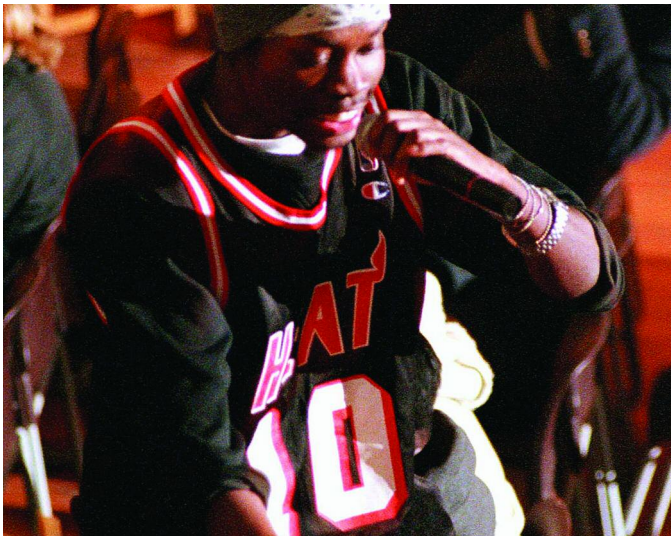


effective entry to work-based learning



making work-based learning work

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has been investigating the effectiveness of the processes in place for securing entry into work-based learning (WBL) and how these could be improved. The research examined the roles of key players in the promotion of WBL to young people.¹

Rationale

The provision of clear, impartial and accessible advice and information about all possible post-16 routes is widely recognised as essential to ensure that young people make the best career choice. In spite of this, good-quality information on WBL is not routinely available to all learners. Competition for learners between schools, colleges and WBL providers may restrict the availability of information and guidance about WBL.

The Connexions service is a crucial part of the communications system that should link prospective learners in WBL to the opportunities available. However, there are concerns about the extent to which Connexions personal advisers (PAs) and school-based careers teachers are aware of WBL opportunities and actively promote them to all young people. In addition, transition into WBL can be complicated and there is no single agency to guide learners through it.

It is within this context that LSDA investigated recruitment into WBL and the related advice and guidance given to young people, to identify what is working well and what needs to be improved.

Research method

The research involved:

- a review of the literature on recent developments in careers advice and guidance (CAG) for young people and of the evaluations or inspections of this service. The review helped to identify key aspects of the provision of effective careers guidance, which the study investigated further
- a statistical analysis of the proportion of school leavers entering WBL
- interviews and focus groups with careers teachers, head teachers, Connexions staff, learners, providers, employers and local LSC representatives within the same five selected local LSCs, and a questionnaire to parents.

Key findings

The availability and accessibility of CAG

- Learners reported that school-based CAG was influenced by teachers' desire for them to remain at school and teachers' lack of knowledge and personal experience of vocational pathways.

¹ The term work-based learning (WBL), as used in this study, refers to government-supported training programmes for young people. These are primarily Apprenticeships, at Level 2 or Level 3, or Entry to Employment programmes. However, when used to describe a mode of learning, WBL takes many other forms, workforce development for employees being one example.

CAG on WBL

- Basic information on WBL was given to all pupils. However, those less likely to achieve five General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) at grade C or above were more likely to be referred to a Connexions PA or to receive detailed information, advice and guidance on WBL opportunities.
- Careers teachers observed that learners' fear of being labelled as having problems could prevent them seeking advice from Connexions.
- Marketing materials for WBL were not easily available and were thought by parents, learners, careers advisers and teachers and local LSCs to be confusing and to provide insufficient information to promote WBL.
- Local LSC and Connexions staff thought that teachers and parents were highly influential in students' choice of post-16 route. However, the majority of parents thought that they were not fully included in the process of giving information and guidance to their children.
- Employers and learning providers thought that they could play a greater role in CAG to promote WBL.

Perceptions of WBL as a barrier to recruitment

- While many careers professionals recognise the potential of WBL as a pathway for young people to achieve high-level vocational qualifications, WBL is presented largely as an option for learners of lower academic ability. Learners seen to be able to undertake further academic study may not be given access to guidance on WBL options.
- Parents and young people with no experience of WBL view it as an option for those with little chance of academic success.

Raising awareness of WBL among advisers

- Teachers involved in careers education programmes do not routinely receive professional development and updating on WBL issues.
- Local LSC and Connexions staff observed that many new Connexions PAs often had no knowledge of WBL. It was suggested that Connexions PAs should have compulsory training on WBL and access to online information about it.
- It was acknowledged that WBL is complex and teachers could not be expected to have a complete knowledge of it. Nevertheless, it was thought that teachers ought at least to know when and how to refer learners to Connexions to ensure that they received impartial and accurate information on WBL.

Support agencies and educational organisations promoting WBL

- A variety of collaborative arrangements, including 14–19 education forums, are in place that could be used as vehicles to promote WBL. However, WBL issues are not always a high priority for such groups.
- There was little evidence that local support agencies were routinely collaborating to meet learner and employer demands and to increase participation in WBL by employer organisations. However, new networks were being set up to support learning providers and employers.
- One-stop shops for activities involving employers, education and training providers could rationalise requests from local organisations to employers about work placements.

Mismatch between learner supply and employer demand

- Most careers professionals, employers and providers perceived a mismatch between the supply and demand of WBL opportunities on offer and the requirements of the employers, aspirations of the learners and local skills needs.
- Pathfinder projects and Increased Flexibility Programmes (IFPs) were enabling schools to secure some success in engaging learners in vocational learning.²
- Further employer involvement in WBL was seen to be essential to secure increased learner participation.

Complexity in securing access to WBL

- The recruitment process into WBL and Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) is complicated. Potential learners need to find a WBL provider, go through a number of interviews and assessments and, in some cases, also find jobs or placements for themselves. Learners can become discouraged during this protracted recruitment process and may opt instead for more straightforward routes that may not be the most suitable.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research identified four major areas requiring action both locally and nationally in order to improve recruitment and achievement levels in WBL programmes.

1. Better-quality CAG on WBL

Improving availability, impartiality and quality

- More CAG on WBL is given to learners thought to be 'at risk' or unlikely to achieve five GCSEs at grades A*–C. The promotion of this route to 'at-risk' learners or those of lower ability may negatively influence the image and profile of WBL and its users.
- Teachers in schools with sixth forms have a vested interest in encouraging young people to stay at school, as funding is based on the size of the sixth form.
- Learners may be unduly influenced by teachers promoting their own subjects and by parental/family aspirations for them to go to college or university.

Recommendations

- The quality and extent of careers education and guidance (CEG) on WBL needs to be increased in order to encourage a wider range of learners to follow WBL routes.
- Guidance for schools on what constitutes high-quality CAG on WBL is required.
- WBL should be marketed equitably with school- and college-based academic and vocational programmes.
- Funding steers that unduly influence the advice given to young people about post-16 options should be reviewed.

² Pathfinder projects test the local delivery of 14–19 education and training in a range of settings, with the aim of building on the distinctive specialisms of local schools, colleges and training providers. The IFP seeks to create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities through partnerships between schools, colleges and providers for 14–16 year olds, including provision of new GCSEs in vocational subjects (programme descriptions taken from the DfES website '14–19 Gateway', 2004).

Professional development

- Careers teachers and Connexions staff are not routinely updated on developments in WBL.

Recommendations

- Regular in-service training on WBL should be provided for teachers and Connexions PAs who are involved in careers education programmes and responsible for giving WBL advice and guidance in schools.
- Cooperation between schools, local learning providers and employers should be promoted to enhance WBL careers advice and guidance.

WBL marketing information

- Larger providers, such as further education (FE) colleges, often have their own careers marketing material, but smaller providers do not. Personal Advisers and careers teachers do give out locally produced directories of WBL provision, but the quality of these varies.

Recommendations

- National and local WBL marketing material should conform to minimum quality standards in order to bring consistency to their quality.
- Careers guidance advice and material should be readily available and in a range of appropriate forms to communicate effectively to parents, teachers, referral agencies and employers.

2. Increasing employer participation in WBL

Marketing WBL to employers

- Many opportunities for marketing WBL to employers are not being fully exploited. Contact with employers through existing forums, such as Education Business Partnerships (EBPs) or through existing relationships developed for other purposes, such as arranging work experience or providing workforce development, could provide opportunities to promote WBL opportunities.

Recommendation

- There is a need for all the organisations with an interest in promoting WBL to take an active and coordinated role in increasing employers' engagement in it.³

Planning provision to meet needs

- The needs of employers, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), could be more fully reflected in local skills planning processes. Better use could be made of employer representative groups and of information from other sources such as Business Link.

Recommendations

- Local arrangements for the strategic planning of WBL provision should involve a wide range of employers.

³ Since the research was conducted, the end-to-end review of MAs has identified the need to collect data on interest and initial enrolment in Apprenticeships to help drive performance.

- The advice given to learners interested in WBL should be informed by the availability of placements with local employers.
- An infrastructure needs to be established to find appropriate jobs and placements for WBL provision.
- Better cross-department communication needs to be developed within local LSCs to ensure that all contact with employers raises relevant WBL issues.

3. Financial considerations for learners

Parity in allowances

- The extension of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) may influence young people and their parents to choose full-time school or college courses at post-16 as the more economically favourable option.⁴

Recommendation

- A review and comparison of WBL/MA allowances to ensure parity with full-time education and other training and employment options should be conducted, including an assessment of the impact of the minimum wage for 16 and 17 year olds.

Rural disadvantage in WBL provision

- While learners in urban areas have access to a range of local providers and employment opportunities, rural and outer urban areas provide limited opportunities for learners because of lack and cost of transport.

Recommendation

- A transport policy is required that enables learners from rural and outer urban areas to draw upon additional funding or facilities to allow them to access WBL/MA provision. Policy could be informed by current local and regional schemes run by national employers, eg ASDA, and by local councils.

4. Access to broader life chances

More flexible vocational pathways

- Combined school/college and work-based pathways could bring together the best of both forms of learning. Such routes could reduce the competition between academic and work-based routes and would enable learners to move smoothly from work-related learning (WRL) and WBL, rather than choosing between them.⁵ It could also secure participation in Apprenticeships by more able, post-18 learners and provide a supportive pathway for those requiring extra support for learning.

Recommendation

- Models that combine school- or college-based learning and WBL should be extended.

⁴ The HM Treasury/Department for Work and Pensions/Department for Education and Skills publication *Supporting young people to achieve: towards a new deal for skills* has highlighted the anomalies in the current system of financial support for 16–19-year-old learners. Proposed measures to address these include a National Minimum Wage for 16–17 year olds at a rate of £3 an hour, the extension of family support to unwaged trainees and a commitment to work with employers to achieve decent minimum wage levels for apprentices.

⁵ For further work in this area see: LSDA (2004). *Vocational learning routes to Level 2*. Learning and Skills Development Agency.

Recruitment into WBL

- Recruitment of school leavers into WBL is complex and confusing and could result in potential participants' rejection of this route. A coherent process to secure entry into WBL is required.⁶

Recommendations

- The recruitment processes to WBL should be streamlined to ensure that they support learners from initial enquiry to entry on a programme. All concerned need to be aware of how this process works and who is responsible for it.⁷
- WBL contracting arrangements need to be reviewed to clarify respective responsibilities for identifying jobs/placements for learners entering WBL programmes.
- The impact of the lack of placements or apprenticeships on the take-up of WBL should be monitored.

Progression from Entry to Employment

- While some learners make the transition from Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes to employment quite easily, others may find difficulty in progressing from E2E to first jobs or Apprenticeships in one stage.

Recommendation

- Better support for progression from E2E is required, accompanied by a broader range of options.

HE progression and WBL

- Learners and employers are not informed about the progression route from WBL to higher education (HE).

Recommendation

- The opportunities for progression to higher education from WBL should be promoted through the local provision of case studies.

⁶ This was a need identified by an earlier LSDA study and is being addressed with regard to Apprenticeships under the recent reform in the form of a 'clearing house' for school leavers.

⁷ The LSC has commissioned a feasibility study for a youth portal.

Background and context

LSDA has been investigating the effectiveness of the processes in place for securing entry into WBL, including the provision of CAG, and recruitment into WBL provision. The study looked at how the current processes for securing entry into WBL programmes could be improved and examined the roles of key players in the effective promotion of WBL to young people.

Rationale for the research

Clear, impartial and accessible advice and information about all possible post-16 options is essential to ensure that young people make the most appropriate career choice. Young people need support when making decisions about learning and career options in relation to their goals, aspirations, abilities and the labour market context. However, there is a concern that links between schools and post-16 providers are not uniformly strong, which limits the development of mutual understanding and the scope and impartiality of information presented to learners. Accurate information on WBL is not routinely available to 14–19 year olds. The relatively low take-up of MAs was thought by the Cassels report to be due in some part to the way they are promoted and presented (DfES 2001).

The Connexions service is a crucial part of the communications system that links prospective learners in WBL to the opportunities available. However, Connexions PAs may not be fully aware of WBL opportunities or actively promote them to young people. The arrangements for careers advice have been in transition over the last few years, and changes in emphasis in the Connexions service towards concerted support for young people at risk of social exclusion may have had a knock-on effect on general support for careers education for all young people.

Becoming an apprentice involves a complex process of finding an employer who is willing to both provide the young person with a job and sponsor their apprenticeship, as well as finding a WBL provider to supply the learning programme. There are many gaps in this process, with no single agency to guide young people through it. Transition into and between WBL can be complicated and may deter participation by learners for whom WBL could be a valuable progression route.

Scope of the research

It is within this context that the research investigated the effectiveness of CAG in relation to the take-up of WBL programmes by young people. The project objectives were to:

- identify patterns of recruitment into WBL nationally and in five selected local LSC areas
- consider recent changes to CAG provision and any evaluations of its effectiveness
- examine the process for recruiting young people onto WBL programmes.

Definition of CAG

The terms careers advice and guidance (CAG), careers education and guidance (CEG), careers education, careers guidance, and careers information, advice and guidance are generally used interchangeably. This research defined CAG for school leavers, for the purpose of this project, as the provision of specific information on possible occupational and learning pathways. This advice may, for example, indicate how to enter a certain career and what routes may be the most appropriate. Information of this type is generally provided by a careers adviser within the school and by careers professionals within the Connexions service. CAG could be located in the school curriculum within CEG and be

delivered by careers teachers, form tutors and careers advisers. CEG helps individuals to investigate opportunities and make choices that are both realistic and ambitious (QCA 1999).

Method

The research briefly comprised:

- a review of the literature on recent developments in CAG for young people and of the evaluations or inspections of this service. The review helped to identify key aspects of the provision of effective careers guidance, which the study investigated further
- a statistical analysis of the proportion of school leavers in the selected LSC areas who progress into WBL, their success rates and a comparison of these statistics with statistics for England as a whole
- interviews and focus groups with careers teachers, head teachers, Connexions staff, learners, providers, employers and local LSC representatives and a questionnaire to parents drawn from five local LSC areas.

Findings

A review of recent developments in CAG

Introduction

The literature review on recent developments in CAG looked at the significant shifts in the statutory, structural and curriculum importance of CAG over the last decade. It revealed a number of key concerns, which are summarised below.⁸

Change in policy and status of CEG

CAG now targets particular groups of learners deemed 'at risk'. Simultaneously, there has been a decrease in the amount of contact CEG services have with students that are of average or higher academic ability. It has been suggested by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) that the focus on 'at risk' learners may have had a negative effect upon more academic students, with an increase in drop-out from post-16 academic courses possibly due to the insufficient preparation and advice students are receiving before selecting this option (Morris *et al.* 2001).

Current scope of CAG

The majority of schools make some CEG provision for students in Years 9–11 within the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. This provision can range from between 10 to 15 hours of CEG per year for students in Years 9–11. Initial contact between young people and Connexions may be through individual referral by the school, or by Connexions being offered as a service to all students. However, not all young people have an individual interview with Connexions, and priority may be given to those young people deemed most at risk of social exclusion.

Evaluations of CAG

Area-wide inspections of provision undertaken by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) found CAG to be neither impartial nor comprehensive in nearly half of the areas inspected (ALI/Ofsted 2003). Schools failed to provide adequate information concerning WBL and other options available outside of their sixth form and were keen to retain a large proportion of their leaving-age cohort to achieve target numbers. Pressure from parents on careers professionals also led to young people being advised to stay on in education rather than seeking an apprenticeship. A separate evaluation by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) found that detailed awareness of the features and content of MAs was often lacking among careers professionals, and there was some indication that these programmes were perceived to be for the less able (DfES 2001).

Appraisal of guidance by users

Young people entering A-levels, employment or training felt that CEG had not prepared them adequately for what to expect. CEG provision was seen to lack coherence and the preferred method of individual, face-to-face guidance was decreasing.

⁸ The full literature review is contained in Appendix 1.

Appraisal of CAG by school-based providers

Careers service staff expressed a lack of confidence in the CEG provision offered and many were unsure if the school was the best place to deliver CEG to Year 11 pupils. Careers service staff and other school colleagues felt that there was a lack of clarity concerning the role and purpose of CEG, and possibly due to this, provision was subject to pressure from other areas of the curriculum. Few of the staff involved in delivering CEG were qualified to the same level for this function as careers coordinators. This lack of careers guidance expertise meant that programmes were not always coherent or comprehensive.

Other sources of information on WBL

Careers professionals were considered by school leavers to provide more accurate information about WBL than family members or employers. However, learners went to family members for first-hand information on vocational experience. Learners observed that their family knew them better than anyone else and could, therefore, advise them on routes that would suit their personality and abilities. Despite this reliance on the family as a source of information, little guidance is aimed at parents and employers with the purpose of equipping them to advise young people on general post-16 routes and MAs in particular.

Conclusions from the review

The review identified a range of issues associated with gaining entry into WBL, which led to the conclusion that accurate, impartial information is scarce and that young people of all abilities are not routinely encouraged to pursue WBL. This may be particularly important for young people with borderline achievement levels who may not excel in further academic study but who could make significant progress through the vocational route.

Key principles for effective entry into WBL

The review suggested the following key principles and associated questions which needed to be considered in order to secure effective entry into WBL for young people:

- *CAG availability*

What CAG provision is made for young people in schools and colleges to enable them to make informed choices about their futures?

- *CAG relating to WBL and MAs*

What specific advice and guidance relating to WBL and MAs is given to young people to enable them to make informed choices about their futures?

- *Professional development of staff*

How are the staff involved in giving students CAG relating to WBL and MAs kept up to date with skills, knowledge and experience to fulfil their role?

- *Support agencies and educational organisations*

What local arrangements exist for support agencies, educational organisations and training providers to help young people and employers to engage in WBL and MAs?

- *Supply and demand*

What evidence is there to show that local WBL programmes and MAs contribute to meeting local and regional skills needs and young people's career aspirations?

- *Recruitment into WBL and MAs*

How do the local recruitment processes work to match learners to WBL opportunities and entry into MAs?

These questions formed the basis of the interviews and focus groups conducted with interested parties in five local LSC areas.

Data analysis

A statistical analysis of the proportion of the school-leaving cohort entering WBL was undertaken in order to ascertain patterns of participation in this form of provision. The analysis used data from the LSC's Individual Learner Record (ILR) 2001/02 and 2002/03 and data drawn from other sources such as the 2001 Census. It considered progression into WBL and success rates for England as a whole and compared these with rates within five local LSC areas.

The analysis of data from the local LSC regions showed regional variation in the proportion of school leavers entering WBL.⁹ While this data alone cannot confirm a causal relationship between CAG and post-16 transitions, or whether CAG has evolved to accommodate the preferred transitions, differences in post-16 destinations between the regions may indicate differences in the advice and guidance being provided.

Consultation in local LSC areas

The project consulted widely with interested parties on the provision of advice and guidance for young people. The consultation was concentrated in five local LSC areas to ensure that it encompassed a geographical spread, including urban and rural areas with varying degrees of success with WBL recruitment and achievement, and separate or combined arrangements for Connexions and careers services.

The initial analysis of participation and achievement within WBL suggested differences across regions, which led to the selection of the five local LSC areas.

The consultation involved:

- telephone and face-to-face meetings with head teachers, careers teachers, local LSC staff, Connexions staff and providers
- focus-group meetings with learners
- a postal survey of parents.

⁹ See Appendix 2 for a full analysis.

The five selected local LSCs provided advice and support to identify participants in the consultation. A breakdown of participants is shown in Figure 1.¹⁰

Figure 1. Breakdown of participants in the consultation

	Regions from which local LSCs were drawn					<i>Total</i>
	East Midlands	Eastern	London	South East	North East	
<i>Type of participant</i>						
Head teachers	3	3	0	1	3	10
Careers teachers	3	3	0	1	3	10
Learners	5 x Year 11 4 x Year 12	5 x Years 10 & 11 6 x Year 12	9 E2E learners	6 x Year 11	7 x Year 10	42
Employers	3	2	2	2	3	12
Local LSC staff	2	2	2	2	2	10
Connexions/careers service staff	4	4	4	4	4	20
Learning providers	3	3	3	3	3	15
Survey to parents/carers	9	11	9	6	7	42 (7 returned)

Interviews were conducted by telephone or in person and each lasted approximately 45 minutes. Learners took part in focus-group meetings comprising between five and eight participants and lasting no more than 40 minutes.

On the advice of the schools taking part in the consultation that focus groups with parents would be difficult to arrange and the turnout poor, a postal survey was used to gather parents' opinions on the CAG their child had received.

¹⁰ All participants in the research were informed that their remarks would be non-attributable and that only regional references would be made to identify the case studies.

Findings from the consultation

CAG availability

Key points

- Careers teachers felt that learners' fear of being labelled as having problems could prevent them seeking advice from Connexions.
- In some cases, Connexions staff had found it difficult to get into schools regularly because of large caseloads.
- Student dissatisfaction with CAG included the belief that advice was influenced by the teachers' desire for them to stay on at school, or by teachers' lack of knowledge and personal experience of other vocational pathways.
- Insufficient or out-of-date information about specific jobs or irrelevant classroom activities and tasks in careers education sessions were other criticisms of the provision.
- Teachers and parents were deemed by both local LSC and Connexions staff to be the most influential on students' decision-making. However, only one parent out of seven responding to the survey strongly agreed that parents were fully included in the process of giving information and guidance to their children.
- Neither the providers nor the employers interviewed were aware or informed about the provision for CAG. However, all believed that they had a role to play in this process.

Interviewees were asked what CAG provision is made for young people in schools and colleges to enable them to make informed choices about their futures.

The schools

Models of CAG provision

The most common model of provision in schools was the inclusion of CEG as part of PSHE or within timetabled tutorial periods. Some of the schools in the sample had one teacher providing all careers education lessons, ensuring that a common message is communicated to all, while in others this was undertaken by form or group tutors, supported by the careers coordinator. The Connexions PAs were responsible for providing information, advice and guidance through groupwork and individual interviews with students in Years 9–11. Local business speakers contributed to some programmes.

A third of the schools and their Connexions PAs attempted to interview all students within a year group individually, while the rest provided interviews to those who were perceived to require the most support and help. There were also opportunities for students to self-refer or to be referred to a PA by a teacher. All careers teachers said they ensured that all young people had the opportunity to self-refer or to be referred by a teacher for an individual interview with the Connexions PA. However, three careers teachers recognised that other barriers could prevent learners seeking advice from Connexions, such as the fear by some students that they would be labelled as having problems or be required to provide their home address for further follow ups.

One head teacher provided an example of how the school had developed a different model of guidance for Years 10 and 11 in September 2004:

A school in the eastern region has moved from a model of one careers lesson every two weeks to a programme of three guidance days a year in Years 10 and 11. This provides a holistic personal, social, health and careers education programme, run by tutors with the support of the Connexions coordinator and PAs, work-related coordinator, careers coordinator, outside speakers and other support. It also includes individual interviews for students with their tutors, to review progress, targets and predicted grades.

The changing role of Connexions

Three head teachers voiced a desire for a closer working relationship with Connexions. Another requested more individually tailored advice and guidance for students, especially those with learning difficulties or disabilities, as it was thought that currently all students were given the same advice. A number of careers teachers voiced concerns regarding the approach taken by Connexions, which deals with all social aspects of a young person's development: drugs, pregnancy, careers and homelessness. It was also believed that careers education was being diluted and that in some cases Connexions staff had found it difficult to get into schools regularly because of large caseloads. They considered that PAs' information was not always up to date. One careers teacher suggested that to be effective, Connexions PAs should not only have daily contact with the school, but also with employers. The majority of the careers teachers acknowledged that it was still early days in the development of Connexions and that the impact of the changes to the service had not yet settled down.

Careers teachers believed that schools ensured impartiality in careers education through the use of external providers such as Connexions PAs, employers and post-16 providers, including learning providers, to support the CAG process. However this view was not supported by any of the other interest groups interviewed, who believed that schools and teachers still strongly influenced young people's post-16 option choices, and in some cases did not pass on information about WBL.

Student assessment of CAG

Few students spoke highly of careers education programmes. Reasons for dissatisfaction included the belief that advice was influenced by the teachers' desire for students to stay on at school, or by teachers' lack of knowledge and personal experience of other vocational pathways. Some students suggested that there should be more individual careers education rather than group provision that ignored individual interests and abilities. Insufficient or out-of-date information about specific jobs or irrelevant classroom activities and tasks in careers education sessions were other criticisms of the provision.

Views on teachers' ability to provide careers information and advice seemed to be related to the age of the student, with younger students believing their teachers held current and relevant information.

Our teachers are very well up to date. Some teachers have this [WBL] background.

Year 10 student

They [teachers] don't give you as much information as you need. They encourage you. I don't know if they had the information.

Year 11 student

Our careers lessons were taken by a not very experienced, in-house careers teacher.

Year 12 student

Ten E2E learners in London, having left school, had little or no memory of any careers education provision as part of the curriculum.¹¹ Their only recollection was receiving information and guidance from Connexions PAs. It was difficult to ascertain whether the problem was that they had not experienced careers education programmes or whether they had been forgotten, perhaps indicating the lack of relevance.

In all focus groups with students and learners, the Connexions brand was identified positively as a source of information and all seemed aware of the role of the PAs whether they had been for an individual interview or not.

Local LSC and Connexions staff

Impact of changes to the Connexions service

The 10 local LSC staff interviewed all commented that CAG provision is still developing due to the changes created in setting up the Connexions service. Views as to whether the changes would ensure the provision of high-quality CAG differed across local areas. Some staff believed that the loss of a dedicated careers service would continue to damage the quality of CAG provided.

There are gaps in the provision. Connexions is not the Careers Service. There is muddled thinking in this whole area. A vacuum has been created. Few schools have a guidance curriculum. Schools can provide broader PSHE, but not in-depth or individual careers guidance.

Local LSC staff member

Other local LSC staff promoted the concept of Connexions but had concerns about the current level of resourcing. This view was supported by a number of the Connexions staff. All local LSC staff interviewed voiced concern that the Connexions service was spread so thinly that it was not able to give the level of information, advice and guidance needed by learners.

The role of Connexions is essential. It is one of the best partnerships in the area. But there is a serious deficiency in the resource available to do the job it is meant to do. We must do whatever we can to make sure Connexions has these resources. Face-to-face contact with young people and employers to encourage participation in WBL/MAs is the most successful – we need this – and at present we can't do this.

Local LSC staff member

¹¹ Definition of E2E: *The primary aim of E2E ... is to enable learners to progress into employment with training or onto further learning programmes. The curriculum offer will comprise three interdependent core strands: basic and key skills; vocational skills and development; and personal and social development. Learners on E2E will, where appropriate, have the opportunity to gain qualifications up to and including Level 1 on the National Qualifications Framework. Learners may also work towards units of other qualifications. E2E is a full-time WBL programme and planned attendance should be 30 hours a week. Learners may start by attending for 16 hours a week, but must build this up to 30 hours as soon as possible (LSC 2004).*

There used to be four like me, now I am the only one in the team. So, it is good that Priority 1 learners are getting help, but Priority 3 are not getting interviews and are making the wrong choices.

Connexions PA

Teachers and parents were deemed by both local LSC and Connexions staff to be the most influential on students' decision-making. However, only one parent out of seven responding to the postal survey strongly agreed that parents were fully included in the process of giving information and guidance to their children. Parents were receiving information from careers teachers on general post-16 options, but this was supplemented with information from family and friends. One local LSC believed there was a need for local LSCs to work with parents and teachers in ensuring their understanding of different career pathways.

Connexions staff saw themselves as giving fair and impartial advice to young people. Views of the Connexions staff interviewed varied from those who thought that academic students knew what they wanted to do and needed no support, to those who thought that academic students did not know what they needed and required as much support as their non-academic peers.

Both local LSC staff and Connexions PAs raised a further issue in two parts of the country, in that not all PAs have careers and guidance training or sufficient knowledge and experience of WBL. These PAs may not necessarily refer to their careers-trained colleagues when unsure of how to advise a young person on career choices.

Learning providers and employers

External links to school-based CAG

Seven of the 15 learning providers interviewed did not have any direct links with schools or colleges and recruited learners mainly from employers. Neither the providers nor the employers interviewed were aware of or informed about the provision of CAG. However, all believed that employers had a role to play in this process, although finding resources for this may be difficult for small firms.

The eight providers with links with schools were the larger or FE college providers. They received information from newsletters or through membership of local 14–19 steering groups, E2E providers' groups, Connexions liaison groups, or through their work with Connexions PAs.

Not all employers had direct links with schools, and the majority of employers that did worked with their local EBP to support the delivery of CAG through activities such as presentations to students on career opportunities and support for school industry days.

The majority of employers and all providers were aware of the role of Connexions in the delivery of CAG, but thought that young people still did not have all the information that they needed to make a fully informed decision.

CAG relating to WBL and MAs

Key points

- All schools gave basic information on WBL/MAs in CEG programmes or in assemblies to learners in Years 9–11. However, detailed information was targeted towards learners for whom the academic route was considered to be unsuitable.
- Local information was thought by most interviewees to be more useful than national literature.
- WBL materials were generally available to students in careers libraries or in the careers section of the main school library, although there was no consistency in their availability or distribution.
- Materials relating to WBL were confusing, implying that there was a large pot of apprenticeships available when in reality not all the opportunities existed.
- WBL/MA marketing material could not compete with material produced by the local FE colleges.
- Work experience is not always giving pre-16 students a positive view of the workplace, which in turn could contribute to the poor image of WBL.
- Where employers and providers felt that they had a part to play in the CAG process, they expressed the need to sell the benefits of WBL to students, parents and teachers.

The interviewees were asked what specific advice and guidance relating to WBL and MAs is given to young people to enable them to make informed choices about their futures.

The schools

WBL information available to school professionals

All head teachers, careers teachers, local LSC and Connexions staff described a range of promotional materials that informed students about WBL/MAs. These were provided by LSC National Office (NO) and some local LSCs, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and learning providers. A minority of careers teachers commented that they did not receive any WBL information from local learning providers. Careers teachers stated that they received information on specific MA vacancies from Connexions, but they felt that there was insufficient information available on this pathway compared with other routes. Materials were also said to be general rather than sector- or occupation-specific. Local information was thought by most interviewees to be more useful than national literature.

WBL information available to learners

WBL materials were generally available to students in careers libraries or in the careers section of the main school library, although there was no consistency in their availability or distribution. One parent complained that guidance on 'non-academic' options was confusing and that accurate information was not readily available. Learners also saw the internet as providing material on WBL through national WBL websites and local Connexions websites, but not many parents referred to the internet as a way that they had personally found out further information about WBL. As not all students had easy access to the internet, this was not seen as a good way of providing initial information about or marketing WBL/MAs to learners.

It was suggested by one Connexions PA that conventional marketing is not necessarily the most effective way of reaching young people, as they are more likely to take notice of innovative methods targeted at their age group, such as information via mobile phone text messages or music websites. Year 11 and 12 students still at school found

publications that had college/WBL/MA information helpful. However, the overwhelming response from the 30 out of 33 school-based students interviewed was that WBL/MAs were not a choice they would consider. There were no examples given of the effectiveness of the existing materials being evaluated.

All schools gave basic information on WBL/MAs in CEG programmes or in assemblies to learners in Years 9–11. This was followed up in some schools by work on WBL, conducted in smaller groups, run by Connexions PAs, and which targeted learners for whom the academic route was thought to be unsuitable, or who said that they wanted to leave school and go to work. Some schools also promoted local MA vacancies to Year 11 on notice boards. This provision was supplemented by industry days or work opportunities days and mock job interviews involving employers.

An 11–18 school in the East Midlands provides its Year 9 learners with a rolling programme of external speakers from different employment sectors. In Year 10, learners have industry days, facilitated by employers, and FE college visits, with time spent in different vocational areas. They also work on CVs and letters of application, and receive training on the use of Kudos and Kangaroo (computer packages). In Year 11, two days' preparation for work experience is provided, including a mock interview with an employer.

Schools' relationship with Connexions

All careers teachers interviewed spoke highly of the work of Connexions PAs and there was evidence of good relationships between teaching staff and PAs in delivering information about WBL/MAs.

We have two good PAs who are in school once or twice a week, and they are good at picking up MA applications.

Careers coordinator

Learners engaged in E2E programmes had been guided towards these programmes and specific learning providers by Connexions and friends, after leaving school and starting full-time college courses.¹² Some of the learners had wanted to start WBL but could not find a job or placement and so were advised to start a full-time vocational college course as an alternative. Others had not been able to join their first-choice vocational course and were offered unsuitable second choices. The majority of the learners had left the college courses, either because they did not pass certain exams or because they did not like the courses. The choices offered to the learners before entering E2E indicated that individual advice and guidance was limited. Getting the learners to start any kind of course appears to have been the greatest priority, and learners were not given sufficient help to find jobs or placements.

Importance of work experience

All learners and a couple of parents mentioned work experience as one way of finding out about the world of work and helping to make decisions about future choices. A number of criticisms were voiced and improvements suggested by both parents and learners, many

¹² LSC guidance indicates that most young people accessing E2E will have been referred from Connexions. This may follow a period of the learner working with a Connexions PA to address barriers to learning. Learners aged 16–18 have a right to a place on E2E in line with the young person's guarantee. Other routes into E2E include self-referral or entrance via partner organisations on recommendation. Providers can recruit eligible young people onto E2E from any location they see fit, provided the learners meet the eligibility requirements specified by the relevant local LSC.

of which indicate that work experience is not always giving pre-16 students a positive view of the workplace, which in turn could contribute to the poor image of WBL.

Suggestions included:

- *Provide a shadowing experience for a day in a career of real interest to the students.*
- *Provide a wider range of work experience placements in sectors like IT, not just shops and fast-food places.*
- *Take 16 year olds more seriously and don't treat them like skivvies.*
- *Ensure asylum seekers/refugees have 'catch-up' work experiences to help them understand the workplace (one school).*
- *Encourage teachers to make more of a connection between work experience and the courses studied.*
- *Provide work experience for all students – not just low-ability students or those who say they want to go to work (one school).*

Local LSC and Connexions staff

Promotion of WBL

All the local LSCs consulted took part in national marketing campaigns and had all run their own local ones at various times to raise awareness of WBL opportunities to both young people and employers. National marketing literature was deemed by most PAs interviewed to be unrealistic, showing no real job destinations. The material was often difficult to obtain and was not available in quantities that allowed wide distribution to students and parents. Some of the materials were also confusing, implying that there was a large pot of apprenticeships available, when in reality the opportunities did not exist. Local LSC staff stated that if WBL provision was a 'complete package', ie with training/job/placement all provided, they would be happy to promote the provision more widely, but that at present this is not the case, particularly with the lack of jobs and placements.

The majority of PAs interviewed also observed that marketing material on MAs produced by WBL providers could not compete with material produced by the local FE colleges that often had attractive stands of literature in most schools. Smaller learning providers were unable to match this because they did not have the resources to produce glossy material.

Local MA awards were seen as a good way of raising the profile of WBL/MAs to young people and employers, and three local LSCs spoke of them as being highly successful. National awards were seen as less useful by both local LSC and Connexions staff as they did not generate a high level of local press interest to promote the programmes to employers, learners and parents.

Learning providers and employers

External involvement in the promotion of WBL in schools

Of the 15 learning providers interviewed, the majority were not aware of what specific CAG was given to young people in schools to enable them to make informed choices about WBL.

The eight learning providers with school links were increasingly being invited into schools to talk about post-16 routes and were also working with schools to support the delivery of vocational taster programmes, Applied GCSEs and the IFP. In this way a progression route was emerging that expanded post-16 choice for students. However, it was reported by a

number of learning providers that they were often only invited to talk to groups of students who had lower levels of achievement.

Where employers and providers felt that they had a part to play in the CAG process, they expressed the need to sell the benefits of WBL to students, parents and teachers. One FE college-based learning provider used a range of ways to work with schools and employers, including hosting themed events for construction, hospitality and catering sector employers and inviting local schools to attend. One employer found it beneficial to encourage its modern apprentices to act as ambassadors in local schools, talking about their experiences. Other employers and providers worked with Connexions to host open days at their workplaces for teachers and Connexions staff, to provide them with an insight into the structure of the organisation and the jobs, career and training opportunities available. In one case, the second time such an open day was run it was not well attended by teachers. This was thought to be because of the cost of supply cover to release the teachers, but it may also indicate that WBL is not a high priority for teachers and Connexions staff.

Learning providers expressed the need for better communication with schools. Two providers suggested that there should be an impartial individual or organisation with a defined role of promoting WBL/MA in schools and to advise young people about local training provision, highlighting excellence when applicable. This view indicated that providers do not see Connexions, with its broad focus on all the development needs of young people, as promoting WBL.

A group of six north-east learning providers is considering employing a schools liaison officer to work with 14 local secondary schools. It is planning to develop an exhibition/roadshow that could be based at a school for a week at a time. This would be open during and after school hours to enable the providers to have the opportunity to talk to students, parents and teachers about the full range of WBL and MA programmes.

Professional development of staff

Key points

- Teachers involved in careers education programmes do not routinely receive professional development and updating on WBL issues.
- Local LSC colleagues and Connexions representatives thought that many new Connexions PAs had no knowledge of WBL. A number of Connexions staff interviewed suggested that there should be compulsory training in WBL information and access to online services.
- Connexions PAs acknowledged that teachers could not have a complete knowledge of WBL due to its complexity. Instead, it was felt that knowing when and how to refer learners to Connexions was the most important knowledge for teachers to have, so that learners might receive impartial and accurate information on WBL.

Interviewees were asked how the staff involved in giving students CAG relating to WBL and MAs kept up to date with skills, knowledge and experience to fulfil their role.

The schools

Opportunities for staff development in WBL

There was a perception by all of the schools interviewed that opportunities for staff professional development had reduced over the last few years. Professional development for careers teachers and coordinators included external provision from the local education authority (LEA), Connexions, EBPs and other providers. Professional development placements in business were still offered, despite the poor take-up by careers teachers and coordinators. No examples of professional development relating specifically to WBL were given by any school.

Opinions of head teachers were divided as to whether tutors involved in careers education needed to be kept up to date about WBL to fulfil their roles.

We have reduced the amount of in-service training – we need teachers in front of classes. Ten years ago we had teacher placements into business. That has all stopped.

Head teacher

Our careers coordinator has access to almost everything she wants. We never say no to her. The rest of the staff are woefully ignorant about the modern world of work. But not every tutor needs to be up to date, providing you have the right structure.

Deputy head teacher

We will be investing in the guidance team. It is time-consuming to brief all the tutors. They know the children. Our guidance team, Connexions, subject specialists in our vocational sectors and outside supporters bring in the knowledge and information about WBL/MAs.

Head teacher

There is no training for tutors. That is interesting. I had never thought of that before. Maybe we should have some twilight sessions for tutors to make them aware of what is involved in MAs.

Careers coordinator

Models for increasing staff knowledge of WBL

WRL programmes use work-related activities as a context for learning. Activities are designed to allow students to experience and develop the necessary skills for working life, to learn about working practices and to actively learn through challenges set in work-related contexts. Using teams of teachers from across institutions was seen as a way of both developing teaching staff and ensuring the quality of WRL programmes.

In the north east, two schools are working with two training providers in the engineering and business administration sectors. Fifteen Key stage 4 students work on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in one of these two sectors. They are team-taught by a trainer and a teacher, with professional benefits to both. The idea for the project was stimulated by the IFP and it is currently funded by the Regional Development Agency (RDA).

Careers coordinators mainly had responsibility for briefing tutors on WBL for the delivery of careers education programmes. They acknowledged their tutor colleagues' lack of knowledge and information on WBL, some seeing it as not necessary, others as a weakness or an oversight of the school.

Professional development of staff is a weakness in the school. In the careers fair, the tutors said they were pleased that the PAs were there as they didn't know the information being asked about. There is a lack of interest in WBL by teachers and it is outside their experience.

Careers teacher

Local LSC and Connexions staff

Local LSCs' role in school staff development concerning WBL

Local LSCs were aware of the need for teachers in schools to have a positive attitude to WBL and to be informed about provision. However, the methods they suggested to provide solutions varied, including the local LSC's possible role.

It is not local LSCs' role to ensure teachers are up to date other than through education-business links. The LEA is responsible and holds the budget for teachers' continuous professional development. Most teachers have never experienced the WBL pathway and have little understanding. They are also under pressure to recruit for the sixth form. The answer is to address the 14-19 curriculum and create a culture change, creating a positive attitude to the vocational pathway.

Local LSC staff member

Several local LSC interviewees suggested activities that they could organise or contribute to that would involve not only schools but also Connexions PAs and others. The training needs of new Connexions staff were also raised. New PAs often had no knowledge of WBL and there was a request by a number of Connexions staff for compulsory training in WBL information and for access to online services.

Only one local LSC area of the five interviewed indicated that the mapping for the 14–19 curriculum had included future training needs for teachers and other staff involved in WBL. However, two local LSCs suggested that the professional development of teachers and trainers had already commenced, with the closer working relationships between schools and colleges through the IFP.

One local LSC area identified a model of professional development, which involved teachers and employers finding out more about WBL:

Visits to local learning providers had been successfully organised for a number of years in one Midlands town. Groups of teachers and employers had visited the providers to find out more about the WBL provision and training methods. This was organised by the local EBP.

Although the programme was considered beneficial, the local LSC thought that it was unlikely to run in other parts of the county. It was considered too expensive, with supply cover for teachers a necessary element of the budget.

Updating Connexions staff

Connexions staff identified a range of ways in which their staff were kept up to date with WBL/MAs, including cross-partnership training, multi-agency PA meetings, team and update meetings, visits to training providers and local networking events. PAs said that they were offered all kinds of courses but often saw the training as not meeting their needs, being rhetoric rather than practical, and so they tended to rely on more informal ways of keeping up to date such as networking and contacting colleagues, which they found time-consuming. Two local LSCs already offered or intended to provide briefings for PAs to keep them informed. One of these wished to include a feedback loop to check that the PAs were giving accurate information to students and learners.

In two areas, Connexions staff supported the professional development of teachers by running courses for careers teachers on topics such as careers education and setting up work experience, although take-up was not good. Others were willing to provide input into school in-service training, but they did not feel that this offer was taken up by schools regularly. None of the examples of Connexions professional development provision for teachers was specifically about WBL.

The majority of PAs interviewed acknowledged that teachers could not know everything about WBL, as it was so complex. It was stated that knowing when to refer learners to others, such as PAs, was the most important way of ensuring that impartial and accurate information on WBL was given.

Learning providers and employers

Employers recommended that the inclusion of information on their and learning providers' roles in WBL and the skills needs of employers should form part of the professional development of teachers, Connexions and Employment Service staff.

Support agencies and educational organisations

Key points

- A variety of collaborative activities, including 14–19 education forums, were mentioned by schools as offering potential to work with other organisations to help young people engage in WBL. However, it was recognised that WBL would only constitute a small part of the agenda.
- A number of staff in local LSCs had relationships with employers, but there was little sharing of information across the organisation.
- Similar concerns were expressed in one Connexions area: that internal communication was the main issue that needed to be overcome to ensure effective working practice.
- Employers were not aware of any organised referral systems in place for employers interested in engaging in WBL.
- There was little evidence that local support agencies were routinely collaborating to meet learner and employer demands and to increase participation in WBL by employer organisations. However, some interesting new networks were being set up to focus on the needs and views of learning providers and employers. Jointly funded employer liaison posts had significantly increased the number of apprenticeships created.
- A one-stop shop for activities involving employers, education and training needs to be established. This would rationalise requests from local organisations to employers regarding work placements, which can reach a burdensome level.

The interviewees were asked to describe what local arrangements existed for support agencies, educational organisations and training providers to help young people and employers to engage in WBL and MAs.

The schools

The need for cooperation and collaboration

All head teachers and deputies mentioned 14–19 education forums and head teacher network meetings as their main way of working with other organisations to help young people engage in WBL. However, a lack of knowledge was evident in the schools interviewed as to what local arrangements existed to engage employers. A minority of head teachers/deputy head teachers and careers coordinators saw Education Business Link Consortia (EBLC) having a key role to play in leading the development of WBL. There was confusion about the difference between education–business link activities, WRL and WBL. All three require the engagement of employers but there was no evidence of any attempts by local support agencies to collaborate and coordinate these demands and provide a cost-effective way to engage employers across all three areas of activity.

There was evidence from careers teachers in two schools of local arrangements involving a range of partners that could encourage the take-up of WBL by young people and employers:

Two schools in East Anglia work with their local FE college to deliver a 'Skillsforce' programme for a cohort of 20 pupils in Key stage 4, which is funded through the Education Action Zone (EAZ). This includes two and a half days studying GCSE core subjects and two and a half days at college. The programme includes work experience, an ASDAN Youth Award, a Duke of Edinburgh Award life-saving certificate and a Young Enterprise award. Progression routes from the programme include higher-level qualifications at FE colleges and apprenticeships with work experience placement providers.

IFP with an FE college enables other students to work towards or achieve NVQ Level 1 qualifications. This programme is provided for one afternoon a week and there is good take-up from 'academic' students. Work experience is an element of this programme. Students are guaranteed a place at college post-16 and can progress to a higher level course than their peers, who have not had the same experience, and can start an NVQ Level 2 programme. This programme is well supported by employers from the motor vehicle and construction sectors, which provide work-shadowing opportunities, visits and presentations to interested students.

An 11-19 school in the East Midlands works with a local construction employers' group that funds a Saturday club at the local FE college. The one-day programme is free, including lunch, and is open to all students in Years 9-11. Opportunities on offer include painting and decorating, plastering, engineering and motor vehicle maintenance. One student has already negotiated with the school and college to take him on a programme for one day a week while he is still at school.

Connexions PAs were identified by all the careers teachers as the strongest partners in helping students to engage in WBL/MAs. Careers teachers who had attended local LSC briefings on WBL had found them useful and wished that they were regular events.

Local LSC and Connexions staff

Networking and support opportunities

Local LSC and Connexions staff identified many local arrangements that existed for key organisations to help young people and employers engage in WBL. These included training provider networks, 14-19 education forums, employer networks and head teacher networks.

In most of these local networks and meetings, WBL issues would constitute only a small part of the agenda. One local LSC staff member provided a voice to the general concern that the numerous meetings had little day-to-day operational benefit to the take-up or achievement of WBL. It was stated that all the relationships are in place, but it is not clear whether they are having the maximum impact.

There used to be lots more communication funded and channelled in the old TEC. We had follow-up and representatives to market WBL/MAs to employers.

Local LSC staff member

There was a gap in the local LSC being involved in employer fora following the demise of the TECs. But now the RDA and local LSC are seen as strategic convenors with a good relationship with the LEA and other bodies. We can get people round the table but they are not always able to work through the issues of WBL/MAs in their own organisations.

Local LSC staff member

The view that there were many meetings but not many outcomes was reinforced by Connexions PAs, who stated that their closest working relationship was with schools and local learning providers and that they would like more direct support and contact with local LSCs. In two areas there was some resentment that the local LSC appeared to be doing nothing to get employers involved in WBL, except producing glossy marketing material.

Promoting employer involvement with WBL

There were, however, examples where the issue of employer engagement was being tackled by collaborative projects in which local LSCs played an important lead role. One area was running a major pilot project to increase the number of jobs/placements available to WBL/MAs:

A pilot project in the East Midlands involves the local council, Connexions, the local LSC and the local college. It offers 20 'at-risk' Year 11 and care leavers the chance to enrol in an E2E programme and take up to 12 work taster days in different council jobs, helping them to choose an occupational direction. After following this programme they will be eligible for one of 20 ring-fenced Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMAs) in the council. If this is successful then the council will use this method of recruitment for 25% of its future annual jobs; that would be 400 jobs via WBL/MAs. There has also been interest from other employers to see how this works.

In some areas, the setting up of learning provider networks was seen as a positive move to ensure greater collaboration and representation for the smaller provider. This approach was present in four local LSC areas interviewed. One local LSC proposed to offer a contract to the local provider network, to engage employers and secure placements/jobs as a way of increasing the take-up of WBL/MA programmes. The network will then develop this as a service to its members.

Another local LSC was trying a different solution:

A new pilot starting in the north east will employ a recruitment consultant in an area of social deprivation to work with employers. There is a target of securing entry of 100 learners into MAs in the first year. The consultant, initially funded by the local LSC, will be based in the local Connexions office.

Internal communication

Internal communication within local LSCs was said by two of the five local LSCs visited to be an area needing further development, especially when working with employers. A number of teams within the local LSCs had relationships with employers, but there was sometimes no cross-over or collaboration between the people working within them to share information.

There was similar concern expressed in one Connexions area: that internal communication was the main issue that needed to be overcome to ensure effective working practice.

We must have a database that all staff can share. At present, we can key our data in about our clients but we can't see what anyone else writes about them, so that we can look at the whole relationship with Connexions.

Connexions PA

Connexions employer and vacancy units were named in two areas as valuable ways to work with employers. However, these teams had been reduced in size in the majority of the local LSCs sampled and did not have capacity to engage in additional work, limiting the possibility of them working to increase employer engagement. Connexions staff in all areas and who used to work for Careers Services thought that they had lost the close contact they used to have with employers and that this was having a negative effect on WBL. A couple of approaches to re-establish this bond were being developed. One area had a Connexions link person for each training provider to ensure a close working relationship. Another Connexions PA positively described a new local LSC-convened employer engagement group, which will bring together all agencies working with employers. Although not focusing just on WBL, it could prove helpful in forging links with employers.

The employer and vacancy unit of one of the regions sampled had been strengthened in the previous six months as a result of collaboration between Connexions and the local LSC. Two employer liaison adviser posts, jointly funded, were filled in January 2004, with the specific purpose of increasing the level of employer engagement in WBL and also helping to increase the number of young people participating in learning and training. It was stated that liaison officers were having a clear impact; since their appointment they had visited 168 employers throughout the county. As a result, 102 apprenticeships had been created within companies across the county (figures up to the end of June 2004).

Learning providers and employers

Partnership working

Learning providers most frequently mentioned Connexions PAs and employers as their local WBL partners.

Communication between learning providers and Connexions staff varied across the areas surveyed. Where it worked well, there was a close working relationship and evidence of partnership working, particularly at the interview and initial assessment stages of the recruitment process. Local areas that had more success in recruiting learners to WBL had established specific networks for learning providers. In contrast, where providers had representation only on general 14–19 forums, schools and colleges dominated the discussions. Such forums were not seen to promote WBL.

The majority of learning providers thought that despite the shortcomings of the Connexions service in promoting WBL, individual Connexions PAs provided excellent advice and support to young people and had a good understanding of the MA frameworks. The Connexions service was thought to have potentially further roles in working with employers and providers to give ongoing support while the learner is on a WBL/MA programme and in planning the next career move or exit strategy at the end of the programme. This view was supported by one of the parents, who herself was a Connexions PA.

Learning providers stated that they had a role to play in helping employers to understand WBL/MA routes, as many employers were not very clear about the opportunities and requirements of programmes, and there was a need to engage employers by promoting

the business benefits. This was confirmed by the employers interviewed, who were not aware of any organised referral systems in place for employers interested in engaging in WBL. Three employers had contacted learning providers when they had suitable vacancies for young people and those relationships had grown over time. One employer worked closely with a large private training provider with Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status for engineering and it now refers possible MAs to the employer.

Local employer collaboration may be a powerful way of encouraging employers that are reluctant to recruit a modern apprentice to their own company to take part in the programme.

In the north east, an engineering manufacturers' forum is considering setting up a central pool of modern apprentices not employed by one company, for years one and two of the MA. The modern apprentices would then be taken on by a single company in years three and four. This scheme would enable apprentices to move between companies to broaden their experience. It may enable SMEs to become more involved in MAs/WBL.

Two out of the 12 employers sampled commented that their local LSC promoted WBL and MAs to employers. Another employer received updates on developments in MAs from a national training centre where its company's apprentices had 15 weeks' residential training. However, there did not appear to be any systematic provision of information about WBL to employers to ensure they knew how to become engaged at local level.

Barriers to employer participation

In some rural areas employers felt that the lack of local off-the-job training provision was a barrier to some employers offering MA programmes. One employer identified the non-integration of the key skills element of the MA as an issue that prevented some employers from engaging in MAs and as affecting the retention of learners. His company had developed the following strategy to address the perceived problem:

In East Anglia an employer, which is also an NVQ centre, is introducing the Global on-line assessment (GOLA) system for the delivery of key skills end-of-unit tests, so that these can be carried out on the employer premises to fit in with the candidates' working day. This is seen as less daunting for trainees, who carry out their training in-house. The awarding body only requires 24 hours' notice for the candidate to register to take the test. The integration of key skills into the portfolio would be more useful as candidates could then see the skills' relevance to the workplace.

Providers believed that employers were overloaded with requests from a range of local organisations for jobs/work placements/experience that were an essential part of a number of programmes, and some say no to all requests. Some interviewees across sample groups requested a rationalisation of all the organisations making these requests and the setting up of a genuine one-stop shop for activities involving employers, education and training.

It was also suggested by all sample groups that there needed to be a local strategic group, to include employer, school, college and learning provider representation, to share ideas and act as champions to all involved in WBL development.

Supply and demand

Key points

- Information on skills needs did not appear to be routinely available to schools.
- Schools were experiencing some success in engaging learners in vocational areas via the Pathfinders projects and IFPs.
- Most professionals, employers and providers perceived a mismatch between the supply and demand of WBL opportunities on offer and the requirements of the employers, aspirations of the learners and local skills needs.
- Further employer involvement in WBL was deemed necessary to secure increased learner participation.
- Access to WBL routes was limited in rural locations.
- There was a perceived lack of parity by key stakeholders between the MA allowance and incentives available to learners pursuing further education.

Perceptions of WBL

- While many professionals recognise the potential of WBL as a pathway for young people to achieve high-level vocational qualifications, it is viewed largely as an option for learners of lower academic ability and not as an option for all learners, especially for learners seen as suitable for further academic study.
- Parents and young people with no experience of WBL see it as a choice made by those with modest academic success.

Key players from schools, local LSCs, Connexions, providers and employers were asked what evidence there was to show that local WBL programmes and MAs contributed to meeting local and regional skills needs and young people's career aspirations.

The schools

Awareness of local priorities

None of the head teachers and careers teachers/coordinators interviewed were aware of local targets for WBL/MAs and how these were set. Labour Market Information (LMI) was not received by schools on a regular basis. However, the majority of schools liaised with either local Chambers of Commerce or local FE college-based learning providers, or had used information received through EAZ membership to build up awareness of local skills needs.

Schools are not good at tuning in to WBL opportunities. What is involved is not abundantly clear to students or teachers. On the demand side, employers have ad-hoc relationships with schools. It isn't all joined up.

Head teacher

Tailoring school-based provision

One school in the sample had been developing a course to meet local skills needs. This course had begun as part of the school's application for a 14–19 Pathfinder project. Pathfinders are designed to test local delivery of 14–19 education and training in a range of settings, building on the increasingly distinctive specialisms of local schools, colleges and training providers.¹³

¹³ Pathfinders were proposed in the Green Paper H14–19: *extending opportunities, raising standards*, published in February 2002.

Following the scheme's apparent success, it had been expanded to include four other local schools.

A school in the north east developed a pilot programme before becoming a Pathfinder school. The head teacher worked with a large local company, which owned nine construction-related companies including its own training provider, to design a programme to suit the school, raise the learners' job aspirations and encourage lifelong learning. An added benefit for the employer was the improved retention rates on MA programmes. A total of 100 Year 10 students spent one week on generic employability training in a construction skill area of their choice, led by the training provider division of the group. After the first week, 50 students indicated an interest in taking part in a second week of the programme in Year 11. The second week covered all aspects of construction craft, technical and professional occupations. In the final stage, 30 students have been selected and will spend a further five days focusing on construction activities. It is anticipated that many of the final group of students will be offered MAs within the group of companies, depending on the specialism that they are interested in and availability. The school is interested in expanding the model to include healthcare and retail sector employers, where there is local growth in the labour market.

Within the schools in the sample it was found that the IFP had opened up the WBL pathway to some learners. IFP students had experienced learning in a college and often engaged in taster courses for a range of employment sectors. This helped them to make more informed choices at the end of Year 11.

All the schools interviewed offered at least one programme of WRL at Key stage 4 including Applied GCSEs, vocational tasters or IFP; some schools involved FE colleges and/or learning providers in the delivery of these options. Careers teachers commented on the increased take-up of a range of vocational programmes at Key stage 4, with one school forecasting an increase from 25% to 30% of the cohort in September 2004. Indeed, schools have been obliged to include WRL within the curriculum for all pupils at Key stage 4 since September 2004. However, there was no evidence to confirm that this increased interest in WRL had led to an increased take-up of WBL, although other benefits might include learners continuing their education post-16 and re-engaging in school.

Perceptions of WBL

The prevailing view of head teachers and careers teachers was that WBL was an appropriate route for non-academic students. Nevertheless, where the ethos of the school encouraged progression into higher or further education, careers teachers would rather encourage the take-up of a full-time vocational course at an FE college than WBL.

The school wants more of us to go to college because it makes the school look better. We have glass cabinets in the classroom with the names of those that go to college, not those who get jobs.

Year 10 student

Head teachers recognised the local competition to attract school leavers, noting that FE colleges sought out the school leavers for their full-time courses, competing with the WBL route. No head teachers identified their own school provision as competing with the WBL route. However, given that there is a finite number of school leavers every year and that funding is often based on the number of learners enrolled on courses, it would seem that there must be some extent of competition.

Destination analysis for leavers of a Midlands school with strong vocational provision, pre- and post-16 (2003)^{14T}

Continuation in school sixth form	58.4%
In full-time education at a college	28.6%
In WBL, excluding employed status	0.6%
In employment with planned training	6.8%
In employment without planned training	0%

The underlying message, given by the majority of schools and substantiated by all students interviewed, was that staying on at school or going to an FE college was a better choice than entering the labour market or WBL. Students saw the WBL route as one taken by the less academic and it was not regarded highly. Those who stayed on in Year 12 saw their peers who had chosen WBL as taking an easier route than those staying on in full-time education, and showing less commitment to their futures. The students interviewed who were considering taking WBL/MAs did so because a family member had already chosen this route and recommended it, or because it was perceived as a way to high earnings.

Learners already involved in WBL through E2E programmes saw the provision in a very different light, describing it as 'my lifeline' and as 'stepping stones' to other experiences that would help in the future.

Local LSC and Connexions staff

Meeting local skills needs

The local LSC and Connexions staff interviewed found it difficult to provide evidence that the potential of the WBL pathway to meet local skills needs and young people's aspirations had been realised; in fact WBL was described as 'a flawed model'. There are nationally set WBL/MA targets for local LSCs, and although there was a level of success with the recruitment of learners, retaining them was seen as a problem. Reasons for this included learners' low aspirations, lack of suitable placements and jobs, the lack of WBL opportunities below Level 2, and competition from WRL and full-time FE college courses.

Strategic Area Reviews (StARs) carried out in two areas had found a mismatch between the current provision of learning providers and the skills needs of employers. Partners such as the local LSC, Connexions and learning providers had responded positively to this finding, seeing it as an opportunity to review and develop WBL/MAs as part of the overall 14-19 provision. Specific sectors of business and industry were being identified, with the intention of concentrating on developing provision in these areas.

You need a magic wand. If you could produce the jobs, you would have many more young people on these programmes.

Connexions staff

However, Connexions staff perceived that learners who showed interest in WBL/MAs were not necessarily the ones that employers were interested in employing. Some learners wanting to take up apprenticeships, who included many on E2E programmes, often had low-level basic skills or insufficient qualifications to meet the apprenticeship framework requirements. Learners who could meet the training requirements were encouraged to stay on at school or attend college by teachers and family members, in

¹⁴ Analysis provided by the school. Figures do not round to 100% possibly due to a number of destinations being unknown.

some cases to follow vocational programmes or other combinations of academic and WRL courses.

Local LSC and Connexions staff were also concerned about difficulty of access to WBL provision in terms of geographic location. Lack of transport and the needs of learners in rural areas were mentioned in four of the local LSC areas visited. Even if learners were willing to travel to the main towns and cities where learning providers were often clustered, public transport systems were costly, unreliable or did not fit the required travel times of the learner and provider.

Financial parity between further education and WBL

An emerging concern from local LSCs and Connexions, which may affect the number of future learners who are interested in WBL, is the EMA and the perceived lack of financial parity with the MA allowance. Staff believed that the MA allowance needed reviewing, to ensure parity with other allowances available to learners. They believed that the EMA, which allowed families to keep their Child Allowance for the learner, was seen as a far more attractive offer than allowances for WBL.¹⁵

Learning providers and employers

Adequacy of information

The majority of employers and learning providers in the sample obtained information on local and regional skills needs from at least one of the following sources: local LSC, RDA, Rural Development Agency, County or Borough Councils, LEA, Chamber of Commerce, SSCs, professional or trade institutes and associations. Learning providers commented that the information was frequently too generalised, providing a general occupational sector breakdown without a detailed breakdown of specific skills needs. Providers suggested that greater detail would be more useful when planning provision.

Two larger learning providers in different regions were conducting a review of skills needs through consultation with employers on their database, which would be used to inform the planning of local delivery.

Mismatch between learner supply and employer demand

Employers and learning providers in all areas believed there was a mismatch between young people's interest in particular WBL opportunities and employer needs. A frequently quoted example from all sample groups was young people's current interest in plumbing, which is not supported by either local vacancies or training places, but which is fuelled by media reports of high earnings.

Reports on changes in learners' demand for WBL varied by providers. In one regional area there had been a decrease in demand for MAs over the last three years in line with the national trend (LSC forecasts a 9% national reduction), while two areas reported increased demand. This increase was attributed to the wider promotion of WBL by local schools and to local marketing campaigns.

Further employer involvement with WBL was seen to be necessary by all providers interviewed. Only one learning provider out of the 15 interviewed reported an increased employer demand for WBL.

¹⁵ At the time of writing, the government has proposed that regulations concerning Child Benefit will be revised to enable this to be paid in respect of young people on WBL programmes.

There has been an increase in demand from employers for WBL and MA programmes following our enhancement of the training to include additional qualifications in first aid, food hygiene, cellar management and National Certificate and professional bar qualifications for the licensed trade.

Learning provider

The extent of involvement in WBL on the part of the interviewed employers ranged from companies having no apprentices to those having 30 apprentices. Of the two large employers in the sample, both with over 900 employees, one had no apprentices, the other only had two. The care sector of one region had up to 30 apprentices at any one time, but employers in this sector believed that negative portrayal of their sector by the media reduced demand from young people for the jobs on offer. Some companies recruited apprentices on a needs-only basis, which meant that they were not able to offer new places each year. Demand for placements outstripped availability. One employer commented that there had been 26 applicants for one apprenticeship last year, indicating a level of interest in apprenticeships by young people that it may not be possible to meet.

Rural provision

Providers were picking up on concerns expressed by the local LSCs regarding provision in a rural area. One provider explained how it was working with local schools in an attempt to develop WBL opportunities in a rural locality:

A small learning provider in the south east is working in a consultancy role with four schools, the LEA and the LSC to set up four pilot MA centres in four post-16 schools in a rural area where there is a lack of provision. MAs in Early Years will be offered initially plus one other still to be finalised. One of the schools already offers Early Years experience through the IFP. It is anticipated that more local learning providers and MA sectors will be involved in the future.

The introduction of E2E provision has helped learners start on the WBL route and may help them to access the FMA framework. However, half of the providers consulted expressed their concern about progression routes for learners unable to access Level 1 or FMA routes at the end of the E2E programme, echoing the similar views held by both local LSC and Connexions staff.

Recruitment into WBL and MAs

Key points

- The schools relied upon Connexions to advise students on the entrance process to WBL.
- Some private providers left the search for placements to the prospective learners, which learners had neither the experience nor the confidence to do. Employers that became engaged in this way were possibly not fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to the MA framework.
- Local LSCs expected all types of learning providers to find jobs and placements for their learners but could not confirm whether this responsibility was written into providers' contracts.
- There was a call for common application forms and initial assessment as a way of streamlining the recruitment and placement processes.
- The lack of feedback given to the WBL applicants could demoralise and demotivate potential learners.
- Learning providers identified financial issues that could impact on recruitment to WBL programmes, including the disparity between the allowances received by non-employed status learners and employed apprentices, and the provision of the EMA in full-time education.

The interviewees were asked to explain how the local recruitment processes worked to match learners to WBL opportunities and entry into MAs.

The schools

Support for recruitment from schools

All careers teachers reported that Connexions PAs worked with students to assist them with the completion of application forms and to prepare them for interview. The reliance of schools on Connexions in advising students on entrance to WBL was noted by two of the ten careers teachers interviewed.

Pupils ask me 'How do I find an MA?' I am not sure how to answer that and I advise them to apply for a college course. I really need training here and pass the pupil on to the PA because I know they are in a safe pair of hands.

Careers teacher

I pass them [pupils] on to Connexions.

Careers teacher

One student who was applying for an FMA as a plumber or an electrician described with confidence what he had done following his individual interview with a PA. He phoned a large local building company and arranged to take the CITB Construction Skills test in June. He had then been told that he would receive a list of placements or jobs for which he should apply. If he did not get one of these, he said he would do a full-time FE college course.

Four of the E2E learners said that learners needed more help from Connexions to help locate jobs and WBL placements. It was suggested that learners also needed more help with interview skills and speaking on the phone. One parent, who coincidentally was a Connexions PA, recognised the difficulty that her daughter had in finding an apprenticeship and had taken the step of referring her to an E2E programme, so that she would not become demotivated.

Local LSC and Connexions staff

Current recruitment practice

Good practice for recruitment into WBL was described by one local LSC member of staff as one where both the learner and the job/placement were assessed and matched to each other. However, it was acknowledged that this did not always happen. It was felt by a minority of local LSC representatives interviewed that some private providers, in an attempt to reduce costs, were leaving learners to find their own placements, which learners had neither the experience nor the confidence to do. As a result, some employers who became involved in this way were not fully aware of their role and responsibilities in relation to the apprenticeship, and therefore could not provide appropriate support for the learner. Another outcome of this practice was that those learners who could not find a job started on a full-time vocational course instead.

However, local LSC staff interviewed also saw shortfalls in the recruitment process used by some providers that favoured recruiting learners who were already in employment or had a job lined up. It was thought that these providers did not put enough resources into finding placements and jobs. Local LSCs expected all types of learning providers to find jobs and placements, and yet could not confirm whether this responsibility was written into providers' contracts.

Communication within and between agencies

One local LSC suggested that more work needed to be done to encourage greater collaboration between learning providers in the recruitment process. It was suggested, for example, that if a learner was not right for one provider, it may be possible for the provider to refer the learner to a fellow provider for whom it may represent a 'good fit'. This view was confirmed by two providers, where it was suggested that learners and placements from different providers could be brought together to ensure that learners were aware of all the opportunities available in their location.

Recruitment as a complex process

Four local LSC interviewees stated the need for common application forms and initial assessment as a way of streamlining the recruitment and placement processes. However, even when a common application form was available, this had not reduced the bureaucracy but had created confusion among learners. One regional area reported that some learning providers, having received the standard application form, would then send out their own application forms. Understandably applicants were confused and, thinking they had already applied, did nothing. The original applications were not followed up by the learning provider and the applicants were lost from the recruitment process.

Concerns were also voiced, particularly by PAs, about the length of the recruitment process and the variety of interviews and tests the applicants had to complete in order to secure a place on a WBL programme. The lack of feedback given to the applicants was also an issue acting to demoralise and demotivate potential learners. If the applicants were put on waiting lists and heard nothing, they could then lose confidence, interest and motivation.

There is a barrier in that the process is complicated and costly: come to Connexions, go to the provider, go to a number of employers. The learner goes from pillar to post, and build into that the cost of travel and interviews, and in some cases the distances they have to go.

Careers PA

There is a lack of feedback on how the application is going. At the interview the training provider will say, 'We will try to get you a placement'. The learner hears nothing and gets demoralised.

Careers manager

Online application forms for specific MA job vacancies had been developed in some areas for more flexible use in school, at home, in Connexions offices or in local libraries. One sampled region had launched its own 'Apply Online' service in September 2003. By June 2004, nearly 2500 young people had created their own application form online and used it to apply for WBL provision.

Recruitment into E2E

A concern was voiced in three of the regions about the low level of basic and social skills of large numbers of learners who had been recruited onto E2E programmes and who were not work-ready at the end of their E2E course. It was suggested that the current E2E provision could not be economically sustained by local LSCs if it continued to recruit so many learners, many of who will not get jobs or places on college courses. One local LSC representative described a model for a pre-E2E programme that has been very successful:

A project is running in the south east where, after a rigorous assessment, learners requiring additional basic and employability skills work on an initiative with youth workers. Working on a one-to-one basis and in groups with a student:youth worker ratio no higher than 4:1, students are helped with their personal and social development before moving on to a learning provider for a vocational programme.

Learning providers and employers

Provider and employer recruitment practices

The WBL recruitment process for learning providers and employers took many forms. Learning providers placed advertisements in the local press and held joint recruitment events with employers either annually or throughout the year. Some employers sent information on their vacancies to their local schools or Connexions office, which led to direct referrals, and others contacted their local college or learning provider when they had vacancies.

Another form of recruitment into WBL for providers was via referral from Connexions or other agencies. However, two learning providers commented that they had not received any referrals from the Connexions service. One provider recruited 95% of young people as a result of outreach work and through close working relationships with the Youth Service, Youth Offending teams and other referral agencies.

Learning providers conducted an initial assessment and often worked with Connexions PAs at their offices to support the interview process. Further in-depth assessment followed to match the learner to appropriate provision.

A college-based learning provider has a WBL work placement officer who matches employer requests to young people and vice versa. If a young person is suited to the programme, the WBL work placement officer will assist the applicant to prepare a CV and letters of application, which they are told to send to two or three identified employers. The college will also contact employers to request recruitment into an MA programme. The young person is supported by the work placement officer as needed.

One London LSC ran a pilot project and contracted with Working Links (www.workinglinks.co.uk), which has a database of 35,000 employers nationally, to recruit 150 new employers and secure 50 MA placements by 31 July 2004. Working Links has a bank of placement opportunities and matches interested young people to the jobs and training.

Financial constraints on WBL recruitment

Learning providers also identified financial issues that could impact on recruitment to WBL programmes. Non-employed status learners only received £40 per week minimum training allowance (MTA) plus travel expenses, whereas employed apprentices could often receive between £80 and 100 per week. The growth of job agencies that take on young people on short-term contracts was also seen as a factor, as they could poach young people already on WBL/MA programmes. These financial issues add to the conflict between WBL allowances and the provision of EMA in full-time education.

Conclusions and recommendations

Four areas of critical concern that need to be addressed nationally and locally to achieve improved take-up and achievement levels in WBL programmes emerged from the research.

Better-quality CAG on WBL

Improving availability, impartiality and quality

The research suggests that WBL options are not fully explored as possible post-16 career paths for all young people within careers education programmes in schools or CAG. While basic information on WBL was given to all students during Years 9, 10 and 11, follow-up work on WBL, carried out with small groups by a PA, usually focused on lower-ability learners, or those who wanted to go straight into work at 16. This helps to create and perpetuate the image that WBL is for the less-academically able – a deficit approach. In the majority of cases, young people chose WBL because they thought that they were unable to take, or had been discouraged from taking, other options.

The promotion of WBL as a route for the less able could also deter employers from offering work experience and placements.

Connexions PAs were seen as the professionals that gave the most WBL information, advice and guidance to students. While students recognised the Connexions name and while the work of the PAs was well regarded by most schools, the number of students given individual interviews varied across local LSC areas. In some, the aim was for complete coverage, in others learners ‘at risk’ were targeted. Careers teachers suspected that learners were not attending interviews or self-referring because of the fear of being labelled as ‘having problems’.

The common view held by careers professionals outside of schools was that it was almost impossible for a school to give impartial advice and guidance, even if it did not have sixth form provision. Staying on in full-time education in school or college was seen as a mark of success for a school, and where there was Year 12 and Year 13 provision, the percentage of students staying on was a vital economic factor for the school.

Professional development

While recognising a school’s need to market its own post 16-provision, the lack of training, information and knowledge regarding WBL given to tutors and teachers may deter take-up of WBL by subliminal influence on students through careers programmes and subject courses. There was no evidence of WBL in-service training or placements in business for careers teachers in any of the schools interviewed. Briefings by careers coordinators or by Connexions PAs were the only example of WBL information being given to this group. Ensuring that form tutors involved in careers programmes, and other subject teachers, have real knowledge and understanding of WBL, local skills needs and progression routes would require a radical re-think of their continuing professional development.

The changing curriculum and the development of vocational pathways, IFP, WRL and WBL seemed to have had little effect on the way that careers programmes were delivered in schools. However, there was some evidence that teachers involved in IFP and in the development of vocational programmes were benefiting in terms of gaining a greater understanding of WRL and WBL from working with college and provider colleagues.

WBL marketing information

The marketing and promotional information that is in use for WBL varies in its quality, availability, distribution and occupational sector coverage. Some glossy national literature from the larger sector providers is available. Larger local training providers, such as FE colleges, often provide their own literature. PAs and careers teachers sometimes give out locally produced directories of WBL provision, but these often lack details of employment sectors or what the WBL programmes, assessments and training actually involve. This patchy and sometimes incomplete information cannot compete with the information on full-time FE courses provided to schools, or with the day-to-day influence from the school to stay on post-16.

A comprehensive WBL marketing package, available to all students and parents, could contain:

- national literature promoting WBL
- local information from all providers endorsed by employers
- explanation of the WBL programmes – E2E/FMA/Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) – how and where you learn, how you are assessed, what financial earnings/allowances you can expect
- case studies from E2E/FMA/AMA learners
- the opportunity for learners, parents and employers to comment on the usefulness of the literature
- information on access to higher education via WBL routes.

Some schools that participated in the research were increasingly involving local FE colleges and learning providers in careers education programmes. Post-16 providers were, in most cases, able to give presentations to whole year groups or to smaller groups. However, presentations whose audience was restricted to lower-ability students did not provide fair and impartial advice. Local networks of learning providers, where these existed, were seen by some schools as an efficient way of ensuring that information from all provider sources was given to students who were interested in WBL.

Recommendations

- The quality and extent of CEG on WBL needs to be enhanced in order to encourage a wider range of learners to consider taking WBL routes.
- Guidance for schools on what constitutes high-quality CAG on WBL is required.
- WBL should be marketed equitably with school- and college-based academic and vocational programmes.
- Funding steers that unduly influence the advice given to young people about post-16 options should be reconsidered.
- Regular in-service training on WBL is required for teachers and Connexions PAs who are involved in careers education programmes and responsible for giving WBL advice and guidance in schools.
- Cooperation between schools, local learning providers and employers needs to be promoted to enhance WBL careers advice and guidance.
- National and local WBL marketing material should be evaluated and revised in order to bring consistency to their quality.
- Careers guidance advice and material should be readily available and in a suitable format so that the benefits of WBL can be communicated to parents, teachers, referral agencies and employers.

Increasing employer participation in WBL

Marketing WBL to employers

Employers were not routinely involved in WBL careers advice and guidance, and there was little evidence that any connections were made between WBL and Year 10/11 work experience, part-time jobs and other education–business link activities organised by schools. Local LSCs did not appear to connect their education–business links and work experience activities and contracts with WBL. For example, some local LSCs required EBPs to organise professional development placements for teachers with employers that had modern apprentices or placements in local priority sectors with identified skills needs.

Those interviewed suggested local services that could be used to market WBL to employers and help to identify jobs and placements. Suggestions included:

- learning providers and their local networks
- Business Link
- local LSCs
- Connexions
- EBPs
- EBLC.

Within the organisations responsible for developing and promoting WBL/MAs there seemed to be a number of missed opportunities to engage employers. The lack of internal communication within local LSCs with colleagues working in workforce development – who have good working relationships with employers – is a case in point. Connexions and Careers Services employer vacancy units had reduced in size in recent years as part of the transition from the Careers Service to Connexions, and this was thought to limit the development of sustainable links with employers.

Planning provision to meet needs

Employers interviewed were not involved in local skills planning, and the absence of employers at strategic level planning was commented on by local LSCs and Connexions. The needs of employers, especially the SMEs, are not adequately considered in the development of much WBL provision. StARs are seen as a good starting point to address some of these omissions and to give WBL a new focus on priority sectors and regional/local skills needs. However, the responsibility of employers for engaging in these developments also needs to be acknowledged. Business organisations, Chambers of Commerce, trades unions, and SSCs at regional and local level provide communication channels to represent the needs of local employers and ensure that these are known.

Recommendations

- There is a need for all the organisations with an interest in promoting WBL to take an active and coordinated role in increasing employers' engagement in it.¹⁶
- Local arrangements for planning WBL provision should involve a wide range of employers at a strategic level.
- The advice given to learners interested in WBL should be informed by the availability of placements with local employers.

¹⁶ Since the research was conducted, the end-to-end review of MAs has identified the need to collect data on interest and initial enrolment in Apprenticeships to help drive performance.

- An infrastructure needs to be established to find appropriate jobs and placements for WBL provision.
- Better cross-department communication needs to be developed within local LSCs to ensure that all contact with employers raises relevant WBL issues.

Financial considerations for learners

Parity in allowances

Those local LSCs, Connexions representatives and learning providers consulted during the research expressed concern that young people and their parents saw staying on at school or progressing into a post-16, full-time college course as the more economically favourable option. Since September 2004, learners staying on in full-time education have been eligible to apply for the EMA, and their parents continue to receive Child Benefit. At the time of writing, WBL learners receive allowances, but because they will lose their Child Benefit and are dependent on finding a job, they or their families could perceive the WBL option as less attractive financially. The government has recently announced that the position of young people moving on to WBL will be reviewed, to enable them to continue to claim the Child Benefit allowance. This could make a significant difference to decisions about post-16 options made by young people from lower income groups.

The current allowance for MAs has been in place for a number of years. It is considered to be a negative reminder of the old Youth Training Scheme. The allowance needs reviewing in the light of the EMA and the development of E2E programmes.

The recent joint review by the HM Treasury, Department for Work and Pensions and the DfES (2004) agrees that the current system of support for 16–19 year olds is complex, anomalous, and is a source for perverse incentives regarding the post-compulsory education transition. A young person may be forced to choose a course at college as opposed to a course with a WBL training provider based on the difference in financial support available. The joint report sets out proposals to remove these distortions via the reform of Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit rules for 16–19 year olds to better support young people's choices between education and unwaged training. It is, therefore, intended that Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit will be extended to the parents and carers of unwaged trainees. The government also proposes that the MTA will be replaced for the unwaged with the EMA. The HM Treasury, DfES and LSC have also pledged to work with employers to achieve a minimum level for trainee pay in the range of £70–80 a week. A minimum wage of £3 an hour was introduced in October 2004.

Rural disadvantage in WBL provision

While most urban learners have access to local providers and some employment opportunities, rural and outer urban areas were described as offering little or no opportunities for learners, because there was little training provision, it was too expensive to bring assessors to the workplace and transport was unreliable or non-existent.

In other areas of the country, some young people were attracted to the variety of low-paid jobs without training that are available and that pay more than the WBL allowance. This option is particularly attractive to young people and their parents within communities that do not have a culture of post-16 training or continuing education. As this group is one of the main targets for WBL/MAs, it is important that participation is seen to be financially rewarding.

Recommendations

- A review and comparison of WBL/MA allowances to ensure parity with full-time education and other training and employment options should be conducted, including an assessment of the impact of the minimum wage for 16 and 17 year olds.
- A transport policy is required that enables learners from rural and outer urban areas to draw upon additional funding or facilities to allow them to access WBL/MA provision. Policy could be informed by current local and regional schemes run by national employers, eg ASDA, and by local councils.

Access to broader life chances

More flexible vocational pathways

Schools and FE colleges are offering an increasing range of work-related provision both pre- and post-16. Year 11 destination data from the schools interviewed indicated that this provision could be in competition with WBL, as it is offering less academic students the option to stay on in full-time education. Work-related options offered by the school may be seen as the 'safe' option by many learners who do not feel ready or able to enter the workplace, and they may also be the options favoured by parents. Considering ways of bringing together the best of both pathways could be advantageous to whole vocational pathways and would enable learners to move smoothly from WRL and WBL, rather than choosing between them. As described in the interim Tomlinson report (DfES 2004), schools should be offering high-level status vocational programmes that provide recognised routes into apprenticeships, employment and/or further learning. The introduction of Young Apprenticeships may help to bring WRL and WBL together for 14–16 year olds.

Recruitment into WBL

Learner recruitment into WBL was characterised as a complex and confusing process that could lead to frustration and ultimately rejection of the route. The potential learners underwent a plethora of interviews and assessments, completed different application forms for different providers and employers, and experienced periods when they were not informed of the progress of their application. When this lengthy process was added to the difficulties of getting placements/jobs, or being put on a waiting list, it is perhaps inevitable that many young people opt for a different route.

One of the most frequently stated remarks was the need for a local service or system to secure jobs and placements for learners. No one interviewed was able to identify whose responsibility it was to find jobs and placements for potential WBL entrants. Consequently, it was a responsibility undertaken fully by no one. The research indicates that it is in the provision of placements and jobs that the biggest short-term improvement could be made to the take-up and achievement in WBL, as many young people either remain on waiting lists or take up full-time college courses as an alternative.

Progression from E2E

Some learners were able to make the transition from E2E to employment quite easily, as they were considered to be work-ready by their learning providers by the end of their course. However, this was not the case for all E2E learners, and where they were not considered sufficiently work-ready or had not had placement experience, they were not able to progress easily either into the workplace or into FMAs. It is believed that for a number of learners the gap between E2E and first jobs or FMAs is just too big.

HE progression and WBL

A-levels were seen as a stepping stone to an HE degree, and MAs were seen to be associated with employment and no further progression beyond that. There is not sufficient knowledge or understanding of the possibility of an MA leading to higher education by learners, parents or, in some cases, the professionals providing advice and guidance. The appeal of MAs to learners who are also interested in higher education needs to be given more promotion.

Recommendations

- Models that combine school- or college-based learning and WBL should be extended.
- The recruitment processes to WBL should be streamlined to ensure that they support learners from initial enquiry to entry on a programme. All concerned need to be aware of how this process works and who is responsible for it.¹⁷
- WBL contracting arrangements need to be reviewed to clarify respective responsibilities for identifying jobs/placements for learners entering WBL programmes.
- The impact of the lack of placements or apprenticeships on the take-up of WBL should be monitored.
- Better support for progression from E2E is required, accompanied by a broader range of options.
- The opportunities for progression to higher education from WBL should be promoted through the local provision of case studies.

¹⁷ The LSC has commissioned a feasibility study for a youth portal.

Appendix 1. A review of recent developments in CAG for young people and of the evaluations or inspections of this service

Policy background

CEG has undergone significant shifts in statutory, structural and curriculum importance in the last decade (Morris *et al.* 2001). There were two major changes in policy in the Eighties. The first (DfEE 1998) required CAG to target particular groups of learners deemed 'at risk'. The second set out plans to launch the Connexions strategy (DfES 2000). Both changes increased expectations of the provision for vulnerable learners.

The 1998 strategy, known as the 'focusing agenda', has had a significant impact on the delivery of CEG for young people and has shaped the provision available today. However, the changes have not increased the availability of CAG for all students. A study carried out by the NFER (Morris *et al.* 2001) found that the new system had led to a decrease in status of CEG in schools and a significant decrease in the amount of contact CEG services have with students that are of average or higher academic ability. There had also been an increase in drop-out from post-16 academic courses, possibly due to the insufficient preparation and advice students are receiving before selecting this option.

Current scope of CAG provision

In a large-scale study of 528 schools, Morris *et al.* (2001) found that 95% of the schools made some CEG provision for pupils in Years 9–11 within the personal social and health curriculum. The mean length of programmes for students in Year 9 was just under 10 hours, increasing in Year 10 to between 14 and 15 hours. This was followed by a slight decrease in the final year of compulsory education to 13 and a half hours. However, these figures conceal a variable picture of provision, with some schools offering the minimum possible CEG and 1% allocating just one session a year to each cohort. The length of the sessions also varied from a 10-minute tutorial to three complete days 'off-timetable'.

Initial contact between young people and Connexions, which provides focused CAG, is usually through referral by their school, or Connexions being offered as a service to all pupils (Joyce *et al.* 2003). Not all young people have an individual interview with Connexions, and priority may be given to those young people deemed most at risk of social exclusion. The Connexions service has set itself the target of reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) by 10% before November 2004 (Popham 2003). CAG for young people outside the 'at-risk' group has not received this increased emphasis, and it maybe that learners with borderline academic ability no longer have easy access to personalised advice about the range of post-16 options available, including WBL.

Evaluation of CAG

Evaluations of CAG provision relating to WBL have found the information and support available as inadequate to meet the needs of potential entrants.

In a series of college and area-wide inspections (ALI/Ofsted 2003), CAG was found to be neither impartial nor comprehensive in nearly half of the areas inspected. Schools were failing to provide adequate information concerning WBL and other options available outside their sixth form. Ofsted confirms that the quality of information in schools relating to work-based training opportunities is poor, with unsatisfactory practice observed in a small number of guidance sessions (Ofsted 2002). As a result, ALI concludes that too

many borderline students are enrolled on programmes that are too demanding for their level of academic ability.

The failure to provide comprehensive information concerning WBL could be related to three factors. First, as *Modern Apprenticeships: the way to work* (DfES 2001) found, while general awareness of what an MA entailed was relatively high among career advice professionals, detailed awareness of the features and content of MAs was often superficial. Conscientious careers teachers felt inhibited in recommending MAs, as unlike full-time, post-16 courses they did not understand the syllabus. Secondly, there were concerns about the status of MAs among careers advisers and teachers, with some indication that the qualifications were perceived to be for the less able. This misconception was found within the college and area-wide inspections. *Modern Apprenticeships: the way to work* (DfES 2001) also raised the concern that pressure from parents on careers professionals had led to young people being advised to stay on in education rather than seeking an apprenticeship. Thirdly, a report for the LSC by LSDA (Hughes 2003) found that schools were keen to retain a large proportion of their leaving-age cohort to achieve target numbers. The study also found that there were competing targets in the same area for schools, colleges and WBL providers. Promoting the work-based route may not be in the interest of the schools.

Poorly informed guidance on WBL was cited by a sample of east London providers as a barrier to increasing participation in the work-based route (Hughes 2003). The providers universally reported a lack of contact with Connexions and the Careers Service and felt that these agencies were not knowledgeable about WBL, its structure and opportunities. However, Hughes (2003) found that when schools had invited providers to attend progression events, the responses were sometimes slow and the information presented did not compare favourably to school and college prospectuses.

Appraisal of guidance by users

Research by Stuart, Tyers and Crowder (2000) corroborates Hughes' (2003) findings concerning inadequate information about WBL provision by careers services from the perspective of learners. Stuart, Tyers and Crowder found that young people entering A-levels or employment/government-supported training felt that CEG had not prepared them adequately for what to expect. This is an important finding in relation to the uptake and completion of the WBL route, as a research brief for the Department for Education and Employment (IFF Research Ltd 2000) found that 45% of young people dropping out of MAs did not have a clear understanding on joining the programme what their training would involve, how long it would take or the nature and volume of training.

Houston *et al.* (2001) conducted a series of focus groups with school and college pupils and found that they did not perceive CEG provision to be a coherent programme. The preferred method of provision was via face-to-face advice, yet this form of provision was decreasing as guidance interviews were limited to those students deemed at risk of social exclusion. This resource allocation allowed little capacity for those students regarded as 'low priority' to receive individual advice and for careers advisers to ensure that their career plans were 'appropriate' (Houston *et al.* 2001). Within the study, teachers expressed their concern that the Connexions service may exacerbate this situation. With Connexions setting its own targets to reduce the NEET group, there could be a danger that students of middling ability may become further neglected. It could be argued that these 'low priority' students, making moderate achievements in academic fields, may be better suited to WBL instead of struggling through further academic study. Coherent careers education, guidance and associated advice could, therefore, be of benefit to 'low priority' students, in terms of making them aware of work-based routes and the process of entry.

Appraisal of CAG by school-based providers

Morris *et al.* (2001) found that 59% of careers coordinators argued that time and budgetary support to CEG was in need of 'significant enhancement'. 46% also felt that the service required more 'in-school' support for their programmes. Careers service staff expressed a lack of confidence in the provision offered, and many were unsure that schools were the best place to deliver CEG to Year 11 pupils. Interviews with careers service staff and other colleagues within the school revealed a lack of clarity concerning the role and purpose of CEG. This meant that the provision was subject to pressure from other areas of the curriculum. While 45% of careers coordinators were suitably qualified for the role, few of the staff involved in teaching the CEG programmes possessed the same level of qualification. This lack of expertise meant that programmes were not always coherent or comprehensive.

Unqualified staff, time pressures and the poor status of CEG in the curriculum may lead to a lack of information being made available on routes other than sixth form or college. It is essential that careers staff understand the WBL route so that they have the confidence to provide appropriate and accurate information, rather than falling back to promote sixth form as the reliable option (Hughes 2003).

Other sources of information on WBL

Kenwright (2003) found that careers professionals, for example Connexions PAs, school/college advisers and teachers, were considered by school leavers to provide more accurate information than family members, or interestingly employers, concerning the MA route. However, learners went to family members for first-hand information on vocational experience, believing that as their family knew them better than anyone else, relations could advise them on routes that would suit their personality and abilities. In the instance that these secondary sources are relied upon, it is important that they have accurate and up-to-date information. Kenwright's research revealed that this is often not the case. The research showed that even the careers professionals found it difficult to keep their knowledge base updated. There was also little available information aimed at parents and employers with the purpose of equipping them to advise young people on general post-16 routes, and MAs in particular. Indeed, Kidd and Wardman's (1999) research with young people who were likely to leave post-16 education prematurely, or to switch courses, found that they were more likely to rely on the advice of parents and friends than their peers who remained in their first option. The reliance on non-professional sources may therefore be misplaced.

Conclusion

There is little research considering the impact of CEG on subsequent career decisions (Payne 2003a, 2003b) and a lack of information surrounding the delivery of WBL guidance. The latter point may be due to the rarity of this practice and the perceived standing of WBL by careers professionals in comparison to further academic learning. From the research that is available it would seem that accurate, impartial information is scarce and that young people are not being encouraged to pursue WBL. This is particularly pertinent to young people that have borderline achievement levels, who will not excel in further academic study but who will also not fail.

Appendix 2. Data analysis

Figure 2 compares the percentage of 16 year olds participating in education and training within each of the sampled local LSCs with the national average. As can be seen, there appears to be a variation in participation within the sample, with the number of school leavers entering WBL in the north-east LSC cohort nearly double that of other sampled areas. It would also appear that more learners in the south-east cohort opt to continue their learning in sixth form colleges as opposed to continuing in their school. However, on further investigation this could be due to the fact that, according to Ofsted, East Sussex has over 60% of secondary schools (27/40) with no sixth forms and West Sussex over 50% (18/33), accounting for this high transition into sixth form colleges or further education. It cannot be established if there is a causal relationship between CAG and post-16 transitions from this data alone, or indeed whether CAG has evolved to accommodate the preferred transitions.

Figure 2. Participation in education and training of 16 year olds by local LSC area in England, 2001¹⁸

Percentage of age group								
Regions from which local LSCs were drawn	<i>Full-time education</i>					WBL	Other part-time education	Total in education and training
	Maintained schools	Independent schools	Sixth form colleges	Other FE	Total			
North East	27	3	4	33	67	15	8	90
East Midlands	30	3	3	29	65	9	8	82
East	30	4	7	26	67	7	4	78
London	24	16	8	26	74	4	5	83
South East	23	9	20	23	75	4	3	82
England	28	6	10	26	70	7	5	82

Figure 3 indicates the number of school leavers in each of the selected local LSCs who entered WBL in England in 2002–03. This is then given as a proportion of 16–17 year olds in the area, as taken from the 2001 census.¹⁹ Figure 3 supports the data in figure 2 as showing a higher percentage of school leavers entering WBL in the sampled north-east and East Midlands local LSC areas compared to the other sampled local LSC regions.

¹⁸ Source: DfES (2004). Statistics of Education: Participation in education and training by 16 and 17 year olds in each local area in England, end 2001. *National Statistics Bulletin* Issue No. bweb01-2004)

¹⁹ A 'count' of 16 year olds is not available – the census instead has a group category of 16–17 years.

Figure 3. Number of school leavers entering WBL as a proportion of 16–17 year olds in the area, 2002–03

	North East	East Midlands	East	London	South East	National
Total number of 16-year-old new entrants	1 702	2 450	1 186	1 305	1 374	91 953
Total number of 16–17 year olds	19 581	28 133	39 272	44 255	52 772	2 199 999
Total % of 16–17 population	8.69%	8.71%	3.02%	2.95%	2.60%	4.18%

Success rates

As defined by the LSC, success rates are calculated as the number of qualifications achieved divided by the number of starters who do not transfer out. It can also be achieved by multiplying achievement rate by retention rate.

From the data presented in figure 4 (again with the sample identified by region), it is possible to see that from the sampled local LSCs, the London-based sample had the highest success rates for its new entrants to WBL. This was followed by the sample from the North East and then the South East region.

Figure 3. WBL success rates for each of the sampled areas for new entrants to WBL, 2002/03

Local LSC area	Learning outcome				Total	All learners	New entrants
	Framework achieved	Partial achievement	No achievement ²⁰	Unknown outcome: exam results not yet known/exam not yet taken/continued study		Success rate (%)	Success rate (%)
East Midlands	95	16	1115	23	1249	41.16	7.61
East	54	2	527	3	586	38.88	9.22
London	220	20	417	14	671	45.74	32.79
North East	109	37	644	3	793	53.09	13.75
South East	81	17	491	4	593	27.67	13.66
National total	7015	844	36 687	1286	45 832	39.87	15.32

²⁰ This column would include those learners who withdrew from the learning aim.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
AMA	Advanced Modern Apprenticeship
CAG	careers advice and guidance
CEG	careers education and guidance
CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
E2E	Entry to Employment
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EBLC	Education Business Link Consortia
EBP	Education Business Partnership
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
FE	further education
FMA	Foundation Modern Apprenticeship
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	higher education
IFP	Increased Flexibility Programme
ILR	Individual Learner Record
LEA	local education authority
LMI	Labour Market Information
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
MA	Modern Apprenticeship
MTA	minimum training allowance
NEET	not in education, employment or training
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NO	National Office (Learning and Skills Council)
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PA	personal adviser (Connexions)
PSHE	personal, social and health education
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SSC	Sector Skills Council
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
StAR	Strategic Area Review
WBL	work-based learning
WRL	work-related learning



This study investigated the effectiveness of the processes in place for securing entry into work-based learning (WBL) and how these could be improved. The research examined the roles of key players in the promotion of WBL to young people.

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