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Standards
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Supporting 14 to 19 education

Evidence from the work of 12 LEAs

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Background

1. This inspection examined how 12 local education authorities (LEAs) support the education of young people between the ages of 14 and 19.¹ Each of the LEAs had previously identified support for 14 to 19 education as a specific priority in its education development plan (EDP) for 2002 to 2007. Four of the LEAs had also been subject to earlier Ofsted area-wide inspections of 16 to 19 education. These found improvement in the LEAs' work with key strategic partners, but highlighted the need to extend the range of vocational provision and improve the use of management information.

2. The inspection considered the ways in which LEAs are effective in supporting 14 to 19 education and the extent to which they contribute to the progress made by young people in this age-group. It also sought to identify examples of both good practice and possible barriers to effective LEA support. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited the LEAs between May and December 2002, holding discussions with elected members, staff in education departments, representatives of the LEAs' partners and students. The authorities' 14 to 19 strategies were explored during initial visits, while follow-up visits focused on particular themes, tracking the effect of the LEAs' actions. The inspection also studied a range of data and inspection information and each LEA completed two questionnaires on aspects of its work.

3. Seven themes were tracked in most of the LEAs:

- 14 to 19 partnerships
- use of data to track students' progress
- the role of the LEA 14–19 co-ordinator
- funding
- school place planning, including reference to local demographic issues and consortium working
- support for social inclusion, with particular reference to support for disaffected students
- support for leadership and management in schools, with particular reference to challenging schools about their provision.

4. Four other themes were also explored in a minority of the LEAs:

- strategies used by LEAs to maximise student attainment at Level 2, with particular reference to the Department for Education and

¹ Doncaster, East Sussex, Hackney, Haringey, Herefordshire, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Oxfordshire, South Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, Sutton and Windsor & Maidenhead.

Skills (DfES) Increased Flexibility Programme for 14 to 16 year olds²

- supply and quality of teachers
- support for special educational needs (SEN)
- support for information and communication technology (ICT).

² Level 2 refers to this level of qualification in the National Qualifications Framework, equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grades A*–C, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Level 2 and Intermediate General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ).

Commentary

5. In their efforts to support the 14 to 19 phase, LEAs face a challenging and complex leadership role. They need to ensure policy and strategic direction for students up to the age of 16, and use their professional influence to secure effective progression and success for these same students beyond 16. The LEAs included in this report are, in the main, facing up to these challenges well.
6. About fifteen years ago, many LEAs were inspired by the national initiative aimed at expanding technical and vocational education and improving the range of opportunities for young people between the ages of 14 and 19. LEAs were given a central development role that included fostering collaboration. Subsequently, the concept of a 14 to 19 phase became diluted and legislation promoting competition limited the role of LEAs. Recently, however, 14 to 19 has re-emerged as a key national priority and LEAs have a fresh opportunity to influence and help shape the arrangements to support it.
7. Education between the ages of 14 and 19 spans the point at 16 where compulsory education ends and young people make choices about continuing their studies at school or entering further education, work-based training or employment. Although LEAs have statutory responsibilities for education up to 16, beyond this many other stakeholders and partners are involved. Following the formal removal of some of their previous powers, the capacity of LEAs to support education 14 to 19 has become constrained. In 1992, colleges of further education were removed from LEA control and in April 2002 the main responsibility for funding post-16 education and training passed to the new local Learning and Skills Councils.
8. LEAs retain some responsibility for post-16 provision in their schools, including raising standards of attainment in sixth forms. They have a continuing role in proposing the opening and closing of sixth forms and may allocate additional funding to support these. They are also responsible for post-16 students with SEN and for over 16s in care. As members of the new local Connexions partnerships, LEAs are required to develop a strategy for lifelong learning. They are entitled to be consulted by the local Learning and Skills Councils on wider 16 to 19 organisational issues and are required, with others, to take appropriate action following an Ofsted area inspection.
9. In its recent paper *14-19: opportunity and excellence* (DfES, 2003), the government identified several key issues facing providers of education for 14 to 19 year olds. It is suggested that the vocational offering in the education system is often weak and that many post-16 academic programmes are too narrow. As a result, too many young people lose interest in formal learning at an early stage, half of 16 year olds do not achieve five good passes at GCSE and many young people do not take full advantage of education or training beyond 16 and fail to reach their full potential.
10. To address these issues, the government has identified a need for greater flexibility in the system, including a wider range of courses and qualifications. It has proposed a greater individual mix of subjects post-14, easier switching between courses and a sharper focus on developing analytical, problem-solving and essential practical skills for life and work. It is expected that schools and further education colleges will work together in partnership and that students will have access to a

broader range of expertise. Among other specific proposals, it is recommended that all Key Stage 4 students should learn about work and enterprise and more students should be helped to reach at least Level 2 in literacy, numeracy and ICT by age 19. The task of LEAs lies in helping to develop local responses to the proposals and in supporting schools to manage the changes involved.

11. LEAs' ability to collaborate with a wide range of key partners, over whom they have little or no authority, is the key to their effectiveness. For example, bringing schools and colleges together can mean overcoming the effects of many years when these institutions competed for the same students. Collaboration requires co-ordination and there is a broad consensus among the partners of the LEAs inspected that an LEA is well placed to fulfil this role, although it cannot fulfil it alone or completely. By incorporating the development of 14 to 19 education into their plans, LEAs can also provide leadership to regenerate depressed and deprived urban and rural areas, with the potential to reduce future levels of crime and other community costs.

12. Until recently, most of the LEAs have tended to view the development of Key Stage 4 and post-16 quite separately. In their new EDPs, however, the LEAs inspected have sought to tackle this discontinuity. They have responded well in developing networks and a range of strategic partnerships and these are proving to be effective vehicles for joint decision-making and planning. There is also demonstrable evidence that steps being taken to improve the attendance, attitudes and motivation of some of the most vulnerable students pre-16 are being effective and encouraging continued study post-16.

13. All of the LEAs provide at least satisfactory support to help schools to manage 14 to 19 education. There are, however, a number of areas where planning is being impeded. Few of the LEAs have set out a well-defined vision of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and attributes needed by young people by the age of 19. LEAs' monitoring of schools' performance 14 to 19 is steadily improving, but there are weaknesses in tracking students' attainment and progress from 14 to 19. Although elected members show a high degree of interest in children in care, insufficient attention is paid to challenging the achievements and progress made by young people between 14 and 19 as a whole.

14. The LEAs' efforts to support 14 to 19 education are also being hampered by both funding and recruitment difficulties. The various funding streams available are perceived by the LEAs to lack coherence. Bidding processes are confusing and deadlines for submitting proposals and implementation are often too short. Where evaluation of effect is a requirement, performance measures are not consistent and criteria for success are not explicitly linked to student attainment and progress. The difficulties faced by the LEAs in managing the supply and quality of teachers for the 14 to 19 phase are broadly similar to those at other key stages. There is, however, one additional area of difficulty. As schools and colleges increasingly work together, the differences between the pay and conditions of service of teachers in schools and lecturers in further education are being highlighted.

15. The ending of statutory education at 16, the complex funding arrangements and the reduction in their powers, are potentially significant barriers to LEAs' providing effective support for 14 to 19 education. The LEAs inspected accept the need for strategic partnership and recognise collaboration as a necessary pre-requisite for

success. However, weaknesses in the monitoring of students' progress are hampering the capacity of the LEAs and their partners to target resources.

Main findings

- ❑ Overall levels of students' attainment vary widely across the 12 LEAs. However, the performance in most is either broadly in line with or above that nationally.
- ❑ The various funding streams available to support 14 to 19 learning are perceived by LEAs to be complex and lacking coherence. Despite these difficulties, the LEAs are generally performing well in their efforts to secure additional funding for their schools.
- ❑ Many of the LEAs view their support for 14 to 19 education as an integral element of plans for urban and rural regeneration.
- ❑ Few of the LEAs have set out a well-defined vision of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and attributes needed by young people by the age of 19; this is impeding longer-term planning.
- ❑ All of the LEAs have developed effective networks and strategic partnerships to support 14 to 19 education; links with local Learning and Skills Councils, although still developing, are generally constructive.
- ❑ The role of elected members in supporting 14 to 19 development is underdeveloped; although they monitor attainment at 16 and show a high degree of interest in children in care, insufficient attention is paid to challenging the achievements and progress made by young people between 14 and 19 as a whole.
- ❑ All of the LEAs provide at least satisfactory support to help schools to manage 14 to 19 education.
- ❑ LEAs' monitoring of schools' performance 14 to 19 is steadily improving.
- ❑ The DfES Increased Flexibility Programme for 14 to 16 year olds has begun well in the 12 LEAs; most have embraced the programme and have both encouraged and supported its implementation.
- ❑ LEAs have had limited success in tracking students' attainment and progress from 14 to 19; for example, it has proved difficult to track the progress of young people who transfer from schools either to further education or to work-based training post-16.
- ❑ The differences between the pay and conditions of service of teachers in schools and further education lecturers are being highlighted as schools and colleges increasingly work together.
- ❑ LEAs successfully support a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving the attendance, attitudes and motivation of some of the most vulnerable students pre-16 and encouraging continued study post-16; however, weaknesses in analysing and using data on the progress made by these students are constraining local planning.

Corporate planning and strategic management

Context

16. The 12 LEAs inspected serve a range of rural, urban, metropolitan and inner city areas. Together, they are responsible for over 200 maintained secondary schools; well over half of which have sixth forms. The LEAs also provide education for students in over 20 pupil referral units. The proportions of students of minority ethnic heritage and eligible for free school meals range considerably and, in one urban LEA, are as high as 50%.

Performance

17. Levels of students' attainment vary widely across the LEAs. In 2002, the proportion of 16 year olds achieving five or more passes at GCSE or equivalent at grades A*–C ranged from 29.8 to 64.2%. In 2001, the average points scores at A level ranged from 11.9 to 20.9.

18. However, overall, the performance in most of the LEAs is either broadly in line with or above that nationally. The government's 2004 target of at least 38% of students attaining five or more passes at GCSE grades A*–C in every LEA was achieved in all but two of the LEAs and two thirds exceeded the national figure of 48.8%. At A level, the average points score in just over half the LEAs was either above or broadly in line with the national figure.

19. In 2000 (the latest year for which figures are available), the proportion of young people participating in education and training post-16 ranged from 75 to 99%, compared to the average for England of 83%. These figures do, however, mask considerable variation in completion rates and whether the programmes followed are appropriate.

Funding

20. During the last two financial years, the LEAs inspected have done well in obtaining funding from various sources to support 14 to 19 development, and in co-ordinating and managing the distribution of these funds for schools. However, the funding arrangements are perceived by the LEAs as complex and lacking coherence. Bidding processes consume a lot of staff time and the lead-times for submitting proposals and for implementation are often too short. Where evaluation is a requirement of the different initiatives, criteria are neither consistent nor explicitly linked to student attainment and progress.

21. Many different sources of funding are employed by the LEAs to provide support for students from vulnerable groups. Standards funds are used for learning support and to help children in care. Funding via Connexions is used to support students at risk of exclusion and for additional staff to support young people leaving care. European Union Objective 1 funds are helping to tackle, for example, behaviour issues, while New Opportunities funds are financing summer programmes for Year 11 leavers and additional study support. A few of the LEAs are piloting education

maintenance allowances for 16 to 19 students and these are already helping to raise attendance levels. Urban regeneration funds are also being used to address non-attendance and to help develop employability skills for students with SEN.

22. A similar picture is apparent in funding to support the curriculum. Potentially mutually supportive initiatives are funded from a range of sources and over different periods. For example, funding for the recently launched DfES Increased Flexibility Programme for 14- to 16-year-old students wishing to study for the new applied GCSEs was routed via local Learning and Skills Councils, initially for only two years. Local initiatives funding, to support consortium arrangements and improved access to post-16 courses, is also available through the local Learning and Skills Councils, but is subject to an entirely different set of rules. In one LEA, Pathfinder funds are being used to support a diversity project, aimed at improving access to specialist provision post-16. As well as preparing their EDPs, several of the LEAs have negotiated local public service agreements with the DfES, with the purpose of improving GCSE results in priority areas. While the various funding arrangements do encourage attention to be focused on important priorities, their current short-term nature and the lack of coherence do not encourage longer-term planning.

Strategy

23. The development of strategic partnerships with other stakeholders is a key feature of each LEA's plans to support 14 to 19 development, and performance in this area has been good. Since the formal removal of some of their previous powers, the LEAs have recognised that their capacity to support 14 to 19 education is limited. Although they have key strategic and policy responsibilities for education up to the age of 16, their ability to secure the best opportunities for young people beyond the age of 16 depends on building collaborative relations with other partners. Developing links with the new local Learning and Skills Councils has also meant accepting new, albeit less tangible, responsibilities for post-16 students.

24. Many of the LEAs view their support for 14 to 19 education as an integral element of plans for urban and rural regeneration. Increasingly, the LEAs have recognised that investment in the education of young people post-14 is crucial if many social and community issues are to be tackled effectively. However, few of the LEAs have yet to set out a clear vision of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and attributes needed by 19 year olds, and this is impeding longer-term planning. For example, only one LEA has an up-to-date policy statement on 14 to 19 education, although three others are developing one.

25. The creation of 14 to 19 strategy groups is a key strand in many of the LEAs' approaches. Typically, the groups provide a useful forum for discussion with a range of local partners, including employers. In most LEAs, the groups have clear terms of reference and action plans and are helping to create a shared understanding of local strategic issues and the potential contribution of the various partners in addressing these. The local Learning and Skills Council is represented in the groups, which are therefore also an effective mechanism for joint decision-making on funding priorities. Relations with the local Learning and Skills Councils, although still developing, are generally constructive.

26. In several of the LEAs, close working between the education departments and social services has resulted in more co-ordinated support for vulnerable groups of

students, notably children in care. Similarly, relations within the local Connexions partnerships, though still evolving, are also generally productive. Several of the performance indicators for Connexions relate to improving pre-16 students' attendance rates, and to improving performance rates at both 16 and 19. Increasingly, therefore, the LEAs and the Connexions partnerships are working to a common and mutually supportive agenda.

27. The LEAs have had variable success in working with regional authorities responsible for area regeneration. In some areas, a common agenda for developing and funding new opportunities for 14 to 19 year olds has been established. However, in others, a lack of success in identifying common priorities relating to students of compulsory school age has meant that agreement has only been reached on tackling post-16 issues, or has not been possible at all.

28. The LEAs' strategies to improve provision and raise standards of attainment in 14 to 19 education are set out in their EDPs. Around half of the plans propose development of an overall 14 to 19 strategy and two thirds identify actions linked to further developing local strategic partnerships. Some of the LEAs have adopted area- or district-based strategies for tackling 14 to 19 issues. Where relevant, the LEAs have indicated their intention to build on the work of Excellence in Cities, Excellence Challenge and Education Action Zones. All the LEAs are also actively involved in co-ordinating various projects to support 14 to 19 education.

29. Most of the EDPs include activities intended to broaden the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and encourage wider student participation and better progression to learning opportunities beyond the age of 16, for example through the expansion of school consortium arrangements. Three quarters of the LEAs have specific plans to improve the number of 16 year olds staying on at school, in part through better provision of Level 1 and Level 2 programmes. Half the LEAs have strategies to improve course completion rates. Around half of the EDPs propose strategies for varying teaching and learning styles, promoting key skills and expanding the use of ICT to support learning to improve the support for vulnerable students. Several plans also identify various actions to support senior managers in schools in addressing 14 to 19 issues by, for example, targeting the supply and quality of teachers and improving the work of individual subject departments.

30. Implementation of the EDP actions to support 14 to 19 education is mostly on track and is being monitored appropriately by the LEAs. In a few of the LEAs, actions have been revised as new ideas have developed or local circumstances have changed. The actions proposed in the EDPs are generally capable of being achieved within the intended timescales. However, inadequate data on students' progress from 14 to 19 mean that some strategies are not securely underpinned by evidence and this, in turn, is hampering detailed planning. As a result, though many of the LEAs have set some challenging targets for improving the performance of students at 16, only a minority has chosen to map these through to students' attainment at ages 18 or 19.

31. Around half of the LEAs have recruited 14 to 19 co-ordinators, often by combining funding from different sources and securing the support of other partners. Difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified candidates to the posts have led some LEAs to innovative solutions. Some of the LEAs, for example, are making use of part-time consultancy to employ recently retired headteachers. Where things work well, the co-ordinators are involved in either leading or contributing to various

networks, in facilitating links between schools to share expertise, and in building bridges between schools and other providers, including further education.

For example:

*In **Northumberland**, a shared commitment to developing area partnerships to bring together schools, further education colleges and providers of work-based training has resulted in the joint funding of the post of Headteacher 14–19 Co-ordinator by the LEA, local Learning and Skills Council and high schools.*

*In **Hackney**, the 14–19 co-ordinator has been pro-active in identifying strategic gaps in provision and bringing schools and colleges together to address these. The co-ordinator has also identified additional funding opportunities and has helped providers to access these.*

32. Several LEAs have decided to move away from the idea of a single 14–19 co-ordinator. While recognising that co-ordination of 14 to 19 initiatives is necessary, these LEAs and their partners are seeking greater coherence and co-ordination through a team approach. Developments are at an early stage and it remains to be seen whether this approach will be more effective than employing an individual co-ordinator.

Elected members

33. Elected members in most of the authorities inspected have minimal involvement in championing 14 to 19 development and only rarely participate in 14 to 19 strategy groups. Although they monitor the standards achieved by students at the age of 16, they give insufficient attention to challenging the rate of progress made by young people during the 14 to 19 phase as a whole. The lack of a clear vision about the learning needs of young people across the phase is also hampering members as they try to determine how education and training might best contribute to local area regeneration. However, transition arrangements for vulnerable students at 14 and 16 are well monitored. A high degree of interest is shown in children in care and successes achieved by these students are celebrated with parents and carers.

School places

34. The attention given by the LEAs to the planning of school places for students in the 14 to 19 phase is satisfactory. However, decisions are often difficult as there are complexities in the essential partnerships that are required, and changes and improvement in the availability of post-16 places are often slow. In one of the LEAs, for example, where the reorganisation of local secondary schools required a change in post-16 provision, the decision-making process involving schools and the local Learning and Skills Councils has exceeded 12 months and fallen behind schedule.

35. There are many small sixth forms where collaboration is essential if the breadth and quality of student programmes are to be improved. Although in some cases senior officers and elected members recognise the issues, they are tentative about reorganisation and closure proposals. This is not always in the best interests of students. Some of the LEAs, however, have radical medium term plans under development.

For example:

*In **Hackney** there has been a history of outflow of students at secondary transfer and post-16 to provision outside of the borough. The establishment of a new sixth form college has helped achieve a two per cent year-on-year increase in post-16 participation rates and has increased the number of local students choosing to continue their studies within the borough. An ambitious secondary strategy includes plans for three new schools together with a 14+ centre.*

36. School organisation plans are beginning to reflect the need to broaden Levels 1 and 2 provision in schools. In areas where the local Learning and Skills Council's policy requires this to secure funding for 14 to 19 developments, such curriculum changes have become an integral part of both school and LEA planning. Most of the LEAs are actively involved in 14 to 19 reviews, mainly driven by the need to broaden and improve the choices and quality of programmes for students post-16. Many of the urban LEAs have also incorporated the development of specialist schools into their strategy to ensure that local provision is diverse, yet balanced.

Recommendations

In order to improve the funding arrangements to support 14 to 19 education, the appropriate departments of government, singly and jointly, should:

- help LEAs to understand more easily the various sources of funding and aim, whenever practicable, to provide greater continuity of funding
- encourage a close link between the required evaluation of the use of funding and students' attainment and progress.

In order to improve the strategy for developing 14 to 19 education, working in conjunction with other strategic partners, LEAs should:

- set out a well-defined vision of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and attributes needed by young people by the age of 19 and the steps needed to achieve these
- set challenging performance targets for students' attainment by 19; for example, by identifying the proportion of young people attending maintained schools at 16 who will achieve at least Level 2 qualifications by 19.

In order to enhance the role of elected members in 14 to 19 education, in conjunction with other strategic partners, LEAs should:

- expand the role of members in challenging the rate of progress made by young people from 14 to 19 and develop opportunities for members to contribute to local 14 to 19 strategy groups and partnerships.

Improving the quality and provision of 14 to 19 education

Support for school improvement

37. The LEAs inspected all provide at least satisfactory support to help schools to manage 14 to 19 education. All have been involved in initiatives to improve schools' capacity to develop the curriculum, including supporting and challenging heads of subject departments. Three quarters of the LEAs have also either provided or brokered support to help individual schools to address 14 to 19 issues.

38. The LEAs' monitoring of schools' performance 14 to 19 is steadily improving. A common model involves a school improvement officer reviewing the latest examination results with each school. LEAs have appropriate strategies in place to support schools that are achieving below the government's target of at least a quarter of students achieving a minimum of five GCSE grades A*–C. Several of the LEAs have begun challenging schools about the breadth and balance of their 14 to 19 curriculum and the extent to which this meets the needs of all students. In a few cases, LEA reviews have drawn attention to a narrow curriculum at Key Stage 4 and uneconomic provision post-16.

For example:

*In **South Gloucestershire**, data analyses of schools' performance by school improvement advisers help to identify under-achievement and effective practice. The outcomes are also used by the 14–19 co-ordinator to inform discussions with schools' senior management teams about the appropriateness of curriculum provision.*

*In 2000, **Windsor & Maidenhead** LEA employed a consultant to conduct a review of the 16–19 curriculum offered by schools. This drew attention to the limited nature and breadth of some of the provision, in particular the lack of Levels 1 and 2 courses in schools. Following the review, there has been a much sharper focus on collaboration between centres, with the result that previously non-viable courses now have sustainable numbers.*

39. All of the LEAs recognise that successful schools should have a high degree of autonomy. Most of the LEAs have established support for school self-evaluation, either by developing their own audit tools or by promoting other models. Some systems of evaluation are benefiting from access to the LEAs' existing performance data, enabling, for example, the identification of weaker departments. However, most schemes do not yet ask more challenging questions about, for example, the extent to which provision enhances or impedes students' acquisition of key skills and their progression.

40. Many of the LEAs encourage schools to collaborate in order to sustain minority courses. In some of the urban LEAs, a situation exists where most schools have sixth forms, but a few do not. The LEAs involved have been keen to address this inconsistency. Invariably, however, collaboration with other institutions has been necessary to ensure that any new provision is viable.

For example:

*In **Sutton**, a new sixth form was added to an existing 11-16 school, to bring it in line with other local schools. The LEA supported the change and helped to secure the endorsement of the local college of further education, with which the school is developing close collaborative links and shared provision.*

41. The LEAs are also providing good encouragement to schools to work with local further education colleges to enhance their Key Stage 4 provision. There are many examples of effective practice, some of which are long-standing. The colleges provide staff expertise and resources that are not available in the schools and offer courses with a learning style and environment that appeal to many 14 to 16 year olds. Collaboration also enables the schools to offer a more varied and differentiated curriculum.

For example:

*In **Hackney**, a school of Asian and Oriental Catering has been set up on a further education college campus to provide a high quality environment for students to develop and apply their catering skills. The LEA has encouraged the development which provides Key Stage 4 students with the opportunity for quality work placements in an unusual but growing vocational field. The school also offers the opportunity for further in-depth study post-16.*

42. In two mainly rural LEAs, post-16 collaboration in the larger towns includes joint planning and development with the local further education colleges, resulting in both single site and multi-site provision.

For example:

*In the Tamworth district of **Staffordshire**, six schools have combined with the local further education college to develop and provide a range of courses offering Level 2 accreditation post-16. The courses cover eight curriculum areas and incorporate key skills. Independent learning packages have been developed and joint staff-planning meetings are held weekly. A similar Level 3 programme has also recently been introduced.*

43. In all the LEAs inspected, the DfES Increased Flexibility Programme for 14 to 16 year olds has begun well. Although funding for the programme was not routed through LEAs, most of those inspected have embraced the programme as being compatible with their EDPs and have both encouraged and supported its implementation. Despite the relatively short lead-times, recruitment to most of the schemes aligned to the programme has been good and targets have been met. Students were recruited in a variety of ways: the best of these involving interviews with students and parents by careers advisers and college staff. In most cases, schools selected the students, usually based on aptitude but also, in some cases, in an attempt to tackle disaffection. In each scheme, students across the ability range were chosen.

44. Students have generally made good progress in the early stages of the programme. There have been some difficulties with students' misconceptions about the course content and learning style, and some students have struggled in trying to overcome weaknesses in basic and study skills. The choice of further education lecturers with experience of working with pre-16 students has meant that students' attendance and motivation have been mostly good and drop-out rates have been very low.

For example:

In Herefordshire, the Increased Flexibility Programme has already had a strong effect on all the students involved, including the disaffected. Although it is too early for quantifiable data, there is ample anecdotal evidence of effect on attendance, motivation and exclusions.

45. However, links between the Increased Flexibility Programme and other 14 to 19 programmes are not being made sufficiently explicit. Schools recognise that where the programme improves students' motivation and skills, this can have an influence on their attitude to study and their work across the rest of the curriculum. Most further education colleges have seen the programme as an opportunity for students to sample a vocational area. Where a minority of other colleges has seen the programme simply as a mechanism for recruiting students on to post-16 courses, this view has been strongly challenged by the LEAs. The experience gained by students in creating portfolios of evidence is particularly useful preparation for further training and accreditation post-16.

46. Along with most aspects of 14 to 19 provision, monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of the Increased Flexibility Programme are at an early stage. However, students whose weak basic and study skills are hampering their progress on the programme have usually been identified and learning support is being provided in various ways. In some cases, a teacher accompanies students to the college to provide extra support. Alternatively, specialist learning support assistants are fulfilling the role. In one inner-city area, a new sixth form college has also made available an IT-equipped learning base for students to use out of school hours. In some instances, however, further education colleges have identified the need for support but have been unable to access funding to provide this.

47. Several of the LEAs are using both established and new networks to support senior and middle managers in schools and to influence practice. Some networks use geographical groupings of schools and partners. Others have been set up to manage specific initiatives, explore curriculum models or review practical issues such as timetabling and sharing good practice. These networks are valuable, not only because they promote good collaborative working, but also because they are an effective mechanism for sharing good practice and encouraging change.

48. Each LEA is providing specific support in response to the demands of new curricular programmes and this is contributing to improving the quality of students' learning. However, the development of more generic approaches to teaching and learning within the 14 to 19 phase have, so far, received attention in only a few LEAs.

For example:

In collaboration with a local university department of education, Northumberland LEA initially funded an advisory teacher to support teaching and learning in schools, including the development of thinking skills. Other projects followed, including supporting independent learning as a strategy for delivering Curriculum 2000. Building on the previous work and following receipt of funding for the Increased Flexibility Programme, a project was set up to support joint working between schools and colleges, providing professional development on teaching and learning to align students' experiences in different institutions. This aspect of the LEA's work is now well established and is reflected in recent restructuring of the advisory service.

49. A third of the LEAs has been involved in Excellence in Cities schemes and seven have supported the development of an Education Action Zone. In all cases, these initiatives have added extra impetus to the LEAs' efforts in addressing the 14 to 19 agenda. Funding channelled through the schemes is effectively supporting the development of vocational education programmes and the setting up of learning support centres. It is also enhancing support for gifted and talented students. In those LEAs involved in Excellence in Cities, Excellence Challenge funding is supporting the upgrade of computer hardware and providing specific programmes for particular groups of students, for example, through enrichment classes for A level courses and art and design projects.

50. Although most of the LEAs collect and supply to schools a wide range of student performance data, they have not been able to track individual students' attainment and progress across the entire 14 to 19 phase. Several of the LEAs have mechanisms for highlighting the value added by schools to students' attainment during Key Stage 4 and a few provide predictions of their potential attainment at 16 and 19, based on Key Stage 3 data. Where schools have sixth forms, it is already feasible for the LEAs to track individual students' progress through the qualification levels for the entire 14 to 19 age-range, but this is not yet happening.

51. The main difficulty in tracking students' progress from 14 to 19 arises where students leave the maintained school sector at 16 and transfer to either further education or work-based training. The Data Protection Act currently limits LEAs' obtaining student data from various post-16 providers and this is frustrating. In some areas, Connexions partnerships have begun to work towards comprehensive tracking of the destinations of students leaving school. This initiative is at an early stage, but is worth pursuing.

52. Many of the LEAs collect data on student performance at both 14 and 16 for different ethnic groups, children in care and various other vulnerable groups. Some of the LEAs have also identified gifted and talented students within their data tracking systems. While these developments are helpful in drawing attention to the relative underperformance of different groups, they are not yet sufficient to provide effective tracking of students' progress across the entire 14 to 19 age-range.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

53. To date, information and communication technology is having little effect on raising attainment, enriching provision and increasing flexibility for students across the 14 to 19 curriculum. There is some evidence that the LEAs and their partners are looking to extend accreditation and develop creative solutions to curricular problems using ICT, but most of this work is at an early stage. LEAs recognise, rightly, that ICT is not a panacea for the challenges of provision for the 14 to 19 phase. Developments are only well advanced where LEAs have been able to secure additional funding and have dedicated time for support from an adviser.

54. A range of accreditation is being promoted, and support is provided through partnership working through, for example, Excellence in Cities. There is good take-up of the new GCSE in applied ICT at Key Stage 4 and LEAs are supporting schools in developing this course with advice and staff training. Early indications are that the qualification is raising attainment and reducing disaffection. The promotion of IT as a Key Skill is also growing, notably where specific funding has been available for

training to support it. (ICT is one of five DfES-approved Key Skills, for which national accreditation is available at five levels.)

For example:

*In **Doncaster**, additional European Union funding is being used to promote key skills in mainstream and special secondary schools. Most schools chose the IT Key Skills qualification to match students' ICT entitlement and introduced it initially at Level 1 in Year 9 or at Key Stage 4. This was in recognition of the need for staff training, as well as allowing students' portfolio expertise to be developed. No performance data are available yet, but there is some evidence of students' increased knowledge and skills being used across the curriculum.*

55. Little work has been done to track students' attainment in ICT, although a few of the LEAs are beginning to set up systems for doing this. In exploring the use of ICT to increase flexibility in the curriculum and students' access to that curriculum 14 to 19, some use has been made, for example, of methods such as video-conferencing, mainly to support minority subjects or those difficult to staff at A level. However, these developments are on a small scale and experimental and it is recognised that ICT solutions are more complex or inappropriate in some vocational areas.

Supply and quality of teachers

56. The difficulties in managing the supply and quality of teachers for the 14 to 19 phase are broadly similar to those at other key stages. There is, however, one additional and specific area of difficulty affecting the 14 to 19 phase. The differences between the pay and conditions of service of teachers in schools and further education lecturers are being exposed as schools seek an ever-widening range of subject specialists and schools and colleges increasingly work together. Some partnerships have created local solutions to address the problem. However, there is a clear consensus in schools, colleges and the LEAs that the issue must be addressed nationally if important strands of provision for the 14 to 19 phase are not to be impeded.

57. Some LEAs are adopting innovative schemes to retain teachers through programmes that provide management development or opportunities to broaden teaching experience.

For example:

***Doncaster LEA** has identified potential leaders at each career stage for a support programme of mentoring and professional development aimed at developing middle and senior managers. This includes membership of LEA working parties. This scheme has resulted in an increase in the number of local teachers applying for management posts and, in particular, in the number of female applicants, previously under-represented.*

Recommendations

In order to enhance the monitoring of schools' performance 14 to 19, LEAs should:

- improve the liaison between 14 to 19 co-ordinators (or their equivalent) and school improvement officers, so that there is greater clarity about which aspects of schools' 14 to 19 performance should be monitored and challenged
- create and/or revise self-evaluation materials to help schools monitor individual students' attainment, progress and progression 14 to 19.

In order to improve the tracking of students' progress from 14 to 19, LEAs should:

- build on existing and developing practice by focusing the collection of individual students' performance data on the progress made through the various national qualification levels and, in particular, the levels attained by the students in English, mathematics and ICT.

In order to improve support for the supply and quality of teachers for the 14 to 19 age-range, the appropriate departments of government should:

- review the pay and conditions of school teachers and lecturers to ensure greater comparability for similar work.

Support for vulnerable young people

Support for students with special educational needs

58. Most of the LEAs inspected provide effective support for students with SEN, although many are still grappling with the arrangements needed to achieve coherent and high-quality provision across the entire 14 to 19 age-range. In a quarter of the LEAs, a review of SEN provision is taking place alongside a reorganisation of secondary schools. This is providing a significant opportunity for these LEAs to establish a more cohesive strategic direction for educational inclusion. Two thirds of the LEAs visited have been involved in specific initiatives to support students with SEN across the 14 to 19 phase. Most encourage links between special and mainstream schools and further education colleges, some of which are long-standing. Enhanced specialist SEN provision is being planned in many mainstream schools and some LEAs are looking to extend this in partnership with further and higher education providers.

59. Many of the LEAs stress the importance of effective transition arrangements for students with SEN at age 16. Continuity of staff involvement and interest between schools and further education colleges is often enhanced by part-time college placements for students during Key Stage 4. In several of the LEAs, there are very good procedures to ensure that students with SEN are well supported when they embark on college programmes.

For example:

*In **North Tyneside**, post-16 students with SEN at a further education college gain great benefit from continued contact with staff from their previous schools. The college course offers basic skills in English, mathematics, ICT, sports, dance, outdoor activities and work experience. The wide range of visits, both locally and internationally, are having a profound influence on the students' confidence to communicate.*

*In **Haringey**, there is a longstanding partnership between special schools and the local college of further education. Key Stage 4 students with SEN follow a two-day basic skills programme taught by college staff, with school staff in support. Resources are available to meet individual student needs, enabling the college to use person-centred planning in line with the requirements of the learning disabilities board. There is a direct link into college transition courses and currently a 14+ transition plan is being piloted. Progression onto post-16 college courses is generally good.*

60. In three of the LEAs, students' progress is being enhanced through effective curricular initiatives that are broadening the range of opportunities for learning. In two cases, programmes being planned aim to develop independent living skills for those students with severe learning difficulties and visual impairment. In another, funding has been secured from the local Learning and Skills Councils to develop provision at Level 2 for students with SEN between the ages of 16 and 19. The programme is focused on developing key skills and raising self-esteem. More widely, considerable effort is being put into developing programmes leading to both Entry and Level 1 accreditation.

61. In all the LEAs inspected, the progress made by students is already being assessed in most special and some mainstream schools. However, the LEAs have no comprehensive means of analysing and using such data to inform strategic decisions about resources and specialist 14 to 19 provision. This constrains local planning and, in particular, impedes the effective targeting of vocational training and alternative forms of accreditation. Various initiatives are beginning to tackle these issues. For example, one LEA supplies each school annually with an SEN profile that includes an analysis of national, local, school and individual student data. This provides a valuable range of management and attainment information for the schools. By reviewing the data for each school, the LEA has established useful benchmark evidence on all students with a statement of SEN. This is helpful in informing future strategy. More generally, the information gained from the audit of SEN needs is also helping the LEAs to be clearer about the trends and changes in students' specialist needs for which they have to plan.

Support for social inclusion

62. The LEAs inspected have a strong commitment to social inclusion and to raising expectations of education within the community. Most provide effective support for 14 to 19 students in danger of exclusion from mainstream education. There are many examples of good intervention and preventive work and demonstrable evidence that steps being taken are improving the attendance, attitudes and motivation of some of the most vulnerable students pre-16 and encouraging continued study post-16.

63. All the LEAs have a range of specific initiatives to address poor attendance of Key Stage 4 students, by supporting schools and families. The support is satisfactory overall with some good examples of strategies that are making a difference.

For example:

Doncaster has shown improvements of 1.25% in secondary attendance rates over the last two years. The work with schools has concentrated on improvements in teaching skills, together with enrichment of the curriculum and improving its relevance for young people. The LEA has focused on reducing absences that are supported by spurious authorisation and has made greater use of prosecutions. The education welfare service is mainly based in the schools and undertakes assessments, plans interventions or refers to other professional or voluntary organisations as appropriate. The LEA ensures that expectations of schools, students and families are made clear. Part-time attendance support assistants have been recruited to carry out first day of absence calls or home visits as well as responding to post-registration truancy. In addition, a parenting programme worker undertakes individual programmes in response to Parenting Orders. For post-16 students the pilot education maintenance grant has been effectively used to raise participation.

64. Despite some difficulties with staff recruitment and the quality of accommodation available, good practice is developing in the provision for Key Stage 4 students who are educated in places other than at school. LEA support to help early identification of students and appropriate intervention to prevent exclusion is having an effect and permanent exclusions have begun to decline. Where the practice is particularly effective, the LEA also provides strong support to schools in developing links with further education colleges and work-based trainers. Early use

of such links frequently contributes to improvement in students' self-esteem and motivation. Area-based arrangements also support groups of schools in developing local improvements for the inclusion of students.

For example:

*In **Staffordshire**, district arrangements are in place to support groups of schools in improving the inclusion of vulnerable students. In the Tamworth district, the six secondary schools work through a representative inclusion panel. The panel is used to raise early concerns about individual students, and is establishing a detailed database of students' needs, trends in needs and local providers of support and advice. The purpose is to find a success route for each student. The range of provision includes targeted behaviour and learning support, FE college programmes with extended work-based learning and vocational accreditation, part time provision at the student referral unit and managed moves to other schools.*

65. Some of the LEAs are also establishing strong partnerships with a wide range of local agencies and providers and have been successful in obtaining additional resources through social and community development funding.

For example:

*In **Sutton**, the Building Bridges project is managed and co-ordinated by the youth service in partnership with schools and other providers. It supports Key Stage 4 students who fail to attend school, have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion. Termly programmes are currently provided for over 100 students in 11 different centres, each with its own curricular specialism. Courses cover basic skills and personal development and include the imaginative use of vocational contexts to develop self-confidence and improve communication. Student attendance is closely monitored and levels of attendance are good.*

66. All the LEAs inspected have sound support strategies to help schools deal with behaviour problems. Where students are excluded or require alternative education, a referral unit maintained by the LEA generally provides a suitably differentiated curriculum, with programmes that are frequently linked to further education college programmes.

For example:

*The Key Stage 4 'Fast Forward' project in **North Tyneside**, based at the two further education colleges and now in its third year, is designed to overcome barriers to progression for the most disaffected students. Over three days, the students attend a work related and basic skills programme offering an opportunity for a fresh start. Accreditation is mainly at Entry Level. The programme leader monitors attendance and the individual needs of students. Mentors and a counsellor also attend. Students report that the practical approach to courses suits them well, with 50 per cent intending to continue in education or training post-16. In summer 2002 all students involved in the programme moved on either into training or modern apprenticeships.*

*In **Northumberland**, supported by the youth service, disaffected students can attend summer schools and a youth council, as well as getting advice from a worker from the Prince's Trust. These projects help to raise self-esteem.*

67. Mentoring of students is a common feature of many successful LEA programmes, in particular those involving the Connexions services and Excellence in Cities. In the best managed approaches, schools and colleges monitor the amount and range of adult guidance that each student receives and make adjustments where necessary. The support provided is normally part of a much wider partnership for encouraging inclusion.

*For example, in **Hackney** and **Haringey**, multi-agency teams working in schools and funded by the government's Street Crime initiative deal with student referrals on a regular basis. Each student is promptly allocated a named case-worker and provided with a support plan from one of the organisations involved.*

*In **Oxfordshire**, multi-agency teams in the Education Action Zone's schools deal with student referrals on a regular basis. A speedy solutions-based approach puts in place, for each student, a support plan and named case-worker from one of the organisations involved. The rapid response to exclusions project has been expanded to take in additional schools within the city and across the county, where needs are greatest. The newly configured countywide PRUIS (pupil referral unit and reintegration service) links effectively into the school consultation teams and has a good knowledge of each student. Connexions personal advisers, with identified specialisms, provide student support in all schools.*

68. Over half the LEAs have good strategies for supporting children in care that focus specifically on celebrating success and helping the young people to make key decisions about their educational future. Several LEAs have designated officers to provide advice and support, notably at transition points at ages 14 and 16. Most of the LEAs also have effective procedures in place for tracking the progress of these students. In one LEA, learning is also supported by a combination of extra tuition, residential study weeks and the provision of computers for foster and care homes. This support has been of particular value to children who are both in care and also asylum seekers or refugees.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for students with SEN, LEAs should:

- devise effective ways of tracking students' progress from 14 to 19 (see *Improving the quality and provision of 14 to 19 education*) and use the information to assist the planning of SEN provision, including expanding students' access to vocational training and to national accreditation.

Summary of recommendations

In order to improve the funding arrangements to support 14 to 19 education,

the appropriate departments of government, singly and jointly, should:

- help LEAs to understand more easily the various sources of funding and aim, whenever practicable, to provide greater continuity of funding
- encourage a close link between the required evaluation of the use of funding and students' attainment and progress.

In order to improve the strategy for developing 14 to 19 education, working in conjunction with other strategic partners, LEAs should:

- set out a well-defined vision of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and attributes needed by young people by the age of 19, and the steps needed to achieve these
- set challenging performance targets for students' attainment by 19; for example, by identifying the proportion of young people attending maintained schools at 16 who will achieve at least Level 2 qualifications by 19.

In order to enhance the role of elected members in 14 to 19 education, in conjunction with other strategic partners, LEAs should:

- expand the role of members in challenging the rate of progress made by young people from 14 to 19 and develop opportunities for members to contribute to local 14 to 19 strategy groups and partnerships.

In order to enhance the monitoring of schools' performance 14 to 19, LEAs should:

- improve the liaison between 14–19 co-ordinators (or their equivalent) and school improvement officers, so that there is greater clarity about which aspects of schools' performance 14 to 19 should be monitored and challenged
- create and/or revise self-evaluation materials to help schools monitor individual students' attainment, progress and progression 14 to 19.

In order to improve the tracking of students' progress from 14 to 19, LEAs should:

- build on existing and developing practice by focusing the collection of individual students' performance data on the progress made through the various national qualification levels and, in particular, the levels attained by the students in English, mathematics and ICT.

In order to improve support for the supply and quality of teachers for the 14 to 19 age-range, the appropriate departments of government should:

- review the pay and conditions of school teachers and lecturers to ensure greater comparability for similar work.

In order to improve the support for students with SEN, LEAs should:

- devise effective ways of tracking students' progress from 14 to 19 (see above) and use the information to assist the planning of SEN provision, including expanding students' access to vocational training and to national accreditation.