

Research Report DFE-RR003

Evaluation of the Entry to Learning pilots

Tim Bickerstaffe, Fiona Walton

This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Contents

SUMMARY	I
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 PROGRAMME CONTEXT	1
1.2 E2L PRINCIPLES	3
1.3 PILOTS' CONTEXT	4
1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT	5
2 METHODOLOGY	6
2.1 THE REALIST METHOD (PROGRAMME THEORY EVALUATION)	6
2.2 THE PRIMARY RESEARCH	7
3 PILOT DEVELOPMENT	8
3.1 DEVELOPING THE PILOTS	8
3.1.1 <i>Adherence to the Implementation Plan</i>	9
3.1.2 <i>Reviews of Local Beneficiary Need and Available Provision</i>	9
3.2 PROMOTION AND MARKETING	12
4 PILOT MANAGEMENT	13
4.1 MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS	14
4.1.1 <i>Staffing Structures</i>	15
4.1.2 <i>Staff Background and Experience</i>	16
4.1.3 <i>Partnership Working</i>	17
4.2 THE STEERING GROUP	18
4.3 ROLES OF THE THIRD SECTOR IN MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS	18
4.4 DCSF MONITORING, SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT	21
5 PILOT OPERATIONS	22
5.1 RECRUITMENT	23
5.2 RETENTION	24

5.3	SUPPORT FOR BENEFICIARIES	25
5.3.1	<i>Levels of Support Provided</i>	25
5.3.2	<i>Establishing Beneficiary Needs</i>	26
5.3.3	<i>Identifying Appropriate Provision</i>	28
5.3.4	<i>Support for Beneficiaries on Bridging Provision</i>	29
5.3.5	<i>Support Beyond 15 Weeks</i>	31
5.4	PA CASELOADS	32
5.5	FINANCIAL SUPPORT	34
5.5.1	<i>Administration</i>	34
5.5.2	<i>Non Payment</i>	35
5.5.3	<i>Significance for Recruitment and Retention</i>	36
5.5.4	<i>Issues Concerning Welfare Benefits</i>	36
5.5.5	<i>Bank Accounts</i>	37
5.5.6	<i>Discretionary Fund</i>	38
5.6	ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT INFORMATION	38
6	THE YOUNG PEOPLE	40
6.1	NATURE OF THE CLIENT GROUP	40
6.2	PILOT EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE	41
7	PROVISION	48
7.1	IDENTIFYING AND COMMISSIONING PROVISION	49
7.1.1	<i>The Nature of Provision</i>	51
7.1.2	<i>Securing Flexible Quality Provision</i>	52
7.2	THIRD SECTOR PROVISION	54
8	OUTCOMES & IMPACT	58
8.1	PROGRESSION ROUTES	58
8.1.1	<i>Post E2L Support</i>	60
8.2	SOFT OUTCOMES	63

8.3	SUCCESS OF PILOTS	64
8.3.1	<i>What Has Worked Well</i>	65
8.4	THE E2L PILOTS AND ACTIVITY AGREEMENTS	66
9	CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	69
	APPENDIX ONE: STAKEHOLDERS' TOPIC GUIDE	73
	APPENDIX TWO: BENEFICIARIES' TOPIC GUIDE	80
	APPENDIX THREE: PROVIDERS' TELEPHONE TOPIC GUIDE	84

SUMMARY

Introduction

A central priority for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). This priority is set in a context of evidence which has revealed that being 'NEET' between the ages of 16 and 18 is not only a severe waste of individual potential, but is also linked to a range of other poor outcomes including low levels of educational attainment and skills acquisition, leading to poor employment outcomes, or even labour market exclusion.

Entry to Learning (E2L) was designed to provide young people who are NEET with opportunities to improve their skills and employability through strengthening the progression between re-engagement activity and formal learning. The Policy Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University was commissioned by DCSF to undertake a process evaluation of the four pilot E2L projects delivered in Birmingham, Brighton and Hove, Lancashire and Sandwell.

Key findings from the evaluation are presented below:

Pilot development

All the Pilots have followed the strategy and design detailed in their respective Implementation Plan.

Initial operationalisation of the Implementation Plans entailed the Pilots orientating themselves within their local demographic, NEET, and provision context. Pre-existing relationships and/or access to local networks proved valuable in this respect.

The tailored approach encapsulated in the E2L Pilot design has enabled the individual Pilots to develop new partnership working and support – for example, arranging for established city-wide provision to be delivered in local venues easily accessible to beneficiaries, and through establishing relationships with student support services at local colleges to better facilitate beneficiary support upon entering formal learning

The ability of the Pilots to identify and commission appropriate third sector provision has also allowed the Pilots to address some identified local 'gaps' in provision for young people generally.

As the Pilots have progressed, a mix of provision intended to facilitate a 'light touch' engagement leading to more structured learning during the beneficiaries' 15 week participation has become a common feature.

Recognition and understanding of how local young people conduct themselves in their daily lives has necessitated careful planning in some cases to address local issues such as notions of 'territoriality', local gang activity, or local inter-community or inter-ethnic tensions more generally.

Pilot management

Management of the intervention has been identified by Pilot staff as quite complex, given the intricate organisational relationships and extensive subject areas covered by the provision.

The Model 2 Pilots (where Local Authorities (LAs) contract with a third sector provider) acknowledge the tension between managing the intervention and affording the third sector the flexibility to remain true to their organisational culture.

The experience and local knowledge of the Personal Advisers (PAs) has been critical in the promotion of the Pilots.

Experience of working with young people from different backgrounds and with different needs has emerged as a key characteristic of a successful E2L PA.

In areas where Steering Groups have been established, all stakeholders consider them to be operating effectively.

The importance of existing contacts and relationships between key staff, Steering Group members, agencies and organisations central and peripheral to the Pilots was stressed by all respondents.

The E2L Pilots have been welcomed by many local stakeholders with whom no previous working partnership has been established by the delivery partners.

Different models of engagement of third sector providers have been established in the Pilot areas.

There are both positive and negative aspects arising from the heterogeneity evident in the Pilot areas' third sector provision landscape. Third Sector agencies often work creatively with the young people but there may also be some lack of consistency in organisational policies, procedures and quality.

Pilot operations

Recruitment to the pilots was running at just under 90 per cent of profiled starts at the end of December 2009.

No 'typical' level of support is given to beneficiaries. There is a mix between intensive support and more 'light touch' support, depending on individual need.

There are formal processes for establishing beneficiary needs, for example through existing and new assessment procedures. Informal routes, which underpin the development of the relationship between the PA and the beneficiary, are also important in contributing to an understanding of individuals' barriers to learning.

Action planning has been a useful tool to help to provide a focus on short and long-term goals.

The level of PA caseloads has been highly variable, ranging from 15 to more than 30 clients. Overall, caseloads of between 15 and 20 clients were felt to be manageable in order to allow Personal Advisers (PAs) to offer a truly bespoke and personal service.

The financial incentive is felt to have brought more young people into E2L and kept them there than would have been the case had there been no financial reward for participation.

There was a strong and commonly held view that young people in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and Income Support should be eligible for the financial incentive if they participate in E2L.

The discretionary fund is considered to be an important tool in helping to overcome some specific, financial, barriers to engagement in formal learning.

Pilots remain frustrated that young people on E2L are recorded as NEET.

The young people

E2L is attracting a range of young people, a significant proportion of whom are considered to be from one or more vulnerable group. The diverse nature of the client group was stressed by stakeholders in the different pilot areas.

Amongst the beneficiaries that we spoke to, most had had negative experiences of school and many lacked a clear idea of what they would like to do when they began on E2L. The mentoring process provided by E2L was identified as particularly

positive in helping young people to identify areas of interest that could be pursued further.

Beneficiaries had heard of E2L from a number of sources, most commonly Connexions or word of mouth through their friends.

The relationship between the PA and the beneficiary was frequently identified as an important factor in helping the individual to progress.

Reinforcing the findings from other stakeholders, there was no consistent view amongst beneficiaries about the extent to which motivation for engaging with E2L is dependent upon the financial incentive.

A number of beneficiaries had progressed into positive outcomes at colleges or training providers, studying for a range of courses and qualifications.

The large majority of beneficiaries that we spoke to were positive about their experiences on E2L, a number indicating that, without it they would have been “*doing nothing*”.

Provision

Each Pilot area has its own characteristics, opportunities and challenges in relation to the provision landscape.

Efforts, issues and aspects of identifying and commissioning appropriate provision have been driven as much by practical requirements as original Pilot intentions.

The tailored focus of identifying and commissioning provision has required Pilot staff to find appropriate and attractive provision for their beneficiaries; the flexibility within the intervention has enabled them to do this. All Pilots report the existence of certain pre-existing or developing local consortia of providers, enabling commissioners to identify provision via a single access point.

Issues relating to economies of scale required by various providers have been faced by all Pilots.

All Pilots have experienced successes and failures in relation to securing flexible quality provision.

Two Pilot areas have encountered difficulties engaging some of the local Further Education colleges.

The start dates of college courses have had an impact on progression for some beneficiaries who may have completed their E2L provision but must face perhaps several months delay before being able to start at college.

Very good relationships between one Pilot and two of their local FE colleges has led to better outcomes in relation to progression into college courses and retention.

The flexibility and general ethos of many third sector providers is regarded very positively by all Pilots, although third sector flexibility is usually limited by funding.

There is evidence that E2L is helping to build capacity among commissioned third sector providers in terms of internal operations and external delivery.

Outcomes and impact

Management information indicates that just over 60 per cent of young people that have started E2L have progressed into positive destinations, about half into education. Destinations appear to vary significantly across the different pilot areas.

The rigidity of September start dates in colleges was frequently identified as a potential barrier to progression for those leaving E2L. This was particularly felt to be an issue for the more academically able (level 2 and 3) E2L clients.

Responsibility for E2L clients transfers to a range of professionals in the wider support and learning environment once they have left the PAs' caseloads. There is potential to develop a more formal approach to this, with guidelines to clarify roles and responsibilities. Some concerns were expressed about the lack of support for this client group within many colleges.

A range of soft outcomes from E2L were identified and the importance of these in evidencing the impact of the programme was highlighted. In taking the pilots forward, it may be beneficial to formalise processes for recording and monitoring soft outcomes.

Stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive about the success of E2L and identified a range of areas where the pilots have worked well, including in relation to: being client centred; the development of management and delivery infrastructures; putting in place flexible pathways; and financial arrangements.

Conclusions and recommendations

Some management structures and supervision arrangements within the pilots should be simplified and pilot managers should continue to share experiences and knowledge in this regard with a view to establish a 'model' or 'toolkit' of effective E2L management.

Continued recording of relevant management information will be important to this end and also important in relation to more fully revealing the local context within which the pilots are operating.

All pilots will need to maintain or develop further their flexible working arrangements to ensure continued positive outcomes but this flexibility must be recognised as context-dependent.

Pilots should maintain and develop their current focus on the importance of local networks and partnerships in relation to both operational and strategic issues.

- Consideration should be given to the possible graduated payment of the Financial Incentive but local arrangements for payment of the Financial Incentive may need to be simplified to accommodate this.
- There should be a continued focus on the numbers of E2L beneficiaries appearing on PA caseloads at any particular time. Efforts should be made to ensure that caseloads do not exceed 15 – 20 young people.
- Pilots should seek to develop their ability to target potential E2L beneficiaries within the local NEET population.
- All pilots will need to develop their understanding of local provision and continue to focus on the importance of capacity building in this regard.
- In order to ensure all E2L interventions can be appropriately evaluated and to allow for a fuller appreciation of 'distanced travelled' and accompanying 'soft outcomes' in relation to all beneficiaries regardless of the extent of their E2L engagement, the MI classification 'Negative Destinations' should be replaced with the classification 'Other Destinations'.
- The measuring of E2L pilot outcomes should take due account of those beneficiaries who encounter difficulties accessing funded progression routes due to them having reached the maximum age for E2L support during their 15-week engagement.

- DCSF should consider the option of removing young people from the NEET register for the duration of their engagement with E2L although this risks reducing the incentive for local areas to support young people to progress on from the programme.
- The issues and problems associated with E2L participation and its reported effects upon Child Benefit and other public welfare eligibility should be resolved to avoid benefit-related barriers to engagement occurring further.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Programme Context

A central priority for DCSF is to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)¹. This priority is set in a context of evidence which has revealed that being 'NEET' between the ages of 16 and 18 is not only a severe waste of individual potential, thus restricting the ability to fully contribute to society, but is also linked to a range of other poor outcomes – including low levels of educational attainment and skills acquisition, leading to poor employment outcomes, or even labour market exclusion².

The DCSF target is to reduce the proportion of 16-18 year olds who are NEET by two percentage points by 2010. Subsequently, the publication of the DCSF NEET Strategy in 2007 set out the key steps the Department is taking to support local authorities and delivery partners to prevent young people from becoming NEET, as well as to support those who are NEET to re-engage in education, employment or training³.

The Strategy contains four key themes considered essential to reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET:

- Careful tracking – to identify early those young people who are NEET, or who at risk of becoming NEET;
- Personalised guidance and support – to make sure young people know how to access education, training or employment and to enable them to overcome barriers to participation;
- Provision of a full range of courses to meet demand – to engage young people through sufficient provision at every level and in every style of learning;
- A new emphasis on rights and responsibilities – so that there is a clear set of incentives on young people to re-engage as quickly as possible if they drop out.

¹ DCSF produces NEET estimates by calculating the number of young people (aged 16-18) not in education or training (NET), then subtracting the number of young people known to be in education and training from the total population. Data from the Labour Force Survey is then used to calculate what proportion of that residual group is NEET.

² Coles, B., Hutton, S., Bradshaw, J., Craig, G., Godfrey, C. & Johnson, J. (2002) *Literature Review of the Costs of Being 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' at Age 16-18* RR347 Norwich: HMSO

³ DCSF (2008) *Reducing the Number of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training: The Strategy* Nottingham: DCSF

The subsequent publication in 2009 'Investing in Potential'⁴ set out the Department's aim to drive up participation in education and training and maximise employment opportunities for 16 to 24 year olds.

Following on from, and complementing, the various policies and initiatives contained within the Children's Plan⁵ is a commitment to pilot a new Entry to Learning programme (E2L), to include a process evaluation, intended to provide young people who are NEET with opportunities to improve their skills and employability through strengthening the progression between Third Sector re-engagement activity and formal learning.

As a subject of evaluation, the E2L Pilots follow a series of initiatives and interventions designed within the broader Strategy and proposed within the Children's Plan, to reduce the numbers of 16-18 year-olds classified as NEET (DCSF, *op cit.*). Thus, in terms of both their timing and key elements of their internal mechanisms, the E2L Pilots have been informed by the development, piloting, and evaluation of interventions such as Entry to Employment⁶ and the Activity Agreements⁷.

The specific purpose of the E2L Pilots, commissioned by DCSF in November 2008 in four local areas, is to examine how local authorities can most effectively ensure that the re-engagement provision they commission has maximum positive impact on the NEET beneficiaries and supports them to progress into formal learning.

DCSF wishes to test three key elements of the Pilots:

- **A personal adviser (PA)** – to provide continuity of support throughout the beneficiary's re-engagement and to broker their access to further learning and development opportunities;
- **Bridging provision** – to provide smaller manageable steps between re-engagement provision and formal learning, accredited wherever possible, and;
- **A financial incentive** – to encourage young people to take part in the Pilots and to remain committed as they return to formal learning.

⁴ DCSF, DWP, BIS (2009) *Investing in Potential*, Nottingham: DCSF

⁵ DCSF (2007) *The Children's Plan*, Norwich: DCSF

⁶ LSC (2006) *The Framework for Entry to Learning Programmes* Coventry: LSC National Office http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/The_Framework_For_Entry_To_Employment_Programmes accessed 04/10/09; IPSOS MORI (2008) *Evaluation of Education Maintenance Allowance to Entry to Employment and Programme Led Apprenticeships* Coventry: LSC National Office

⁷ Hillage, J., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Maguire, S., Tanner, E. & Purdon, S. (2008) *Activity Agreements Evaluation Synthesis Report* RR063 Nottingham: DCSF; Newton, B., Levesley, T., Oakley, J., Fearn, H. & Johnson, C. (2009) *Activity and Learning Agreements Pilots Evaluation: Working Paper5, Activity Agreements and Small Step Progression* RR098 London: DCSF; Maguire, S *et al.* (2009) *Activity Agreement Pilots Process Evaluation* London: DCSF

These three elements are to be tested via two specific Pilot models:

- In **Model 1**, the Connexions Personal Adviser will act as the E2L PA, holding a flexible pot of funding to be used to secure the appropriate provision for the beneficiary.
- In **Model 2**, the local authority will contract with a third sector provider (or consortium of providers) in order for the PAs, working with Connexions, to ensure the appropriate provision is in place for their beneficiaries.

The financial incentive will be available under both models.

Following a tender procedure conducted in October and November 2008, the four Pilot areas commissioned by DCSF are:

Birmingham (Model 1)

Lancashire (Model 1)

Sandwell (Model 2)

Brighton & Hove [with East Sussex] (Model 2)

In a recent joint publication with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, DCSF announced a continuation of the E2L Pilots in 2010-11 to refine the model and to work towards creating the most effective and efficient support for NEET young people.⁸

1.2 E2L Principles

The key success measure for the Pilots will be the proportion of young people who take part in E2L and go on to make a successful transition into formal learning. Further, both Pilot models must operate around certain key principles:

- Through engagement in the Pilot, beneficiaries develop knowledge, skills, understanding and personal qualities essential to enable their continuation in learning and to improve their employability;
- Beneficiaries should work towards qualification(s) or accreditation where appropriate. For example, through ADSAN or Foundation Learning;
- The Pilot should complement and build upon existing core activities and funding for the NEET group, rather than commissioning large amounts of additional re-engagement provision; and

⁸ DCSF, DWP, BIS (2009) *Investing in Potential: Our Strategy to Increase the Proportion of 16-24 Year Olds in Education, Employment or Training* Nottingham: DCSF Publications

- Where possible, the outcomes and lessons of the Pilot should be sustainable beyond the end of the Pilot period.

1.3 Pilots' Context

Each of the Pilot areas faces its own particular challenges in relation to the reduction in the numbers of local young people classified as NEET aged 16-18.

In **Sandwell**, local authority documents published in 2008 and 2009 highlighted a fall in the proportion of NEETs from 14.4 per cent in July 2007 to 11.7 per cent in quarter 3 of 2008⁹. Key informants interviewed for this evaluation spoke of a series of interventions targeted at the local NEET population (e.g. Entry to Employment, 'Kick Start Life', 'Krunch', and 'Ready Steady Go') but reflected upon a general dearth of available provision in the Sandwell district historically. Interviewees with long-term experience of the local support and guidance infrastructure for young people reported a pattern of identifying and attempting to close persistent gaps in available provision over recent years.

The Learning and Skills Council 'Statement of Need' 2009-2010 for the **Birmingham** local area reported a 16-17 NEET population of 7.7 per cent¹⁰. Yet, it noted both a decline in apprenticeship participation and a local take up of the Education Maintenance Allowance below the national average. Key local informants reported on some recent efforts from the NEET Strategy Group, which has worked with local schools, the youth offending service, as well as seeking to promote E2E – with some success. There has also been a local strategy to 'clean up' the NEET data, which is now tracked on a monthly basis and reveals that in the east and south west areas of the city, the NEET population is made up of high concentrations of White British; whereas in the inner city and north west areas, an ethnic mix is more apparent. This data has helped inform a recent Connexions strategy to match personal advisers to the city's twelve priority wards.

Data from 2006 was used to map the NEET population in **Brighton and Hove** by electoral ward, and revealed that the incidence of NEET ranged from a low of 1 per cent in some wards to above 8 per cent in certain others¹¹.

⁹ Sandwell Metropolitan Council (2009) *Sandwell Economic Review January-March 2009*; Sandwell Metropolitan Council (2009) *Report to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People 16 March 2009*.

¹⁰ LSC West Midlands Region (2008) *Birmingham Local Area Statement of Need 2009/10*

¹¹ LSC South East (2008) *Targeting Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): Brighton and Hove*

The highest NEET population was mapped across East Brighton where 27 per cent of 16-18 year olds fell into the classification.

For **East Sussex**, 2007 data revealed 7.8 per cent of 16-18 year olds classified as NEET¹². In Brighton & Hove (with East Sussex), the trialling of E2L has enabled a process of joint working practices and a discovery of different working cultures. In this respect, several respondents spoke of the E2L Pilot as a 'pilot within a pilot'.

The **Lancashire** 'Annual Plan' for 2007-2008 noted a NEET rate of 8.9 per cent across the county, but with particularly high rates in certain NEET 'hot spots' such as Preston and Burnley¹³. These 'hot spots' were also highlighted in the Local Area Agreement Improvement Target, which included the aim to reduce the county's NEET population to 7.7 per cent in 2010/2011¹⁴. Given the difficulty of offering the E2L Pilot across Lancashire, a large county with two unitary authorities operating within it, the Pilot is concentrating upon Preston and Burnley. The Lancashire E2L Pilot has reviewed the existing local NEET data and has categorised its NEET population into groups, where some fall into the classification only briefly, whilst others are more entrenched as NEET. The Pilot is seeking to concentrate upon the 'entrenched' NEETs who are likely to require the most extensive support and guidance.

Across England, despite the increase in participation rates in education and training over recent years, the proportion of 16-18 years olds classified as NEET has also increased: from 9.7 per cent in 2007 to 10.3 per cent in 2008. Moreover, as employment rates among NEET young people have declined as the recession has proceeded, the proportion of NETs (not in education or training) in a job fell from 56 per cent in 2007 to 49 per cent in 2008¹⁵.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The following sections detail the findings from the interim and second phase fieldwork visits to the four Pilots. As Section 1.3 of Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 refer to each Pilot's local context and experience of development, the Pilots are identified. Subsequent sections are presented thematically.

¹² LSC South East (2007) *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training South East*

¹³ LSC Lancashire (2007) *Learning and Skills Council Lancashire Annual Plan 2007-08*

¹⁴ Lancashire Local Area Agreement Improvement Target 2008-09: Children and Young People

¹⁵ DCSF (2009) *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds in England* Statistical First Release 16 June 2009

2 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation research strategy employed by the research team involves several stages:

- A scoping phase – including an inception meeting with DCSF, a review of management information, and an initial visit to the Pilot areas to meet project staff and to gain an understanding of how each Pilot has been organised. This phase of the research was conducted between February and April 2009.
- Two distinct primary research phases, each including: analysis of management information; fieldwork visits to each Pilot area to conduct a series of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with key Pilot informants, stakeholders and beneficiaries; and data analysis and reporting. The first primary research phase was undertaken between May and July 2009.
- A learning workshop – with representatives from each Pilot in order to share experiences, views and best practice. This workshop was conducted following the second primary research phase in January 2010.

2.1 The Realist Method (Programme Theory Evaluation)

The E2L evaluation utilises the approach and tenets of the realist evaluation methodology. Sometimes referred to as ‘programme theory evaluation’, the realist method recognises that interventions are always based upon a hypothesis (e.g. a policy or programme theory). Often these hypotheses postulate: ‘If a programme is delivered thus, or services are managed like so, then it will bring about some improved outcome.’ Such conjectures are grounded on assumptions about what gives rise to poor performance, inappropriate behaviour, and so on, and then speculate how changes may be made to these patterns¹⁶.

Further, as the E2L pilot interventions involve stakeholder consultation, networking and partnership working, and a deliberate attempt to foster support and guidance relationships with young pilot beneficiaries, the realist method can be useful as it acknowledges that interventions are embedded in social systems.

Thus as an evaluation tool it recognises that the individual capacities of the Pilots’ key actors, the interpersonal relationships supporting the Pilots’ operations, the

¹⁶ Pawson, R & Tilley, N (1997) *Realistic Evaluation* London: Sage; Pawson, R (2006) *Evidence-Based Policy: A Realist Perspective* London: Sage

institutional setting, and the wider infrastructural system, will all have considerable influence over the E2L Pilots' outcomes.

However, the realist method does not attempt to provide some arithmetic verdict on an intervention but rather a refinement of the underlying programme theory. That is, there is no attempt to offer a mechanical cause and effect model. Instead, the method seeks to identify the 'theory of change' that lies behind an intervention, drawing out both intended and unintended outcomes, to address the configuration puzzle: what works, for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects, and why?

2.2 The Primary Research

Following the scoping phase, each of the four Pilots were visited twice over a two or three day period. Over the two fieldwork visits, eighty-five face-to-face or telephone semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with Pilot staff, stakeholders, key local partnership agencies, providers, and beneficiaries.

The resulting data was then transcribed verbatim and coded using the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo.

Management information supplied by DCSF was also reviewed as were documents and local research papers relevant to each Pilot area – particularly in relation to the local NEET population.

3 PILOT DEVELOPMENT

Key findings

All the Pilots have followed the strategy and design detailed in their respective Implementation Plan.

Initial operationalisation of the Implementation Plans entailed the Pilots orientating themselves within their local demographic, NEET, and provision context. Pre-existing relationships and/or access to local networks proved valuable in this respect.

The tailored approach encapsulated in the E2L Pilot design has enabled the individual Pilots to develop new partnership working and support – for example, arranging for established city-wide provision to be delivered in local venues easily accessible to beneficiaries, and through establishing relationships with student support services at local colleges to better facilitate beneficiary support upon entering formal learning.

The ability of the Pilots to identify and commission appropriate third sector provision has also allowed the Pilots to address some identified local ‘gaps’ in provision for young people generally.

As the Pilots have progressed, a mix of provision intended to facilitate a ‘light touch’ engagement leading to more structured learning during the beneficiaries’ 15 week participation has become a common feature.

Recognition and understanding of how local young people conduct themselves on a day-to-day basis has necessitated careful planning in some cases to address local issues such as notions of ‘territoriality’, local gang activity, or local inter-community or inter-ethnic tensions more generally.

3.1 Developing the Pilots

The process of developing the Pilots has involved two main aspects. First, each of the Pilots had to implement the internal and external working arrangements as proposed in their Implementation Plan. This has included the recruitment of staff members and the formation of working partnerships with the relevant local agencies, communities, and third sector organisations included in the Plans. Details of this operational process are covered in subsequent sections of this report.

3.1.1 Adherence to the Implementation Plan

Documentation and respondent evidence shows that the four pilots have remained true to the Implementation Plans agreed at the outset of the programme. In one case, it was suggested by the pilot manager that the original Implementation Plan allowed for some interpretation, but that the focus remains on achieving the target outputs in terms of NEET progression to learning.

The fact that the E2L model affords PAs the opportunity to take creative approaches to address the needs of their clients has been lauded by the majority of respondents in all four pilots. One respondent felt that their PAs have the opportunity to be really creative, which can be of real benefit when working with young people.

The fact that E2L is currently a pilot intervention was cited by some respondents as a reason to allow for some flexibility in delivery. This point was made by a Learning Partnership representative:

“You work against the grain almost, and you are allowed to fail ... or not fail ... and that you learn from mistakes that are made along the way”.

3.1.2 Reviews of Local Beneficiary Need and Available Provision

Parallel to this process, have been the efforts by each staff team to position their Pilot both within the context of the local NEET strategy and alongside the existing provision and learning infrastructure. For all of the Pilots, this process has entailed a careful review of needs of their intended beneficiaries and a review of available local provision – drawing upon evidence of best practice of working with the local NEET population. These reviews were conducted through a process of information gathering, previous pilot and NEET experience among the Pilot staff, and through local stakeholder consultation.

For the Lancashire Pilot, the elements of the E2L programme – in particular the intensive individual beneficiary support and the option to offer bespoke provision – was seen as a ‘golden opportunity’ for beneficiaries at risk of becoming completely disengaged from any employability or learning opportunities. Initially, for some local stakeholders, there was some confusion as to the nature of E2L; some thought that it was an adjunct to E2E – an intervention considered by some as having important elements but somewhat of a ‘one size fits all’ initiative.

“I made it clear with the emails and staff briefings that this wasn’t E2E and it was a bespoke programme for young people ... To be honest with you, we’d been looking for this because there have been similar pilots to this in other parts of the country in the past but we’ve never had one in Burnley”.
Local Connexions Stakeholder, Burnley

Furthermore, the Lancashire Pilot has been pleased to be able to take advantage of the flexible delivery offered by some of the third sector providers who have joined the county-wide Commissioned Outcome Funding network. As the Pilot has progressed there have been some variations in the type of providers being commissioned, so that each ‘area’ has been able to offer a mix of ‘light touch’ and more structured provision to facilitate both initial engagement and progression.

For the E2L Pilot team in Birmingham, the initiative has provided an opportunity to address local NEET needs and to provide support and guidance that had been identified through local research some years ago. This research highlighted the importance for NEET young people of achieving qualifications but that this often necessitates accessible local tailored provision and one-to-one support – including help with travelling, which can be a significant barrier for local young people whose life may be bounded within just a few streets. Thus, part of the Birmingham Pilot’s early efforts concentrated upon persuading providers, traditionally based in the city centre, to deliver training in a more local venue.

These efforts also took account of the stakeholder consultation, which revealed that some of the city’s ‘right’ provision for NEET young people is considered to be located in the ‘wrong’ places – that is, it is geographically inaccessible for all those potential beneficiaries who do not live within very short distances of it.

“If you happen to get the access to the right thing that is lucky for you ... A lot of our children and our families live in areas where they don’t travel; not because there isn’t access to very good public transport but because it isn’t in the culture to travel outside your area to get access”. Local Connexions Stakeholder, Birmingham

In Brighton and East Sussex, one of the potential benefits of E2L in the view of Pilot staff is the opportunity to support young people when they first enter formal learning. Local evidence has revealed a high drop-out rate from FE college in the early days and weeks of the new college year. For example, E2E providers do not have the capacity to support beneficiaries into college and some young people can feel lost in a large college environment even when fully committed to their learning. The ability of the E2L Pilot PAs to support their beneficiaries' transition into a formal learning environment is seen as a key strength of the E2L Pilot design by key Pilot staff – several of whom mentioned their preparations for the September 2009 intake at their local FE college(s).

“We’ve got a lot of E2E provision in Brighton and Hove, probably more than most places in the South East, certainly; a lot of providers offering a wide range of E2E. But there isn’t this additional Trusted Adult support for those that are the furthest disengaged” Learning Partnership Manager, Brighton

The situation facing the new Sandwell Pilot included an existing 10 training providers in the local area, as well as an FE college, all effectively competing to offer provision to local young people. However, under the E2L tenets, the Pilot has been able to commission provision from a number of established local third sector providers with capacity – and local credibility. The Sandwell Pilot considers itself to be fortunate to have had this access to existing third sector provision, particularly in respect of the need to get the Pilot set up and operational in a short period. Moreover, being able to commission bespoke third sector provision has enabled the Pilot to help address some of the gaps in local provision identified by the research unit of the local authority.

The Sandwell Pilot is aware of significant local research having recently been conducted into the NEET population. One aspect of this research highlighted by the PA respondents concerns the importance of appropriate information, advice and guidance in relation to young people of dual heritage – an increasing phenomenon in the Sandwell area.

The importance of local knowledge about the likely beneficiaries and availability of appropriate provision has also proved valuable in enabling some of the Pilots to address issues of ‘territoriality’ among local young people, including possible membership of local ‘gangs’, and the potential for clashes between certain groups of beneficiaries. For some PAs, this has involved accompanying beneficiaries on their caseload to certain providers, as the journey entails the crossing local ‘boundaries’

that could result in physical confrontation from those who consider the young person to have encroached upon their 'territory'.

3.2 Promotion and Marketing

A range of activities to promote and market E2L have taken place across the pilot areas. These have included:

- Networking with all key stakeholders (including Connexions, Entry to Employment, colleges, youth centres, third sector, work based learning providers, other NEET providers etc.)
- Advertising on websites
- Advertising in appropriate publications e.g. the Connexions staff bulletin
- Producing flyers and leaflets (separate ones for practitioners and for young people)
- Holding publicity events
- Publishing personal success stories in the local press

Pilots have tended to avoid a blanket approach to marketing, stressing that E2L is a targeted programme and that, therefore, practitioners need to be the priority recipient of information about the programme, enabling them to identify appropriate potential beneficiaries. As such, networking with stakeholders has been a significant marketing tool. This has been particularly important for PAs that are new to a locality, as they have had to begin to develop relationships with the key players in the area. In most of the pilots these relationships were already at least partially established; and in some these have been in place for a number of years.

The experience and local knowledge of the PAs has also been critical in the promotion of the initiative. In two areas, potential beneficiaries were identified from locally held Management Information. In one of these pilots, the PAs 'cold called' all of the young people on their local system for an update on circumstances and, where appropriate, to let them know about the opportunities presented by E2L.

4 PILOT MANAGEMENT

Key findings

Management of the intervention has been identified by Pilot staff as quite complex, given the intricate organisational relationships and extensive subject areas covered by the provision.

The Model 2 Pilots acknowledge the tension between managing the intervention and affording the third sector the flexibility to remain true to their organisational culture.

The experience and local knowledge of the PAs has been critical in the promotion of the Pilots.

Experience of working with young people from different backgrounds and with different needs has emerged as a key characteristic of a successful E2L PA.

In areas where Steering Groups have been established, all stakeholders consider them to be operating effectively.

The importance of existing contacts and relationships between key staff, Steering Group members, agencies and organisations central and peripheral to the Pilots was stressed by all respondents.

The E2L Pilots have been welcomed by many local stakeholders with whom no previous working partnership has been established by the delivery partners.

Different models of engagement of third sector providers have been established in the Pilot areas.

There are both positive and negative aspects arising from the heterogeneity evident in the Pilot areas' third sector provision landscape. Third Sector agencies often work creatively with the young people but there may also be some lack of consistency in organisational policies, procedures and quality

4.1 Management Arrangements

Not all Pilot managers line manage delivery staff, which can mean that staff are not getting the support they require. One manager identified this as a very important issue for the next year of the Pilot, saying that they:

“need to pull the team together so that they can get a bit more support and make sure that things are up to scratch and that we’re all singing off the same hymn sheet, as it were ... we need to tighten the whole team issue”. Pilot manager

Management of the intervention has been identified by participants from all four Pilots as quite complex, given the intricate organisational relationships and extensive subject areas covered by the provision. One Pilot admitted encountering some problems with staffing relating to travel to work issues and an early departure of a PA as a result of this. Moreover, the highly structured information, advice and guidance environments that some former Young People’s Service workers had been used to before joining the Pilot entailed a period of readjustment to the close, flexible mentoring of E2L.

The delegation of budgets to delivery partners, whilst seen as beneficial (particularly in that it gives PAs control over negotiations with providers, and allows for greater flexibility of provision), has also been identified as problematic in one key aspect.

One Pilot manager observed that she would have more leverage over providers if she was able to negotiate for multiple places, and it would be easier for the programme to absorb costs relating to participants failing to attend sessions if the budgets were managed centrally:

“ ... if we’re looking for places for three young people from different partners to do something, as an over-arching organisation I could say to a provider ‘I’ll pay you for six, and if only three turn up, that’s my problem’; different organisations can’t do that”. Pilot manager

The Model 2 pilots acknowledge that there can be a tension between managing the programme while at the same time trying to afford the third sector delivery partners the flexibility they need to remain true to their organisational culture. One respondent described this process as a case of trying to stay ‘hands off’ to a certain extent, *“to let the third sector get on with it and trial and test what they are meant to be doing, but also making sure that the pilot’s successful”* in terms of meeting output targets. Another programme manager described their frustration in that they are managing the programme, but the day-to-day caseload management – management of the Personal Advisers, recruiting young people, and so on – is *“out of my hands”*. In most

cases, however, this tension appears to have been well managed, and has been addressed by collaborative sessions between programme managers and front line staff (particularly PAs), or through enhanced communication with delivery partner managers.

4.1.1 Staffing Structures

Staffing structures vary between pilots, although all employ a programme manager / co-ordinator who retains oversight of progress and provides support to staff in all of the other parts of the structure. Delivery partners employ the PAs, although none use this term to promote their service (using terms such as Young People’s Worker or Youth Support Worker instead).

The following table presents an overview of the staffing structures of the four pilots, for ease of comparison:

	Programme Manager	Delivery Manager	Personal Advisers
Birmingham	Connexions	Birmingham City Council Youth Service	Birmingham City Council Youth Service
Brighton & East Sussex	Brighton & Hove City Council; East Sussex County Council	Third Sector Delivery Partners	Third Sector Delivery Partners
Lancashire	Lancashire County Council	Lancashire Young People’s Service/ Children and Young People’s Service	Lancashire Young People’s Service/ Children and Young People’s Service
Sandwell	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (seconded from Prospects)	Third Sector Delivery Partners	Third Sector Delivery Partners

One of the third sector delivery partners’ managers identified a potential shortcoming of the management of the programme in their pilot, expressing concern that their contract did not include payment for their organisation’s management time. So, while some third sector organisations’ staff act as the PAs’ line managers, there is no payment for this function.

4.1.2 Staff Background and Experience

As described elsewhere in this report, effective delivery by PAs has been found to be crucial to the success of the E2L process. Respondents from all four pilots emphasised this point, and described the characteristics that they felt contributed towards the effectiveness of these workers. Several respondents identified as key the need for PAs to have extensive experience of “working with young people from different backgrounds and with different needs ...”, and, in particular, experience of covering a wide range of issues with young people, including “money issues, complex issues, multiple issues”, many of which are likely to have been of a personal nature. To this end, one Pilot took an early operational decision to only recruit PAs with Level 4 information, advice and guidance qualifications.

Equivalent similar themes to have emerged from the research is that the success of E2L pilots in securing rapid turnaround from inception to delivery has been a function of the network of local contacts developed prior to their appointment of the Pilot managers/ co-ordinators. One PA expressed this in the following way:

“... with any project it’s a gradual process, and I already had relationships or somebody within the Council had relationships with all of these people. So it wasn’t that we were knocking on doors and trying to break barriers ... I’ve already got strong connections”. PA

The same can be seen to apply to staff working in PA roles, some of whom were able to describe how they had been able to build on existing relationships to ensure that partner agencies refer young people to the programme. Others spoke of their need to familiarise themselves with a new area, stakeholders and contacts. The following quote highlights both the potential benefits of building on such relationships, as well as the potential drawbacks of relying too much on such contacts:

“I’ve had four or five referrals from one client adviser, and that’s purely been because she’s based where I’m based and she knows me ... inevitably you get this strong contact – ‘if you’ve got any queries then pop up and see us’ kind of thing – but there’s less of that from other advice centres, so the young people in that area possibly aren’t getting quite such a good service ...”. PA

One Pilot manager emphasised the benefits to the programme’s delivery of her having a Connexions background. In particular, it is felt that this has allowed third sector delivery partners with limited experience of the Connexions service’s approach to learn from her, shortening the lead-in time. Other respondents questioned whether it was likely to be more beneficial for delivery staff to have any previous or current link to Connexions, or if a youth work background might be more beneficial. In practice, it

seems that teams comprised of individuals with both types of background are able to draw on complementary skills, contacts and experience to the benefit of the programme.

4.1.3 Partnership Working

The importance of existing contacts and relationships between key staff or Steering Group members and the various agencies and organisations central or peripheral to the Pilots' operations was stressed by all respondents. In this respect, all of the Pilot managers spoke of the importance of their existing relationships or contacts in relation to timely set up and early delivery arrangements.

There were also reports from key respondents that any new partnerships needed for the Pilot were considered when the Implementation Plans were being drafted. To this end, one Pilot held an 'open event' at a local venue and invited a range of providers to attend – a number of whom were unknown to the more established local providers. In this way, the Pilot has helped to foster new relationships and partnerships among the local providers.

Another Pilot manager spoke of how the E2L programme has been welcomed by many local stakeholders with whom no previous working partnership had been established. So, despite the usual processes and issues that accompany any new relationship, all those involved have shown real commitment to the Pilot's aims.

"You know, you've got to start somewhere and you build on the rest ... You've got to feel your way through and see what's needed and what level of partnership's needed ... There've not been particularly any obstacles, its just taken time to implement". Pilot Manager

During the second phase of fieldwork, a number of Pilot respondents spoke of how, as their local profile has increased, so partners have come to see them as an established part of the local NEET reduction landscape – with, moreover, the ability to fund or part-fund provision for young people that has real benefit and a focus upon genuine progression to a positive outcome. The following quote from a Connexions partner is indicative of the type of comments received:

"[The] Connexions agenda has always been about partnership working, so that's been quite useful from our point of view. And it [the Pilot] really has enhanced it further because we've been able to go to partners with another different type of approach as regards NEET options that are available and how young people can be referred to them ... And it has given more of an insight for some partners to develop in the way they work as well." Connexions partner

4.2 The Steering Group

At the time of the field work, not all Pilots had established Steering Groups, although in all Pilots there was evidence of extensive networking between the programme staff, delivery partners and other local stakeholders. All Pilots intend to have a Steering Group in place for the second year of their operations. In areas where the Steering Groups are currently established, there are terms of reference and most respondents expressed satisfaction with the way that they are being run. There was a high degree of commonality in relation to members' understanding of the Groups' roles, typified by the following comment:

"It's [role is] to provide a general oversight, to ensure that the targets are being met, to ensure the linkages are made with other organisations' vacancies, and to ensure the programme is successful". Local Stakeholder

One Pilot manager explained that the Steering Group had been very useful in 'pulling together' the two areas involved in the Pilot, and in helping to identify and deal with any issues that might arise from the Local Authority or providers. As well as being a valuable source of local information regarding target groups within the local NEET population in the Pilot's early days, the Steering Group is also considered to be a 'safe' forum for the third sector delivery partners to feed into and to discuss any delivery issues or problems.

One Pilot currently without a Steering Group is seeking to establish one for the coming operational year that will include members who can lend valuable guidance and assistance in relation to progression routes for their beneficiaries and how these progression routes can link to the Foundation Learning framework.

4.3 Roles of the Third Sector in Management and Operations

One of the elements that the E2L pilots were designed to test was the effectiveness of third sector involvement in supporting young NEET beneficiaries. Originally, three of the Pilots were to be delivered by the third sector, with the fourth delivered by the relevant local authority. This subsequently changed so that two of the pilots are now being delivered by the third sector, and two by local authorities. The intention is to understand what benefits the third sector can bring when considering future delivery models.

Different models of engagement of third sector providers have been established in the areas where the E2L pilots are running. For example, in one third sector led pilot area there is a consortium of third sector providers that have been working together for about five years. This has given the E2L Pilot a sound basis for the identification of providers, which have already undergone stringent quality and monitoring checks, and as a result they feel confident about the provision that they can commission. In one of the local authority led Pilots the process of developing a more effective relationship with the third sector is in its relatively early stages. In this area, one third sector organisation has been selected as a 'portal' through which the local authority will work to identify and access a wider range of third sector providers. This is intended as a model that E2L will be able to work to in the future.

A number of interviewees stressed the heterogeneity of their local third sector landscape. This was seen as having both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand it enabled the Pilots to work more creatively to meet the needs of young people, but on the other it could also mean addressing issues such as a lack of consistency by some third sector providers in terms of policies, procedures and quality.

"What you do get with the third sector...is different structures, different boundaries, different. At least with statutory, it's statutory. You understand what you're getting ...The third sector, you can't lump them together, they are individual charities, organisations...with different policies and procedures" Local Stakeholder

However, a range of benefits of third sector involvement in the pilots were identified, including:

- Bringing added value by having access to a range of inter-related support mechanisms, for example: housing; Information, Advice and Guidance; and job clubs
- Delivering a wide variety of provision, with young people signposted to the most appropriate for their needs
- Having access to provision to act as an 'in fill' for young people whilst they are waiting to start at college
- Bringing a different kind of outlook and the opportunity to meet different people in terms of age, culture and so on
- Having access to venues where young people feel comfortable, which may not always be the case for local authorities.

Yet, the relative inexperience of some, smaller third sector organisations in terms of the development of financial and quality systems to align with those of the statutory authorities, was identified as a concern. This, again, reflects the diversity of the

sector, as it was acknowledged that some of the larger national providers operate to a model that fits well with the procedures of statutory bodies, but that this can be a problem for the capacity of smaller grassroots organisations:

“I think some people think they’re all the same, but they’re not. I think that’s very important because local grass roots organisations often bring something different, but you’ve got to be careful about using them too much....because...young people have got to move on, but when you use people like xxx, that’s not a community organisation. Young people come from all over the city, so it’s a difference again.” Project Manager

One Pilot described attempts in their local area by the Voluntary and Community Sector Executive to establish a group that could represent the local sector to a range of existing and potential statutory partners. The impetus for this initiative had been the recognition that more could be done to promote what the third sector can offer, as well as to provide a mechanism for feedback into the sector with the experiences and expectations of their local partners.

For example, one Pilot manager spoke from their experience when recommending that third sector workers should undergo some kind of central, collective induction and work to a common staff development framework. Their Pilot experiences of working with a third sector delivery partner had revealed that staff had not always undergone the same level or intensity of relevant training, particularly in relation to some of the challenges when dealing with vulnerable and disengaged young people.

Dependency on external funding and limited geographic coverage were also identified as issue which may be barriers to the third sector’s ability to deliver on a programme such as E2L. Nevertheless, one of the Pilots has benefited significantly from the experience and professionalism of their two third sector delivery partners – both of whom were existing delivery agents of the local authority and experienced providers. Not only have they been able to offer considerable flexibility in terms of delivery and management but they have also been able to take advantage of their significant local knowledge and established networks to build up packages of provision to offer the E2L beneficiaries.

4.4 DCSF Monitoring, Support and Oversight

The number of DCSF progress monitoring meetings appear to have reduced, in one case from monthly initially to quarterly, a level of monitoring which is felt to be more appropriate now the programme is up-and-running. The high level of staff turnover at the DCSF has been felt to be challenging (one pilot citing the fact that they have had three DCSF contacts in six months; another thought they were onto their fourth), as it has necessitated programme staff going over the same ground with replacement staff. (As well as the practical problems this turnover presents, some respondents expressed concern about the message this sends out about the status of the E2L programmes). Experiences of support from DCSF have also been varied, with collective meetings (of DCSF staff and E2L programme managers / co-ordinators) having been found to be useful, but sporadic responses to e-mail requests for information less so.

There has been some networking between pilots, with programme managers / co-ordinators from each area getting together to compare progress. This has been felt to be useful, with information on how clients have progressed and what appears to have worked in different contexts, being shared between pilots.

5 PILOT OPERATIONS

Key findings

Recruitment to the pilots was running at just under 90 per cent of profiled starts at the end of December 2009.

No 'typical' level of support is given to beneficiaries. There is a mix between intensive support and more 'light touch' support, depending on individual need.

There are formal processes for establishing beneficiary needs, for example through existing and new assessment procedures. Informal routes, which underpin the development of the relationship between the PA and the beneficiary, are also important in contributing to an understanding of individuals' barriers to learning.

Action planning has been a useful tool to help provide a focus on short and long-term goals.

September start dates remain a key issue in relation to outcomes from E2L, with the academic calendar being highly influential in determining what is available and when.

The level of PA caseloads has been highly variable, ranging from 15 to more than 30 clients. Overall, caseloads of between 15-20 clients were felt to be manageable in order to allow PAs to offer a truly bespoke and personal service.

The financial incentive is felt to have brought more young people into E2L and kept them there than would have been the case had there been no financial reward for participation.

There was a strong and commonly held view that young people in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and Income Support should be eligible for the financial incentive if they participate in E2L.

The discretionary fund is considered to be an important tool in helping to overcome some specific, financial, barriers to engagement in formal learning.

Pilots remain frustrated that young people on E2L are recorded as NEET, although they remain on the register to incentivise local areas to support young people to progress on from the programme.

5.1 Recruitment

The latest available Management Information (end of December 2009) indicates that recruitment to E2L nationally is running at just under 90 per cent of profiled starts, with some variation in these figures at an individual pilot level.

All of the pilots indicated that their experiences with recruitment to the project have been positive, although there have been peaks and troughs through the year, for example with starts being relatively low in August, with the exception of one pilot area. In this area, where there has been a strong focus on education outcomes, recruitment exceeded that profiled for August, in preparation for the new college start dates; and then fell off in September and October, as emphasis was placed on supporting beneficiaries as they entered Further Education, rather than building up the new intake. In this pilot in particular, the influence of the academic calendar in relation to recruitment, retention and progression is apparent. As a result, recruitment patterns have not followed those set out in the implementation plan, but ebbed and flowed according to the availability of provision and progression routes.

Referrals to E2L are predominantly made by Connexions PAs, although in some areas the Youth Offending Team have also been a significant source of recruitment. The importance of raising awareness and understanding of E2L amongst professionals working with the client group was emphasised in order for the referrals process to work effectively. In particular, it was acknowledged that Connexions PAs have a range of choices in terms of provision for NEET clients and that they need to be clear about what it is that E2L is offering and how this is both different and more appropriate than other interventions. The choice can be confusing for young people, so it is important that Connexions hold the correct information to make those decisions. In one pilot area the need for Connexions to understand the additional support that E2L can offer was identified as a key factor in stimulating referrals – Connexions PAs were considered to be less likely to signpost young people to E2L if they felt it would only provide the same service that was available elsewhere. The potential for referrals to suffer because young people remain NEET whilst on E2L, which is not the case for other provision, was raised. There were particular concerns that this might be influential at specific times of the year, e.g. in October and November when there is a focus on NEET figures within local authorities.

Other methods of recruitment to E2L include: word of mouth; through existing relationships with support workers; or by dropping in to the centres where the PAs are based.

5.2 Retention

Anecdotally, retention on E2L has been relatively good, with only a small number of young people leaving before they completed their 15 weeks. In one pilot area it was suggested that the dropouts that do occur tend to be in the very early stages of E2L, amongst those that don't engage in the initial sessions. Those who stay for a couple of weeks tend to remain involved until the end. Factors identified as contributing to early leaving included the chaotic lifestyles of certain individuals who fail to engage with any of the support agencies; and cultural issues, specifically the restrictions placed on some Asian females. This can be a particular problem in identifying appropriate bridging provision, and subsequent progression routes.

At times, PAs have had to make a judgement that E2L is simply not working for some young people. In these circumstances, beneficiaries have been referred back to their original support worker. For example:

“they can't be bothered to turn up to appointments, they don't answer the phone or they don't phone you or respond to texts...you reach the point where you have to say 'I can't be giving you any more time because there is somebody else who is ready for this'” PA

Overall, the package of support offered through E2L is felt to encourage retention of beneficiaries. This includes the action planning process, which, it was suggested, enables PAs to develop a good understanding of beneficiaries' interests and preferences. The flexibility of the programme is also considered to be a key factor contributing to retention:

“Had it been a regimented course, whereby you are in it for 22 weeks, it has got to be on these days, they wouldn't have made that because they would have fallen foul of poor attendance....but because E2L has got that almost natural flexibility in it...that has helped” PA

5.3 Support for Beneficiaries

5.3.1 Levels of Support Provided

The emphasis on personalisation and putting beneficiaries at the centre of the project was commonly observed by those delivering E2L, other stakeholders and the beneficiaries themselves. The result of this is that there is no 'typical' level of support given to beneficiaries – each individual's requirements are different and will impact to a different degree on the resources of both the PAs and the pilot as a whole.

A number of interviewees highlighted the diversity of young people supported through E2L. For example:

"I've got one young person who is homeless...she's in an abusive relationship, benefits problems, there's loads...she had no food, there were loads of issues, so with that young person I can see her four times a week, but then another young person I just see them once a week, a phone call, a text message and they're fine" PA

Whilst it was acknowledged that there is a balance to be achieved within a caseload between those requiring intensive support and those who can progress with more limited guidance, the extent to which this happens is largely outside the control of the PAs. One group of PAs indicated that, amongst a caseload of 12 beneficiaries, there were likely to be up to 10 requiring significant support, with just two that simply need pointing in the right direction.

The time consuming nature of much of the support required by individuals was highlighted by PAs, in particular the constant reminders to attend appointments and the process of making sure that all relevant issues and barriers to participation are identified and understood:

"What is very time consuming but obviously is part of the job has been contacting them and chasing them, reminding them that they have got to go to college on Wednesday or they have got an appointment on Wednesday. Remind them initially when our appointments are booked for our one to one, chasing up by text and phone.....What has become a regular part of the support we offer has been going with them to interviews. A lot of support especially initially in meeting them pretty regularly to do the action plan with them, get to know them and to get to find out a bit about what their issues really are or might be. Although Aspire is quite a comprehensive back up system, the system that Connexions use, what is actually detailed on there obviously is quite an overview really. I find it takes a fair while to actually get to know the young person and you only do that by being in their presence for one to one meetings or if you are taking them to an interview" PA

However, PAs also identified the benefits of working hard for individual beneficiaries, acknowledging that young people recognise this and respond to support in a positive manner:

“I do think they see how much we bust a gut for them and they do....whereas they might come into the centre and get some advice off a young people’s worker, it’s great they’re getting advice but they know it could have been anyone walking in the door and getting that piece of advice. They see how much we bust a gut for them, they respect us, it becomes mutual and that’s why I think sometimes they are more agreeable to doing things you’ve asked them because they see how much you’re doing for them” PA

The majority of beneficiaries will receive at least two hours one to one support each week in the early stages of participation in E2L. At this time, practical issues such as bank accounts and birth certificates will be dealt with; initial assessments will be made and action planning will begin. All beneficiaries require a bank account in order to be paid the financial incentive, but many of this group do not have one when they first join the project. PAs frequently provide support in ensuring that young people have, or can obtain, the necessary identification required to open an account; and then accompany young people to the bank to support them in this process.

As an individual progresses through the programme, the level of support required will vary according to their current activity. A number of PAs referred to the challenges created by the need to switch between individuals that are at different stages of E2L and therefore require different input.

5.3.2 Establishing Beneficiary Needs

The process of establishing beneficiary needs is ongoing throughout the individual’s period of engagement on the project. There are formal processes including, for example, the Connexions’ Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR) tool; information from referring bodies; previous assessments undertaken by practitioners; and the associated records held in relation to individuals. Previous assessments will also be used to develop an understanding of the beneficiaries’ basic and key skill needs. Alongside this process of assessment, which identifies personal and educational issues, an action plan will be developed to identify appropriate steps towards progression.

The way in which the assessment and action planning process develops is again highly dependent on individual need and characteristics; and can only progress at a speed with which the beneficiary is comfortable. A number of PAs pointed to the

importance of informal routes in assessment – with young people frequently revealing significant information at times when they feel most relaxed, for example, whilst playing on the Playstation, but being less forthcoming in a formal interview environment. The significance in one pilot area of having PAs based in centres where young people will 'drop in', even when they are not due for an appointment, was also identified as contributing to the development of this informal relationship. As was highlighted in the interim report, the development of a relationship between the beneficiary and the PA over a period of time is the factor that underpins the assessment process and is fundamental to ensuring that key barriers to progression are identified and overcome. As such, the assessment and action planning process tends to evolve over the period that the young person is engaged with E2L and can change significantly at any given time if the beneficiary introduces new information which impacts on this process.

The limitations of existing Connexions data was identified by one group of PAs in that it focuses solely on issues relating to education and careers, failing to identify the underlying issues that have contributed to an individuals' progress, or lack of it, in relation to these areas. In this respect, E2L is viewed as a positive development, allowing the PA to identify and address these wider issues.

Experiences of the action planning process appear to have been mixed across the pilot areas. In a couple of areas it was acknowledged that action plans have, perhaps, not been as fully developed as might have been hoped, as a result of multiple pressures on PAs' time. Increasing the amount of detail in action plans is seen as a potentially positive development, particularly in terms of the contribution that action plans make to determining payment of the financial incentive. For example, one pilot manager suggested that action plans should go beyond recording attendance at particular activities, to perhaps include behaviour and outcomes from those events.

The variable nature of some of the action plans has, to some extent, been determined by the capacity and levels of engagement of the individual. Those delivering E2L indicated that some action plans are very detailed with lots of ticks next to lots of activities, but that this is not necessarily achievable or appropriate for some of the client group for whom it is a challenge to simply attend appointments. As such, action plans have to be adapted to the circumstances and expectations of the individual; whilst also helping to facilitate progress.

The relative merits, or not, of action planning for different E2L beneficiaries were highlighted by PAs. On the one hand, action plans are viewed as providing a potential focus for young people that are unclear of their future pathway; on the other, the demands of an action plan for a young person that has been disengaged for a significant period of time can be intimidating:

“I do find that for some young people the action plan, if they genuinely can’t see the end and the path they’re supposed to go down and they genuinely don’t know where they’re headed it’s really good.....they’re just been doing nothing, all they know is doing nothing, for them they can take it home and say to mum ‘Look, this is what I’m going to be doing’”. PA

“They do want to engage but you’re writing an action plan, you’re sorting out a bridging provider and formal learning at the end, this is your journey and they’ve not done anything for months and months. It’s too much too quick and that’s when you’ve got to spend a few weeks with them” PA

5.3.3 Identifying Appropriate Provision

The process for identifying appropriate bridging provision is an extension of the assessment and action planning stages, based on an evolving understanding of what the young person would like to do and the best route for achieving this. In most pilot areas, the needs and preferences of the beneficiary are then matched to the available provision, the commissioning of which is covered in more detail in Chapter 7.

Managers in the pilot areas are reasonably confident that they are able to access appropriate provision for the majority of their beneficiaries, although the extent to which this is tailored specifically to individual needs tends to vary across the pilot areas and from provider to provider within pilots. Overall, there was an acknowledgement amongst project managers that there is a continuous need to investigate the potential for new and alternative providers and to grow the provider lists, although the scope for this within a pilot project with a limited timescale is of course limited. These issues are, again, covered in more detail in Chapter 7.

One group of PAs suggested that some beneficiaries have pre-conceived ideas about some local providers and/or courses, sometimes based on previous experiences. In some cases, persuasion is required to encourage beneficiaries to attend the initial session. It was acknowledged that what may appear to be a minor issue, such as the dress code of the teachers/trainers or the appearance of the building, can put young people off, and that all of these factors need to be taken into consideration when selecting provision. Location is another key issue, particularly in large cities or areas where reluctance to travel, particularly to unfamiliar destinations, is common amongst the E2L client group.

The potential for providers to deliver a progression route post E2L, for example, Entry to Employment, was identified by some PAs as being a contributory factor in influencing their decision as to where to place young people. The existence of progression routes at the same location as the bridging was considered a positive factor in potentially encouraging the continued participation and engagement of beneficiaries.

A number of providers cited the relationship between the provider and the PAs as being of particular importance in ensuring access to appropriate provision for beneficiaries. In particular, the need for PAs to have a good understanding of the provision landscape and what it can deliver, in terms of outcomes, was identified:

“Options for the young people often are as good as the knowledge and understanding of the worker” Provider

A number of ways of improving this relationship, including the potential for workshops, seminars, or exhibitions at which providers promote their courses and develop communication routes with PAs, were suggested.

5.3.4 Support for Beneficiaries on Bridging Provision

As at other stages of the project, levels of support given to young people attending bridging provision are highly variable and dependent on identified need. As one PA expressed it:

“It depends on the level of need of the young person. Sometimes it can be an introduction and they are off and actually feel quite patronised that you still want to be involved, or other times it is about texting, calling, structured timetables to keep them to their routines, so it really does depend and like I say, we have tried to keep it varied with levels of need. And it depends how they engage, it depends on what relationships they build with the tutor, with peers and if that is enough to hold them then great I can step back.” PA

The key change at this stage is that responsibility for the wellbeing of the beneficiary tends now to be shared between the PA and the provider. Providers remain in contact with the PAs throughout the bridging process, keeping them informed in relation to issues such as attendance and behaviour. The need for close working was identified by a number of PAs and providers, for example:

“We’ve ended up working in quite close partnership, but because it is utterly focused on the young people it’s not a negotiating service level agreement type partnership, it is a very practical, ongoing. You’ve got these young people, these young people are our joint concern and we’re all interested to make it work for them” PA

During the bridging some PAs still have significant levels of contact with the beneficiary, particularly where individuals continue to ‘drop in’ to see them. PAs will also intervene if issues relating to attendance and behaviour require particular attention. One example was given where an individual had stopped attending his bridging provision when a change was made to the day that it was delivered. He continued to attend one day a week, but not the second day. Whilst the provider was willing to revert back to the old timetable to ensure attendance on both days, the PA felt that this was avoiding the problem and chose instead to work with the beneficiary to find out why he was unable to attend in accordance with the new timetable.

Levels of contact between PAs and providers vary. In one pilot area one of the PAs is now delivering training around CV development at the premises of the bridging provider; as a result she is developing the relationship with the provider and is available for the beneficiaries that are attending courses there.

The relationship between the PAs and the providers can, therefore, be critical in, first, ensuring that appropriate bridging provision is secured for the young person; and, second, facilitating a smooth pathway through that provision. These relationships are likely to develop over time, with PAs returning to providers with whom they have had previous positive experiences; and these providers responding to deliver a service that meets need. As a result, the shared understanding between PAs and providers should improve over the period that the project is delivered. It remains important, however, that this does not result in the exclusion of providers who have not been able to develop that track record.

5.3.5 Support Beyond 15 Weeks

The aim of E2L is for beneficiaries to move into a positive learning destination after 15 weeks of engagement on the programme. Pilots noted, however, that there have been examples where young people require support beyond the 'standard' 15 weeks. In most cases, this has been possible due to the flexibility of the programme and the potential to transfer resources from individuals that have completed E2L in a shorter timescale to those that require a longer period of engagement.

Young people requiring support for more than 15 weeks tend to fall into two categories. The first is those, often highly disadvantaged, that are not considered to be ready to access formal learning after the initial 15 week programme. One pilot manager observed that this was a particular issue when the project started, as some inappropriate referrals were accepted:

"I think when we first started ...all the PAs perhaps accepted referrals which weren't necessarily appropriate and I think Connexions were referring young people who they thought 'oh well, we can't do anything with them, let's give them to somebody else' and when you're beginning, you want some numbers and it's like 'ok, yeah, fine we'll take them' and they weren't ready to move into learning, their barriers were too extreme and those young people were extended with the hope that 'oh, a little bit more work and they might be ready'" Pilot manager

One pilot, in exceptional circumstances, will enrol individuals for a further 15 week period; others will extend the period of engagement for the length of time that they feel appropriate or necessary in order for progression to be made. In circumstances where individuals have left E2L for a positive destination, but then disengage, they are able to rejoin the project. October half term was cited as a critical point where the likelihood of this happening increases.

The other cohort of beneficiaries potentially requiring an extension to the 15 weeks engagement are those that are waiting for start dates for college courses and for whom there is a danger that, should they leave, they will fail to enrol at the start of the new term. A number of PAs expressed their frustration at the lack of flexibility in college start dates and the potential that this has to undermine the work that has been done with E2L clients:

“I feel bad for the kids that we’ve kind of found them, wherever they were, drifting about in life, given them some hope, got it together, made something happen, they’re feeling really positive and then you’re just dropping them back in where they were but it’s worse because they’ve been out of it and kind of got re-engaged and motivated and everything”.
PA

“Bridging providers do a load of work, get these kids good to go and there’s nowhere to go” PA

In these circumstances some beneficiaries will remain engaged with E2L for a short additional period, or PAs will seek to identify alternative activities such as voluntary work, other, for example, third sector led, provision, or Entry to Employment in order to maintain engagement.

September start dates were identified as an issue across all of the pilot areas. Those delivering E2L have had to work around these at times relying on the roll on-roll off provision that is accessible at all times of the year. There was some suggestion that, although change is slow, some colleges are developing their portfolios to extend and diversify provision to meet the need of this client group more effectively. For example, one college provided a Foundation Pathways course which is delivered over a six week period six times each year. The importance of developing relationships with colleges in order to facilitate a shared approach to more flexible delivery was identified by a number of stakeholders. This however, can be a considerable challenge, particularly in large geographical areas that are served by a number of Further Education learning providers; and given the resources of a pilot project such as E2L.

5.4 PA Caseloads

The level of caseload with which PAs have been working is highly variable, both across and within the different E2L pilot areas, ranging from 15 to more than 30 clients at any given time. Some PAs and pilot managers felt that caseloads have been largely manageable, others were concerned that at times the quality of the service that they offered had been at risk because of the multiple demands on their

time. There was a general consensus that between 15-20 active clients is the 'ideal', which enables enough time to be given to offering a truly bespoke and personal service.

One of the key challenges of the PAs' caseload was identified as having to juggle support between individuals and groups of clients that are all at different stages of the project. For example, one PA was working with three different groups of clients – one in the initial engagement stage; one that was attending bridging provision but still required time and support; and one that was looking at transitions. Within the groups, individuals had different needs (for example Learning Difficulty and/or Disability (LDD)) and required different levels of input. In addition to working with the young people, PAs are also responsible for a considerable amount of administration and for working with referral agencies and providers to ensure that appropriate pathways for young people are in place. All of the stakeholders involved in E2L consider the PA role to be a challenging one, requiring a high level of professionalism, flexibility and commitment; and it was frequently acknowledged that many of the PAs delivering the pilots achieve the outcomes that they do because of their considerable dedication.

Different levels of caseloads appear to be influenced by the different stages that young people are at, with some PAs having clients on their caseloads that require limited input at that particular point in time. For example, young people in the engagement period tend to require a greater degree of time input than those that are on bridging provision. Therefore, PAs need to carefully monitor the number of new starts each month, at times delaying individuals for a week or two in order to ensure that they have sufficient time to embed them in the project. Balancing the demands of those with greatest need and those who require lighter touch is one of the challenges of caseload management. Some peaks and troughs in caseloads have also been observed, for example, with case loads in a couple of pilot areas being particularly high immediately prior to September start dates at college, but then tailing off, with a slow subsequent build up.

Some of the pilots have levered in additional support for PAs, either administrative or from Connexions staff, to aid delivery of the project. One pilot area felt that their targets for recruitment were particularly challenging and that these could not have been met without the support of Connexions. It was also suggested that the recruitment of additional staff to support highly qualified PAs in certain tasks could free up the time of the PAs to focus on areas where their skills and qualifications are most in demand, but this hasn't occurred at this stage. The importance of employing

experienced PAs was emphasised, in particular in relation to their understanding and knowledge of the provider market.

When research was undertaken for the interim evaluation of the pilots, concerns were expressed that, as the number of young people officially leaving E2L but remaining in contact with the PAs increased, demands on PA time would become unmanageable. To date, these concerns appear not to have been realised. Whilst PAs are continuing to offer the required support to clients until the 13 week check-back, in the majority of cases this appears to be of limited intensity; and the processes for transferring responsibility for support to other professionals appear to be in place. One project manager did, however, raise the possibility of formalising this process so that clearer boundaries are established as to where the different agencies' responsibility for a young person starts and ends.

E2L PA caseloads are substantially smaller than those of a traditional Connexions PA, with an aim that this will enable them to commit the time required to support each individual client. To a large degree this appears to have been possible across the pilot areas as a result of flexible delivery, team working and support across project teams. PAs have at times been stretched and, given the potential that this raises for the fundamental principles of E2L to be undermined, caseload management is an important area for consideration as pilots are taken forward.

5.5 Financial Support

One key element of the E2L programme is the provision of a financial incentive to encourage young people to participate and remain engaged. A number of issues relating to the incentive, and other elements of financial support, have been examined throughout the course of the evaluation. Each of these is outlined below:

5.5.1 Administration

Whilst the process for administering the incentive was described as 'laborious' in one pilot area, overall new systems have been implemented and established in all areas which have led to the development of fairly smooth administrative arrangements. Pilots are generally confident that payments are made at the right time to the young people.

In three of the pilot areas the £30 per week incentive is paid in full each week as long as the beneficiary has met the requirements of the action plan for that week. In initial periods of engagement this may be attending for as little as 2 hours a week, and this

will then build up to involvement in a bridging course which may require 16 hours per week. Whilst all pilots are based on a process of an incremental increase of time commitment by beneficiaries over the period of engagement, the number of hours that this involves in each stage varies from pilot to pilot.

In one of the pilot areas, a more graduated approach to payment has been adopted, with money accumulating according to the number of hours that have been committed by the young person each week. The financial incentive is therefore made as a block, rather than a weekly, payment and builds up over time. This approach is felt by this pilot to better reflect the financial situation in the wider learning environment, for example, where a commitment of 16+ hours a week would be expected in order to access Education Maintenance Allowance. This approach is felt to have operated effectively in this pilot and encouraged the young people to focus on the benefits that the learning itself is providing, rather than being motivated predominantly by the money. As a result of this, the pilot has under spent in relation to the incentive, and this has strengthened its flexibility to engage some young people for more than 15 weeks if their circumstances require this.

Discussions about the potential to introduce a similar graduated approach were also had in other pilot areas. In one area, it was suggested that the logic of paying £30 to a young person whether they attend for 2 hours a week or 10 hours a week can be difficult to explain. Examples were given of young people who were reluctant to attend bridging because, as they saw it, they would rather just continue to meet with the PA a couple of times a week and earn their money anyway. However, the potential for graduated payments to increase the complexity of the financial arrangements and administration was also identified.

5.5.2 Non Payment

All of the pilots were clear that if the young people did not fulfil expectations in terms of attendance then the incentive would not be paid. However, it was acknowledged that there are some grey areas in relation to this, particularly in terms of authorised absence and sickness, parameters for which need to be clearly established at the outset. PAs tend to have been flexible and used their discretion as to when payment is and is not appropriate, with some encouraging beneficiaries to make up time that they've missed in order to ensure that payments continue. PAs suggested that some element of judgement is sometimes required on an individual basis in order to avoid a

situation where someone who has made progress becomes de-motivated because they lose their allowance.

The need for clear guidelines is, however evident, particularly as the potential for young people to 'play the system' was also identified. For example:

“Unfortunately recently here have been a few young people who have just been doing the bare minimum to get their allowance so they have seen it as enough to turn up and subsequently their behaviour on groups or bridging activities hasn't been really acceptable and they have become almost quite demanding about getting their allowance...I think what I have learned from that is having to be ...much clearer and specific on when they were all awarded the allowance, what is expected of them and what we won't accept in terms of behaviour” PA

5.5.3 Significance for Recruitment and Retention

There was a general consensus that the extent to which the financial incentive influences the recruitment and retention of young people is highly variable and dependent on individual circumstances. Amongst some beneficiaries there is genuine need for the allowance; for others it is a bonus. Some young people are motivated to join E2L because they actively want to progress with learning; others respond to the carrot of £30 to begin on the pilot, but, once established, would continue even without payment because they are positively engaging with the project. It was acknowledged that, for some, the £30 remains the key focus throughout their period of engagement.

Overall, interviewees suggested that the financial incentive has brought more young people into the project and kept them there than would have been the case had there been no financial reward for participation. Clearly there is some deadweight associated with the payment, but those delivering the pilots tended to be in favour of continuation of the incentive in order to continue to attract a wide body of NEETs. The importance of young people learning that you get 'something for something'; and helping them to understand the value of money was also identified as a positive outcome of the payment.

5.5.4 Issues Concerning Welfare Benefits

There was a strong and commonly held view amongst interviewees that young people in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Income Support should be eligible for the financial incentive if they participate in E2L. This is not currently the case and, whilst this is not felt to have had a major impact on the pilots – the number of young

people who have not engaged for this reason is perceived to be relatively small and, indeed, in at least one pilot area recruitment of these groups has been quite high (Brighton) – it is regarded as a key inequality within the programme. This is particularly the case as benefit recipients are felt to be those that are most in need of additional financial support:

“if a young person’s receiving benefit it’s pretty much because they’re living independently or they’re a teenage parent so, actually, the money that they’re getting on benefits goes towards them living in their own flat, or bringing up a child, so actually....they should be entitled to the allowance as well...the other young people who are earning it haven’t got to spend it on living independently, so why shouldn’t they all have this allowance?” Pilot manager

One group of PAs questioned the incentive for benefit recipients to engage with the programme when they get no more financial reward than they would if they did nothing; and others highlighted the potential friction that this issue causes within groups of E2L participants where some are in receipt of the incentive and others are not.

A further key benefits issue was raised in relation to the removal of Child Benefit from the families of those that participate in E2L. This was identified as a further potential barrier to participation, with one group of PAs indicating that a number of potential beneficiaries had not signed up for the programme because of this issue:

“I had one parent who really drilled the kid saying this course is the best thing for you, you’ll be starting Monday, and I said ‘You won’t get your Child Benefit’ and she was like ‘I don’t think he should be doing this’” PA

5.5.5 Bank Accounts

A number of young people embarking on the E2L programme do not have bank accounts, or the necessary identification to open one. Some PAs have spent considerable time supporting young people in this process, including paying for birth certificates with money from the discretionary fund. Some banks appear to have been more helpful than others and PAs suggested that developing a relationship with a local branch of a bank to set up the systems to help to support E2L clients in this process could be beneficial.

5.5.6 Discretionary Fund

The discretionary fund has been used in a variety of different ways by the pilots to provide additional support to beneficiaries, be it in relation to group leisure activities that promote confidence building or shopping for particular items of clothes or materials and books required for further education. In this respect, it was noted that this is a particularly useful tool for helping to overcome some specific barriers to learning that disadvantaged young people face. One manager explained how the discretionary fund had been used for one beneficiary:

“..a young girl who had learning difficulties...she’s not ever been taught how you can look after yourself and how you comb your hair and you have clean clothes – she didn’t have these life skills....This could be a real barrier and potentially you know if she goes into college she could be bullied...she did this provision ..it was all about thinking about how you present yourself and thinking about combing your hair, putting a bit of make up on and washing your clothes, looking nice and tidy when you go to college...the £200 supported her...just basically getting a few clothes like nice jeans, nice t-shirts, a coat, a pair of gloves so that she felt comfortable going to college and not out of place. And that really helped her and she’s still at college now.” Pilot manager

5.6 Administration and Management Information

Processes of administration and the collection and recording of management information appear to have been successfully introduced in all of the pilots. Whilst there is a considerable amount of administration associated with the project, most interviewees acknowledged that this is necessary and recognised the value of the data collected. In one pilot area the role of the central pilot management team in absorbing a significant amount of the administrative demands was acknowledged. Here the main issue for the PAs was the lack of integration between the internal database systems held within different local authority departments. In another pilot area, it was acknowledged that some increased administrative support for PAs would be helpful.

The pilots were generally comfortable with the collection and recording of data for DCSF. In one pilot, the manager was keen to utilise the management information to greater effect, putting more resources into interrogation and analysis to provide evidence to inform developments such as those relating to the 14-19 Foundation Tier. Some gaps in the data were identified, specifically information relating to age, ethnicity and accreditation of activities.

The greatest frustration in relation to management information is the continued recording of E2L participants as NEET. This is considered to be inaccurate – as beneficiaries are engaged in positive activities – and can be misleading in terms of the local authority NEET figures. This, in turn, can have financial implications for Children’s Services within local authorities. Cases have also been cited where referrals have been made to alternative provision rather than to E2L because the beneficiary will not be registered as NEET on these, although this is not considered to be a widespread problem. This can also be demoralising for delivery partners who are working hard with a particular client group, but seeing no impact on their target figures. However, young people remain on the NEET register to incentivise local areas to support young people to progress on from the programme

6 THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Key findings

E2L is attracting a range of young people, a significant proportion of whom are considered to be from one or more vulnerable group. The diverse nature of the client group was stressed by stakeholders in the different pilot areas.

Amongst the beneficiaries that we spoke to, most had had negative experiences of school and many lacked a clear idea of what they would like to do when they began on E2L. The mentoring process provided by E2L was identified as particularly positive in helping young people to identify areas of interest that could be pursued further.

Beneficiaries had heard of E2L from a number of sources, most commonly Connexions or word of mouth through their friends.

The relationship between the PA and the beneficiary was frequently identified as an important factor in helping the individual to progress.

Reinforcing the findings from other stakeholders, there was no consistent view amongst beneficiaries about the extent to which motivation for engaging with E2L is dependent upon the financial incentive.

A number of beneficiaries had progressed into positive outcomes at colleges or training providers, studying for a range of courses and qualifications.

The large majority of beneficiaries that we spoke to were positive about their experiences on E2L, a number indicating that, without it they would have been “*doing nothing*”.

6.1 Nature of the client group

The latest available management information (end of December 2009) provides an indication of the client group that the E2L pilots have been serving. Just under 30 per cent of starters (n=1192) are classified as having a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) and a similar proportion have been NEET for more than 20 weeks. Approximately 13 per cent of clients have been referred from the Youth Offending Team (YOT); eight per cent are looked after, in care or care leavers; and five per cent are in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). There are some variations across the different pilot areas, for example, in one pilot, 45 per cent of clients are classed as

LDD and 10 per cent are in receipt of JSA. In another area, 57 per cent of beneficiaries have been NEET for less than five weeks, compared to an average across all pilots of 37 per cent. This area also has the smallest proportion of YOT referrals. Overall, the data suggests that E2L is attracting a range of young people, a significant proportion of who are considered to be from one or more vulnerable groups.

Anecdotally, stakeholders stressed the diverse nature of the client group, both in terms of their potential and actual academic achievement and their personal and social barriers to learning. Low self-esteem, lack of confidence and an inability to engage in formal learning were identified as almost universal issues, whilst barriers relating to experiences at school and home, health and lifestyle vary considerably for each individual. Specific issues such as benefits' dependency across generations of families and gang related activity were also identified. One provider highlighted the difference in academic ability:

“Once we'd got the first group of learners in I saw something quite different. I saw a real cross section of the community. We've got some very, very low levels of literacy and numeracy in there, but we've also got people who were in the sixth form having accessed A level learning who'd just lost...she'd lost her way” E2L Bridging Provider

The 'target group' for the initiative was loosely identified in all of the pilot areas as 16 and 17 year olds that want to enter learning, as specified in the DCSF guidance. In one of the areas it was suggested that an explicit interest in further learning was a particular criteria for referrals, with a view that this meant targeting those that would benefit the most from the programme.

6.2 Pilot experiences of young people

The focus of our research was to examine the processes that have been put in place to support the development and implementation of E2L. We also spoke to a number of beneficiaries of the programme to find out about their experiences. Discussions were held on an individual or group basis with young people that were selected by the PAs with whom they were working. In some cases we spoke to the same young people during both the interim and final research. The findings in this section of the report are based on interviews held with young people over the period of the research.

Most of the beneficiaries that we spoke to were fairly negative about their experiences of school and many of them had left early without taking their GCSEs. Specific

examples of problems with bullying, mental health issues and pregnancy were cited by individuals as barriers to their progress in education; other young people acknowledged that they had simply not applied themselves at school and, as a result, had not achieved to their potential. There were some that had gained GCSEs, although usually at low grades. In nearly all cases, the beneficiaries indicated a lack of direction once they had left school; some had passed in and out of various college or short courses, unable to maintain a stable and continuous path through learning.

The majority of the beneficiaries had arrived at E2L through one of two routes – either having been referred by a Connexions PA, or as a result of word of mouth. There were a substantial number of examples of “*I heard about it from my mate*”. One or two of the young people were already in touch with the PA or had links with the centre at which they were based and accessed the programme through this route. In a couple of cases, the PA went to the beneficiary’s house to talk to them about the project. Motivation for engaging with E2L varied – for some it gave them something to do, some were seeking to make new friends and some had quite specific reasons, for example wanting to study for qualifications to teach music in a youth setting, or familiarising themselves with the college environment before formally returning to learning in September.

Beneficiaries had participated in a range of activities whilst engaged with E2L including mentoring and support activities with the PA; personal development courses designed to increase confidence and motivation; group work and leisure activities (e.g. mountain biking and rock climbing); preparation for learning courses; and vocational tasters whilst on bridging provision, such as construction, childcare or hair and beauty. A number had participated in first aid courses and in driving theory. They had also been engaged with CV development and some had participated in activities to improve their literacy and numeracy. Almost all of the beneficiaries acknowledged the importance of the mentoring process in helping them to identify specific areas of interest. For example:

“X was really good at helping me decide what I wanted to do. It wasn’t like sitting down with your mum and talking about what you wanted to do. When you say you didn’t want to do this and that they didn’t get all stressy about you need to do it. They were really helpful with getting you on to what you wanted to do”

“With this...you get a choice of what you want to do, which I really do like because nothing’s been forced down my throat”

“They give you a lot of information about each course at first and then you just decide what you want to go for and then they help you move on from there and then they help put you on the right course for you”

The majority indicated that they had developed an Action Plan, although the memory of this was vague for some and most could only recollect that it involved some target setting that was linked to payment of the financial incentive.

Beneficiaries acknowledged the role of the PA in providing support, both practical and emotional, in a number of areas including with: paperwork; financial issues; bank accounts; confidence building; supporting independent travel; and preparing them for and accompanying them to interviews. The relationship between the PA and the beneficiary was frequently identified as an important factor in helping the individual to progress. For example:

“I think the relationship that x has had with me has been very helpful...it’s very hard for people to understand me and my problems, I’ve gone through so many different counsellors and people....we got to know each other and I know a bit about her....I could trust her so I could tell her more and she could help me so it worked really well, she’s been so helpful”

“Well he was there supporting me for the problems that I was having at the time. So it helped quite a lot talking to another person about what was going on....If I wanted to talk to him I could just ring up and come down if I wanted to. And he was there willing to see me whenever”

The idea that beneficiaries respond to the hard work and dedication of PAs and feel a responsibility for delivering something in return, as suggested earlier in the report, was evidenced by one respondent:

“I think as well I became friends with my support workers. He wasn’t just a support worker, he was like a friend. And they worked so hard to get me into college and did so much for me I don’t want to let them down by just dropping out of college”

There was some confusion amongst beneficiaries about the financial support that they had received through E2L, with some of them suggesting that they were in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance whilst on the programme and being unclear about any changes in their entitlements as they moved from one initiative to another. The majority received the £30, although a couple were ineligible because they were claiming JSA. One of these suggested that the support received whilst on E2L was more important than the payment:

“but x was helping me whether I got it [financial incentive] or not and the help was slightly more important to me anyway”

Overall, there was a split between the beneficiaries that suggested that the money was a contributory factor motivating their participation and those who would have been happy to engage without the financial incentive. Some had no other source of income and for those not living with their families this was particularly important. Others felt that the benefits in relation to personal development that accrued from participation were a sufficient reason to remain involved.

The beneficiaries that we spoke to were at different stages of E2L, so levels of progression varied significantly. In one pilot area, a number of those that had completed had moved onto a college course studying for a mix of GCSEs, A levels and BTEC qualifications. In a different area, beneficiaries had progressed to college to study music production, catering and media studies. Other completers had accessed E2E courses; whilst others were looking at apprenticeships. A number of beneficiaries that we spoke to were aiming to start college courses the following September and had either identified activities or courses to fill the gap whilst they waited for this, or were seeking to do so. Some of the beneficiaries, particularly those still in the early stages of the project, were unsure as to where it would lead.

A number of beneficiaries indicated that the PAs remained available to support them after they had completed the project, some receiving a weekly phone call to check on progress. A specific example was given by one beneficiary who was having problems

with other people on her college course. She discussed this with her PA who then spoke to the course tutor and the problem was resolved.

The large majority of beneficiaries that we spoke to were positive about their experiences on E2L; and those that had completed the programme and progressed onto learning recognised the contribution that E2L had made to this process. For many of those in the earlier stages of the project, the alternative to participation would have been to do nothing. A range of comments were made which beneficiaries overall perceptions of the programme. For example:

“You take your time, step by step and they don’t push you into anything. If you don’t want to do it they say ‘okay, fine, think about it’, especially when you first came....we’re made loads of new friends and thanks to x and x [the PAs] I wouldn’t be here today doing this with you, I would have just been sitting at home doing nothing”

“When I got to go to college the first time I did nothing for so long and I think getting on E2L, it got me used to routine again. So it made it easier when I went to college”

“I feel that I was privileged because the summer school that I went to there was only just about 20 people there so it was very interesting and I’m still like showing off that I went”

“Thanks to this I’ve got seven certificates on my wall”.

Examples of the 'stories' of a small number of E2L beneficiaries are given below.

X is 17 and left school 18 months ago. She had negative experiences of mainstream school, from which she was excluded, so attended a special school for the last 3 years of her education, where she received more personalised support from the teachers. She achieved a small number of GCSEs.

Since leaving school she has been looking for work but without any success. She attended at Connexions repeatedly, where a PA told her about E2L. With the support of her E2L PA, she has identified two courses at college which she is due to begin attending after Christmas. Prior to participating in E2L, she hadn't considered further learning as an option:

"I've found two courses at college which, I've never thought I'll go in college because of [my experiences of] school....but [the PA] said 'I'll come with you, we'll go for a meeting, you don't have to start but we'll just see what it's like'. So I went in and it were alright, so I said 'Well, yeah, I'll start then'...So I'm starting after Christmas and I might as well get some qualifications whilst I'm not working and then I've more chance of getting a job....It's only a couple of days a week...But it's still something...at least I'm not sitting around at home all day."

X particularly acknowledged the support that she had been given by her PA in finding the courses, making appointments and accompanying her to the interview:

"She came with me which was a big help because I don't really like going to things on my own"

The PA had also been particularly supportive in helping her to open a bank account, which had proved a particular issue as she had no photo ID. The PA had accompanied her three of four times to banks to enable the situation to be resolved and ensure that she could receive her £30 payment from E2L.

X left school at 17 without any qualifications. He heard about E2L from Connexions and was interested in participating because he wanted to do some further learning. He met with the PA who told him about E2L. They put together an action plan identifying short and longer-term goals. The longer term goal was to go to college to do his GCSEs; the short term plan identified courses that he could attend to help him on his route to college. During his participation on E2L he has been on a 'fast lane' course, which is a two week course to introduce a range of other courses that are available. He has also been on a course with the Princes Trust which lasted 12 weeks and involved personal development, volunteering, a residential course, team building exercises and work experience. He found out about the Princes Trust through his PA, who also helped him with the application form and the interview:

"x helped me fill out the forms and came with me to my interviews, so that helped a lot, otherwise I don't think I would have done it...I need someone, not to hold my hand, but just to support me when I'm doing it"

Overall, the support and motivation given to x through E2L has helped him to identify what he wants to do and to gain a place at college to take his GCSEs. He wants to progress to A levels and eventually to become an accountant

X is in the early stages of E2L. He's now 16 and has suffered from anxiety since he was 13. This has had a major impact on his schooling, with periods in and out of mainstream education since Year 9. For much of the time he has been home taught. He found out about E2L at an open day that he attended with his parents. They chatted with the PAs who then contacted them and X agreed to attend. The main focus of his participation on E2L so far has been to build his confidence. One example of this is the support that he will be getting for going on bus journeys:

"One of my weak points is getting on buses...so we're going on a bus journey....I think we're doing two. He's [the PA] meeting me at first and we're going to one stop and back. And then I think on the second one I might be meeting him down there and going on my own"

X is about to start bridging provision doing gardening and landscape, two days a week for five weeks. He is hoping to progress from this to an E2E course. He is very positive about how E2L and the PA in particular have supported him to get to the stage where this is an option:

"If I hadn't met [the PA] I'd probably still be sitting in my house every day not earning any money, no GCSEs, nothing, still as nervous as I was three years ago.... [E2L has] just made me come alive really, give me my life back."

We initially spoke to X when we undertook the research for the interim report. We did a follow up interview with her six months later:

X started in school sixth form doing health and social care, but dropped out by Christmas, due to family circumstances. She was already meeting with the PA to discuss other issues when he told her about E2L. They did a number of activities during the first stage of the project and worked to identify what she would like to do. As a result of this, the PA found her a work placement at a nursery – her experience there has confirmed that this is what she would like to focus on. Having completed her placement, X continued at the nursery under E2E. She is now waiting for a CRB check to come through before she begins an apprenticeship in childcare. Whilst she is waiting she is studying to improve her maths and English.

X has really enjoyed E2L and it has helped her to identify what she would like to do in the future. She would have continued with the project even without the £30 payment, but this has been particularly helpful to her as she had no other source of income. When she progressed onto E2E she became eligible for EMA. Without E2L, she would probably have returned to college, but she now realises that this was not the right thing for her:

"It was just too hard for me to do and I just kept getting behind because it's just too much. I couldn't handle it."

The support of the PA has been particularly important in enabling her to talk through problems and X continues to see him on a regular basis.

7 PROVISION

Key findings

Each pilot area has its own characteristics, opportunities and challenges in relation to the provision landscape.

Efforts, issues and aspects of identifying and commissioning appropriate provision have been driven as much by practical requirements as original pilot intentions.

The tailored focus of identifying and commissioning provision has required Pilot staff to find appropriate and attractive provision for their beneficiaries; the flexibility within the intervention has enabled them to do this. All pilots report the existence of certain pre-existing or developing local consortia of providers, enabling commissioners to identify provision via a single access point.

Issues relating to economies of scale required by various providers have been faced by all pilots.

All pilots have experienced successes and failures in relation to securing flexible quality provision.

Two pilot areas have encountered difficulties engaging some of the local Further Education colleges.

The start dates of college courses has had an impact on progression for some beneficiaries who may have completed their E2L provision but must face perhaps several months delay before being able to start at college.

Very good relationships between one pilot and two of their local FE colleges has led to better outcomes in relation to progression into college courses and retention.

The flexibility and general ethos of many third sector providers is regarded very positively by all pilots, although third sector flexibility is usually limited by funding.

There is evidence of E2L building capacity among commissioned third sector providers in terms of internal operations and external delivery.

7.1 Identifying and Commissioning Provision

Each pilot area has its own characteristics, opportunities and challenges with regards to the provision landscape. For example, one pilot operating in a large urban area identified a good number of established, larger providers offering a range of training and personal development courses but had to concentrate on securing local venues and convincing the providers to deliver at these venues because of the reluctance of their beneficiaries to travel into the city centre where the providers are based. Another pilot, operating across certain county areas has tended to find provision available in clusters that are not always accessible to all their beneficiaries.

In this respect, the efforts, issues and aspects of identifying and commissioning appropriate provision for all pilots have been driven as much by practical requirements as by the intentions of the pilot interventions. All pilots reported the common goal of securing appropriate provision under flexible delivery arrangements with either established local statutory providers or third sector providers that have the clear capacity to offer this.

Despite the practical requirements involved in the pilots' set-up phase, all pilots have retained the view that many of their actual and potential beneficiaries would likely not succeed if placed unprepared into a formal learning environment. Further, many of the pilots' beneficiaries had already experienced several different types of provision and attempts at learning support – ranging from various 'taster' or other short courses, to self-development and basic skills provision. Given this, the tailored focus of identifying and commissioning provision under E2L has required pilot staff to find appropriate and attractive provision for its beneficiaries; the flexibility within the intervention has enabled them to do this. Pre-existing membership of local provider networks, or the ability to access these quickly, therefore proved crucial for the pilots in the early months of their operations. An illustration:

“The actual network of VCFS organisations that we’ve got already as a local authority is very, very strong. So, we’ve got a lot of well-established connections within the sector, which has then made it relatively easy to go back to them and say, “Is there an aspect of what you you’re delivering already under the Commissioned Outcome Funding that you can deliver for us, or would you need some additional funding to do something very specific?” Pilot Manager

It is noteworthy that all pilots report the existence of certain local consortia of providers – either pre-existing or currently under development – enabling commissioners to identify appropriate provision via a single access point, or being

able to put together a package of provision by effectively 'joining up' local specialist provision.

Some pilot managers also report certain providers offering training in response to E2L need, either by submitting a list of their full portfolio of available provision to which the pilots have matched beneficiaries, or from direct enquiries and requests made by the pilot team. The following quote from a provider outlines the process they followed to offer their services to their local pilot:

“When E2L came through we approached the local authority to ask whether or not we could apply to become a provider within the E2L programme. We sat down and looked at where our provision fitted within the framework that Birmingham were looking at and clearly identified that we were very much part of the bridging provision and that there were opportunities within the transitions for, in spot purchases, different courses and activities. We looked at our core provision and amended it slightly so it would actually achieve those outcomes and work as part of the pathway within the fifteen weeks”. Provider

Further, from the viewpoint of a Personal Adviser:

“When I talked to the work-based learning providers they were very reluctant to get involved because – and a lot of them are third sector as well; you can see that from the list – because of the nature of it, that it was about the individual young person, they asked: “What are we going to get out of it?” Which you can’t blame them for”. PA

“They live hand to mouth third sector organisations but I think now they’re quite positive about it, or the ones where it’s worked. But it’s worked because they’ve adapted, I think that’s the thing, they’ve adapted because I think they’ve realised that by infilling or offering this additional course or whatever, they will get the referrals”. PA

Elsewhere, some providers have submitted applications to their relevant pilots to offer provision but were deemed not to be appropriate. And some larger providers have declined to work with E2L, citing a lack of available funding from the pilots or a reluctance to offer provision to E2L in addition to that being supplied under existing alternative local contracts.

Issues relating to economies of scale required by various providers have been faced by all of the pilots. Some providers have been used to funding models whereby they will be contracted to offer provision to a certain number of young people, whether they actually receive that certain number of referrals or not. Moreover, the previous funding environment enabled these providers to be paid in advance of receiving their first referrals. The E2L commissioning model is based on a system where the funding follows the beneficiary and where providers are only paid for the provision they have delivered to each beneficiary. For some providers, the E2L commissioning model

has proved to be one they have chosen not to engage with. Other providers have adapted their approach to suit the E2L model.

There has also been some variation in how the pilots have identified and sought to commission provision generally. These approaches are reflected in the following explanations:

“We really wanted it to be person-centred and our approach was to get the provision in once we’d spoken to the young people and found out what their needs were. So we worked from the ground up, really. I don’t know whether DCSF thought that the provision would be there; that’s why it’s taken a long time in _____ to build it up because we’ve had to go with speaking to the young people first: what were their barriers, what has been their previous experiences of education, what’s turning them off. And then we had the whole bank of providers who has said “Yes, we’re interested” but then we had to go back to each one. So it was this constant communication and it took quite a while”. Pilot Manager

“Over here we basically commissioned, for example, for ten young people and found ten young people. We made sure there are young people out there – the PAs have done a sterling job. There are needs out there so they went out there and they found them; they worked with the colleges and Connexions and the agencies and just found the right young people for the courses. We didn’t have a menu of provision, we have had set courses happening at different times and we’ve built up a cohort of young people and then put them onto the course”. Pilot Manager

7.1.1 The Nature of Provision

A considerable range of bridging provision – relating to personal development, ‘taster’ sessions, training, work experience, and other employability-related courses – has been accessed by the young beneficiaries on E2L. This includes:

- Basic skills
- Anger management
- Driving theory
- Business administration
- Computer maintenance
- Hair and beauty
- Gardening and landscape work
- Child care
- Mechanics
- Construction Woodwork
- Interview techniques
- Media
- Preparation for College
- Food hygiene
- Teambuilding
- Music production

7.1.2 Securing Flexible Quality Provision

Each of the pilots has experienced some successes and failures in this regard, and these appear to reflect the local provision landscape. Some providers have been prepared to accept an E2L beneficiary onto an existing course through 'infilling'; this flexibility was usually, but not exclusively, felt to come from larger providers with sufficient capacity to offer 'roll-on roll-off' provision. On other occasions pilots have needed to secure a cohort of beneficiaries before formally contracting with the relevant provider. There were also reports from pilot staff of the difficulties in securing work experience places for beneficiaries. Although those who mentioned this stated that they believed it was related to the current economic downturn.

In two pilot areas several respondents reported encountering difficulties engaging some of their local Further Education (FE) colleges; a problem they believe could not only have a certain effect on the success of the pilot's progression outcomes but for any NEET initiative in the future.

"Our biggest problem in _____ is the position of the FE colleges. We have a mass of 11-16 schools and a significant number of FE colleges. Many of whom in terms of quality are graded one and two. The problem is progression for young people because the colleges will only recruit those youngsters who fit their entry requirements and many of them set quite high standards. The result being that many youngsters are excluded directly from the type of provision they need". Pilot Manager

A further problem in relation to certain FE colleges and progression from E2L is the start dates of many of the courses and training they offer. Most colleges only accept new entrants in September and to a lesser extent in January. This has created an issue with all the pilots where a beneficiary may have completed their 15-week E2L engagement and be ready to progress onto a formal college course but cannot do so because they have completed their bridging provision 'too early' or 'too late' to start at college – at least until the next scheduled intake of students. This has raised not insignificant issues for all the pilots in respect of seeking to ensure that beneficiaries remain engaged in the period between E2L completion and progression into accredited learning at an FE college.

The dedication and flexibility of the PAs is once more highlighted here, as it is they who have sought to ensure that no successful E2L beneficiary disengages from the whole process of progression before the college start dates come around. The

following quote from a third sector delivery partner reflects the views of all those pilot respondents who spoke about this issue.

“I think there needs to be development on the flexibility issue because I think this is the frustration with the colleges. You can work with someone but they could be put in limbo at the time they want to start college. I know _____ have got rolling courses that can help maintain and keep them (beneficiaries) until they can progress onto a college course. I think there needs to be real work on that. It’s an absolute nightmare and it would be great if more colleges could look at more start dates for their enrolment”. Third Sector Delivery Partner

Further, following the tenets of the E2L approach, pilots have sought to develop a detailed appreciation of much of the provision in their localities and to employ E2L funding as a means of securing quality courses and training. Yet, information from some FE colleges has been difficult to obtain on occasion. For example:

E2L has been an opportunity for our staff to get a much broader aspect on what provision is out there ... And the buying of provision as well. It’s given us the opportunity to negotiate some good quality training for the young person. Whereas, you go into a college and you’re limited as to what information they’ll share with you. Third Sector Delivery Partner

Despite these difficulties, one pilot has developed a very successful relationship with two FE colleges in their area, whereby Preparation for Learning courses have been set up to introduce E2L beneficiaries to the college environment and to the skills that will help their formal learning. Working in partnership with the two colleges and funding the cost of the courses, the pilot has helped set up these preparatory courses that have enjoyed very good attendance and retention by E2L beneficiaries.

The Preparation for Learning course, now called ‘On Course’, introduces beneficiaries to the college library, refectory, student services, and a general introduction to college life. Importantly for many E2L beneficiaries the course runs outside of the normal college term, meaning that the young people can sample aspects of college learning and services in a quiet and relaxed manner. Following the success of these courses during the summer of 2009, there are plans to offer a further course in February 2010 for young carers and to continue to offer this provision to E2L beneficiaries during the pilot’s second year of operations.

Both colleges report very positively on 'On Course', explaining that despite their awareness of the need to offer more flexibility in relation to the courses they offer, becoming involved with E2L in this way has enabled them to more fully appreciate the needs and circumstances of many young people classified as NEET, and how preparatory courses, such as 'On Course' are an important way to help ensure course retention and successful progression.

"Preparation for Learning really helped them (the beneficiaries) get an idea of what college was going to be like. They had a few young people who had already tried college and _____ College previously had not such a positive reputation with young people in the city, in that its behaviour policies have been quite harsh in the past. I think it was 'one strike and you're out', and working with the type of young people we're talking about, it wasn't very flexible. Partly working with the pilot, partly from new staff they've brought in, this has helped. They've given young people a second chance and the young people have given college a second chance". Pilot Manager

7.2 Third Sector Provision

The consensus among all the respondents who gave a view on the involvement and benefit of third sector provision was that the ethos and approach of many of these providers is extremely important when seeking to re-engage vulnerable young people into a learning environment. The extent of flexibility displayed by a third sector provider or delivery partner is usually limited by funding and the particular commissioning environment that they are operating within.

"I think you have the flexibility to bend and mould around need, as opposed to bend and mould to present need around service provision".
Third Sector Provider

One of the most challenging aspects of engaging young people on an intervention such as E2L is that many have had a variable or problematic former experience of school or other learning. A majority of pilot staff, stakeholders and providers felt that much of the provision offered by the third sector displays a different ethos to that of provision from the 'statutory sector'. Some respondents mentioned that for many E2L beneficiaries any provision or other service that has local authority 'branding' or has a 'formal' education element to it – particularly in the early phases of their engagement with E2L – is considered to be 'too threatening' or is delivered in what is seen to be a large, impersonal environment where they are likely to feel lost and out of place. Working with third sector providers at their own, or community-based, premises often enables E2L beneficiaries to feel more at ease. The following quotes are indicative of the responses received:

“I think the benefit of the third sector and some of the work-based learning organisations is that, they may work out of difficult premises, they’re under-funded but they treat the kids as individuals so they’re not lost, they’re not just a number”. Pilot Manager

“I think a voluntary sector culture is different to a statutory sector culture and I think there is a culture within the _____ that does go that extra yard. So I think that creates that additional support and I feel that at times you get more of that attitude and approach from people in the voluntary sector rather than the council, having worked for both”. Contact Liaison Officer

“We have resources and lots of [provision] from individual trainers and tutors and we used the WRVS Centre, which is just fantastic and caters for the older community. They were so flexible in us using their space. We have used their kitchen, used their meeting room, for a tinner an afternoon ... We approached all children’s centres and Surestarts, because I’ve got a lot of teen parents on my caseload, and got a “No. We can’t accommodate you”. So to come across a place that said “Yes. Have our kitchen and our meeting room and there are some sofas over there for your young people to wait”, was just brilliant”. PA

However, and as covered in Section 4.3, a number of respondents, both from within the pilots and external stakeholders, view the current heterogeneous nature of their local third sector provision landscape as having both positive and negative aspects. Thus, along with the flexible and creative manner in which much third sector provision engages and works with young beneficiaries, there can also be a lack of consistency by some third sector providers in terms of policies, procedures and quality.

Interviews conducted with third sector providers and delivery partners showed that E2L had a capacity building element for some third sector organisations. This is reflected in the following:

“I think there needs to be a massive change in perception within the third sector ... Part of their job and part of what they need to be doing is to [recognise] that even if you are a one-man band with a load of volunteers, delivering a particular service to a group at a community level you’re still delivering a public service; you’re still delivering under a business ethos. And the capacity building around that has got to be about educating people how to do that, and to understand that there are quality measures in doing that”. Provider

Furthermore, through working with E2L, some providers have come to recognise that they need to consider working in partnership with other third sector providers to concentrate both on what they deliver in terms of provision and how they can ensure that this provision is available to as broad a section of their potential local beneficiaries as possible. As an illustration:

“We’d worked on the best case scenario for us: that’s how many young people we would be able to accommodate during the period of the year. Now I recognise that through that process we’re not going to attract [E2L beneficiaries] because we’re in a specific area in the city ... There’s issues of young people travelling ... There’s a spread north/south of the city whereas our studio is in the south west, so when I did the figures I didn’t really anticipate that we wouldn’t be able to attract the full amount.

And what we’ve done is work with another charity that has a central location and that has a studio. What we’ve done is we’ve approached them and asked them to consider some partnership working”. Provider

Some of the third sector delivery partners have shared their experience and knowledge with smaller third sector providers to smooth E2L commissioning and contract monitoring but also as a way to help develop their local sector. For example:

“Out of the three third sector delivery partners, _____ have the most experience and the most knowledge. And they have been very supportive in working with the smaller organisations, showing them examples of good practice, and paperwork, and processes, which has enabled that capacity building within these organisations. So I think if you’d had a partner who was not so responsive to that kind of support, there could have been difficulties but we haven’t experienced that”. Skills for Life Strategy Manager

Also, several pilot respondents highlighted the importance of transparency in relation to what is expected of providers, particularly smaller third sector organisations. Although smaller third sector organisations can offer important flexibility in relation to provision delivery and beneficiary support, they may be limited in practice in what they can deliver because of the funding arrangements in place. It is incumbent upon the pilots, therefore, to fully inform their third sector providers as to their requirements for the duration of their working partnership and to be sensitive to the needs of third sector organisations with which they work.

To conclude, evidence gathered at all stages of the evaluation reveal that the identification and commissioning of third sector provision by the E2L pilots has been seen by virtually all stakeholders as a process that will likely help inform many future interventions of this kind.

“This programme has been different in that they have had to do things like attendance monitoring, they’ve had to do a certain number of hours, we’ve had to move them along the qualifications element ... So, from that point of view it’s been very much more structured and very much more or our agenda than theirs. They might still deliver it in a particular style and with a particular ethos and so on, but the way that they’ve delivered I think they’ve had to adapt it to suit this programme a lot more than they have for other funding that we’ve given them”. Local Authority Strategic Development Officer

8 OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Key findings

Management information indicates that just over 60 per cent of young people that have started E2L have progressed into positive destinations, about half into education. Destinations appear to vary significantly across the different pilot areas.

The rigidity of September start dates in colleges was frequently identified as a potential barrier to progression for those leaving E2L. This was particularly felt to be an issue for the more academically able (level 2 and 3) E2L clients.

Responsibility for E2L clients transfers to a range of professionals in the wider support and learning environment once they have left the PAs' caseloads. There is potential to develop a more formal approach to this, with guidelines to clarify roles and responsibilities. Some concerns were expressed about the lack of support for this client group within many colleges.

A range of soft outcomes from E2L were identified and the importance of these in evidencing the impact of the programme was highlighted. In taking the pilots forward, it may be beneficial to formalise processes for recording and monitoring soft outcomes.

Stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive about the success of E2L and identified a range of areas where the pilots have worked well, including in relation to: being client centred; the development of management and delivery infrastructures; putting in place flexible pathways; and financial arrangements.

8.1 Progression Routes

The latest available Management Information relating to national outcomes from E2L is shown in Table 8.1 below. Overall, 61 per cent of leavers from the pilots have progressed to a positive destination, half of them into education (predominantly FE, although about one fifth have gone to sixth form colleges) and two fifths to training (largely Entry to Employment or an apprenticeship). The remainder have entered employment with training.

Table 8.1: Outcomes from E2L, end December 2009

	No. of starts	No. of leavers	% of leavers to positive destinations (EET)	% of leavers to negative destinations (NEET)	% of all positive leavers into education	% of all positive leavers into training	% of those at 13 week check back who are EET
All pilots	1192	704	61	39	52	40	72

There is considerable variation in the proportion of positive destinations across pilot areas, ranging from almost 80 per cent in one area to 44 per cent in another. The different foci of the pilot areas is evidenced in these destinations, with 86 per cent of positive leavers entering education in one pilot area; whereas in the other three there is a much greater mix of education and training destinations. In one of these areas, two thirds of positive leavers enter training and one third education.

Of those that left the project to negative destinations, remaining NEET, 25 per cent were no longer interested in participating; 15 per cent could not be contacted; 12 per cent moved away; 10 per cent could not secure relevant or suitable provision; and 10 per cent had complex personal issues.

The process of checking back on beneficiaries after 13 weeks to assess the sustainability of outcomes is still in its relative infancy. However, check backs have taken place on 282 young people across all of the pilots, with almost three quarters of these being recorded in a positive destination (i.e. education, employment with training or training).

Feedback from the pilots suggested that they largely consider outcomes from the project to have been positive. A number of interviewees highlighted how the statistics compare favourably with those from other interventions such as ESF. In the pilot area with the lowest incidence of positive destinations, the significant geographical variation across this pilot area was noted, with performance in some areas being significantly better than others. A number of possible reasons for this were given including: the availability of an appropriate mix of provision in particular areas; some lack of clarity regarding expectations of beneficiaries in the initial stages of work between the PAs and young people; and the challenging nature of the client group. In particular, some referrals, now considered to have been inappropriate, were accepted in the early stages of delivery.

The difficulty of developing progression routes after the closing of the September college start dates was highlighted by pilots. In particular, in one pilot whilst E2E is viewed as an appropriate destination for level 1 learners, the lack of relevant provision for some of the E2L group, who are considered to be academically more capable (level 2 and above), but who lack certain personal and social skills, was noted. In these circumstances, E2E sometimes has to be a stop-gap until college places become available.

In one pilot area in which 30 per cent of positive leavers have entered E2E, the potential for individual providers to deliver progression routes from bridging provision into E2E was identified as a particularly successful model. In this area, there is a strong sense that, for a significant proportion of the client group, E2L is a precursor or stepping stone to E2E.

8.1.1 Post E2L Support

Once young people have moved from E2L into formal learning they remain officially on the E2L PA's caseload for 13 weeks, at which point E2L PAs report on their outcomes. This enables an assessment of the extent to which positive outcomes from E2L have been sustainable. This 13 week period tends to be one of transition ("*light touch support*") and is approached slightly differently in the different pilot areas. PAs remain in touch with beneficiaries and are available to provide support, as is appropriate on an individual basis, through phone calls, text messages and meetings; but young people are also encouraged to embed in their new environment, supported by Connexions PAs and/or support workers in colleges or at training providers. This is considered to be particularly important for the long-term sustainability of positive outcomes.

In the local authority led pilots in particular, the wider network of Connexions PAs, youth workers and Information, Advice and Guidance workers are utilised to support young people, particularly through their links to providers, and to alert E2L PAs if problems are occurring:

"Because we've got the Information, Advice and Guidance workers that are part of the young people's service that are in the schools, the sixth forms and the colleges and linked with training providers in the E2E programmes. We've got that network within our own service to be able to pick up anybody who drops off once they've gone into formal learning....we would be able to pick those young people " Strategic development officer

Having had some form of continuous contact between the Connexions PA, the E2L PA and the beneficiary throughout the period of engagement on E2L tends to help to facilitate this process.

In one pilot, a number of E2L PAs are also delivering Connexions contracts, raising the potential for them to remain the lead PA for beneficiaries even post E2L. This was felt to be a positive option. It was also noted that where E2L is based in a multi-agency environment, PAs are likely to continue to have contact with beneficiaries as they utilise other services.

One pilot manager noted some uncertainty over the point at which beneficiaries should be referred onto a professional outside of E2L for support, suggesting that some form of written protocol within the youth service may be required to clarify this, thereby releasing E2L PAs to focus time and resources on their new intake.

The process of transfer of responsibility for the young person can, however, be a difficult one, particularly with the most vulnerable beneficiaries, with E2L PAs often actively wanting to remain available to provide support:

“I’ve actually had a person who’s got loads of issues ...and...I’m finding it really difficult to disengage from working with her at the level that I was...because obviously I’ve built a relationship and I know her and I know all the issues and....it’s almost like I’ve been told well you’re no longer it because she seems to have moved onto a positive destination...but in actual fact she’s in a world of trouble still” PA

In most cases, E2L PAs remain available for their beneficiaries for as long as the individual requires, although the intensity of this support tends to diminish over time (for example, in one pilot area, the main contact is within the first four to six weeks of engagement in formal learning) and is highly dependent on individual need. One pilot manager indicated that the majority of those that enter a positive destination “*don’t need an awful lot of support*”.

In one of the pilots, E2L PAs were provided with a desk at the local college at the start of the new term to help to promote a smoother transition into formal learning. This was considered by the PAs to be highly beneficial, enabling them to be proactive in supporting beneficiaries during the first few weeks of the course and ensuring that problems did not go unnoticed for any length of time, thereby reducing the potential for disengagement. As one PA commented:

“It was a useful place to catch up with them just for meetings, see if things were going ok, and also for them to come and see us with problems, particularly with their EMA and other, and trying to sort out other college expenses” PA

Being co-located also helped to improve the relationship between E2L and the college and is felt to have raised awareness and understanding of E2L amongst college staff. The PAs acknowledged, however, that they also needed to be available outside college and in the community for the young people that were not attending their courses and needed to talk about why this was the case.

The different levels of support available for young people within the college environment were observed by PAs, with some noting that the E2L client group tend not to be well served in this respect. Whilst some colleges have personal tutors, mentors and high levels of pastoral care, this is not universally the case and concern was expressed as to the options for support for E2L clients. In one college, E2L has helped to raise awareness of the support needs of this group and, partly in response to this, a learning mentor for post 16 provision is being recruited.

8.2 Soft Outcomes

Whilst the overall aim of E2L is for young people to move into formal learning, it should be noted that beneficiaries are also achieving a range of soft outcomes, often relating to personal and social issues, which can be invaluable even when a formal positive progression is not achieved. Stakeholders observed that for many of the young people that they work with, simply attending the programme as and when they should over a 15 week period demonstrates some degree of progress. Others observed that beneficiaries may move forward in specific areas of their life, for example in obtaining a passport; taking their driving theory; participating in work experience; developing a CV; or attending a taster course. All of these have the potential to contribute to an individual's progress. The development of employability skills was also identified as a critical soft outcome:

“It’s those little things though, and that’s where the mentoring really comes in with this. It’s kind of knowing that when you’re expected to turn up somewhere, turn up on time and look presentable. And if you’re in an interview don’t slouch like that and sit back...when you’re talking about employability skills we are talking about very basic stuff with a lot of these individuals” Strategic development officer

At this stage of the pilots, many of these outcomes are only being captured anecdotally. As such, going forward, there is potential for some measures of ‘distance travelled’ to be applied to the pilots in order for them to more fully demonstrate their impact.

8.3 Success of Pilots

Stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive about the success of the E2L pilots, acknowledging that they fill a gap in provision for this client group, many of whom it was felt would have been 'lost' on their way to formal learning without this intervention. Some of the pilots had taken time to embed and had encountered some problems with delivery, particularly in the early stages in fully understanding the most effective ways of working. However, all are now confident that the processes and structures that have evolved are achieving objectives and that they are well placed to move forward with delivery. There was also a strong sense that E2L 'fits' with the wider 14-19 learning environment and can make an important contribution to appropriate curriculum development in the context of the Raising of the Participation Age. Comments from project managers on the success of the pilots included:

"[It's been] very successful. For all of the things that we've talked about. For the preparation for learning courses, for the relationships with the colleges, for Connexions...starting to see...how things can work differently, for the local authority seeing how this will fit with the bigger alternative curriculum and with Foundation Learning and that wrap-around support is key to a lot of young people's success, that you need to ensure that there's transition from year to year" Pilot manager

"I'm really pleased with where we're at...its embedded in the service, we're getting really good feedback from other professionals, youth offending teams, social services, we're getting the personal case stories of success through now we've seen young people move through the summer into learning and they're still there and everything's rosy....we'll be going from strength to strength and I'd like to see the legacy of the pilot and how it's going to fit in and work to help it fit into foundation learning tier....and I think it has got huge potential to do that". Pilot manager

8.3.1 What Has Worked Well

It is clear from the stakeholders that there is no single factor that determines the success of E2L. Rather, it is the E2L 'package', the way in which this has been interpreted and managed, and the development of an appropriate infrastructure for delivery that has governed its progress. A wide range of factors that have worked well in the pilot areas were identified by interviewees. These are shown in the table below:

Client centred	Management and delivery infrastructure	Flexible pathways	Financial arrangements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring - tailored support • Flexibility • Diverse client groups • Young people take responsibility for choices • Five week engagement period to build relationship • Informal approach • Time and resources to contact, follow up and cajole young people • Contribution of experienced PAs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Models of delivery – centralised management with responsibility devolved to PAs • Commitment of relevant partners in different areas, particularly Connexions and the Youth Service • Referrals process from Connexions • Commitment and flexibility of providers • Geographical coverage • Builds on existing knowledge • Smaller caseloads for PAs leads to higher quality of work • Input and resources of local authority • Role and expertise of third sector in working with client group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment and flexibility of providers • Flexible hours of engagement for young people, building up over time • Support into learning for those at level 2 and 3 as well as level 1 • Capacity to mix and match appropriate provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial incentive • Money attached to the learner • Role of discretionary fund • Funding for bridging provision which isn't accessible through any other route • Value for money

8.4 The E2L Pilots and Activity Agreements

Some of the key features and central mechanisms of the E2L pilots can also be found in the complementary NEET reduction strategy initiative, the Activity Agreements. Activity Agreements (AA) are designed to encourage young people classified as NEET to return to learning, or to help them get a job (with training). In return for completing a series of activities tailored to their individual needs and designed to move towards learning or employment, 16 and 17 year olds who have been NEET for at least 20 continuous weeks receive an allowance. The AAs were piloted in eight areas between April 2006 and March 2008, modelling different levels of financial support, managed by local Connexions Partnerships. The pilots were subsequently extended for a further 18 months and trialled further models of eligibility and support (Hillage, *et al.*, 2008).¹⁷

This section compares some of the findings from the Activity Agreements evaluation with those from the process evaluation of the E2L pilots. However, in so doing, a note of caution should to be introduced. Alongside the qualitative findings from the various phases of research evaluating the AAs are results from a survey of 3,535 NEET young people from the AA pilot areas, and 2441 NEET young people in comparison areas. The findings and conclusions from the Activity Agreements synthesis research draws upon these quantitative findings as well as the qualitative insights gained from interviewee responses gathered at various stages in the evaluation research.

As this process evaluation of the E2L pilots is a qualitative study, no direct comparison between the findings included in this report and those from the AA evaluations should be attempted. Rather, what is intended is a consideration of some complementary learning points. In this respect, whilst drawing on the findings and insights from a range of AA-related evaluations, this section considers some of the key findings as contained in the AA evaluation synthesis report (*op cit.*)

- Echoing the findings from the AA evaluation, the E2L pilots have discovered that a diverse, long-term NEET population needs flexible, tailored solutions. Thus, no typical package of activities/provision was apparent in either the AA or E2L pilots. Some young people were able to progress following relatively brief engagement with their PA, whereas others required careful and constant support and guidance. In the case of the E2L pilots, the details contained within each young

¹⁷ Hillage, J., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Maguire, S., Tanner, E. & Purdon, S. (2008) *Activity Agreements Evaluation Synthesis Report* Nottingham: DCSF Publications

person's Action Plan reflected the agreed outcomes of the weekly discussions with their PA.

- Whilst the AA evaluation found the pilots to have generally engaged the young people they found easiest to reach, data gathered from the E2L interviews revealed these pilots engaging, or seeking to engage, young people from across a broad range of personal backgrounds and circumstances. For example, all the pilots accepted referrals from their local Youth Offending Team. Moreover, some pilot respondents spoke of engaging young people who has recently left care, or who had been through various other initiatives and programmes without successful engagement or progression.
- As concluded by the AA evaluations, this E2L pilot evaluation also found that the 'three sides of the triangle' – the financial incentive, the bridging provision (activities), and the Personal Adviser (PA) – each reinforced the other to produce a particularly effective approach, underpinned by the Action Plan agreed with the young person. An additional finding from the E2L pilot evaluation was that the pilot staff identified the Discretionary Fund as a crucial tool to help buy, for example, equipment or travel expenses, as well as securing provision. In this way, pilot respondents often referred to both the Discretionary Fund and £30 per week allowance as 'the Financial Incentive'.
- On a related point, the E2L pilots discovered that their local payments systems worked well – whether breaking the £30 per week allowance down to an agreed number of related activities, each carrying a percentage of the total £30, or through making one single payment. Data from the E2L evaluation interviews with pilot staff and young people beneficiaries revealed broad understanding and mutual agreement with the 'something for something' ethos of the pilots.
- From the survey conducted with AA beneficiaries, the researchers found that they had a more positive attitude to training and work compared with matched young people outside of the pilot areas. The evaluation of the E2L pilots was qualitative and the experiences and attitudes of the young people who took part were gathered via face-to-face interviews and focus groups. Nevertheless, broadly similar responses were evident, with the majority of E2L beneficiaries interviewed expressing a more positive attitude to training and work complemented by a more general feeling of optimism concerning their future learning options and employment chances.
- The AA beneficiaries' survey also found that the proportion of young people in training or studying, following their engagement with their respective AA pilot, was

11 percentage points higher than it would have been if the Activity Agreements had not been in place. When considering progression routes, the E2L evaluation examined the pilots' management information. This revealed that, overall, 61 per cent of leavers from the pilots progressed to a positive destination, half of them into education (predominantly FE, although about one fifth have gone to sixth form colleges) and two fifths to training (largely Entry to Employment or an apprenticeship). The remainder entered employment with training.

9 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst there was an overarching sense of pride in what has been delivered through E2L, there remain areas that require some consideration as the pilots move forward into their second stages of delivery and for any future roll-out of the programme. These are summarised below and relevant recommendations made:

Management and Operations

- The importance of having a dedicated E2L team to support PAs was identified, particularly in one of the pilot areas. In other areas, the need for a more specific role focussing on the commissioning process and developing provision was highlighted.
- The third sector has played a significant role in leading two of the E2L pilots. The contribution that the third sector can make to this type of intervention is clear. However, it was also acknowledged and evidenced within the pilot that smaller third sector organisations may lack the experience, capacity and infrastructure required for management roles. The need to identify how this capacity can be developed in order to retain and exploit the expertise of the smaller organisations in working with this client group was identified.

Recommendations:

- Some management structures and supervision arrangements within the pilots should be simplified and pilot managers should continue to share experiences and knowledge in this regard with a view to establish a 'model' or 'toolkit' of effective E2L management.
- Continued recording of relevant management information will be important to this end and also important in relation to more fully revealing the local context within which the pilots are operating.
- All pilots will need to maintain or develop further their flexible working arrangements to ensure continued positive outcomes but this flexibility must be recognised as context-dependent.
- Pilots should maintain and develop their current focus on the importance of local networks and partnerships in relation to both operational and strategic issues.

Clients

- The potential for E2L to incorporate more preventative action in delivering to Year 11 pupils was identified.
- The pilots were generally confident that they had achieved a good degree of diversity within their client group, although a predominance of male participants at one provider was observed. Consideration of the client mix should continue through the collection and analysis of management information.
- Across all pilots it was acknowledged that a proportion of clients require longer than 15 weeks to achieve the desired outcomes. Whilst there is some flexibility within the pilot design to cope with this, developing this further could help to facilitate a higher proportion of positive outcomes.

Recommendations

- Consideration should be given to the possible graduated payment of the Financial Incentive but local arrangements for payment of the Financial Incentive may need to be simplified to accommodate this.
- There should be a continued focus on the numbers of E2L beneficiaries appearing on PA caseloads at any particular time. Efforts should be made to ensure that caseloads do not exceed 15 – 20 young people.
- The importance of continued beneficiary support whilst on provision should be reflected in relevant management information.
- Pilots should seek to develop their ability to target potential E2L beneficiaries within the local NEET population.

Provision

- Securing provision that is appropriate and of the desired quality is one of the key challenges of E2L. Pilots emphasised the evolving nature of this process, noting increases in the volume and quality of identified provision as the project progressed. Time is required to ensure that the provision landscape meets the needs of the E2L client group and there is scope for continual improvement.
- Relating to the above, the potential for a greater degree of partnership working between providers was identified, which could help to facilitate a more comprehensive provider network and curriculum. This could be of particular benefit to smaller third sector providers making linkages with those that are more established in the area.
- In one pilot it was suggested that the £1,000 dedicated to bridging provision is at times insufficient to resource the amount of training and support required in terms of both engagement and progression to formal learning.

Recommendations

- All pilots will need to develop their understanding of local provision and continue to focus on the importance of capacity building in this regard.

Outcomes

- College start dates are a key factor influencing outcomes from E2L. The lack of coherence between college funding cycles and the desire for roll on-roll off provision was acknowledged as a potential barrier to greater college involvement. Pilots continued to call for more flexible start dates and more partnership working with the FE sector to help to address these issues.
- The need for post E2L provision to be available at levels 2 and 3, as well as at level 1 were identified in particular within one pilot area, in order to meet the needs of the range of clients that E2L is serving.
- Although the primary aim of E2L is to facilitate progress into formal learning, one pilot manager suggested that employment options remain the preference for some beneficiaries and that these should be regarded as a positive outcome. Linked to this was the suggestion that support for young people could be restructured to reflect their preferred pathways, with individual PAs dedicated to supporting young people either into learning or employment. This could extend beyond the E2L pilots to incorporate young people's support services more widely.
- E2L has achieved a high degree of success in terms of its positive outcomes. However, stakeholders acknowledged that there remain a significant proportion of leavers into negative destinations. More work should be done to identify potential reasons for this. The measurement and recording of soft outcomes is also particularly important in demonstrating 'distance travelled' of these beneficiaries.
- Accreditation of courses appears to have been somewhat ad hoc. This is something that could be developed further as E2L progresses.

Recommendations

- In order to ensure all E2L interventions can be appropriately evaluated and to allow for a fuller appreciation of 'distanced travelled' and accompanying 'soft outcomes' in relation to all beneficiaries regardless of the extent of their E2L engagement, the MI classification 'Negative Destinations' should be replaced with the classification 'Other Destinations'.

- The measuring of E2L pilot outcomes should take due account of those beneficiaries who encounter difficulties accessing funded progression routes due to them having reached the maximum age for E2L support during their 15-week engagement.

DCSF specifications

- Within all of the pilot areas there were calls for young people participating on E2L to be removed from the NEET register for a range of administrative, financial and psychological reasons.
- There was also consensus about the inequalities of existing arrangements regarding benefit recipients, particularly JSA, Income Support and Child Benefit. It was commonly felt that participation in the pilots should not impact on eligibility for benefits. The need for a greater understanding of E2L within Jobcentre Plus was identified.
- The age restrictions of E2L were identified as an issue in one pilot area, in particular for young people that, after participating in the project, wanted to return at a later date but were prevented from doing so because they were now 18.
- The potential for the budget for E2L to be more flexible, enabling pilots to shift resources from one element to another (e.g. from the incentive payment to the staffing budgets) was cited as a development that could enhance delivery and provide greater autonomy to meet need within a particular area.
- Demand for E2L is considered to be high. As such the importance of embedding the project in the wider 14-19 agenda was noted, particularly as this could potentially achieve economies of scale with delivery of other interventions.

Recommendations

- DCSF should consider the option of removing young people from the NEET register for the duration of their engagement with E2L although this risks reducing the incentive for local areas to support young people to progress on from the programme.
- The issues and problems associated with E2L participation and its reported effects upon Child Benefit and other public welfare eligibility should be resolved to avoid benefit-related barriers to engagement occurring further.

APPENDIX ONE: STAKEHOLDERS' TOPIC GUIDE

Entry to Learning Pilots Evaluation

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

(Pilot Managers/Pilot Staff/Stakeholders)

Introductory Statement

We are undertaking research for the Department for Children, Schools and Families to evaluate the Entry to Learning Pilots. The main focus of the evaluation is the effectiveness of the processes adopted by the Pilots to achieve their objectives, and the identification of learning that could aid the future development of the programme.

The interview should take up to an hour. Everything you say will be confidential to the research team and will not be directly attributed to you. The research team will also take reasonable steps to ensure that you cannot be identified from anything written in the research report or other research outputs.

1. Pilot Delivery

1.1 Has the Pilot changed any aspect of its delivery since the development of the original implementation plan? If so what are the changes and why do you feel they were necessary?

1.2 Have there been any changes to the Pilot management and staffing structure?

- Do you feel that your staffing structure has enabled you to organise and administer the Pilot successfully?
- To what extent have Pilot staff had to be flexible in their roles or work outside of their contracted responsibilities? How important has this been to the Pilot's successful delivery?

1.3 Do you have a steering group

- If not, why not?
- If not, do you think it would have been of benefit to the project to have had a steering group?

1.4 How has the Steering Group advised and helped the Pilot?

- Which organisations/agencies are represented on the Steering Group?
- What was the rationale for inviting these members to join the Steering Group?
- Has the input of the Steering Group influenced the Pilot's operations?
- Are there any examples of the Steering Group's effectiveness – for example, in helping with local relationship building or partnership working?
- Has the Steering Group offered help/advice in relation to progression routes for the beneficiaries?
- Has the Steering Group fulfilled the Pilot's expectations?

1.5 What has been the Pilot's experiences of offering and administering the delivery of the financial incentive?

- How effective do you feel the financial incentive has been in securing and maintaining beneficiary engagement?
- In your view, or from your Pilot experience, do you feel that the financial incentive should be offered to all beneficiaries of a programme such as E2L? Why/why not?

1.6 How has management information been collected and recorded?

- Any issues/problems?

1.7 How has management information been used?

- Have any specific issues been raised by your MI?

1.8 How successful have the Pilot's external relationships been?

- With local agencies?

- With local stakeholders?
- With local providers?

1.9 What has been the Pilot's experience of local partnership working?

1.10 To what extent has the pilot:

- Built on existing local relationships?
- Been a catalyst for the development of new relationships?

1.11 How important do you feel that successful local relationships have been in the development of the Pilot since inception?

1.12 Do you feel that there have been any relationships that have contributed significantly to the Pilot's successful operations and development?

2. Provision

2.1 What has been the usual process with commissioning provision?

- Issues/aspects/problems?

2.2 To what extent is the commissioning process:

- Organised centrally by the project manager?
- Devolved to the PAs?

2.3 How successful do you feel the identification and commissioning of local provision has been?

2.4 Has the Pilot made use of a menu of available training/support offered by providers or have providers been able to offer E2L-dedicated provision?

2.5 To what extent has the pilot been able to influence the availability and content of provision?

2.6 Have you been able to secure sufficient provision with the flexibility and quality to offer all beneficiaries the training they need/want?

2.7 Do you feel that providers have understood the purpose and intentions of E2L?

2.8 How flexible have local providers been in terms of beneficiary start dates and numbers?

2.9 What is the make up of the local provision landscape?

- Has the Pilot tended to rely on larger, established providers?

- Has the Pilot made use of smaller (perhaps newer) providers, either singly or via a 'cohort' of several providers contributing their expertise together?
- 2.10 Have you experienced any issues with providers seeking economies of scale in relation to the numbers of beneficiaries needed to make provision delivery financially viable?
- If so, how has this impacted on commissioning?
- 2.11 How successful have relations been with providers? Examples?

3. Beneficiaries

3.1 How successful has the pilot been in terms of:

- Recruitment of beneficiaries
- Retention of beneficiaries – any early leavers? Why? To where?
- Any issues?

3.2 Who do you believe to be the key target group for the pilot? To what extent has the pilot successfully engaged with these young people?

3.3 What level of caseload are PAs typically working with?

- Is this manageable?
- What would be the ideal level?
- Has the size of the caseload impacted on the PAs' ability to provide an effective service?
- Has the size of the caseload fluctuated through the period of project implementation? To what degree and what influences these changes?
- At what point are beneficiaries considered to have officially left the PAs' caseload? Is this the same in practice?
- Have the post-E2L support needs of beneficiaries led to an increased workload for the PAs? Has this impacted on PAs' capacity to support new recruits?

3.4 What is the typical level of support required by beneficiaries each week?

- What different forms does this support take (e.g. in terms of individual contact time / accompanying to interviews/training / getting in touch by telephone/text/email etc.)? How common are each of these?
- To what extent does level of support fluctuate according to the weekly activities of the beneficiary?

3.5 What has been the process for establishing beneficiary needs?

- How successful have been the beneficiary Action Plans?
- How much input have the beneficiaries had in the creation of the Action Plans?

To what extent are the Action Plans the result of a dialogue between the beneficiary and the PA, or based on the PAs experience of identifying and assessing needs?

3.6 What is the process for establishing appropriate provision for beneficiaries?

- Have all beneficiaries been able to access their preferred provision?
- What forms of assessment has the Pilot used?

3.7 What additional support have beneficiaries needed/requested while receiving provision?

- What is the process for dealing with any beneficiary issues/problems while on provision?
- Have there been cases of beneficiaries having their incentive allowance not paid for non-attendance at provision?

3.8 Have beneficiaries requested/needed support beyond the typical 15-week engagement with E2L?

- If so, for how long?
- How has this been funded?
- What form has this support taken?
- Has it prevented disengagement?
- Have any beneficiaries required support beyond 15 weeks and made a successful progression into accredited learning?
- Have there been beneficiaries who have proven to be particularly hard to help?
- What impact has the provision of post-15 week support had on project resources?
- How sustainable has any use of extended provision been?

- 3.9 Have there been any problems with beneficiaries having a period of inactivity between the end of their E2L engagement and before entering accredited learning?
- What strategies has the Pilot introduced to address this?
 - What impact has this had on caseloads? Do PAs now have a 'formal' and 'informal' caseload?
- 3.10 What provision have beneficiaries accessed once they have completed E2L?
In terms of:
- Course
 - Type of provider
 - Mode of delivery
 - Is it possible to get figures from your MI to show these outcomes?
- 3.11 What processes are in place to support beneficiaries moving into accredited learning?
- Are there 'standard' procedures or is each beneficiary supported according to their own needs?
 - What is the process for offering continued support for beneficiaries once they have progressed into accredited learning?
 - What external relationships, if any, has the Pilot fostered to assist with beneficiary support in their accredited learning? How successful have these relationships been?
 - How successful has the project been in undertaking the 13 week check-back?

4. The Role of the Third Sector

- 4.1 What roles has the Third Sector played in the management and operations of the Pilot?
- Has the Third Sector involvement reflected the Implementation Plan or has this been an iterative process?
- 4.2 What has been the process for identifying and commissioning Third Sector provision?
- Has a pattern emerged or has the Pilot approached each provider/offer of provision differently?
- Examples?
- What lessons have been learnt about commissioning provision from the third sector?
- 4.3 Has the Pilot established relationships with particular Third Sector providers or approached relevant providers to reflect beneficiary needs/wants?
- 4.4 To what extent has the pilot worked with Third sector organisations with which you were already familiar or worked with new organisations?
- 4.5 How flexible has Third Sector provision been in meeting the requests of the Pilot?

- a) In relation to start dates for provision?
- b) In relation to the numbers of beneficiaries accessing the provision?
- c) In relation to economies of scale?

4.6 What have been the benefits of third sector involvement?

- To the Pilot?
- To the beneficiaries?

5. Pilot Outcomes

5.1 How successful do you think the Pilot has been?

- In relation to the aims laid out in the implementation plan?
- In terms of the efforts of those involved in the implementation?

5.2 How successful have been the Pilot's systems for monitoring and review?

5.3 Are there any aspects of the Pilot's delivery that have been altered/developed/improved as a result of:

- The Pilot's own experience?
- Knowledge gained from partnership working/professional contacts/the previous experiences of Pilot staff or key stakeholders?

5.4 Do you think that DCSF have provided adequate/sufficient support and guidance during the running of the Pilot?

- Why/why not?

5.5 Would you introduce any significant/moderate changes to any future implementation plan for an intervention like E2L?

5.6 What elements of the Pilot do you think have worked particularly well?

5.7 What elements of the Pilot do you think have worked less well?

5.8 What recommendations would you make to DCSF in relation to any possible future national roll-out of the E2L programme?

APPENDIX TWO: BENEFICIARIES' TOPIC GUIDE

Entry to Learning Pilots Evaluation

Topic guide for interviews with young people

Interviewer:	
Interviewee:	
Location:	
Time:	

CHECKS

- Permission slip?
- Recorder on?
- Introductory statement.

Introductory Statement (to be read only after recorder started)

We are undertaking research for the Department for Children, Schools and Families to evaluate the Entry to Learning Pilots. The main focus for the evaluation will be the effectiveness of the pilots in achieving their objectives and the identification of learning that could aid the future development of the programme. The interview should last about an hour. Everything you say will be confidential to the research team and will not be directly attributed to you. We will also take reasonable steps to ensure that you cannot be identified from anything written in the report.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Could you tell me a bit about your involvement in the project?

- When did you start?
- What are you doing?
- What do you think of it so far?

1.2 How did you first hear about the project?

1.3 Why did you want to join the project?

- What did you hope to get out of it?

2 THE PROJECT

2.1 Can you describe what happened when you **first** came to the project? Probe: how the introduction took place? Who effected initial contact?

2.2 Can you tell me what you have done since you've been on the project? *If necessary, prompt re:*

- Created an action plan (what's in it?)
- Training - what and where? (Eg basic/functional skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT); vocational skills; personal development activities (budgeting, residential etc); study skills; employability skills)
- Achieved a qualification (what?)
- Work experience
- Training / FE tasters
- Looked at options for the future (subsequent training/employment with training etc)

2.3 Who have you worked most closely with at the project? How would you describe this relationship? How important was this / has this been in:

- Encouraging you to join the project?
- Keeping you at the project?
- Have there been any issues with this?

- 2.4 Have you received payment for participating in the project? How important was this / has this been in:
- Encouraging you to join the project?
 - Keeping you at the project?
 - Have there been any issues with this?
- 2.5 Did you at any point think about leaving the project before you had completed? Why? What made you change your mind?
- 2.6 What has been the best thing about the project?
- 2.7 Is there anything that hasn't been so good?
- 2.8 What difference has being on the project made to you? (eg more confident, increased motivation, increased aspirations, understand more about available opportunities - *try to distinguish between practical things eg got a certificate; and areas of personal development, such as changing attitudes*)
- 2.9 Has the project given you what you had hoped for / expected? (*refer back to question 1.2*)
- If no, what haven't you got from the project that you hoped for, and why?
- 2.10 Have there been any problems whilst you have been on the project? How have these been approached?
- Has it made any difference to you that the project is provided by [name of organization]? Would you still have come if it had been provided by a different organization?

3 THE FUTURE

- 3.1 How much longer do you expect to be on the project? What are you expecting to do in this time?
- 3.2 Have you any specific plans for what you will do after you leave the project?
- If yes, what?
 - If no, what do you **hope** to do when you leave? Is there anything that you need to be doing to help this to happen?

- Is this something that you would have done if you hadn't been on the project? How has the project contributed to this?

3.3 Will you remain in touch with the project once you have left?

4 CHARACTERISTICS

4.1 How old are you?

4.2 When did you leave school?

4.3 What were your experiences of school?

- Did you like it?
- Did you get any qualifications?

4.4 What did you do between leaving school and coming on this project? (eg nothing, started some study and then left, been in and out of employment)

4.5 What other support have you needed in order to participate in the project?

Prompt re:

- Support from family and friend
- Access to space and time to do extra study
- Access to transport to go to the project / training / college
- Access to books or other learning resources
- Access to computers

APPENDIX THREE: PROVIDERS' TELEPHONE TOPIC GUIDE

Entry to Learning Pilots Evaluation

Telephone Interview Schedule

(Providers)

Introductory Statement

We are undertaking research for the Department for Children, Schools and Families to evaluate the Entry to Learning Pilots. The main focus of the evaluation is the effectiveness of the processes adopted by the Pilots to achieve their objectives, and the identification of learning that could aid the future development of the programme.

The interview should take about 15 – 20 minutes. Everything you say will be confidential to the research team and will not be directly attributed to you. The research team will also take reasonable steps to ensure that you cannot be identified from anything written in the research report or other research outputs.

Please can you tell me a little bit about your organisation?

- Remit
- Funding (sector)
- Types of provision usually offered, client group etc.

1.1 What do you understand to be the aims and purpose of the Entry to Learning Pilots?

1.2 How did you become involved in offering provision to the E2L beneficiaries?

1.3 What was the process for commissioning your provision?

- Issues/aspects/problems

1.4 What are the contractual arrangements between you and the E2L Pilot?

- 1.5 Has there been any need to review your partnership with the E2L Pilot?
- 1.6 What provision do 'your' E2L beneficiaries receive?
- 1.7 Did you offer provision from a menu of existing available training/support or have you arranged E2L-dedicated provision?
- If E2L-dedicated provision has been arranged, what form has this taken?
- 1.8 How flexible have you been able to be with regards to beneficiary start dates and numbers?
- 1.9 Have you experienced any issues concerning economies of scale in relation to the numbers of beneficiaries needed to make your provision delivery financially viable?
- 1.10 Has there been any need to review the content of provision offered to E2L beneficiaries?
- 1.11 Have you worked with any other providers to enhance the offer that you can make to E2L beneficiaries?
- 1.12 Does your provision incorporate elements of basic skills training?
- How successful has delivery of this aspect of provision been?
- 1.13 How many E2L beneficiaries have you provided training for?
- 1.14 Have E2L beneficiaries required any additional / different support to that of your usual client group? What?
- 1.15 What has been the process for dealing with any beneficiary issues or problems while receiving provision?
- 1.16 Have you been able to liaise with the Pilot Manager/PA regularly?
- Have you arranged regular meetings or when needed?
 - How successful have relations been with the Pilot/PA?
- 1.17 What have been the processes for recording E2L beneficiary attendance information?
- 1.18 Have you experienced any significant levels of non-attendance / dropout?
- What have been the reasons for this?
 - Is there anything that could have been done to reduce this?

- 1.19 What have been the progression routes for beneficiaries from your provision?
- Are you able to offer progression routes in-house or have they tended to transfer to a different provider after E2L?

Third sector providers:

- 1.20 As a third sector provider, what do you think you are able to offer E2L that isn't available from alternative sources?
- Probe re: course content; approach to client group; location of delivery; linkages to other services/training/progression routes
- 1.21 Does E2L present any issues specific to you because you are a third sector provider?
- 1.22 How can the commissioning process be most effectively implemented, from a third sector viewpoint? How could those responsible for commissioning engage more effectively with the third sector in this process?

All:

- 1.23 Overall, how successful do you feel delivery of the E2L pilot has been?
- What factors have contributed to this?
 - What would you like to have done differently?
- 1.24 Is there anything else you would like to say regarding your experience of offering provision to the E2L beneficiaries?

Ref: DFE-RR003

ISBN: 978-1-84775-756-2

© Leeds Metropolitan University

June 2010