Learning Gateway in each of the areas in the region;
- review available performance data about the operation of the Learning Gateway;
- consider issues arising from the operation of the ‘front-end’ and Life Skills within the Learning Gateway in the region;
- provide an overview of the findings.

Models of Delivery

Background

2.2 The Learning Gateway was introduced in the East Midlands as part of the programme’s national roll-out in September 1999. It has been managed since then by the designated Government Office contract team. They worked initially with Training and Enterprise Councils (TEC/CCTEs) in the region, and latterly with Learning and Skills Councils (LSC), who have taken over responsibility for funding and managing Life Skills. They have also directly managed Careers Service companies, and latterly Connexions Partnerships, in regard to ‘front-end’ provision.

2.3 Unlike many initiatives, the operational model for the Learning Gateway was not directly piloted, although a limited number of Pathfinder projects were established (between May 1999 and March 2000) to explore the Personal Adviser role¹⁵. The Learning Gateway model (set out in Figure One) was drawn up on the basis of experience gained through New Start - Round One (aimed at 14-17 year olds) and Round Two (aimed at 16-17 year olds) pilots¹⁶ and a variety of local and regional projects. These local and regional projects were funded, often on a time-

¹⁵ Department for Education and Employment (2000) New Start - Paving the way for the Learning Gateway. Final evaluation of the personal adviser pilot projects. Sheffield: DfEE.

¹⁶ Department for Education and Employment (2000) New Start - Round One Evaluation Final Report. Sheffield: DfEE. Department for Education and Employment (1999) New Start - Paving the Way for the Learning Gateway. An evaluation of second round projects. Sheffield: DfEE.

limited basis, through a variety of sources, such as European Social Fund (ESF), Employment Programme (YOUTHSTART), or Single Regeneration Fund (SRB), and/or were part of TEC-funded provision¹⁷.

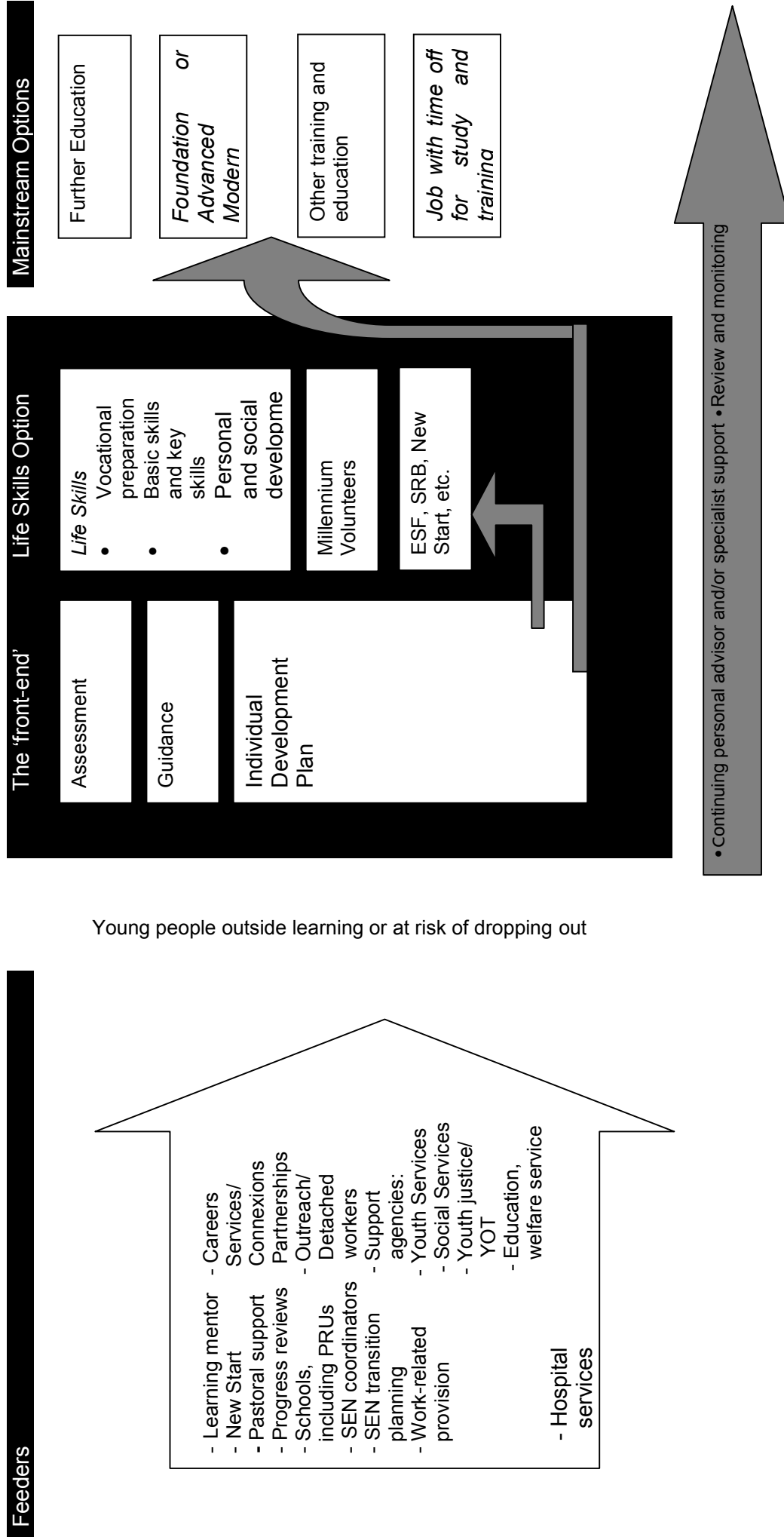
- 2.4 All areas in the East Midlands indicated that there were varying levels of work happening with the Learning Gateway client group, including disengaged clients, prior to the introduction of the Learning Gateway. For example, in Lincolnshire, there were TEC-supported STAR and STAR-Plus courses which were designed to give additional support to what is now the Learning Gateway target group. In addition, three of the areas in the region, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, had been involved as New Start (Round Two) pilot areas.
- 2.5 The introduction of the Learning Gateway has meant that a secure funding stream has become available to enable services to be developed beyond previous levels, and to fill gaps in existing provision. For example, in Northamptonshire five projects had been established by the TEC/CCTEC, supported by Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding, with staff seconded to set them up, but gaps existed in Daventry and East Northamptonshire, which the Learning Gateway funding has filled.

Model Types

- 2.6 A key element of the research brief was to seek to benchmark and model provision and practice across the region, and to consider the potential impact on performance of such models.
- 2.7 The research identified three main models of the delivery of the 'front-end'.
- **Model A:** The Careers Service/Connexions Partnership delivers 'front-end' provision, and working with partner agencies, also holds a contract with the LSC to deliver Life Skills provision, alongside other learning providers.
 - **Model B:** The Careers Service/Connexions Partnership delivers 'front-end' provision, and also has a contract to manage Life Skills provision, which is delivered by agreed learning providers and other local partners.
 - **Model C:** The Careers Service/Connexions Partnership delivers 'front-end' provision, and the LSC contracts with a range of learning providers to deliver Life Skills.

¹⁷ Department for Education and Employment (2000) A Guide to Relevant Practice in the Learning Gateway for 16 & 17 year olds. Sheffield: DfEE

Figure One – The Learning Gateway for 16 and 17 year olds – Delivery Model



Source: Based on Department of Education and Employment, Further Education Development Agency 'Engaging with the Learning Gateway' Report, 2000.

- 2.8 A review of available evidence in the existing research literature on the Learning Gateway would suggest that the predominant model nationally is Model C. This certainly reflects the pattern in the East Midlands, where three out of the five areas deliver the Learning Gateway in this way (as outlined below).
- 2.9 However, it is important to note that, in some ways, Models A and B probably best reflect the early conceptual work about the Learning Gateway, particularly in terms of the Careers Service/PA role in shaping, tailoring and specifying provision to meet identified needs. However, given the management and funding structures under which the Learning Gateway operates, particular operational challenges have arisen where the Careers Service has been involved in operating either Models A or B. Model C too has been far from unproblematic, due in large measure to the way that the contractual responsibilities have been divided.

Model Variance and Flexibility

- 2.10 In terms of the operation of these models, additional flexibility is enabled through:

- **Supplementary Funding**¹⁸. Alongside mainstream funding, some areas have sought to provide additional support for the Learning Gateway. For example, In **Nottinghamshire**, additional European Social Fund support (of some £600,000) has been obtained. This is being combined to enhance the options available to Learning Gateway clients, including offering specialist counselling provision. In addition, the LSC informed us that bespoke Life Skills provision aimed at particular employment sectors (e.g. Hotel and Catering and Electrical Contracting) is being planned in co-operation with local employers, sector bodies and learning providers.

In **Leicestershire**, LCGS has obtained European Social Fund support to operate the 'Reachout in Leicester and Leicestershire' (ROLL) programme. ROLL has a range of specific target groups in the 13-18 cohort. ROLL support is available to 16 –18 year olds to supplement that which they receive through the Learning Gateway. Uses include specialist counselling and assessment, assistance to overcome travelling difficulties, specialist equipment to assist young people in seeking employment or college places, and respite care to assist young carers to access training.

- **Individual case presentation.** Alongside funding Life Skills for groups of young people, LSCs in the region are sometimes able to provide individual support, usually in response to a particular need or circumstance. For example, DCS Ltd mentioned that on a regular basis (a few cases each

¹⁸ It is worth noting that pilot Personal Advisers working within the designated six New Start project areas from May 1999 to March 2000 had access to flexible funding, which allowed them to support directly young people in a variety of different ways. The CeGS evaluation team reported that these PAs universally valued this funding (Source: Morgan & Hughes (2000) 'New Start - Paving the way for the Learning Gateway. Final evaluation of the personal adviser pilot projects'. Sheffield: DfEE.

month) PAs highlight and discuss individual cases with the LSC with a view to seeking some additional support (e.g. a particular piece of equipment required for employment). They stressed that through dialogue they are frequently able to provide a tailored solution to meet identified needs. This practice seems particularly effective, and the scope to explore the funding of individual programmes of learning/support in this way should be explored further, and could be the basis of some useful development pilots.

Operation of the Models in Different Areas

Derbyshire Career Services (DCS Ltd): Model A

- 2.11 In Derbyshire, outside the High Peak area, Derbyshire Career Services (DCS Ltd), as well as providing 'front-end provision', is the main provider of Life Skills through 'Connect 2'¹⁹. With the aid of partners, this programme is able to offer provision throughout the DCS Ltd operational area. Including DCS Ltd 'Connect 2', there are some seven providers contracted by LSC to offer Life Skills. The key reason for the development of 'Connect 2' - and the involvement of the Careers Service - was reported to have been in response to a perceived lack of alternative provision in a number of areas of the county. The anticipated length of stay on all Life Skills provision in the county seems to be 19 weeks, but the LSC indicated that they are flexible on this depending on personal needs.

The LSC in Derbyshire indicated that a total of 470 Life Skills places are available at any one time, of which some 300 are regularly filled, indicating either a level of over-provision, or of under-supply. Similarly, Preparatory Training provision offered by a number of learning providers was also reported to be under-subscribed.

DCS Ltd hold internal meetings on a regular basis to review progress and development in relation to the delivery of the Learning Gateway. Formal meetings used to be held with the TEC every two months, and were said to be broad ranging in scope. Since the establishment of the LSC in March 2001, meetings are now held every three months, and were reported recently to have focused on contractual responsibilities.

DCS Ltd indicated that partnerships exist between them and a wide range of organisations, including the Chamber of Commerce, Local Authorities and LEAs. DCS Ltd works particularly closely with the Youth Service - with whom they have established a service level agreement - and Youth Service staff are seconded into DCS Ltd as PAs/'Connect 2' leaders.

¹⁹ 'Connect 2' is operated by DCS, in co-operation with Derby City and Derbyshire County Council Youth Services. Its provision was the subject of an inspection by Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). The leadership and management of Connect 2 were assessed as 'satisfactory'; Life Skills provision was assessed as being 'good'; 96% of learners were reported as achieving positive outcomes ('By progressing into a job with training, or into further training opportunities, and/or by fulfilling personal development goals'). Concerns were raised about the coverage of quality assurance procedures in regards to the training process, and the promotion of equal opportunities. DCS has been undertaking work to address these concerns.

Links are strongest with the voluntary and community sector at the referral level, both to and from the Learning Gateway. For example, it was reported that referrals are made to local voluntary work placements via voluntary action centres. Referrals are also received from Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and Social Services, and positive feedback has been received about the way this has extended what can be offered to mutual clients.

DCS Ltd has a formalised referral system to the Learning Gateway, based on reviewing young people aged 16-19 on the live register. It was indicated that approximately 25% of young people are deemed eligible for the Learning Gateway, representing about 50 young people at any one time. The make-up of this group was said to include 'hard to reach' young people who are facing disadvantages and barriers to learning. However, a long-standing arrangement has been that if a young person has been on the register for eight weeks or more, it is presumed that they are experiencing a barrier to learning, and so become eligible for the Learning Gateway.

The geography of the county, and the existence of very different labour markets, were highlighted as factors affecting the operation of the Learning Gateway within the DCS Ltd operational area. For example, in the Derbyshire Dales, access to provision is a significant issue, and ex-coal mining areas were reported to suffer from structural unemployment, as they, and other areas, seek to generate new employment opportunities and challenge long-standing views on educational/learning issues.

DCS Ltd is currently involved with its partners in a strategic review of the Learning Gateway. It is hoped that this will lead to a shared understanding amongst key partners of its role, purpose and delivery, in the context of related developments.

Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services (LCGS): Model B

- 2.12 In Leicester - and most of Leicestershire - Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services (LCGS) has the contract from the LSC to manage the delivery of Life Skills provision, as well as providing 'front-end' and ongoing learner support. The only exception to this arrangement is in Hinckley, where Life Skills provision is delivered by North Warwickshire and Hinckley Training (NWHT). The average length of stay on Life Skills was reported by the LSC to be some 12.5 weeks (in periods 1-9), and at any one time there are likely to be about 60 participants on the programme.

LCGS have an agreed list of 93 providers/delivery partners to call on, of which about 23 are used on a regular basis²⁰. One of the challenges faced by LCGS

²⁰ The provision of the Life Skills element of the Learning Gateway was recently inspected by ALI. The inspection report noted that LCGS had held the contract since January 2000, and indicated that the provision provided satisfactory foundation training. LCGS was reported to make good use of its links with support agencies/learning providers to provide a wide range of learning opportunities, and that most learners make good progress in relation to their prior achievement in learning and training. Concerns were raised about 'individual training plans' (sic), progress reviews,

(and a particular issue in the operation of Model B) is the burden the model places on the 'front-end' contractor, both to identify and 'mix and match' provision to best meet the needs of young people. In their inspection report, ALI's judgement was that a satisfactory range of short courses, and opportunities to be placed with more than one provider, were being provided. However, it is clear there are some difficulties and tensions here, particularly in relation to the operation of the delivery mechanism highlighted above.

As indicated, to supplement LCGS Life Skills provision, they are also able to offer appropriate young people the opportunity to benefit from provision funded and secured through the ROLL programme. This evidently contributes to the range of opportunities available, but simultaneously raises the issue of the boundaries and links between the two programmes, and the decisions of who would benefit most from which.

Alongside its distinctive delivery model, LCGS has devised an integrated staffing model for the Learning Gateway, which is different to that in other LSC sub-regions. It has been particularly active through its training team in offering training/development opportunities not only to its staff, but also to partner organisations.

CareerPath Northamptonshire Ltd: Model C

- 2.13 CareerPath works closely with the LSC regarding the delivery of the Learning Gateway. The LSC currently contracts with seven different providers across the county to deliver Life Skills. These include local Further Education Colleges, and/or their external training arms, specialist local and national charities/training organisations, the Lifelong Learning Service (formerly the Youth Service), and the training arms of local authorities.

CareerPath's approach to the Learning Gateway is set out as an appendix to their Business plan (Learning Gateway Plan for Northamptonshire 2001/2). In terms of key planning assumptions, and related targets, these include that:

- the duration of the 'front-end' will be according to individual need, but that for non-claimants the process may be accelerated in response to the need to qualify for the training allowance, as they have no other source of income;
- approximately 4% of Learning Gateway clients will move onto mainstream options at the end of 'front-end' without needing Life Skills Options;
- of the 392 young people who are expected to participate in Life Skills, 145 (37%) are expected to progress into mainstream learning.

CareerPath indicated that they work closely with the voluntary and community sector, and bodies such as Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and Social Services. These organisations clearly have a continuing role with mutual clients, and they

and progression to further learning opportunities. LCGS are addressing these and other concerns raised about leadership, management and quality assurance.

find these links vital in addressing needs (for example with social workers, issues such as accommodation and finance for those leaving care). In addition, CareerPath reported that many of their Learning Gateway clients are experiencing multiple problems. Here, they find the support of the Youth Counselling service particularly important, alongside individual support plans (funded by the LSC) which provide funding for youth workers to provide the additional help needed, including referrals and links through to other support agencies known to colleagues in Lifelong Learning.

CareerPath particularly stressed that the policies and procedures related to the Learning Gateway link directly into the strategic aims and corporate vision of the service, and that an extensive series of standards and procedures are available to guide PAs work. The role of the Learning Gateway Co-ordinator is pivotal in providing a range of support and development functions, and overall for seeing that the needs of young people are met. It was indicated that a 'bottom up' approach allows operational issues to come up from practitioners, with the company then seeking to respond to meet identified needs and challenges.

Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland (CXL&R): Model C

- 2.14 Lincolnshire and Rutland is the only area within the East Midlands to be fully operational as a Connexions Partnership (with others coming on-stream from April 2002). Before April 2001, Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services (LCGS) covered the geographical area of Rutland. Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland (CXL&R) have since that date been working with the LSC in regard to the development of the Learning Gateway, and have devised a joint Learning Gateway Plan for 2001/2.

The LSC indicated that there are 165 Life Skills places available in Lincolnshire and Rutland. Average stay on Life Skills is about 20 weeks but those who require it stay longer. However, there is an acknowledged problem in regard to Life Skills coverage, particularly in the Stamford area and in Rutland, where young people have to access provision that is not locally based. In this and other respects, the LSC and CXL&R confirmed that particular difficulties exist associated with the rural nature of the sub-region, and the distances between main centres of the population. This can mean that provision can be sparse, choice restricted, and young people considering it have to agree, and be able, to undertake long journeys on public transport. In terms of service delivery support in this situation, the LSC has funded a Learning Gateway Co-ordinator post, whose role includes enhancing delivery processes, helping to resolve operational and funding issues and enhancing coherence.

Alongside rural issues, the ready availability of temporary work on the coastal fringe in the summer, and seasonal demand in food processing plants impact on retention rates. CXL&R pointed out that 20% of young people on Life Skills terminate within five weeks. Although hard data is not available, the factors mentioned may have a part to play in this, although other factors could be significant (e.g. custody, maternity, and progression to mainstream options).

The agreed Learning Gateway plan for 2001/2 indicates that an increasing number of young people should benefit from the Learning Gateway in 2001/2 (up some 100, from 500 to 600). The plan states that although the duration of the 'front-end' will *'vary according to individual need'*, the lack of financial support, other than travel expenses for non-claimants, *'often speeds them on to New Options without a protracted period of assessment and support first'*.

A particularly important development in CXL&R has been the introduction of the Distance to the Labour Market Initiative (DLM). This was developed by Luyten Cwp in the Netherlands, and has already been piloted by Tyneside Careers in the North East. The approach breaks down an individual's progress into 23 stages from 'unengaged' right through to 'settled into mainstream choice for 6 months'. The advantage of the system is that it offers a continuing/diagnostic mechanism, as well as providing an effective analysis of 'distance travelled' by the individual. In this regard it can therefore provide a crucial impact measure, and its potential here is increased, in so far as data will be recorded on the company's ASPIRE database, meaning that a range of analytical work will then be possible using the data. Good practice in the implementation of the initiative included that it was introduced via a series of joint training days for PAs and providers, which greatly increased mutual understanding of its purposes and objectives. It is clear that the DLM initiative offers a very promising way forward, and it would be very helpful if a wider range of Connexions Partnerships (possibly working as a development consortium) could be involved in taking it forward, and exploring its wider potential and application.

The CXL&R and LSC Learning Gateway plan emphasises the need for collaborative working relationships with a number of key partners - many of whom have a similar leading role in groups such as the Learning Partnership and the Disaffection Strategy Steering Group. An important forum is the County Learning Gateway Development Group (which meets quarterly), which has a wide membership including YOTs, Training Providers, Further Education Colleges, Pupil Referral Units, Social Care and Health Service representatives. In addition, a number of inter-agency groups are supported and/or run. This includes five regional Multi-Agency Practitioner Groups (established in 1999/2000) and facilitated by CXL&R, and a Benefits Plus Group which meets quarterly to consider issues facing young people who are in receipt of state benefits and/or housing benefit.

GuideLine Career Services: Model C

- 2.15 Up to April 2001, responsibility for delivering training programmes, including Life Skills, was shared between two TECs that covered Nottinghamshire. This resulted in different systems and approaches being developed.

Since April, the LSC has sought to harmonise the two systems, and has a network of nine Life Skills providers across the county. There also appears to be some variation in the availability of provision due to a range of demographic,

geographic, and economic factors. For example, a variety of Life Skills provision is available in Nottingham, but it was reported that there is no current provision based in Retford, and as a result young people have to take the train to the nearest provider, which is based in Worksop. In addition, there appears to be an issue regarding the perceived responsiveness of some providers, with large providers being able to respond more quickly to meeting young people's needs than some of their smaller counterparts. This is due in part to economies of scale, but it was indicated that provider vision and imagination were also important factors.

It was indicated that the level of starts onto the Learning Gateway in the current year was unlikely to exceed that achieved in 2000/1. As a result, there were some concerns expressed that the targets set for Learning Gateway occupancy were higher than were likely to be obtained.

In regard to referrals to the Learning Gateway, it was indicated these come from a mixture of self-referral, from within the organisation, from Life Skills providers, and increasingly from partner bodies such as the Youth Service and YOTs. It would appear that few referrals are coming from colleagues working in schools, though the importance of this is clearly given prominence in company policy and guidance in the current business plan. Similarly, outreach work undertaken directly by the company did not seem to feature, and was not reported as contributing to recruitment to the programme.

The company is heavily involved in working towards the launch of the Connexions Partnership in April 2002. It was indicated that within this a likely development is for more focused activity, for example PAs specialising in delivering Learning Gateway related-services, in place of current arrangements.

Review of Management Information

- 2.16 The CeGS research team have undertaken a detailed study of the data made available from GOEM through the Regional and Head Office Management Information System (RHOMIS), on the operation of the Learning Gateway in the East Midlands overall (and within its five sub-regions). The three main periods considered were:
- September 1999 - March 2000 (programme launch to the end of the first operational year);
 - April 2000 - March 2001 (the programme's first full year of operation);
 - April 2001 - October 2001 (progress to date in the first half of the current operational year).

Programme Performance

2.17 The research team extracted from the RHOMIS management information that data which relates directly to operational performance in the first complete operational year of the programme. The overall performance of the Learning Gateway based on this data is set out in Figure 5 in this chapter. The data for each of the five LSC sub-regions is set out in Figures 6-10 (which are set out in Annex 3). In this section, we consider:

- the number of young people who joined the Learning Gateway in the period;
- the overall performance of the Learning Gateway in terms of its key outcomes;
- whether the management information collected for the operational year 2000/1 across the region provides any insights into the relative effectiveness of the delivery models, and/or operational approaches highlighted earlier.

2.18 The reasons for selecting the data from the Learning Gateway's first full operational year (April 2000 - March 2001) is that it is clear that:

- it took several months to get the programme fully established (meaning that there may be little to be gained from an analysis of performance data pre-March 2001);
- there are seasonal factors in recruitment and retention (as identified earlier) which could impact on performance that we could not account for, meaning that it would be inappropriate to consider data since the start of the current operational year.

However, in terms of ongoing performance review, having established this methodology and rationale, it may well be worth GOEM and partners repeating this exercise at a later stage, and/or on an ongoing basis, to see what progress has been made against this baseline data.

2.19 Key issues identified from an analysis of this data are as follows:

Starters

2.20 A total of 1,626 young people joined the Learning Gateway in the East Midlands between April 2000 and March 2001 (GOEM, Regional and Head Office Management Information System (RHOMIS) data, 2002). In descending order the following provides a breakdown of the numbers of starters in the five sub-regions:

- 576 (35.4%) GuideLine;
- 328 (20.2%) DCS Ltd;
- 321 (19.7%) CareerPath;
- 218 (13.4%) CXL&R;
- 183 (11.3%) LCGS.

Re-Entry

- 2.21 A feature of the Learning Gateway in practice - and a challenge to the original linear model, as set out in Figure One - is the significant level of young people who 're-enter' the programme (some 631 across the region in 2000/2001). The sub-regional data demonstrates that there is no significant variation across the region, and certainly none that could be attributable to the operation of a particular delivery model.
- 2.22 Many of those spoken to during the fieldwork were quite comfortable about the level of re-entry to the programme. Some pointed out that the reasons are varied - for example taking a temporary job, pregnancy, or for a range of other personal reasons. This constituted, in the words of one team leader, *'taking a break, rather than leaving the programme'*.
- 2.23 However, a few were concerned about local levels of re-entry. For example, in one LSC area the contract manager reported that in a recent six-month period, 97 of the 322 entrants to the Learning Gateway (30%) were rejoining the programme, though they were uncertain as to the exact causes. This may suggest that there should be some adjustment to the operation of the Learning Gateway model to factor in re-entry, and to consider the support and learning needs of these young people, as well as those with more linear progression.

Regional Performance

- 2.24 The key aim of the Learning Gateway (as indicated in Chapter 1) is to enable young people to progress into learning opportunities at Level 2. An analysis of the 2000/1 data shows that in the East Midlands overall 3,226²¹ young people left the Learning Gateway (i.e. following entry to the 'front-end', they left from this, or more likely, after entering Life Skills).
- 2.25 As indicated in Annex Three, Figure 1, 1,144 young people (35% of total leavers) are shown as entering 'into learning' through the Learning Gateway, with the balance of 2,082 not entering learning. In terms of specific outcomes, it is clear that the majority - 916 (80%) - of those entering learning did so through work-based or other training, with only 228 (20%), being shown as entering learning through full-time education.
- 2.26 In regard to those entering work-based or other training, a mixed picture emerges in terms of those entering learning leading directly towards Level 2. For example, a significant group of young people - 494 (43%) - are recorded as entering other training (non-employed), and a further 209 (18%) entered employment with local training (not NVQ). This highlights the difficulty for those in the field seeking to assess the training/learning offered by local employers, which is not set in the NVQ framework, and/or otherwise delivered against National Occupational

²¹ The reason that the number of leavers exceeds that of starters, is because young people will have left the programme in that period who started between September 1999-March 2000.

Standards (NOS). This situation is particularly complicated when performance payments are paid on this basis, which, when judgements on equivalencies are then being made, is bound to lead to variations in practice across sub-regions.

- 2.27 In regard to those not entering learning, it should be noted that just over a quarter of them - 543 (26%) entered employment, which, as many staff were keen to indicate, may be a significant achievement for the young people concerned. Again, of them 23% are recorded as in employment 'at NVQ 2', and the same point as made above about assessing equivalencies may well apply in this situation.
- 2.28 In terms of other young people, 40% of those not leaving into learning did so for reasons such as family commitments (7%), and custody (3%). However, just over a third of the total - 698 (34%) - are indicated as not requiring assistance. It would appear that in turn there might be a variety of reasons for this response. These could be positive (e.g. they found work - though, if so, it would be helpful to have details), or indeed possibly negative (e.g. where young people didn't feel the service has been helpful).
- 2.29 The current lack of systematic tracking and follow-up of young people (which hopefully will be addressed within developing Connexions' strategies) means that it is not possible to provide further evidence on this. Research here would provide useful insights into the quality of current delivery, and the ongoing needs of young people. However, the resource intensive nature of this work needs to be noted.

Sub-Regional Performance

- 2.30 Despite the different operational practices, a very similar pattern of performance in regard to Learning Gateway leavers entering learning can be observed across the sub-regions (See Annex 3 for details). In terms of other issues highlighted, there does seem to be some variation in regard to the numbers entering Further Education (in the range 12-33%), and in respect of those not requiring assistance (in the range 23-50%). However, these differences could be accounted for by a variety of factors (including in the case of FE - as highlighted later - the range of provision available), and there is no discernible linkage to the delivery models identified.

Data Limitations

- 2.31 The available RHOMIS data has severe limitations in terms of its ability to evidence or inform the planning, management and development of the Learning Gateway. In particular, it does not include information on key issues such as:
- **Profile:** for example, participants' age on entry, ethnicity, disability, gender, level or nature of qualifications achieved (if any), and level of disadvantage;

- **Progression:** for example : length of stay and outcomes from ‘front-end’, length of stay and outcomes from Life Skills (including individual provider performance), and critically, ‘distance travelled’ in addressing identified needs;
- **Transition:** for example, the extent to which the young people leaving Life Skills are still in learning options after an agreed period (3-6 months).

It is crucial that the considerable effort required collecting and collating the performance data results in the production of information and intelligence of use to management at a national, regional and local level. An urgent review of this matter is required by DfES, in consultation with partner agencies, and it is recommended that this should be undertaken in the context of the development of an enhanced performance management and evaluation system for the programme.

Progression Issues

2.32 During the course of the research a wide range of issues was raised relating to the overall performance of the Learning Gateway, and the role of the ‘front-end’ provision within it, which are considered here under the following headings:

- **The future role of the Learning Gateway.** There was some discussion about the future role of the Learning Gateway. A discussion paper developed by DCS Ltd as part of a strategic review of the Learning Gateway²², sums up the current situation as follows:

‘Although the Learning Gateway was originally devised as a post-16 strategy to re-engage disaffected young people, it has come to be regarded as a programme in its own right rather than fitting into a wider strategy. Although it was recognised at the outset that the earliest possible identification of disengaged young people would aid effective transition, the Learning Gateway is now inevitably seen as a programme for young people who have failed to make a successful transition to post-16 learning opportunities’.

2.33 There was some feeling in Derbyshire and elsewhere that the Learning Gateway should not be seen as a standalone programme, but rather part of an integrated learning strategy. As such, increased emphasis should be placed on integrating the Learning Gateway with other pre- and post-16 work with disengaged young people. The role of partners, such as Learning Partnerships, in these discussions, should be recognised.

- **Who is the Learning Gateway for/who should it be for?** The target group for the Learning Gateway, as set out in the original specification is broadly defined. However, there seems to be a lack of a clear view as to who it is for,

²² Paper provided by DCS: ‘Learning Gateway in Derbyshire - Strategic Review July 2001 -Discussion Paper’.

and - in the absence of previous evaluation research and adequate management information - no clear evidence as to who it works best with. This is a concern in itself, but this is compounded by the fact that numerical targets are then based on raw data, which are felt by some to provide a limited account of: needs; the appropriateness of Learning Gateway provision; and/or young people's interest in entry into learning. Granted these concerns, it would be helpful - as seems to be the case in some sub-regions - that there is more joint planning of targets and provision, against agreed groups and reviewable objectives. This should include consideration of who should undertake **outreach** work in regard to the Learning Gateway, which seems to be a cause of difficulty in some areas.

- **Outreach.** Alongside the issue of who is the agreed target group, is the related question of how, and by whom, they can they best be reached? For 'hard to reach' groups this might involve outreach activity. By this we mean activity where services proactively seek to make contact with individuals, and/or groups, who are not responding to conventional approaches. The question of developing effective multi-agency arrangements to undertake this work is clearly a development issue in more than one sub-region, and one which can be addressed in the context of developing Connexions Partnerships;
- **Funding.** The operation of the funding model has a crucial impact on the Learning Gateway programme. This is particularly the case in regard to how long young people can remain on Life Skills provision, and there are some important differences in how LSCs address this issue.

For example, one LSC explained that they sought to be flexible about the length of time that a young person could remain on Life Skills, and indicated that the average stay was '26 weeks'. This level was assisted by the fact that their start levels were below profile, giving them some flexibility within available budgets.

Another LSC argued that the funding for the programme was predicated on an average attendance of 19 weeks. This meant that if some young people were on the Life Skills for over 19 weeks, then others would have to attend for less (e.g. if one young person attended for 26 weeks this would have to be balanced by another attending for 12 weeks). This, it was argued, necessitated widening the entry criteria for the Learning Gateway, and Careers Service staff in the area were reported to have responded positively to this requirement. In turn, the Careers Service indicated they were being helped by a pilot programme having been started with a Life Skills provider, which consciously splits the group into those who are work-ready and those who are not, to ensure that targets for progression into positive outcomes are met.

In the case of the latter LSC area, the issue is that even if the provision is entirely appropriate, the operation of the programme is being distorted by the

funding model, which requires the Learning Gateway target group to be defined on a much broader basis than was originally envisaged. It is arguable that increased joint-planning, and budgeting, in the delivery of the Learning Gateway would avoid these difficulties.

- **Preparatory Training.** Preparatory Training has traditionally been made available to assist young people who, on leaving education, are 'vocationally uncertain' and/or need help (e.g. a programme of work sampling/tasters) to get a clearer idea of the requirements (e.g. work disciplines) and/or skills required in particular work areas.

The issue was raised directly in three of the five areas (though it may or may not be an issue in the other two) of there being a level of confusion about the current roles of Preparatory Training and Learning Gateway. One LSC indicated that they felt there was a suspicion that some young people are being referred to the Learning Gateway when the only identifiable 'problem' was one of vocational uncertainty. Clearly, an issue for each sub-region where both programmes are being operated is to ensure that the provision is genuinely complementary, and that young people are appropriately referred.

- **Lack of Life Skills provision.** As indicated elsewhere in the report, a number of comments were made about problems concerning the quality or general availability of Life Skills provision. In terms of the latter, specific problems were mentioned in Retford in Nottinghamshire, Stamford in Lincolnshire and the county of Rutland.
- **PA concerns about Life Skills provision.** In at least one sub-region it was reported that PAs' views of available Life Skills provision affects referral intentions, and indeed their willingness to refer young people to Life Skills at all. Particular concerns raised in that area related to staff training within some Life Skills providers, the level of tasks being set for young people, and the need for a broader range of agencies to be involved to provide genuinely tailored provision. As one PA put it, *'sending them would constitute regression, not progression'*.

In another area, PA concerns appeared to relate to the fact that a particular provider had a number young people with drug/substance misuse problems, and they were anxious that they did not want to expose vulnerable clients to this influence. In a further area, concerns were expressed where time on Life Skills provision is restricted to 19 weeks that this is not adequate to meet the needs of some of the most disadvantaged young people.

- **PA 'Gatekeeper' role:** Within the funding and management structure that has been established for the Learning Gateway, a number of people during fieldwork described what they saw as the 'PA gatekeeper' role. The use of the term was deeply resented by some 'front-end' providers, who saw it as pejorative and casting doubt on PAs professional judgement. The term arises

from the fact that without PA approval young people cannot progress directly on to Life Skills provision.

Inevitably this can lead to tensions between organisations involved. For example, one LSC reported that, '*some of our providers can go 6-8 months without a referral*', and one Life Skills provider reported that:

'Clients who only need a short Life Skills programme are worked on for a number of months by PAs in the 'front-end' ...and sometimes young people who need a lot of work are put straight onto Life Skills when they are not ready for it'.

- 2.34 In these circumstances it is very difficult to distinguish what is professional judgement and what is vested interest, but the corrosive effects of this on emerging partnership working must not be underestimated. This is particularly the case in Model A and Model B provision.
- 2.35 In the case of Model A provision, the issue is of a clear conflict of interest, where an organisation is - at one and the same time- acting as the sole method of entry for all Life Skills provision, and is also a major partner in providing that provision.
- 2.36 In Model B the concern is probably more about the perceived equity of usage of providers, when - for reasons of maximising choice - such a wide list of potential sources is retained.
- 2.37 The current operational system is likely to put the two parties ('front-end' and Life Skills providers) on a collision course if/when complex judgements about a young person's perceived 'readiness' in regard to progression is not accepted by the other party. In these circumstances, it is to be hoped that the development and extensive use of common tools (such as the Connexions Framework - APIR tool²³) will be useful. Also, where necessary, more effective ways of handling professional differences of opinion - drawing on best practice in this and other similar fields (e.g. through case conference) - should be used to enable a resolution, as there appears to be no accepted 'arbitration' procedure at present.
- **Movement to Mainstream Training:** A range of issues was raised about progression from Life Skills to mainstream training²⁴. These included:
 - **The lack of differentiation in training allowance.** Young people reported in a number of areas that they did not understand why, if they were being paid £40 for attending 16 hours a week, they should in the words of one individual, '*be paid less for doing more*' when they moved to a 35 hour week. This is clearly an issue. However, to counteract this, an

²³ Department for Education and Skills/Connexions Service National Unit (2001) The Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review. Guidance for Personal advisers. Sheffield : DfES.

²⁴ This topic is the subject of a separate but complementary research study that was undertaken in Nottinghamshire on a similar timescale to this research by Guideline Career Services and local partners. CeGS will be involved in working with colleagues in Nottinghamshire to consider the findings of both research projects.

LSC reported that one Life Skills provider gradually increases the hours of attendance for young people on Life Skills, so that by the end of the programme they are undertaking a full week;

- **The availability of suitable provision and support.** Concern was raised about progression routes in mainstream further education, and training beyond Life Skills. The lack of NVQ1 provision to be part of the 'sloping ramp' envisaged in good practice guidance for Further Education is a particular issue²⁵. Additionally the point was raised that funding does not allow PA support to extend routinely beyond Life Skills to assist those who need continued support into - and in some cases beyond - initial transition to ensure that there is not unnecessary 'drop-out'. Another area mentioned (being outside an Educational Maintenance Allowance pilot area), that the lack of financial support for a young person if they want to go back to education is an issue. It is to be hoped that this will be considered in DfES' current 14-19 review.
- **Information flows.** A certain level of anecdotal evidence was provided during fieldwork about problems that occurred because of lack of clear protocols and arrangements in regard to inter-agency exchange, within the 'front-end' and in transition, of confidential information. This area will need continuous attention within the context of the development and local implementation of the Connexions service and strategy.
- **Lack of specialist support.** A number of areas highlighted difficulties in the operation of the 'front-end' and in ongoing assistance caused by the lack of specialist support services. Areas that were frequently mentioned during fieldwork were the lack of support for homeless young people and those with mental health difficulties. For example, it was reported in one sub-region that the waiting time for a mental health appointment for young people was some 8 months. Issues concerning the specialist support service needs of young people arising through the additional work undertaken with the Learning Gateway client group, need to be raised and openly discussed/reviewed within sub-regions, and as appropriate, at a regional/national level.
- **Work-based provision.** One team leader highlighted what they saw as a missing link in provision, and urged the case for the development of a form of *'supported employment environment for young people where young people with particular needs could be helped for up to a year'*.

Previous research suggests that increasing the levels of work sampling and experience within Life Skills would be popular amongst young people, and may, if well managed, enhance provision. Similarly employment is the preferred progression route (as we shall review later) for many young people, and a key motivator for entering the Learning Gateway.

²⁵ Further Education Development Agency (2000) Engaging with the Learning Gateway: a guide for colleges. FEDA:London

Arguably what is required is more work-based learning and support to increase learning opportunities for young people in work (as envisaged in the Time Off for Work legislation), rather than making the planning assumption that young people leaving will want/be able to attain Level 2 pre-entry. Workforce development is a key government priority, as evidenced through the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit's recent report. It is clear that relevant parties (including the LSC) need to give more consideration to the interface between the Learning Gateway and the wider workforce development agenda.

Overview

- 2.38 The Learning Gateway has been implemented in the East Midlands using a range of operational models. It would appear that the models that have emerged have been strongly influenced by local factors, and shaped primarily by pragmatic decisions about what appeared to be the best available choices, granted the limited time frame in which the programme had to be implemented. A range of operational issues has emerged during the past two years, some of which would have become evident if the programme had been piloted. As indicated, some of these are systemic weaknesses and remain to be addressed.
- 2.39 Unfortunately, the system (RHOMIS) used to collect data on a sub-regional basis has not provided effective management information/intelligence, and is of very limited value when commenting on the quality and effectiveness of provision. Although under-performance against targets (in most cases both in terms of recruitment and learning outcome) has been a recurring issue (in the East Midlands as elsewhere), limited development support has been provided (e.g. good practice materials, or forums to exchange information) or evaluation evidence sought to inform action. This has created tensions between local parties, and left those involved focusing on targets and figures, the relevance and significance of which has not been entirely clear.
- 2.40 The situation has undoubtedly been complicated by organisational change, principally the transition from TEC/CCTEs to the LSC, and from Careers Service to developing Connexions Partnerships. It is to be hoped that the establishment of new arrangements between Connexions Partnerships and LSCs, will enable a much needed review of the role and operation of the Learning Gateway.

Chapter Three: Personal Advisers – Work and Role in the Learning Gateway

3.1 In this chapter we:

- review the different Personal Adviser (PA) Management Models adopted by the Careers Services and the Connexions Partnership in the different sub-regions within the East Midlands;
- consider key issues in relation to the work of PAs in general, and specifically, their work on the 'front-end', and in ongoing learner support;
- provide an overview of findings.

Management Models

3.2 In terms of management of Personal Advisers (PAs), the analysis suggests that two different management models have been adopted. These are:

Model One: Integrated Structure. In this model, the company does not have a discrete Learning Gateway Manager. Responsibility for the Learning Gateway is fully integrated into the company structure, and PAs are managed by area-based team leaders.

This model operates in **LCGS**, where support for operational management and delivery staff is available from the training team, and a Quality Manager monitors the quality of Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

Model Two: Line Management by Team-Leaders/Area Managers (Learning Gateway Co-ordinator/Manager supports). This model operates in the other four areas.

- **CareerPath:** PAs are managed by area managers, and alongside other staff, a Learning Gateway Co-ordinator (who also works part-time as a PA) oversees and supports the work of the PA team countywide.
- **CXL&R:** Targeted PAs are managed by Targeted Team Area Managers, and are supported by other staff, including a full-time Learning Gateway Co-ordinator.
- **DCS Ltd:** PAs are managed by area-based team leaders, and, alongside other staff, are supported by a full-time Learning Gateway Manager.
- **GuideLine:** PAs are managed by area-based team leaders, and, alongside other staff, are supported by a full-time Learning Gateway Manager.

3.3 A key issue that emerged during the discussions with line managers and team-leaders was the complexities of managing PA staff, many of whom (as will be considered later) have other duties.

3.4 In **Model Two**, particular tensions exist where the Learning Gateway Co-ordinator/Manager is responsible for the delivery of targets and workplans through staff over whom they have no line-management responsibility and who in turn may have conflicting operational pressures.

These tensions are clearly reduced when the delivery service is operating within a Connexions Partnership, and PAs are focusing on providing services to either targeted (including Learning Gateway) or universal client groups. Although this suggests a resolution to this issue may come with the advent of full Connexions Partnership operations, experience to date²⁶ suggests that there is still much to be learned about the effective management, and deployment of, PAs within Connexions.

3.5 In respect of **Model One**, a common management structure can clearly assist in ensuring that PAs do not get 'mixed messages' about their roles and responsibilities, particularly when acting as both a Careers Adviser and a PA. However, the model does require clear 'lead responsibilities' to be established, and for functional support (such as quality assurance and training/development) to be well specified and delivered, to ensure that the potential role tensions in Model Two do not apply.

3.6 It is clear from the fieldwork that particular management styles and approaches can improve working arrangements within both models, and that effective approaches are likely to include:

- effective planning and leadership, and a shared understanding between senior and middle managers of roles and responsibilities;
- regular consultation with staff, and the necessary time and will to resolve operational problems identified;
- effective training and development activities (This was more evident for PAs, than for managers, whose development needs in a fast-changing operational environment need to be considered and addressed).

Personal Advisers

Case loads and work-load planning.

3.7 The organisation of PA work and case-loading varies across the region, and indeed in some cases within sub-regions. Given some of the differences already highlighted in regard to variations in approach to eligibility, a warning needs to be given about directly comparing case loads. It should also be noted that the

²⁶ Department for Education and Skills (2001) *Lessons Learned from the Connexions Pilots*. Research Report RR308. Sheffield: DfES.

support needs of individual young people can vary substantially, both in their nature and the length of time over which it is required. What is clear from previous research is the resource intensive nature overall of work with disengaged young people²⁷ and the 'hardest to help'. For case loading to be effective it needs to take adequate account of the actual and potential demand to meet the needs, and not just the number, of clients.

- 3.8 In terms of the arrangements in each operational area, and identified delivery model, this is as follows:

Model A

In **DCS Ltd**, most PAs were reported to have duty and/or group leader responsibilities on the 'Connect 2' course. The level of their caseload was said to vary depending on the work undertaken. In one case, this meant as little as one day a week's work as a PA, alongside course leader responsibilities on Life Skills. As in most areas, staff working as PAs do so on either a full, or part-time, basis.

In terms of caseload numbers, some PAs indicated they have a caseload of between 2 and 12 Learning Gateway clients. An average caseload was reported to be around 10-15 young people.

Model B

In **LCGS**, there again is a mixture of full and part-time PAs, with an emphasis on allowing staff to 'play to their strengths', and balancing their CA/PA work accordingly. The maximum PA caseload number was reported to be 25, and the caseloads of the PAs spoken to during field work ranged from 10-15.

Model C

- In **CareerPath**, most of the PAs fulfill a dual CA/PA role, on either a full or part-time basis. It was indicated that staff undertaking PA work volunteered to undertake that role. In terms of caseloads, this was described in terms of PAs having responsibility for between 2-10 clients on the 'front-end', and between 8-20 on Life Skills.
- In **CXL&R**, as indicated, Learning Gateway clients are part of the Targeted Advisers caseload. The Learning Gateway Plan 2001/2 sets the target that, on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis, caseloads should consist of 13-17 Learning Gateway clients, with the target that every client should receive a minimum of 30 hours support.

²⁷ Research undertaken by ECOTEC for the Department showed - through case studies - that Careers Services required at least 3-4 as much funding per individual to deliver this activity, than that required to deliver core activity. Source: Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Survey of Careers Service Work with Disaffected Young People*. Sheffield: DfEE.

- In **GuideLine**, PAs are employed on a full and part-time basis. In the north of the county, all Careers Advisers (CA) have PA responsibilities. In the south, there are some PAs who do not have CA responsibilities, and vice versa. In practice it was said almost all PAs undertake their Learning Gateway work on a part-time basis. In terms of caseload, the FTE was said to be up to 30 clients, with a 50% part-time pro-rata loading being 15. In practice, in terms of the caseloads of those PAs spoken to, these varied between about 6-16, with a possible suggestion that caseloads were slightly higher in the south than in the north of the county.
- 3.9 As can be seen, no particular pattern of PA work loading can be seen to be linked to each model, although an interesting feature of Model A was that staff have the opportunity to work both on the ‘front-end’ and on Life Skills Provision. The pros and cons of this approach would be an interesting topic to explore in the follow-up action planning workshop.
- 3.10 A general issue that was raised in regard to workload planning, is how to decide which PA new Learning Gateway clients should be referred to. For example, some concern was expressed in one area about the need to ensure that Duty PAs (i.e. those seeing new clients who have come into Careers Centres) have an effective way of ensuring that young people are referred to other PAs. This was a particular issue when they have reached - or are near reaching - their own ‘maximum’ case-loading.
- A couple of interesting examples were provided of how to relieve PA workload pressures. These were:
- In **CareerPath**, relief over the summer months is provided by schools’ Careers Advisers who take on the role of PA to some clients they have been working with in school during the summer holidays;
 - In **LCGS**, it is proposed that temporary support workers will be appointed to help with clients in the period prior to them being assigned to a PA.
- 3.11 A general issue was raised about whether PAs should work full-time. There seemed to be a concern that intensive work with disengaged young people might lead to ‘burn-out’. The assumption seemed to be that this was more likely to be avoided if staff had a balanced PA/CA caseload, which seems to be the predominant pattern.
- 3.12 There is some evidence that those areas with the largest numbers of LG clients have had particular difficulties in enabling staff to choose whether or not to work as a PA, as clearly more existing staff have had to be engaged. This is particularly the case where the company has taken on the provision of Life Skills as well. The lessons emerging from this experience require careful consideration, particularly in the context of the development of the Connexions PA role.

Satisfaction in their work role

- 3.13 Most PAs seen during fieldwork showed considerable interest in their work, and spoke with enthusiasm about what they were seeking to achieve with young people on the Learning Gateway.

However, it is clear that not all staff currently undertaking the role of PA are happy or settled in that role. In part, this can be traced to the speedy introduction of the then new programme in September 1999, and the limited time available to introduce/select staff for the work and role - and indeed to provide adequate pre-entry induction training.

In one area, Area Managers recalled that individuals were asked to volunteer for posts, and no financial incentives were offered. Employment and Training Advisers (ETAs) and Youth Workers applied and were accepted although the majority are qualified Careers Advisers. In regard to the employment of ETAs as PAs, a problem in all areas where this has occurred was of them wanting *'professional pay and status'*, as all we met reported that they were working on their previous (lower) pay scales. This issue was described in one area as *'a pot waiting to boil over'*, and was felt to be inequitable by all with whom the issue arose.

In another area, some disquiet was expressed about the fact that although staff at the outset were given a choice as to whether they were to work mainly with mainstream, or with the Learning Gateway group, although the final decision rested with management. One of these staff expressed the view that *'I didn't join the Careers Service to become a social worker'*, and indicated that they felt (about) *'20% of other PAs feel the same way'* (a sentiment endorsed in other discussions).

Work with Young People

- 3.14 All PAs interviewed during the fieldwork stressed the critical importance of developing relationships with young people. As one PA indicated:

'Effectively moving young people on through the Learning Gateway depends on the strength of relationship developed between the PA and the young person'.

In these circumstances a range of key inter-personal skills are needed to have. One PA indicated that *'Trust, permission to criticise and challenge behaviour, are the key skills in required moving young people on'*. Another group of PAs summed up their key purpose and skills as being about *'support, negotiation and advocacy'*.

Models of Practice

- 3.15 In terms of the **models of practice**, a number of PAs raised their concerns about working in a '*centralised control*' versus a '*professional autonomy*' model. They felt that they worked in the former, where they '*had to adjust their work to meet targets*', whilst they wished to work in the latter, where - by meeting the needs of clients - they hoped/expected relevant targets to be met.
- 3.16 An issue for some PAs concerned recording required data about their work, and the adequacy of PAs' recording was noted as a major cause for tension in two areas. Particularly in one of these areas, the management of the service was concerned that PAs did not appreciate the importance of the task. Some PAs in this and other areas saw the level of recording as unnecessary, and removing them from their primary task of working with young people.

Assessment

- 3.17 The Learning Gateway specification and operational model (see Figure One) clearly identified that, alongside guidance and support, initial learner assessment would be undertaken as an integral part on 'front-end activities'. However, it was clear - across all operational areas - that, as evidenced in previous national research, the predominant model is primarily discussion/interview-based, and that any assessment practice is '*very light touch*'. One team leader summed up the views of many, when they indicated that the reason for this was that:

'PAs' experiences are that young people want somebody to talk and listen to them...they are very reluctant to engage with any assessment because it reminds them of school, which was for most a negative experience'

- 3.18 In general there was considerable negativity towards assessment, and in a few cases open hostility - with one focus group of PAs saying that they:

'would never use an assessment tool'.

Some PAs, rather than use conventional techniques, seem to use proxy measures. For example, one PA mentioned that rather than use a formal assessment tool for literacy, they '*ask the young person to read something to them to assess literacy levels*'. More conventionally a number of the services have collated and/or developed profiling exercises which can be used with clients. In the case of LCGS, these are linked to the development of the Individual Development Plan.

- 3.19 It is clear that one reason why PAs are not undertaking further assessment work is that Life Skills providers are undertaking this themselves. For example, one of the Life Skills providers visited indicated that they '*give a basic skills test about ten days into the programme, and then do different assessments as we go on from there*'. The concern here is that this assumes that they have the necessary

staffing and expertise to undertake the work, and, although this was outwith of this research project's remit, as indicated, other research evidence is not encouraging in this respect.

3.20 The following is a brief summary of the main tools and techniques that PAs reported using:

- In **CareerPath** an example given was of 'strength cards' indicating particular personal qualities and feelings. This can be used more than once, and so informs the PA/young people's view of how they have progressed. Mention was made too of the Genesys computer-aided assessment package (the only specific mention anywhere of a psychometric instrument), although it was unclear whether this was used regularly by more than one, or a small group of, PAs;
- In **CXL&R**, alongside the DLM tool already described, there was some discussion of the use of BeST and Basic Skills Agency assessment materials, computer-aided guidance tools, and profiles (such as the 'About Me' booklet);
- In **DCS Ltd**, again there was some discussion of the use of BeST, though this did not appear widespread on the 'front-end';
- In **GuideLine**, the issue of assessment within the Learning Gateway was raised within their Business Plan 2001/2, and it was agreed there should be trials and assessments this year of both of the BeST and Rickett Assessment packages. There was also evidence of some use of Kudos;
- In **LCGS**, some use was reported of Basic Skills Agency assessment materials, guidance software packages, and the 'Getting Connected Framework', that emerged from the Young Adults Learning Programme.

3.21 As indicated at least two of the services (GuideLine and LCGS) are actively pursuing assessment developments. For assessment on the 'front-end' to progress, considerable development work with PAs will be required, to review with them why assessment work needs to be undertaken, to explore what techniques are appropriate, and - critically - to link this to actual provision that meets identified needs.

3.22 The lack of the regular use of an agreed range of robust assessment techniques is a major issue in moving towards a system of 'distance travelled'. Without an agreed baseline starting point, such measures are likely to be seen as too subjective to be credible as the basis of justifying resource allocation.

Individual Development Plans

- 3.23 The introduction of Individual Development Plans (IDP) was an essential element of the Learning Gateway. Views on the role and purpose of the IDP seem to vary. Some managers spoken to saw the role of the IDP in terms of being the basis for the contract 'between the Careers Service and the Life Skills provider, to ensure that the young person received appropriate support. Others spoke more in terms of this being a document that the young person would own/value, though the PA group who raised this were a little disappointed they had not seen much evidence of this occurring.

One LSC commented that, in their experience, the IDPs they had seen were '*over simple and a bit mumsy in style*', which may have been entirely appropriate for the young person, but was of far less use in the first application as a contract.

Very similar debates have raged in the past over Career Action Plans, and in particular Individual Training Plans. Clearly, in terms of the quality of the document - its fitness for purpose - this depends on which, or both of the roles it has to fulfill. This is an area where a review of practice is required in each sub-region, and some sharing of good practice on a regional basis would be helpful.

Ongoing Support

- 3.24 The PAs' role (as envisaged in the Learning Gateway specification) was to provide seamless support to young people on the Learning Gateway, and at least up to placement. In the best of practice seen this does seem to be the case, although in practice the role is shared with Life Skills providers.

However, there are considerable variations even within sub-regions on this. For example, PAs in one half of a sub-region reported that, although they do continue to review activity with young people whilst on Life Skills, they were unsure of the purpose behind it and were concerned that it duplicated the Life Skills provider role. PAs in the other half of the sub-region clearly regarded their responsibilities as continuing on to, and beyond, Life Skills, and were far more positive about the need for continuing support.

Supervision

- 3.25 The issue of 'professional supervision' was raised in a number of areas. This is recognised as standard practice in counselling basis services, where there may be a need to discuss particularly challenging or harrowing situations raised by clients.

Managers in one area recognised the need for some form of personal supervision for PAs, but explained that they would have to have two managers seeing 20 PAs per month, meaning a maximum time they could commit to each would be 30 minutes. It is vital that good practice models from other comparable professional areas are looked at, including considering external support. This

clearly has both funding and operational considerations that need to be considered by DfES in the context of wider Connexions developments.

Training and Development

3.26 Given the challenging nature of PA work, training and development is a crucial element in effective delivery. Good practice was noted in a number of areas. For example:

- In **CareerPath** monthly meetings of PAs, other training events, and work of the Learning Gateway Co-ordinator, have all helped develop practitioner competence;
- In **LCGS** the training team has undertaken training needs analysis work with PAs, and specific courses have been developed as a result (e.g. motivating the de-motivated, and counselling skills). Regular PA meetings are held. A typical pattern for monthly meetings in the Leicester city office can include opportunities to discuss particular cases in the morning (and to share effective practice, network contacts etc), and in the afternoon for speakers to be invited. Representatives from all partner organisations are also invited to join these afternoon sessions. (Concerns were raised by some LCGS staff who were unable to regularly attend such training - because of other commitments - and therefore felt they were missing out).

Overview

3.27 Our findings would suggest that the introduction of the Learning Gateway Personal Advisers role has been problematic, and that considerable learning has occurred since the posts were first created. Furthermore the role that PAs fulfil is not always as was envisaged in the original Learning Gateway model (e.g. in regard to assessment). It is crucial that what constitutes effective PA practice in the Learning Gateway is reviewed and shared, prior to the extension and development of the role through the role of Connexions Partnerships.

Chapter Four: Views of Delivery Partners and Young People

Introduction

4.1 In this chapter we:

- review the results of the postal survey undertaken with delivery and referral partners, recommended by the Careers Services and the Connexions Partnership in the region;
- review the results of the focus group and individual discussions conducted with young people as part of the research;
- provide examples of good practice identified by delivery partners, in respect of the 'front-end', and related aspects of the Learning Gateway;
- provide an overview of findings.

Views of delivery partners

- 4.2 A total of 57 organisations from the 137 in the survey sample (42%) responded to the postal survey, which sought the views of delivery/referral partners nominated by the four Careers Service companies and the Connexions Partnership. In terms of the profile of respondents, just under half (47%) indicated that they were training providers, with other significant groupings being Youth Services (14%), Further Education Colleges (12%), and voluntary and community groups (7%).
- 4.3 In terms of their involvement in the Learning Gateway, over three quarters (83%) indicated that they were Life Skills providers, with just under one in ten (9%) indicating they were involved in supporting 'front-end' activities.
- 4.4 Just over a half of respondents (53%) indicated their organisation was involved, or very involved, in the Learning Gateway, but a third (33%) indicated they were not involved. 14% indicated they were 'not sure'. Those indicating a lack of involvement are likely to be organisations who refer young people onto the programme, and who may therefore not see themselves as being 'involved' in direct delivery. However, it is possible to put other interpretations on 'lack of involvement' (both at an individual respondent, and/or an organisational level), and this could infer a lack of engagement. Clearly this issue could only be resolved by qualitative work with providers, which was not part of the agreed research methodology, although it should be a part of integrated research into the Learning Gateway, which we recommend should be undertaken.

Level of understanding of, and length of involvement in, the Learning Gateway

- 4.5 Two thirds of respondents (66%) indicated they had been **involved** with - or in - the Learning Gateway from launch, or for two years or more (33%), and a further 33% for up to two years.
- 4.6 The remaining third (33%) have been involved for a year or less, indicating that - across the region - the Learning Gateway has been engaging new organisations in recent times, with cross-tabulation analysis showing most to be Life Skills providers rather than referral agencies (13 and 4 respectively).
- 4.7 In terms of respondents' self-reported levels of **understanding of the Learning Gateway**, four out of five (83%) described their understanding as good or very good, with the balance of just under one in five (17%) indicating that it was not very good, or poor.

Effectiveness of the Learning Gateway

- 4.8 The majority (57%) of respondents assessed the **operation of the Learning Gateway** in their area to be effective or very effective. Slightly less (48%) gave similar ratings to the effectiveness of transition arrangements from the 'front-end' to Life Skills, and/or other mainstream options, with 15% indicating that they assessed arrangements as not effective, and over a third (37%) being unsure.
- 4.9 In terms of specific areas, respondents were asked to give their assessment of the **effectiveness of the Learning Gateway** in identifying and engaging young people, and in assessing their needs. Interestingly a number of respondents (about 10%) did not wish - or possibly feel able granted the lack of understanding indicated above to respond to these questions. Of those who did respond, around three quarters (72% and 74% respectively) indicated that they felt that young people are effectively or very effectively identified for, and engaged into, the Learning Gateway (with 23% and 21% respectively not being sure).
- 4.10 In terms of **assessment**, over two thirds (67%) indicated that they felt that young people's basic skills needs were effectively or very effectively assessed, with only 6% indicating they felt this was ineffective, and over a quarter (27%) not being sure.
- 4.11 Similarly in relation to **wider support needs**, just over three-quarters (76%) felt that young people's wider support needs were effectively or very effectively assessed. Just under a quarter (24%) were not sure. Slightly fewer respondents were confident that the Learning Gateway was meeting the needs of young people with multiple disadvantage, with 62% indicating it was effective or very effective, 2% ineffective, and over one in three (36%) not being sure.
- 4.12 Under two-thirds of respondents (61%) felt that assessments of how long young people should **spend** on the '**front-end**' of the Learning Gateway were effective

or very effective, with 4% feeling they were ineffective. Again, over a third (35%) were unsure.

- 4.13 Of the latter group, analysis showed that 15 out of 18 respondents were Life Skills providers. This response echoed anecdotal feedback received from a number of the Life Skills providers visited (e.g. as part of visits to meet young people). Here, there were individual cases where uncertainty was expressed about what the 'front-end' actually involved, about the existence or use of documentation such as IDPs, and/or about what information they could expect to have on entrants (particularly of a highly confidential nature).
- 4.14 As indicated, this area requires further research, and it may be worth Careers Companies and Connexions Partnerships undertaking an audit/review with individual Life Skills providers about mutual roles and responsibilities in these areas. This could also involve - where they do not exist - developing service level agreements with providers in the context of the delivery of wider area Learning Gateway plans.

Effectiveness of Personal Advisers

- 4.15 Just under two thirds of respondents (65%) rated PAs as effective or very effective in assessing young people's **overall support needs** (4% believed them to be ineffective, and 31% were unsure).
- 4.16 Similarly two-thirds (66%) rated PAs as effective or very effective in devising **Individual Development Plans** (IDPs) 10% felt they were ineffective, one in ten and 24% were unsure.
- 4.17 In terms of **PA support** for young people whilst **on Life Skills**, over two-thirds (70%) rated this as effective, or very effective. One in ten (10%) felt it was ineffective, and 20% were unsure.
- 4.18 Just under two thirds of respondents (64%) rated PAs as being effective or very effective in liaising with partners about meeting young people's needs (4% believed them to be ineffective, and 32% were unsure). This figure is surprising granted the fact that the organisations were nominated as being local delivery/referral partners, and presumably work closely with one or more PAs, and other staff. In part, this probably reflects the consistent level of uncertainty of view (and/or unwillingness) reflected in previous responses (around a quarter or more in most cases). This could be accounted for by a variety of factors. For example, individual respondents may:
- only have recently been in post, and/or have insufficient experience of PA work to comment, and, as indicated, a number of respondent organisations have been involved with the programme for less than a year;
 - feel they have an insufficient knowledge of PAs' work to comment;

- have experience of the work of different PAs, who - other evidence suggests - vary in their effectiveness, and thus have felt unable to generalise on their experience overall.

However, whatever the explanation, the responses highlight the importance of true partnership development and working - with both referral and delivery partners - including sharing understandings of mutual roles and responsibilities, and perceptions of how well these are being implemented.

Good Practice

4.19 Good practice identified by delivery and referral partners included:

- The development of closer working relationships between a Careers Service and a Youth Service;
- A training provider, working with disengaged young people pre-16, being able to promote the Learning Gateway as a first-step Post-16 option for appropriate young people;
- Weekly meetings between the Careers Service and a Life Skills provider have been helpful in identifying potential Learning Gateway trainees, and updating on trainee progress;
- A pilot programme in one site in Summer 2000 resulting in young people starting better prepared for the main Learning Gateway programme;
- The development of inter-agency relationships through regular meetings, shared workshops and training sessions in one area;
- A Life Skills strategy group meeting regularly to discuss progress;
- Tracking/destination procedures improved through work between Careers and Youth Services in one area;
- The establishment of a Basic Skills Co-ordinator post enabling young people on the Learning Gateway to sign-up for a variety of short-courses, including IBT and CLAIT computer courses.

Views of young people

4.20 As indicated, a total of 72 young people were interviewed individually or in pairs, or, as in most cases, seen in small focus group sessions. Although most were already on Life Skills, field researchers also interviewed young people who were still on the 'front-end'. The main issues raised in, and outcomes from, these useful sessions are highlighted below:

Motivation to join the Learning Gateway

4.21 The main reasons mentioned by young people for wanting to join the Learning Gateway were as follows:

- **Aspirational:** Typical responses included, *'it's a good opportunity to gain some qualifications'; 'I'll do some qualifications - don't mind what'; 'I expect it'll help me find some suitable training and employment'*;
- **Financial:** Typical responses were from two young people, who summed this up by saying respectively: *It's the only way I was going to be able to get any money*, and *it gives the chance of a regular income*.
- **Social:** Factors mentioned here included :
 - **Boredom:** Typical responses included: *'It's something to do', 'It keeps me out of trouble', 'nothing else to do - so started this'*;
 - **Loneliness:** Typical responses included, it's a *'Chance to get out of the house and meet people'*;
 - **Pressure from parents/friends:** Typical responses here included, *'Me mum put pressure on me cos she has lost Child Benefit for me now'; 'Me mates said it was OK, and I should do it'*.

These reactions broadly reflect the findings of national research (e.g. the NFER study for DfES)²⁸, and the views expressed by managers and PAs. They are also a reminder of the importance of informal influences (e.g. peers and friends, including boy/girl friends and partners) on informing young people's choice and selection.

Support Received from PAs

- 4.22 Young people in the sample group were very positive about the personal and practical support they had received from PAs (as was also the case in the national research). Echoing the feelings of PAs themselves, many young people stressed the importance they attributed to having a trusting and supportive relationship with the PA, particularly in the case of those who had not previously developed such relationships with many - if any - adults. Typical responses included that respective PAs:

'Gave me lots of help and encouragement' (DCS Ltd)
'Treated me with respect' (LCGS)
'Always makes me feel better when I meet her' (GuideLine)
'Really helpful, and is always ready to talk to you about your problems' (CXL&R)
'Gave me lots of support. She couldn't help with problems with my family, but then I didn't expect her to' (CareerPath).

- 4.23 In terms of the help received whilst on the 'front-end', young people - like PAs we interviewed during fieldwork visits - referred to this being discussion-based. Young people - not surprisingly - were a little vague about the precise help they

²⁸ The national research was undertaken with 152 young people between October 200 and March 2001. The main motives for joining the Learning Gateway identified by the team were the need to get some money, find a job, gain qualifications, change lifestyle, or as a response to family pressure.

had received, although there were no direct suggestions that they felt that what had been offered was inadequate. Typical reactions included:

'Had a bit of a chat to get my life in order' (CXL&R);
'Had a discussion about things' (GuideLine).

- 4.24 Interestingly, most young people had no recollection of any formal **assessment** on the 'front-end'. One young person indicated that they had had a basic skills test, which they recalled had taken them 90 minutes, which they thought was *'rather long'*. However, the most that others mentioned undertaking were computer-aided guidance products, such as KUDOS, which were generally appreciated.
- 4.25 Clearly a number of young people would have undertaken informal assessments (e.g. using profile-based products) which they may not have associated with any kind of testing/assessment. Interestingly, though the clear view in one focus group was that more 'tests' were required, to affirm what they knew or had learned. They felt this would increase their confidence not reduce it. Although this may appear counter-intuitive with the client group, it is a valuable insight, and one that learning theory suggests should be built on.
- 4.26 Similarly in terms of the **Individual Development Plans** mixed views were expressed, with differing levels of certainty amongst young people about their purpose. One group's reaction, included young people who appeared quite genuine when they indicated that they, *'really don't know what it's for'*. In some other groups, there was a more positive recognition of the value of the IDP, or Learning Gateway Plan, with young people indicating that they had an IDP and/or knew what its role was (e.g. *'it's useful to help you remember your goals'*).
- 4.27 Interestingly there was a positive reaction in one group to the use by one provider of the Progress File/Records of Achievement. It would be useful to share good practice in regard to using documentation to help young people's planning and progression emerging from the Learning Gateway (in the context of other similar work in regard to career action individual training, and other progression planning tools).

Likes and Dislikes

- 4.28 Generally, young people spoken to were content with their Learning Gateway experience to date. In terms of particular likes and dislikes, they seemed to most appreciate provision when there was integrated personal support (*'people who have time for you'*), and tailored and varied provision. Dislikes (and/or ambivalence) related to certain activities (e.g. residential training - although the benefits of this are well documented), and periods of inactivity (*'hate just sitting around'*). Other individual concerns related to matters such as a lack in one instance of work experience places, and in another that they would have liked to have undertaken more than 16 hours on the Life Skills course.

- 4.29 The issue of **bonus payments** was not widely raised. The national research indicated the value young people placed on them, and urged strongly that they should be part of the promotional strategy. Where the matter was discussed a number of young people in this study indicated that it was not an incentive, and that they *'would have joined the programme anyway'*, and that end bonuses would not make them any more willing to do a job with training. There are bound to be issues of deadweight here. Possibly what is required is more consultative work with young people on incentives, and the idea of using monies to provide more targeted support for those in particular need²⁹.
- 4.30 Little was offered by way of suggested improvements to provision. Main suggestions included the need for smoking rooms and, unsurprisingly, increases to training allowance. However, many were clearly satisfied with the help and support they are receiving - and would echo the sentiment of the young person who indicated:

'If it wasn't for this, and the help I've had, I wouldn't have done half the things I've done'.

Overview

- 4.31 The research with both young people and delivery partners is in many ways quite encouraging. The majority of delivery partners who responded clearly felt that the Learning Gateway is effective, although it is significant that slightly under half were confident of the effectiveness of transition arrangements.
- 4.32 As indicated, the information, staff and organisational development needs of local Learning Gateway are key issues, and it is clearly of concern that there is so much uncertainty in areas where clearer judgements about quality and effectiveness should be the norm. This issue raises the question - common in the debate about enhancing the capability of work-based training provision - of how best to fund and develop individual organisational capacity. As indicated, good examples do exist in the region already of funding structures being put in place to provide some financial stability, and in training and development work being organised/planned on an area basis. Forums and networks too, which - in the absence of a Learning Gateway development strategy nationally have not been widely developed - can also help in sharing good practice.
- 4.33 Overall, it is clear that much greater consideration needs to be given to the development of a 'learning infrastructure' to support the development of tailored and individualised provision, as in the context of developing effective area Learning Gateway plans.

²⁹ It was argued by PAs in one area that the £50 *'does not go very far'* (particularly in circumstances where a young person is having to work *'a week in hand'*, and/or where they need funds to buy necessary clothes or equipment. A hypothesis worth testing is that smaller numbers of larger/more targeted funds might have a greater impact.

- 4.34 Similarly, in terms of young people, the widespread levels of expressed satisfaction with provision amongst the survey group is welcome, and is a tribute to the work of PAs, Life Skills providers and others involved in the wider Learning Gateway. However, there is still much to be achieved in terms of maximising the effectiveness of provision, particularly in regard to progression issues.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

5.1 In this chapter we:

- set out our conclusions based on our desk research of previous national and regional research, and our findings from our research into the quality of the ‘front-end’ provision in the East Midlands;
- provide a set of recommendations aimed at both policy makers (notably DfES, and LSC), as well as regional (notably GOEM) and local managers and practitioners within the Learning Gateway, especially related to enhancing and reviewing current arrangements.

Conclusions

5.2 This study has focused on comparing and contrasting factors that have made an impact on the preparation, planning, management and delivery of the Learning Gateway in the five geographical areas. It has reviewed a wide range of issues relating to:

- **contextual factors** including urban and rural circumstances, labour market opportunities and transport arrangements that either help to facilitate or impede young people’s participation in ‘front-end’ provision;
- **strategic factors** including vision, management, funding, monitoring, partnership arrangements and joint working to support effective planning and implementation;
- **operational factors** including service delivery, provision, referrals, procedures and systems for tracking and measuring impact and effectiveness of interventions at key stages of young people’s development.

Existing models

5.3 Our review of existing models of operation shows that **three contrasting frameworks** currently operate within the East Midlands. The predominant model for the management of the Learning Gateway (Model C) is where:

a Careers/Connexions service delivers the ‘front-end’, and LSC contracts directly with a range of providers to deliver Life Skills provision (para 2.7).

In contrast, an alternative Learning Gateway approach (Model A) involves:

a Careers/Connexions service that has responsibility for the delivery of the 'front-end', and at the same time, under LSC contract, delivers Life Skills programmes within their own organisation, and/or with others. Within current funding arrangements there is potential for 'conflict of interest's' when an organisation operates both the 'front-end and Life Skills provision (para 2.7)

A further option (Model B) involves:

a Careers/Connexions service having responsibility for delivery of the 'front-end' and managing the contract for the delivery of Life Skills. This relies heavily on the 'front-end' provider being able to both identify, and 'mix and match', provision that best meets the needs of young people. The main challenge within this approach is the 'criteria' for, and ensuring 'transparency' in, selecting appropriate providers (para 2.7).

All of these models rely heavily upon strong collaborative links and effective working relationships between LSC, GOEM, and Careers/Connexions staff.

Benchmarking and performance

- 5.4 In practice, the current RHOMIS management information provides data mainly about 'stocks and flows' of joiners and leavers, combined with limited information on leavers' immediate destinations. This provides insufficient evidence to measure the effectiveness of the programme. There is a pressing need to define progress in terms of '*distance travelled*' by young people, as originally suggested in the Learning Gateway specification. In Connexions Lincolnshire & Rutland a useful start has been made with the introduction of the *Distance to the Labour Market (DLM) Initiative*, but this needs to be built on.
- 5.5 The lack of robust management information, and the continued absence of a *national evaluation strategy*, has affected services' ability to assess accurately the quality of provision, and their knowledge of whether the Learning Gateway 'front-end' and Life Skills programme is meeting its aims. The policy context is now changing. Government agendas are now focused on 'impact', 'cost effectiveness' and 'evidence' of the social and economic benefits of investments. As a result, future provision will need to be more closely monitored, assessed and reviewed.

Provision

- 5.6 Our findings show that, in practice, it is inappropriate to consider the 'front-end' in isolation of Life Skills provision. Identified issues include:
- Funding is a crucial issue for young people who are not in receipt of benefits. In some areas, LSCs and Careers/Connexions services have accepted that, due to current funding arrangements, many young people have to move quickly from 'front -end' provision in order to access the training allowance on Life Skills.
 - There are varying practices across the five areas in relation to the length of time young people can remain on Life Skills. The funding requirements directly impact on decisions made in relation to who should be targeted for entry onto the programme. This can result, as in one LSC area, to extending Learning Gateway provision beyond the 'hard to help' group, to those who require less time on the programme.
 - In at least three geographical areas, the issue was raised regarding 'confusion' between Preparatory Training and the Learning Gateway.
 - Some respondents commented on the lack of Life Skills provision particularly in Retford, Nottinghamshire and Stamford, Lincolnshire & Rutland (para.2.33). The perceived quality of some provision is an issue.
 - Further work is needed to help increase *supported-work taster opportunities* for Learning Gateway clients.
 - In all areas, there is scope for improved flow of information within and between agencies. The introduction of the Connexions service, with joined-up support services for 'targeted' young people, should facilitate closer working links and exchange of information between organisations.

Young People

- 5.7 Our research shows that most of the 72 young people interviewed valued the input they had received, particularly the personal and practical support provided by their PA.
- 5.8 At least three main factors appeared to motivate those who had joined the programme (i.e. *aspirational, financial, and/or social*). These reactions broadly reflect the findings of previous national research (para. 4.21). Unsurprisingly, some young people were vague about the precise help they had received. Most young people had no recollection of any formal assessment on the 'front-end'. However, this does not mean that informal assessments were not carried out. Interestingly, one group of young people argued for 'more tests' to affirm what they knew already and to help increase their confidence.

Personal Advisers

- 5.9 The range of variation in PA roles and responsibilities across sub-regions within 'front-end' and Life Skills means that generalisations cannot be made in relation to how the role is operating within the region. All Personal Advisers interviewed stressed the importance of developing positive working relationships with young people. The majority of Personal Advisers viewed their role as befriending, advising, supporting and advocating on behalf of young people.
- 5.10 In terms of models of practice, the issue was raised by a number of Personal Advisers about their concern of working in what they perceived as a 'centralised control', rather than a 'professional autonomy' model.
- 5.11 Our findings show that just under two-thirds of respondents from the postal survey rated Personal Advisers as being effective or very effective in assessing young people's overall support needs, and in preparing Individual Development Plans.

Managers

- 5.12 The views and experiences of Learning Gateway co-ordinators, managers and practitioners, indicate a common set of aims that each individual and/or agency is striving towards (i.e. improving the quality of life experience for young people).
- 5.13 Within the four Careers Services and Connexions Lincolnshire & Rutland, two contrasting management models (para. 3.2) have emerged. Firstly, an *integrated approach* whereby responsibility for management and delivery has been integrated into existing mainstream structures; and secondly, a *line-management approach* with team leaders and area managers working closely with a Learning Gateway Co-ordinator. In assessing both of these, it is clear that effective approaches require:
- *clear leadership and planning*, including a shared understanding between senior and middle managers of roles and responsibilities;
 - *regular reviews and consultation* meetings with staff and a commitment to problem-solving and addressing key issues that are raised;
 - *investment in training and development* for staff at all levels to enhance skills, improve knowledge and understanding of emerging issues, and to share good and interesting practice;
 - *transparency in relation to funding* arrangements and ways of funding tailored and individualised provision for young people.
- 5.14 Co-operation between agencies and professionals is essential in order to clarify any uncertainties regarding the identification of 'hard to help' group. An emerging issue is how best to structure, support and manage the Learning Gateway within the context of Connexions.

- 5.15 Following the introduction of local Learning & Skills Councils (LSCs) in 2001, managers and practitioners reported that they were in the process of establishing good working links and sharing strategic issues in relation to Learning Gateway policies and practices. In some areas, discussions were taking place to find ways of developing a more integrated pre and post-16 approach to supporting young people within the targeted group.

Delivery partners

- 5.16 The profile of respondents to the postal survey included training providers (47%), Youth Services (14%), Further Education Colleges (12%), and voluntary and community groups (7%). In terms of their involvement in the Learning Gateway, over three-quarters indicated that they were Life Skills providers, with around 1 in 10 indicating they were involved in supporting 'front-end' activities. The majority (57%) of respondents assessed the operation of the Learning Gateway in their area to be effective or very effective. There were issues raised in relation to limited knowledge and engagement in Learning Gateway developments and further research is required to investigate this more fully.

Summary Overview

- 5.17 The aim of the research was to explore the quality of the 'front-end' and to benchmark and model delivery activities. The quality of the programme has to first be considered in regard to its 'fitness for purpose'. The key purpose of the Learning Gateway has been seen in terms of enabling young people to achieve Level 2 (as defined in the National Learning Targets). In the 2000/1 operational year in the East Midlands, only just over a third (35%) of leavers entered learning from the Learning Gateway. It is apparent in this context that there must be concerns about the overall effectiveness and value for money of current arrangements.
- 5.18 The research identified and examined delivery models in order to provide a method of benchmarking. The findings show that there is no marked variation between the effectiveness of the models in increasing outcomes, despite very differing practices.
- 5.19 However, critically, the available RHOMIS data fails to describe what is actually happening in relation to progression within, and outside, the Learning Gateway programme. As a result, it is not possible to clearly identify the distinctive contribution of 'front-end' provision in achieving the desired learning outcomes.
- 5.20 The main body of available evidence currently resides with young people, managers and practitioners who have provided their own accounts of what constitutes effective policy and practice. They indicate that practice is more effective than the limited intelligence that RHOMIS provides would suggest. In particular, they highlighted work in engaging previously disengaged young people, some with 'multiple-disadvantages', and helping them achieve outcomes such as personal/social development and employment outcomes, as well as

learning outcomes highlighted. Clearly, there is some good practice in this regard. However, consideration needs to be given to whether the Learning Gateway, as currently operated, is itself 'fit for purpose', and if not, how best to meet agreed policy objectives.

Recommendations

In light of our findings, the CeGS research team makes the following recommendations:

1. Action Plans

- a) Following on from this research, and related follow-up activities, the Careers Service and/or Connexions Partnership in each sub-region should review issues arising and undertake necessary work - within available resources - to address them.

In particular, the work, roles and current experience of Personal Advisers needs to be reviewed. Appropriate support should be provided where required to enable them to fulfil agreed tasks and responsibilities. The role of the PA must be clarified and agreed, particularly in relation to critical issues such as assessment. Areas for targeted training and development could include:

- Recording work with young people (in the context of enhancing evidence-based and evaluation practice);
 - Managing and supporting PAs (including developing robust professional supervision systems (para.3.25);
 - Developing outreach activities in connection with referral/delivery partners (para. 2.17, para. 2.33);
 - Working with delivery/referral partners to develop a shared understanding of their purpose;
 - Undertaking management development training, particularly for staff line managing PAs (para. 3.2).
- b) There should be a review involving relevant parties (including GOEM, the Careers Service/Connexions Partnership, Learning Partnership and LSC) of the role and current effectiveness of the Learning Gateway in their sub-region, and of the 'learning infrastructure' available to deliver tailored and individualised provision. This should include:
- Consideration of the role and relationship of the Learning Gateway to Preparatory Training (para 2.33);
 - The question of arbitration in the case of dispute between 'front-end and Life Skills providers;
 - The adequacy of provision of specialist support services (e.g. in regard to mental health) (para. 2.37);
 - The relationship of the Learning Gateway to the area's wider workforce development and lifelong learning plans (para. 2.37).

2. Review the Learning Gateway Model

The 'fitness for purpose' of the Learning Gateway should be reviewed, and 'pilots' developed to test out new forms of integrated provision. This could include:

- joint planning between necessary bodies above to develop new integrated models of provision to meet identified needs in sub-regions (based on best existing evidence and practice);
- piloting and enhancing methods of monitoring and recording 'distance travelled', including building on work already undertaken through the introduction of the Distance to the Labour Market (DLM) initiative in Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland;
- undertaking necessary tracking work to ascertain whether a sustainable outcome had been achieved (para 1.16, para. 2.30);
- sharing effective practices in developing Individual Development Plans on a regional basis (para.1.17, para. 3.23);
- considering links between Connexions Framework (APIR), DLM, and MIS to ensure data can be collected once and used many times;
- increasing employer involvement (including using available 'Time off for Study' legislation).

3. Development of a Performance Management, Evaluation, and Inspection Strategy for the Learning Gateway

- a) Relevant bodies (notably DfES and the LSC) must consider the lack of reliable research evidence covering the current operation and future potential of the Learning Gateway and how best to address it (para 1.15);
- b) A robust performance management and related management information system is developed for the Learning Gateway (and successor provision) (para. 2.32);
- c) GOEM must work with Careers Services/Connexions Partnerships to review enhanced performance data so the benefits of provision can be effectively managed and assessed (para.2.32);
- d) The purpose and impact of bonus payments should be reviewed (para. 4.29);
- e) Lessons learned from the work of the PAs in the Learning Gateway is used to inform the development of the Connexions PA role (para. 3.12).

Our findings from the East Midlands, linked to findings in existing research, would suggest that a review of the Learning Gateway is required to ensure that the considerable investment it represents yields proportionate results. The recommendations above are designed to help inform a regional and national review.

However, it is crucial if the need for such a review is agreed, that subsequent developments are planned on a progressive basis, and in close co-operation with those in the field, so that experience gained can be effectively built on.

Annex One - Project Steering Group and Respondents

Project Steering Group

Neil Weightman	Contract Manager, Connexions Regional Unit East Midlands, GOEM
Liz Hutchinson	CareerPath Northamptonshire Ltd
Bill Cooper	Connexions Lincolnshire & Rutland
Chris Williamson	Connexions Lincolnshire & Rutland
Sharon Birch	Derbyshire Career Services Ltd
Amanda Raine	Derbyshire Career Services Ltd
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Annette Temple	GuideLine Career Services Ltd
Michelle Wright	GuideLine Career Services Ltd
Mareen Burrell	Leicestershire Careers & Guidance Services Ltd
Jenny Hand	Leicestershire Careers & Guidance Services Ltd

Respondents

CareerPath (Northamptonshire) Ltd

Jenny Platt	Area Manager
Marissa Jacobs	Area Manager
Alistair Willis	Area Manager
Paula Turley	Client Services Manager
Liz Hutchinson	Learning Gateway Co-ordinator
Kathy McKosker	MI Analyst
Jayne Williams	MI Analyst
Ruth Axtell	Personal Adviser
Danny Chevellerieau	Personal Adviser
Jo Feilding	Personal Adviser
Susila Silva	Personal Adviser
Margaret Smith	Personal Adviser
Jean Troy	Personal Adviser
Lee Webster	Personal Adviser
Jayne Wiggins	Personal Adviser
Alison Tyler	Quality Assurance Manager
Allison McKirdy	Team Leader/ Personal Adviser
Frances Sherratt	Trainer, BATS Life Skills Project
Lloyd Grant	Vocational Trainer, STAR Life Skills Project

Derbyshire Career Services Ltd

John Gibb	Acting Chief Executive
Gordon Savage	Community Education Officer - Lifelong Learning
Andy Conway	Connect2 Group Leader - Lifelong Learning Personal Adviser
Simon Edwards	Connect2 Group leader Personal Adviser
Tunu Hussein	Connect2 Group Leader - Youth Centre Manager
Debbie Till	Connect2 Group Leader - Lifelong Learning Personal Adviser
Tracy Prime	Course Coordinator - Personal Adviser (Social Inclusion)
Dave Bond	Development Manager - Social inclusion (post 16)
Sharon Birch	Development Manager - Quality and Management Information
Bev Oates	Deputy Team Leader and Lifelong Learning Personal Adviser
Maggie Pape	Deputy Team Leader - Lifelong Learning team
Amanda Raine	Learning Gateway Manager (Social Inclusion Team Leader)
Maureen Meakle	Lifelong Learning Personal Adviser
Noleen McGuinness	Lifelong Learning Personal Adviser
Marielle Pedley	Lifelong Learning Personal Adviser
Ben Rusher	Lifelong Learning Personal Adviser
Sharon Isaacs	Team Leader - Lifelong Learning
Richard Korzeniewski	Team Leader - Lifelong Learning
Debbie Yates	Work Experience Coordinator (Social Inclusion)

GuideLine Career Services Ltd, Nottinghamshire

Michelle Wright	Lead Senior Manager
Gavin Alston	Learning Gateway Manager
Ann Dobbs	Personal Adviser
Sue Donald	Personal Adviser
Janet Duke	Personal Adviser
Felicity Elder	Personal Adviser
Arabella Flint	Personal Adviser
Catherine Havenhand	Personal Adviser
Lise Lavelle	Personal Adviser
Pat Longden	Personal Adviser
Shona Neill	Personal Adviser
Sean Panting	Personal Adviser
Rebecca Smith	Personal Adviser
Denise Taylor	Personal Adviser
Sam Homewood	Student at Nottingham Trent University

Leicestershire Careers & Guidance Services Ltd

Gina Lindsay	Employment Training Personal Adviser
Paddy McMahon	Employment Training Personal Adviser
Julian Elkington	Lifeskills Trainer for YMCA
Stuart Wright	Lifeskills Trainer for APEX
Jenny Hand	Operations Director (Development)
Steve Cross	Personal Adviser
Rod Gwyther	Personal Adviser
David Hayter	Personal Adviser
Janet Thirwell	Personal Adviser
Zoe Ryan	Personal Adviser
Emma Lewis	Senior Careers Adviser
Helen Exon	Team Leader
Ros Kershaw	Team Leader
Sue Tombs	Team Leader
Bhups Narsey	Training Officer

Connexions Lincolnshire & Rutland

Francine Davies	Learning Gateway Co-ordinator
Bill Cooper	Manager: Labour Market
Howard Barnes	Targeted Team Area Manager
Alison Newham	Targeted Team Area Manager
Sue Unwin	Targeted Personal Adviser
Lesley Plummer	Targeted Personal Adviser
Pete Smith	Targeted Personal Adviser
Sylvia Masters-West	Targeted Personal Adviser
Kerri Blow	Targeted Personal Adviser
John Reynolds	Targeted Personal Adviser
Joanna Price	Targeted Personal Adviser
John Heslop	Targeted Personal Adviser

Learning and Skills Councils

Derbyshire

Sharon Martin Project Manager (WBL)

Leicestershire

Annie Matushenko Learning Programmes Manager

Lincolnshire and Rutland

Maggie Freeman Diversity Manager

Northamptonshire

Duncan Roberts Business Development Manager

Nottinghamshire

Geoff Baldry Learning Support Manager
Andrew Price Learning Support Executive

Annex Two – Examples of good practice in the Learning Gateway in the East Midlands

In this annex, we have identified a number of examples of good practice in the Learning Gateway, particularly in regard to learner support and progression. We pose the question for each example given, as to how this could be developed and built on in the specified area, the wider region, and beyond:

- Young people on the Learning Gateway across the **Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland** area are involved in collaborating to write and produce a magazine called 'YFM' (Your Future Matters) which is produced with funding support from the LSC.

How can we best develop ways to get young people to share their views, opinions and ideas for the future?

What methods are we using to link young people on the Learning Gateway provision, and to get them involved in common activities?

- **Derbyshire Career Services Ltd** has appointed a PA based at Godkin House with a specialism in **Basic Skills**.

Is there a case for developing more such specialisms for PAs to provide peer support?

- In **CareerPath (Northamptonshire)**, all young people have a **weekly appointment** when on the 'front-end'. Appointments are made on a credit-card sized leaflet which clients sign at the outset.

Should clients have regular appointments while on the 'front-end' and is a credit-card sized leaflet a useful way to prompt young people about them. Could other methods be employed (eg text message/telephone reminders)?

- At **GuideLine (Nottinghamshire)**, a helpful initiative is the use of '**neutral ground**' such as coffee- bars/McDonalds, providers' premises or other non-threatening places for 'front-end' activity.

What are the pros and cons of operating away from usual premises, and what constitutes good and safe practice in these contexts?

- **Derbyshire Career Services Ltd** has developed a range of **short-course** and **work-experience based provision** within '**Connect 2**'. The learning covered has topics as varied as the theory examination of the driving test, landscaping, and baby massage for young mothers.

How can we best enhance and tailor Life Skills/Learning Gateway provision using 'bite-sized learning'/short courses and work experience/sampling?

- A **strategic review** is currently being undertaken of the Learning Gateway in Derbyshire, involving **Derbyshire Career Services Ltd** and other key strategic partners.

Is there necessary clarity between strategic partners in our area, as to who the Learning Gateway is for, what provision should be available within it, and what the respective roles and responsibilities of delivery partners are in effective delivery?

What are the pre-entry, on-'programme' and transition needs of targeted young people – from initial outreach to final subsequent successful placement – and how are these needs meets being met by PAs and other key staff?

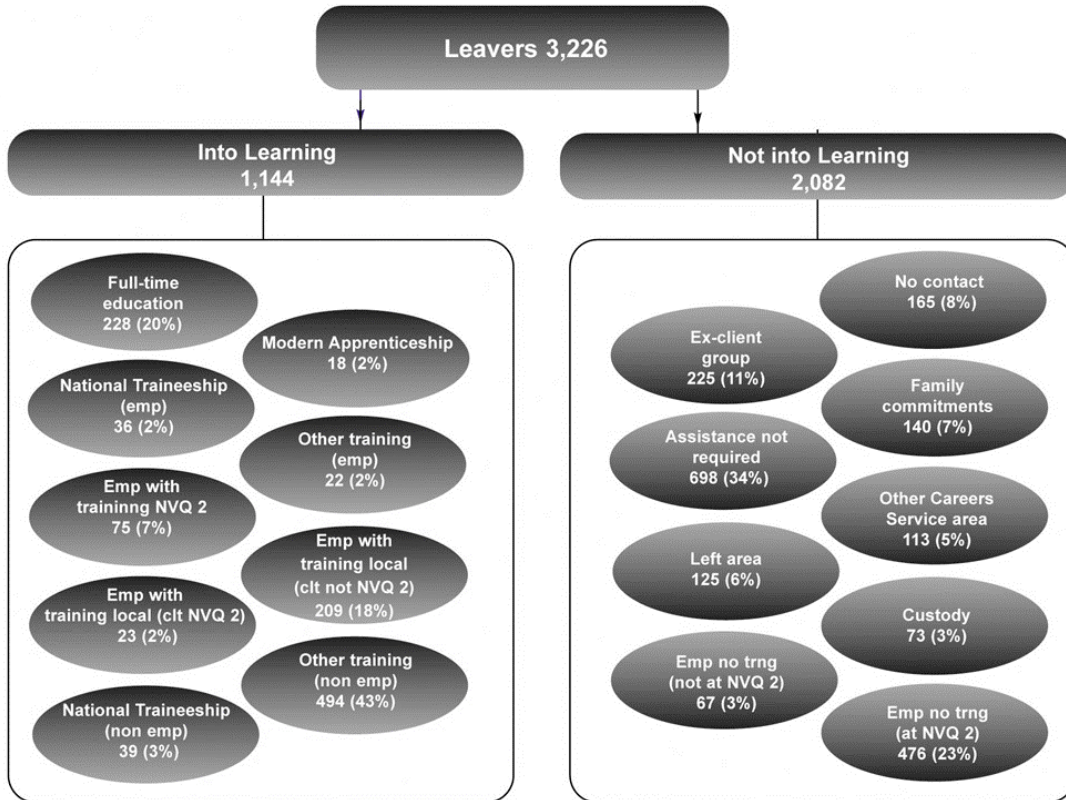
- **Leicestershire Careers and Guidance Services** has worked with young people on Life Skills to produce a **video** which, amongst other tasks, is used to help the induction process.

What use can be made of video and other media - including ICT - to engage young people and enhance the Learning Gateway provision?

Annex Three – RHOMIS Data

Figure 1:

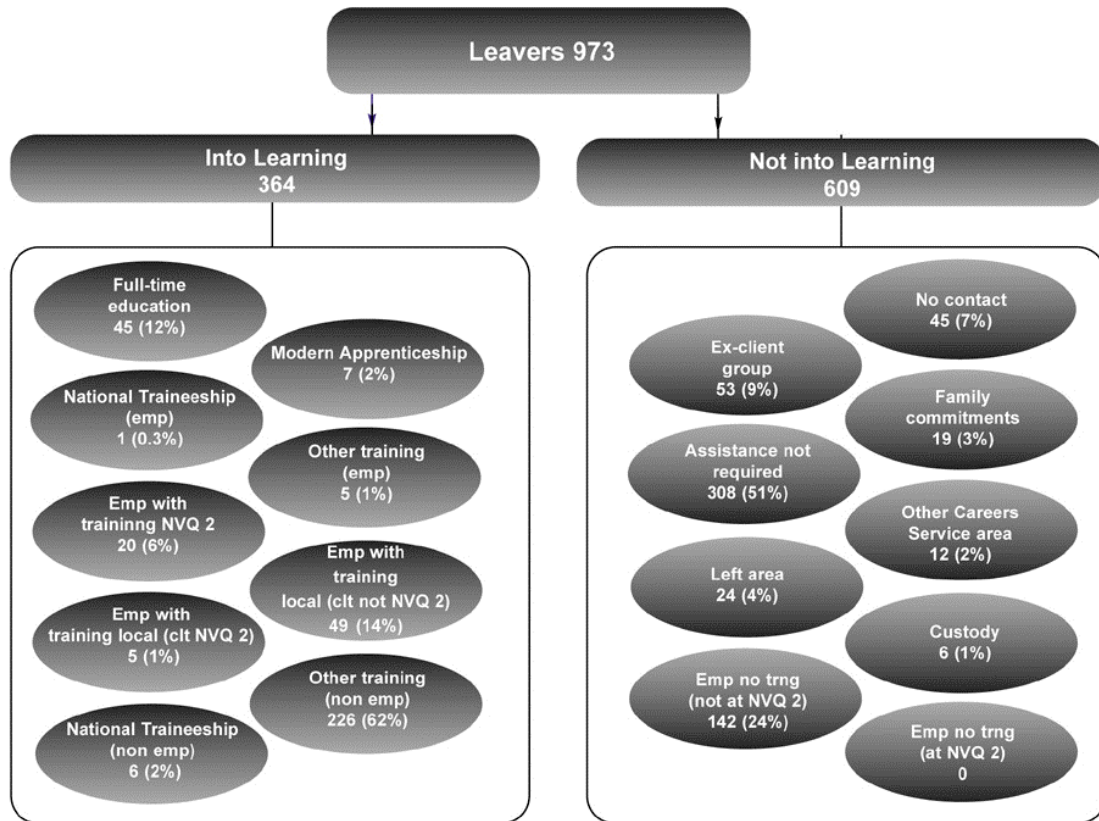
Destinations of Learning Gateway Leavers in the East Midlands,
April 2000 - March 2001



Source: Government Office East Midlands RHOMIS Data, 2002

Figure 2:

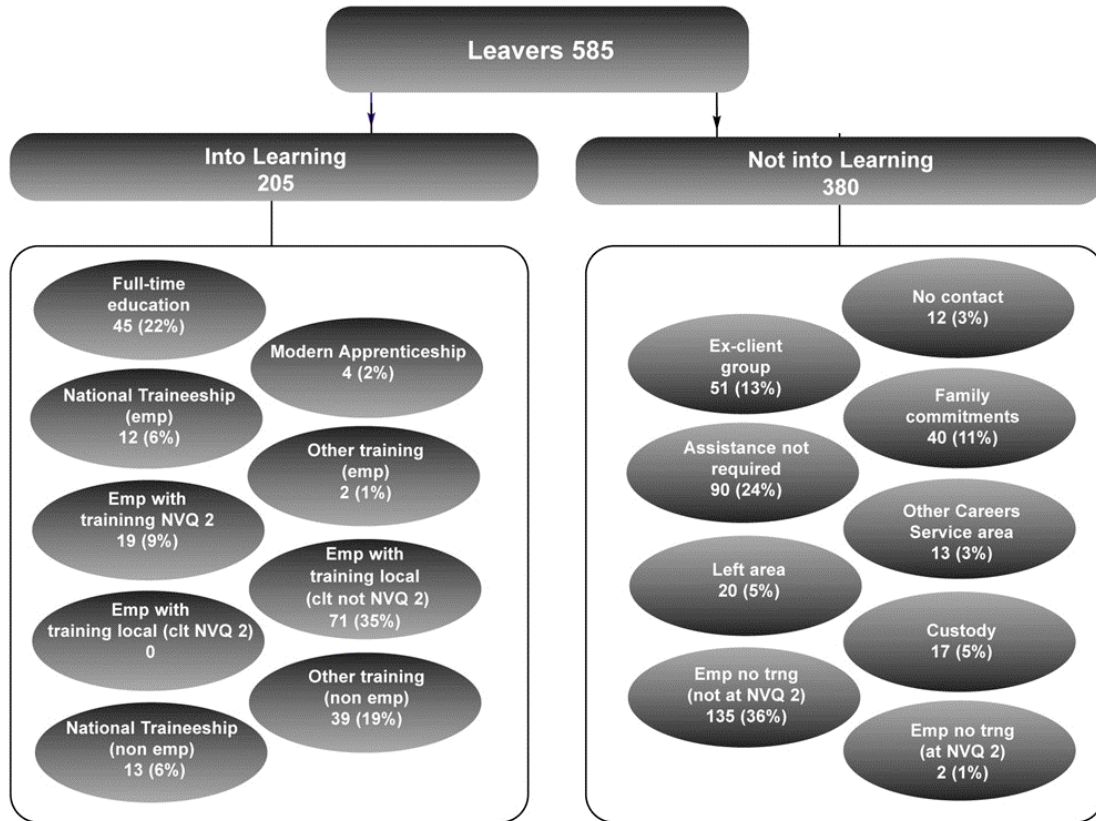
**Destinations of Learning Gateway Leavers in Derbyshire,
April 2000 - March 2001**



Source: Government Office East Midlands RHOMIS Data, 2002

Figure 3:

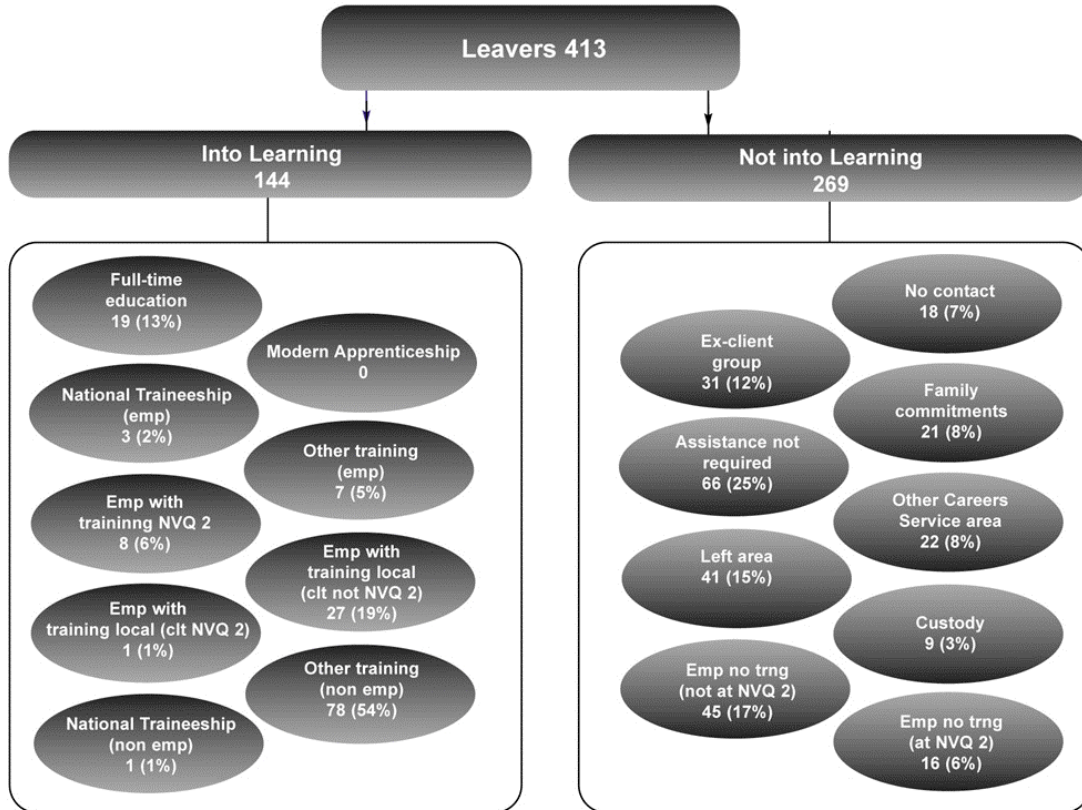
**Destinations of Learning Gateway Leavers in Leicestershire,
April 2000 - March 2001**



Source: Government Office East Midlands RHOMIS Data, 2002

Figure 4:

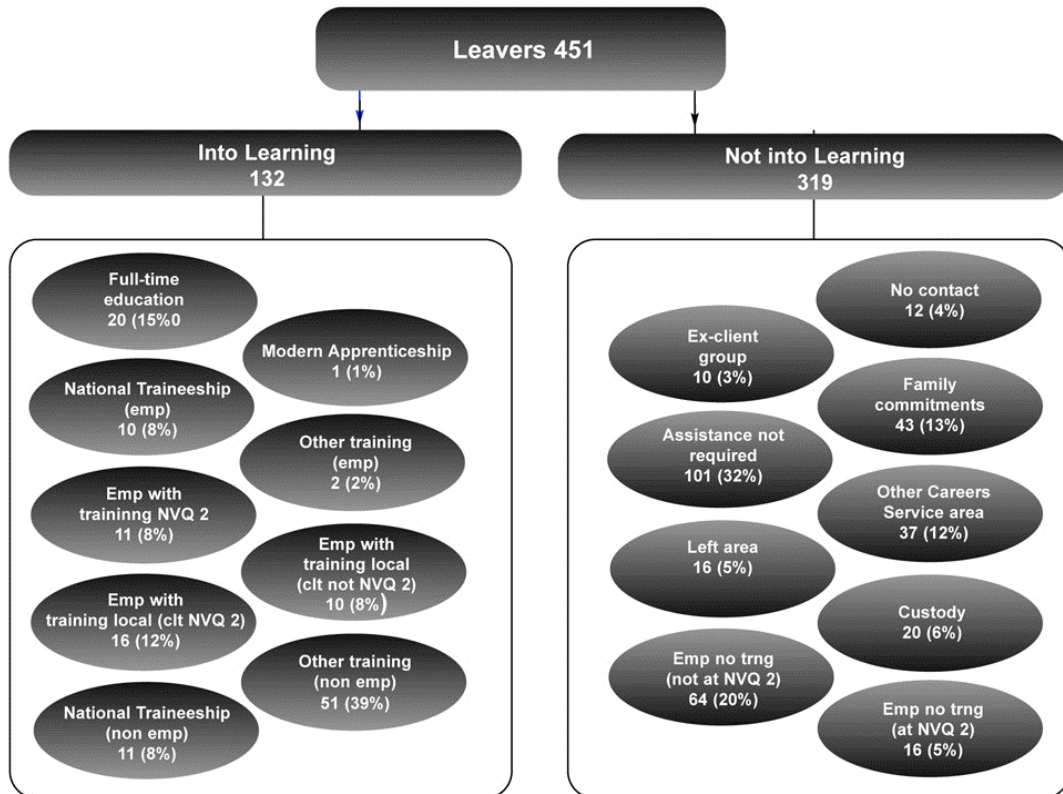
Destinations of Learning Gateway Leavers in Lincolnshire & Rutland,
April 2000 - March 2001



Source: Government Office East Midlands RHOMIS Data, 2002

Figure 5:

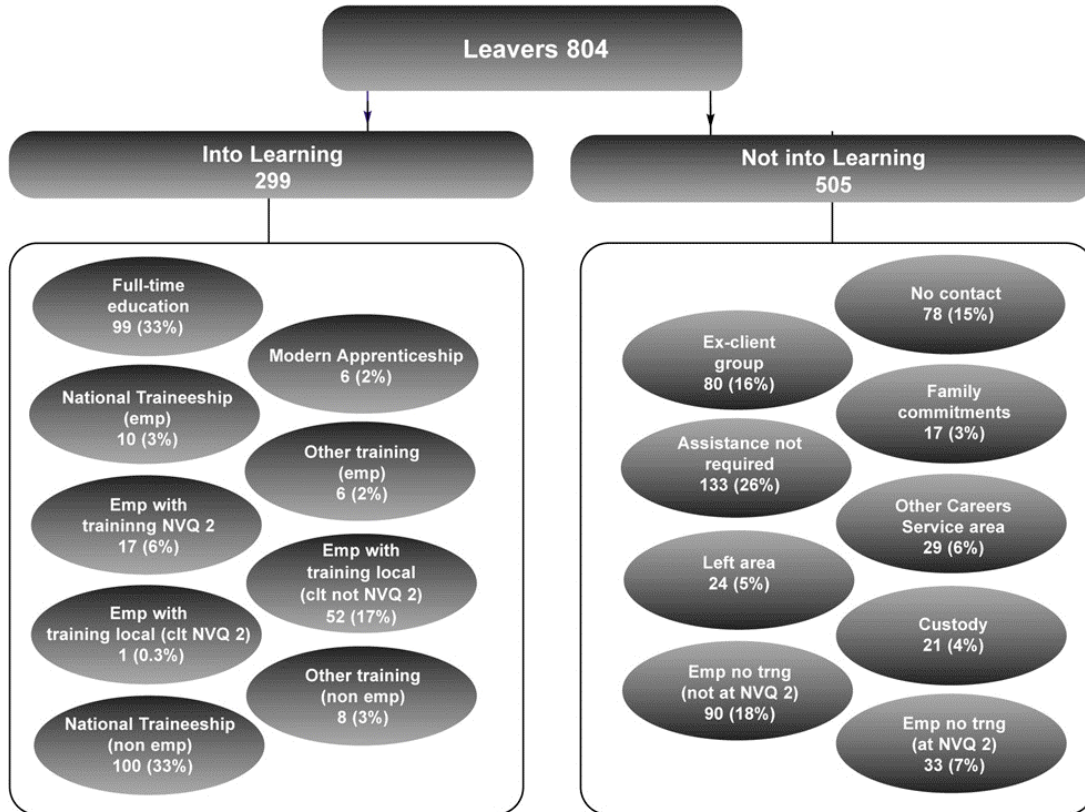
**Destinations of Learning Gateway Leavers in Northamptonshire,
April 2000 - March 2001**



Source: Government Office East Midlands RHOMIS Data, 2002

Figure 6:

**Destinations of Learning Gateway Leavers in Nottinghamshire,
April 2000 - March 2001**



Source: Government Office East Midlands RHOMIS Data, 2002