

Learning Agreement Pilots Evaluation

Synthesis Report

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Summary

Learning Agreements were a joint initiative between Connexions and the local Learning and Skills Council in eight pilot areas. They were originally established in April 2006 to run for two years. The initiative was targeted at young people aged 16 to 17 who were working but not engaged in any accredited training i.e. in jobs without training (JWT). A Learning Agreement outlined the accredited training that the young person would undertake and was drawn up between a Connexions Personal Adviser, the young person and their employer. It also outlined what financial incentive, if any, the young person (or their employer) could receive. The financial incentive varied: in some pilot areas young people and their employers were paid a £250 bonus, in some the employer additionally received wage compensation, while in the remainder no incentive was paid to either the young person or employer (i.e. the young person only had the agreement).

The evaluation

The evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP) was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and carried out by a partnership of the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), the Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) at Warwick University and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). The evaluation had three main elements:

- **a process evaluation**, examining the ways in which the pilots had been set up and delivered and the main issues associated with their implementation
- **a quantitative element**, using surveys of young people to measure the impact of the pilots in comparison to a number of control areas and to provide information about participants' experiences
- **a programme theory element**, focusing on testing some key aspects of the policy to identify what worked, what did not and the reasons for this.

Key findings

- It is difficult to estimate the exact size of the JWT population, but our best estimate is that Learning Agreements were taken up by approximately nine per cent of the eligible population. Around a quarter of those that had heard of LAP took one up (23 per cent). Take-up was twice as high in the second year, ie after the pilots got going, than in the first.
- However, the impact of the agreements among those involved was significant. The level of formal learning among participants was 31 percentage points higher than it would have been without LAP.
- The overall quantitative effect of the LAP programme (i.e. the impact on participants multiplied by the number of people involved) on learning activity among JWT young people was quite modest, driven down by the low take-up. Thus the evaluation estimates that if LAP was rolled out nationally, the level of formal learning among the eligible population as a whole would be between three and seven percentage points higher.
- The evaluation found that the take-up, and therefore the effect, was highest in the pilot areas that offered £250 bonus payments to young people and their employers. The pilots offering wage compensation had a higher impact on learning activity but a

significantly lower take-up and, therefore, saw a smaller overall effect than 'bonus-only' areas. The areas offering 'agreement-only' (without an incentive) experienced the smallest effect.

- Advisers played a key role in engaging with young people and also brokering their provision and providing them with learner support.
- Take-up, and therefore the effect, may have been higher if more flexible learning opportunities were available to young people.
- The ultimate measure of success is the level of qualification attainment. The data suggest that around a third of those who sign an agreement get a qualification. Low take-up and low completion rates limit the overall effect of the Learning Agreements.

Detailed findings

The more detailed findings from the evaluation are summarised below.

Two different delivery models

Pilots were managed by Connexions Partnerships and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSC). They generally adopted one of two main models of delivery:

- **Local Area Autonomy** - predominantly in large pilot areas, where project managers within Connexions had a strategic role in overseeing the delivery of the pilot by operating through a network of local managers.
- **Central Management** - in pilot areas that comprised a small number of local authority areas, project managers retained responsibility for operational staffing and had a standardised approach to the delivery of LAP.

Pilots had a management structure and the key operational unit were teams of advisers. Their skill set was different to those of mainstream Connexions Advisers as they had to find and engage with the young people, identify and source relevant training provision and support the young person through their learning.

The LSC contracted with local training providers, in some of the pilot areas through consortia arrangements - which took time to set up leading to delays in getting provision in place. The pilots enabled local Connexions Partnerships to build better links with other local employment and training agencies and providers as well as employers and employer organisations.

The pilots operated different management systems and there were many difficulties reconciling their data with that held on the LSC's system. The lack of clear and consistent management information weakened the implementation and management of the pilots.

9,500 young people signed up - mainly in the second year

A total of 9,500 young people signed Learning Agreements between April 2006 and the end of March 2008, according to the Connexions records - significantly lower than the numbers expected. However, only 5,306 young people actually started learning according to LSC records. Take-up was twice as high in the second year than the first, as the pilots established effective processes to engage with young people and source relevant training.

Take-up was highest in areas paying young people (and their employer) a bonus

Take-up varied by pilot area. It was highest in the areas paying the £250 bonus (and no wage compensation) and lowest in the 'agreement only' areas. However, relatively few young people (15 per cent) in receipt of the bonus said that they would not have taken part without it and almost half thought that they would have definitely taken up an agreement even if there had been no bonus payment.

Under ten per cent of the potential population took up the offer

Estimating the size of the eligible population is difficult, but the pilots involved less than a quarter of the potential number of young people in jobs without training in their areas (based on those who had heard of LAP), and only nine per cent of our best estimate of the whole eligible population took part.

Take-up was lower than expected for a number of reasons. In the first year the pilots took time to get going, but even when they did they found it difficult to track down eligible young people. When they did find young people in jobs without training, many did not want to take part because they were happy with the level of training they currently received; the training they would have liked to do was not available; they were thinking of changing job or location; or they did not understand what Learning Agreements involved.

Approaching young people directly was the best way to get them involved

The best way of getting young people involved was through direct contact between the adviser and the young person, rather than, say, trying to go through employers or employer bodies. As the pilots continued, other routes emerged including: through providers; word of mouth among young people; and Activity Agreements (i.e. five per cent of LAP trainees said they had previously been on an Activity Agreement before they got a job).

Young people wanted to take part primarily to gain a qualification while they were working. Most were happy in their current job but at least ten per cent hoped that training through a Learning Agreement would be a route to another job.

Employers were generally supportive - but some were by-passed

Not all employers knew that one of their young employees was engaged in the LAP programme, but most did and although generally supportive, 31 per cent of LAP trainees whose employer was aware felt their employer had given them little or no support. There was no evidence to indicate that wage compensation had positively influenced their engagement.

Advisers played a crucial role

LAP trainees had regular contact with their adviser – on average twice monthly - and found that contact useful. Advisers played a key role in brokering training provision to meet the young person's needs. It was difficult to find the right courses for all young people - some wanted training that was not on the LSC's approved list; some wanted training at a time or in a place which providers could not deliver. This meant that in some cases young people had to take their second or third choices or decided not to take part. The most common form of learning undertaken by young people was an NVQ (probably in many cases as part of an apprenticeship), but others worked towards a wide range of qualifications - including City and Guilds, key skills and GCSEs - generally at levels 1 or 2.

A third of starters completed their training

Full completion data for the LAP trainees who started their course between April 2006 and March 2008 is not available, but by March 2008, a third of those who started had successfully completed their course and a further quarter had finished without completing.

LAP significantly increased participants' learning activity

The evaluation measured the impact of the programme by comparing learning activity among participants with that among matched comparisons in areas where the pilots were not operating, and found that the proportion in training was 31 percentage points (ppts) higher in the pilot areas. The effect varied by area and was highest (38ppts) where both the young person's bonus and employer wage compensation was offered. The evaluation also found that LAP participants were more likely than their matched counterparts to be studying for a (further) qualification three months after their agreement had finished.

Overall effect limited by low take-up

However, the overall effect of the pilots is limited by the low level of take-up, which means that, if rolled out nationally, Learning Agreements would increase the proportion of young people studying for a qualification, who had previously been in a job without training, by between two and seven percentage points (depending on how take-up is measured). The 'bonus only' option is the most effective - producing an effect of between four and nine percentage points.

Participation generated more positive attitudes towards training

The young people themselves also thought the programme was effective - over three-quarters had found it 'very' or 'fairly' useful and a similar proportion had enjoyed their experience. The evaluation also found that LAP participants had a more positive attitude towards learning and qualifications as a result of their involvement.

1 Introduction

The United Kingdom has one of the lowest rates of post-16 participation in education or employment in Europe, with the problem being particularly acute at age 17. Just under ten per cent of 16 and 17 year olds in England, around 100,000 young people, do not participate in any form of education, training or employment. A further 85,000, around six per cent of the cohort, are in jobs that do not offer accredited training. This pattern is found across the UK.

The 2005 Budget announced the piloting of two new initiatives aimed at extending participation in education and training among young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and young people who are in jobs without training (JWT). Sixty million pounds was allocated over two years to Activity Agreements Pilots (AA) to support and encourage disengaged 16-17 year olds back into learning. In addition, £80m over two years was allocated to Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP) for 16-17 year olds in work with no training, to increase access to training options for this group. Activity Agreements and Learning Agreements were initially piloted in 12 areas of England from April 2006 for a two-year period, subsequently extended for a further 16 months in 2008. Policy interest in the effectiveness and impact of both types of agreement has been given further impetus by the announcement of plans to raise to 18 the age at which young people have to compulsorily participate in some form of recognised education or training. This report summarises the findings from the national evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP). A separate report pulls together the conclusions of the evaluation of Activity Agreements¹.

1.1 What are Learning Agreements?

The Learning Agreement Pilots were a joint initiative between Connexions and the local Learning and Skills Council in eight pilot areas and were originally established in April 2006 to run for two years. The initiative was targeted at young people aged 16 to 17 who were working but not engaged in any accredited training. A Learning Agreement outlined the accredited training that the young person would undertake and was drawn up between a Connexions Personal Adviser, the young person and their employer. It also outlined what payments, if any, the young person (or their employer) could receive. The Learning Agreement was aligned to the following principles, outlined in the Learning Agreement Delivery Specification (December 2005).

- **Personalised:** agreed activities tailored to the individual and taking account of personal needs and abilities, determined by the profiling and assessment process undertaken by the young person with the Personal Adviser.
- **Participation:** focusing on encouraging and supporting the young person to participate in accredited training.
- **Flexibility:** ensuring, where possible, that learning provision was responsive and flexible to meet the needs of the young person and, where applicable, their employer.
- **Progression:** support and learning provision that provided progression routes for the young person to achieve higher-level qualifications if appropriate.

¹ Hillage J, Johnson C, Newton B, Maguire S, Tanner E, Purdon S (2008), *Activity Agreements Pilots Evaluation: Synthesis Report*, DCSF

The eligible learning provision comprised all qualifications listed that were included under Section 96 of LSC's Learning Aims Database. This included qualifications accredited at Level 2 or above but does not include standalone NVQs. It did include:

- Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships
- BTEC and similar FE courses
- GCSEs and A-levels.

The provision could also support progression to Level 2, as long as the learning plan also addressed basic and/or key skills; including:

- NVQ 1
- Technical Certificates
- Basic Skills (literacy and numeracy)
- Short courses over ten guided learning hours (and on section 96).

Standalone Key Skills qualifications, including wider skills and those which support the LSC's Skills for Life Target, were also eligible¹.

1.1.1 Payments

In return for signing an agreement young people in some pilot areas were eligible for a financial incentive. Three variants of incentive were trialled. In three areas young people and their employers were eligible for a bonus payment of £250 (often paid in instalments against key milestones such as starting or completing learning) and in a further two pilot areas participating employers were additionally eligible for wage compensation for the time their employee spent learning. In the other three pilot areas no financial incentives were offered to either employer or employee (see Table 1.1).

¹ Sources: Learning Agreement Pilot Delivery Specification, December 2005; Learning Agreement Pilots Local / Regional Guidance May 2006; Learning Agreement Pilot Guidance, February 2007.

Table 1.1 - Pilot areas for the Learning Agreement Pilot evaluation

LAP area	LAP payment variant
Cornwall and Devon	Variant 1: Bonus payment to learner and employer
Lancashire	Variant 1: Bonus payment to learner and employer
South Yorkshire	Variant 1: Bonus payment to learner and employer
Greater Manchester	Variant 2: Bonus payment to learner and employer and wage compensation to employer
London East	Variant 2: Bonus payment to learner and employer and wage compensation to employer
West Yorkshire	Variant 3: Agreement only
Black Country	Variant 3: Agreement only
Essex, Southend & Thurrock	Variant 3: Agreement only

Source: DCSF, 2006

1.2 Extension to the Learning Agreement Pilots

In April 2008 the LAPs were extended for a further 16 months with the aims of:

- testing the effectiveness of brokerage and Learning / Activity Agreements as a tool for re-engaging young people now and within the context of a Raising the Participation Age (RPA), in particular in relation to those dropping out of learning
- maximising the number of young people in JWT engaging with learning either with their employer or independently
- monitoring and understanding how the extension is managed and implemented in different areas and to highlight good practice and any problems in the process with a view to inform the current NEET / JWT situation and RPA
- understanding what works (or does not work) within the extension: to understand how young people respond to agreements and brokerage and to understand for whom, in what circumstances, and in what respect the intervention has worked for the 'stock' of NEET and JWT and to inform how the approach would work under RPA.

From April 2008, within the Learning Agreement pilot areas, the existing variants were retained, apart from in areas which had operated a wage compensation model. A wage compensation model was no longer available to employers/young people who were recruited to the programme.

The extension of the pilots is the subject of a separate evaluation.

1.3 How were the LAPs evaluated?

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), formerly the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), the Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to undertake the evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots. The evaluation comprised three strands:

- **a process evaluation**, which explored the local implementation and delivery of the pilots in each area, based on interviews with pilot managers, personal advisers, providers and local stakeholders
- **a quantitative evaluation**, which involved the collection of quantitative data in pilot areas and a number of control areas, in order to measure the comparative impact of the pilots on the employment, education and training activities of the eligible JWT population and explore the experiences of participants
- **a programme theory evaluation**, which aimed to identify and test the key theories which underpinned the policy development and examine what worked or did not work, and why or in what circumstances, through a series of focused studies, three of which examined detailed aspects of the Learning Agreement Pilots.

The evaluation method is described in more detail in Appendix 1.

1.4 What is in this report?

This report draws on all aspects of the evaluation to pull together the main findings. The main sources for these findings are the evaluation papers produced during the course of the study. These include:

- Perry J, Purdon S, D'Souza J, Finch S, (forthcoming), *Evaluation of Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*, Final report from NatCen
- Maguire S, Thompson J, Levesley T, Miller L, Johnson C, Newton B, Bates P, Page R and Hillage J (forthcoming), *Evaluation of Learning Agreement Pilots: Process Evaluation Final Report*, DCSF
- Maguire S, Thompson J, Hillage J, Dewson S, Miller L, Johnson C, Newton B, Bates P, Page P (2008), *Evaluation of the Activity and Learning Agreement Pilot - Process Evaluation: Year One Report* Research Report RW027, DCSF
- Johnson C, Page R, Munro M (2008), *Activity and Learning Agreement Pilot: Programme Theory Evaluation - Working Paper 2: Signing up to a Learning Agreement*, RW029, DCSF
- Page R, Johnson C, Munro M (forthcoming), *Activity and Learning Agreement Pilot: Programme Theory Evaluation - Working Paper 4: Learning Agreement Provision*, DCSF

In addition, a final programme theory study examined progression among LAP participants and the theory that the agreement may encourage young people in jobs without training to take part in small elements of learning and thereby progress towards a more significant qualification. The study had not been completed as this report was written but emerging findings from the research were incorporated in the results reported here.

1.4.1 Report structure

The report is split into five further chapters:

- Chapter 2 examines how the pilots were established and organised including management and staffing structures and their relationship with local and national stakeholders.
- Chapter 3 focuses on how the pilots engaged with young people in jobs without training and specifically looks at how many young people became involved, their main characteristics the best way of getting them involved, and what employers thought about the programme
- Chapter 4 explores the practical details of the programme and in particular the role of the adviser, the learning in which young people engaged, whether the available provision met their needs and the data on learner completion.
- Chapter 5 looks at the impact of the LAP programme on young people's learning activity (and more general labour market engagement) as well as the impact on participants' general attitudes to learning.
- Finally, in Chapter 6 we draw together the conclusions of the evaluation.

The appendices include more information about the method adopted in the evaluation and additional data tables, referenced in the main report.

2 How were the pilots set up?

In this section we look at how the pilots were organised, their staffing and management structures, and the relationships that the pilots established with local and national stakeholders.

2.1 Two main models of delivery

The LAP was managed locally by Connexions Partnerships and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). Joint delivery responsibility for the LAP demanded that Connexions and local LSC staff work together to manage the implementation of the initiative. In some cases, this was a new venture. During the course of the pilot, the process evaluation found that stronger links had been established between the two agencies. In addition, the LAP enabled Connexions Services to work more closely with training providers, since the implementation of the pilot had enabled Connexions staff to become more involved in the management and delivery of training provision.

LAP project managers were based within Connexions. They played a key role in local implementation, establishing and maintaining co-management roles with their counterparts within the local LSC, as well as taking strategic responsibility for the local implementation and delivery of the initiative.

The task facing project managers was more complex in pilot areas which comprised large numbers of local authority areas and required the need to set up multiple sets of contractual and management areas. Management and organisational structures tended to be more complex where a pilot area comprised a number of local authority areas.

Two models of implementation were in evidence:

- **Local Area Autonomy**- predominantly in large pilot areas, where project managers within Connexions had a strategic role in overseeing the delivery of the pilot by operating through a network of local managers.
- **Central Management** - in pilot areas which comprised a small number of local authority areas, project managers retained responsibility for operational staffing and had a standardised approach to the delivery of LAP.

The demise of Connexions Partnerships and the re-integration of Connexions Services within individual local authority control would mean that the 'umbrella' role carried out by project managers could not be replicated within any national roll-out.

The implementation of the initiative was also hampered by organisational change, within both Connexions and local LSCs, which adversely affected staff recruitment and retention to the pilot and meant the first year got off to a slow start. During the second year of the pilot, national LSC guidance had become more consistent and stable and consequently, operational staff at local level were more confident about the LAP 'offer' and how to promote it.

2.2 Staffing structure

The pilots generally had a manager responsible for running them and, depending on their size, area team managers. The key operational unit was the local team of personal advisers (variously called Learning Advisers, Learning and Skills Brokers, Training Advisers etc., but referred to in this report as LAP Advisers), generally dedicated to the

delivery of the pilot. The number of staff was established with reference to the estimated size of the JWT population although as take-up was lower than expected in the first year a number of pilot areas did not recruit as many advisers as they originally planned. LAP advisers within Connexions needed a different skill set, compared with mainstream PAs. As well as being able to work with young people, LAP advisers needed to be able to 'sell' the concept of the initiative to young people and employers. They also needed an understanding of the available learning opportunities. Some new and redeployed Connexions staff found that working with employers and with young people to identify their training needs required new skills and/or challenged their existing skills. Difficulties were reported in recruiting and retaining staff who could work effectively with both young people and employers.

Learning point: *Staff recruitment had been more successful and sustained in areas where managers had employed staff from a wider range of backgrounds - in particular, staff with backgrounds in training and development and/or who had experience of promoting employment and training initiatives to employers and young people. In one pilot area, staff seconded from Jobcentre Plus were effective in using their customer care and employer-engagement skills in promoting LAP.*

The recruitment of LAP advisers within Connexions was slower in areas where staffing was managed by local authority personnel departments, due to the time taken to have vacancies and recruitment authorisation approved. This impeded the development of the initiative in some pilot areas.

Learning point: *In some pilot areas concern was raised about the lack of integration between LAP advisers and mainstream Connexions staff, due to the temporary status of LAP, the different skills and background of LAP advisers and the different nature of their work (ie dealing with the local labour market and training advisers). To overcome these problems and promote cross-referrals, pilots organised communication workshops and monthly adviser meetings to share information.*

All areas reported that there had been a shortfall in operational staff recruitment. The delay in notifying pilot areas about the decision to extend the pilot for a further year, had led to some staff on fixed term contracts finding alternative employment. Advisers were generally located in Connexions offices. In some cases advisers were organised on a geographical basis, in others they were structured around specific occupations or sectors. To promote networking and referrals from other agencies, LAP advisers in some pilot areas were located in a range of education and training providers' (including Train to Gain), voluntary organisations' and other partners' premises.

Contracting provision

Local LSCs had set about contracting with local training providers in a number of different ways. In some areas, an invitation to tender for LAP provision had been issued to all learning and training providers and contracts had been re-negotiated on an annual basis. In four pilot areas, provision was contracted through consortia arrangements, in which the local LSC devolved responsibility for the management and delivery of LAP provision to a group of training providers. Setting up consortia arrangements and subsequent delays in brokering provision had impeded LAP delivery during its first year of implementation.

Learning point: *There were mixed views about the effectiveness of the consortia approach. Even within individual pilot areas, there were differences in performance and in levels of satisfaction with consortia arrangements between local authority areas. The consortium model worked well when:*

- *there was a strong lead provider who had effective communication with other partners, who was committed to the initiative, as well as having the ability to influence other providers*
- *there was a good relationship between the providers involved*
- *the consortia included a representation from all key training providers in the area ie colleges (large and small), voluntary sector organisations as well as private training providers, which could offer a breadth of provision and can be delivered flexibly, and*
- *the consortia had forged positive links with other local stakeholders, most notably the 14–19 partnership and Connexions.*

2.3 Links with other stakeholders and employers

The implementation of LAP has enabled Connexions staff and, to a lesser extent, LSC staff, to strengthen their links with local stakeholders, most notably local authorities, Business Links, local Chambers of Commerce, Train to Gain and other training brokers. In addition, it enabled closer links with many national and local employers to be established. Employer engagement was one of the greatest challenges facing LAP delivery. There were on-going issues related to securing the inclusion of national employers, in particular, national retailers and fast food chains. While some areas had negotiated the cooperation of local managers of national companies in LAP delivery, many local managers would not engage with LAP, since agreement had not been secured at national level.

Secondly, securing the engagement of employers which employ young people in JWT, many of whom had rejected any engagement with other training incentives and/or attached any real value to training young people, was an on-going issue. While significant progress had been made in many areas, most respondents concluded that they still had a long way to go in terms of persuading employers who did not see any value training, to participate in LAP.

2.4 Management information

Most project managers reported that MI requirements had been difficult to manage and time-consuming throughout the life of the pilot. Getting staff used to the Connexions CCIS information system at the same time as coping with changes to the requirements from the system, and ensuring that data held on the Connexions and LSC systems were compatible were all challenges with which the pilots had to grapple.

There was a consensus among respondents to the process evaluation that a clear definition of data requirements at national level would have been helpful, as well as some feedback on why certain types of data were needed. This would have helped to ensure that data were recorded in a consistent way across all pilot areas, thereby enabling performance between areas to be measured in an accurate way. For example, confusion and inconsistency had arisen over definitions of a 'sign up', the '16 hour rule' and employer engagement.

Learning point: *The lack of a uniform and fully operationalised MI system across all pilot areas had weakened the implementation of the initiative. Prior to the launch of any national initiative, a review of current arrangements needs to take place, so as to ensure that any national delivery of LAP is fully supported by one MI system, which is able to deliver data which are timely, responsive, consistent and accurate.*

3 Getting young people to take part

We now turn to examine how the pilots engaged with young people who were in jobs without training and specifically look at:

- how many young people became involved in the programme
- why some eligible young people chose not to get involved
- what were the main characteristics of the young people who did get involved
- what was the best way of getting them involved, and
- what employers thought about the programme.

3.1 How many young people got involved in agreements?

According to the management information, a total of 9,500 young people signed a Learning Agreement between April 2006 and March 2008. The level of participation varied by pilot area and by the model or variant of the financial support on offer (see Table 3.1). However, the number of young people signing up to the pilots was not the same as those who actually started learning (as measured by the Individual Learner Record [ILR] kept by the LSC). Only 5,306 young people actually started learning according to these data (ie 56 per cent of LAP sign-ups). This point is reinforced by the quantitative evaluation survey data which found that only 66 per cent of young people who said they started an agreement also said they were learning towards a qualification. Therefore, although in this report we generally use the numbers who have signed agreements as the 'take-up' figure, this may be an over-estimate of the number of young people who actually started learning.

The number of pilots and the size of the areas differed between each variant of the agreement on offer, therefore the potentially eligible population similarly varied. The evaluation identified two measures which provided an approximate indication of how the number of young people actually starting an agreement compared with the potential number who could have started:

- the profile (ie anticipated level) of starts agreed for each pilot at the outset; and
- the survey sample population.

Did take-up match profile?

Each of the pilots had agreed a profile of 'starts' - i.e. an estimated number of young people they expected to start the pilot. This was agreed at the outset with the pilot areas. The DCSF based their estimates on the potential population of young people in jobs without training and the proportion the pilots estimated that they could get to start an agreement. The profiles were revised (downwards) on a number of occasions to reflect the capacity of the pilots to deliver and were significantly lower in the first year than in the second. These figures, therefore, only bear some relationship to the size of the eligible population as they also depend on the quality of the information available and the range of other factors affecting the detail of the pilots' contractual arrangements.

Generally, the pilots achieved 77 per cent of their expected profile in the two years from 2006, ie only about three-quarters of the expected numbers of young people started, slightly higher (at just over 80 per cent) in year 1 on a much lower profile.

The percentage of profile achieved varied by area and by the variant of the agreement. The pilots operating Variant 1 of the agreement (bonus payment to young person and employer) achieved 92 per cent of their profile; in Variant 2 areas (bonus plus wage compensation to the employer) they achieved 74 per cent of profile; in Variant 3 areas (agreement only) 62 per cent of the expected number of young people started learning (see Table 3.1).

Why was take-up lower in the first year than the second?

Of the 9,500 young people who signed an agreement in the first two years, less than a third (2,932) signed up in the first year. The delay in getting going and the consequent low take-up in the first year were found by the process evaluation to be attributable to a number of reasons including:

- the short lead-in time to deliver a policy targeted at a group of young people and a segment of the labour market, which had not been a policy priority for some time
- delays in staff recruitment within Connexions and local LSCs
- ongoing changes to LAP regulations, which created confusion about the product, particularly among operational staff who were responsible for its promotion
- organisational change which had occurred within both LSC and Connexions
- difficulties in identifying and tracking young people in the JWT group, due to inaccuracies in MI data
- apprehension about wider publicity of LAP because of the delays by local LSCs in procuring relevant education and training provision
- the lack of experience and confidence in working directly with employers among operational staff in some Connexions services
- a lack of flexibility in the content and delivery of provision and the time it took for the LSC to agree contracts with providers.

Given the breadth and number of issues that pilot areas faced, the first year of the pilot was widely regarded as a set up year. Significant progress was made during the second year of delivery and as a result the number of young people signing learning agreements more than doubled.

Learning point: *The experience of the pilots is that it can take at last a year to set up a programme such as LAP to allow for the time not only to recruit and train advisers but also to source and contract with providers. Even then it may take longer to find and engage with sufficient numbers of young people to be working at capacity.*

What proportion of the eligible population got involved?

In theory the survey data provide us with a rough estimate of the size of the eligible population. In practice it has proved very difficult to generate definitive estimates of take-up of Learning Agreements because whether or not a young person is 'eligible' for an Agreement depends on whether they are in a job without training (i.e. JWT) at the point when they were approached by the programme staff. The samples used in the evaluation survey were those young people identified by Connexions as being in a JWT at some

point during the period between April 2005 and June 2007. Many of these may not have been in a JWT at the point in time when contacted by staff about LAP. So, the number recorded as 'eligible at time of contact' by Connexions staff was likely to be smaller than the number of people who were eligible for the survey (perhaps considerably smaller)³.

Learning point: *Eligibility for a programme like LAP depends on a young person's precise circumstances at their potential point of entry. More flexibility in eligibility criteria would have made the programme easier to operate and could have meant a larger take-up among the target group in general.*

However, based on the survey definition of eligibility, we estimate that around nine per cent of eligible young people took up a Learning Agreement. This average take-up rate masks considerable variation across the three LAP variants: 14 per cent for Variant 1 (bonus only); seven per cent for Variant 2 (bonus plus wage); and just four per cent for Variant 3 (agreement only) – see Table 3.1.

One way to reduce the eligibility pool, to bring the definition closer to the working definition used by Connexions staff, is to restrict it to young people who had heard of the LAP. In the evaluation survey 32 per cent of the sample said that they had heard of LAP, and of these 23 per cent took up an Agreement. The rates varied by the financial incentive on offer. In Variant 1 areas take up was 31 per cent, while it was 21 per cent in Variant 2 areas, and 14 per cent Variant 3.

Table 3.1 - Take-up of Learning Agreement Pilots 2006-2008

	Variant 1 (Bonus to young people)	Variant 2 (Bonus + wage compensation)	Variant 3 (Agreement only)	All areas
Number of starts 2006 to 2008 ⁴	4,298	2,767	2,366	9,500
Proportion of expected starts achieved ⁵	92%	74%	62%	77%
Starts as a proportion of the estimated population ⁶	14%	7%	4%	9%
Starts as a proportion of the estimated population who were aware of the pilot ⁷	31%	21%	14%	23%

Source: LAP MI and NatCen survey

What can we say about take-up?

Given the lack of consistent data about participation and the size of the population it is difficult to be precise about the take-up of the Learning Agreements, compounded by the fact that participation seems significantly higher in the second than the first year. However, we can be reasonably confident in concluding that:

³ Although Connexions record data on 'eligible at the time of contact' these are not consistently recorded and collated across the eight pilots and so we have not been able to use these data to estimate the eligible population across the pilots as a whole.

⁴ Young people recorded on the Management Information as starting (ie signing) an agreement.

⁵ Actual sign-ups as a percentage of agreed planned profile.

⁶ Take-up rate based on total survey sample (as a proxy for eligible population).

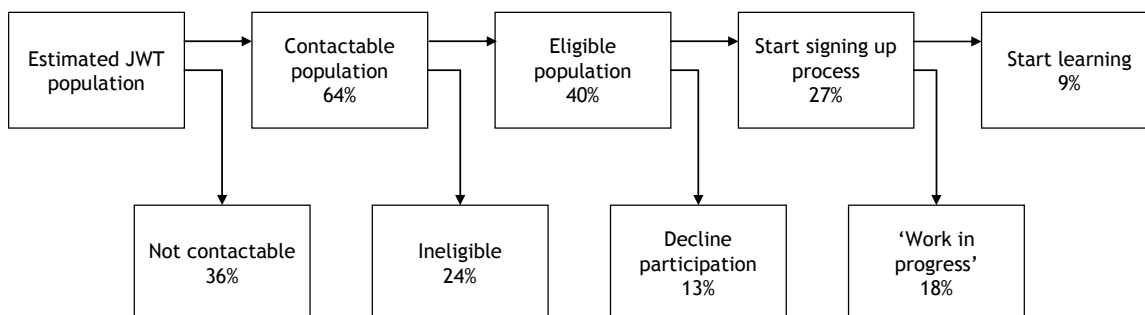
⁷ Take-up rate based on those having heard of LAP (according to the survey).

- the pilots did not get as many young people to take part as was initially expected
- under a quarter of our best estimate of the eligible population took part
- take-up increased significantly in the second year - and, therefore, penetration of the programme among the eligible population could have risen
- Variant 1 (based on bonus payments to young people) appears to have the highest take-up.

3.2 Why did young people not get involved?

Young people drop out of the process at various stages. Figure 3.1 (based on Year 1 MI data⁸) maps the key points in the process starting with the estimated eligible population from the CCIS database. The first year of operation identified severe problems with the reliability and accuracy of the data on the system about young people in jobs without training. These had not been a priority group for Connexions before and the data and processes for collecting up-to-date data on their status and contact details was found wanting. The pilots rectified these problems in the second year.

Figure 3.3.1 - The LAP journey



Source: IES/LAP MI 2007

Thus a significant proportion (estimated to be at least a third in the first year) of the estimated JWT population was uncontactable as the CCIS records were out of date. Of those contacted, a further proportion (around two in five contacted, ie a quarter of the original estimated population) were found to be ineligible.

Thus, only around four in ten of the original estimated population were contacted and offered the chance to take part in the programme. A third of those offered an Agreement (ie 13 per cent of the original population) declined the offer, leaving around a quarter of the original estimate to be in discussions with an adviser about starting an agreement.

The reasons why young people declined to sign an agreement included:

- **lack of interest in training** - particularly younger people who had recently left school with negative experiences and were happy just to be working. It was generally felt (supported by the data, see Section 3.3) that LAP better suited the older members of the age group who had come to realise the value for further qualifications

⁸ Because of concerns about their reliability, similar data have not been collated for Year 2. Year 1 figures should be treated as indicative only.

- **happy with existing training** - e.g. provided in-house by their employer. In some cases these included stand-alone NVQs (for which LAP participants were ineligible for support)
- **lack of support** - from their employer or their parents
- **problems getting to provision** - including time and transport costs
- **uncertainty over future direction** - typically they were in temporary jobs (or planning to leave a permanent one) but did not have a clear idea about what they wanted to do in the longer-term
- **unclear about the offer** - and, for example, did not understand that they could continue working or did not realise the difference between work-based learning and the school work they had recently left.

Some of these reasons were temporary and the young person's views or circumstances could change so Connexions advisers often agreed to keep in touch.

A quarter of those offered an agreement started (in the first year) and the remainder stayed on the books of the Connexions advisers as 'work in progress' (a few of whom had dropped out the process eg by becoming out of contact).

3.3 What were the main characteristics of LAP participants?

Young people who are in jobs without training are a heterogeneous group and LAP participants are similarly diverse.

The survey mapped out the characteristics of both the eligible JWT population and those who were participating in the LAP programme (See Appendix 2, Table 1). Young people taking part in LAP were generally white (95 per cent) and aged 17 (40 per cent) or 18 (55 per cent)⁹, in good health (only three per cent reported a disability), and living with their parents. Only a few (three per cent) had children of their own. Prior educational attainment among LAP participants was lower than the national average (31 per cent of LAP participants had five or more GCSEs at A-C, compared with 62 per cent among all young people).

Generally, participants were similar to non-participants other than that a higher proportion of females appeared to be taking part in the programme compared with the population at large (46 per cent of participants were female, compared with 38 per cent of the general JWT population) and participants were slightly younger than the population as a whole. Compared with the young people who took part in the Activity Agreement programme, LAP participants were:

- less likely to be from a minority ethnic group - less than five per cent compared with 12 per cent of AA participants
- less likely to have children - three per cent compared with nine per cent of AA participants
- better qualified - e.g. only 14 per cent of AA participants had five or more GCSEs.

⁹ at the time of the survey

3.4 What was the best way of getting young people involved?

In addition to general marketing, there were two main approaches adopted by the pilots to engage with young people and secure their involvement with the programme: the **employer route** (i.e. identifying employers of young people and approaching them and their young employees to take part); and the **young person route** (identifying potentially eligible young people and approaching them directly). The second approach was more successful than the first.

3.4.1 Employer route

Pilots forged links with Train to Gain brokers, Business Link advisers, and local employer representative to co-ordinate approaches to employers and identify potentially eligible employees. However, these links did not prove particularly successful, at least in the early stages of the pilots, in identifying suitable workplaces to target. Pilots resorted to other marketing methods include telemarketing and cold-calling employers and organising promotional events. While there were some successes from targeting the types of employers that recruited young people (eg those in the hospitality sector), by and large the more general marketing approaches (eg telemarketing) resulted in few referrals.

3.4.2 Young person route

The most successful method of recruiting young people to the programme was through direct contact with the young person (eg 36 per cent of participants in the survey first heard about LAP via a telephone call from an adviser). In the first year, advisers found trying to contact the right sort of young people a frustrating task, especially if they had changed their status or contact details from the information held on the CCIS database. By the second year, Connexions staff had got much better at ensuring their information was accurate and at targeting their contacting efforts to maximise the chances of approaching eligible young people. This included much closer liaison with school-based advisers to promote LAP to young people before they completed year 11.

In addition new routes began to emerge, through:

- **providers** - of E2E and apprenticeship programmes and who had contact with young people and their employers
- **word of mouth** - from existing participants and in some areas a payment was offered to young people who successfully referred a friend to the programme.

'We've tried radio advertising, we've tried press advertising, we've done all sorts really but to be quite honest for us, nothing has worked better than picking up the 'phone to those young people and saying 'We believe that you are in work. Would you be interested in this?'

Connexions local manager

- **activity agreements** - in the survey five per cent of respondents said they had taken part in the Activity Agreement pilots (in the areas where it was on offer).

3.5 Why did young people take part?

Not surprisingly young people mainly took part in the LAP programme because they wanted to study and get better qualifications. Few were motivated solely by the prospect of the bonus payment.

The survey asked LAP participants why they had decided to take part¹⁰. We can link the results with the programme theory study which examined the reasons why young people signed an agreement and the views of advisers and pilot managers in the process evaluation, to identify the main reasons why young people took part in the programme:

- **improve their qualifications** - (49 per cent in the follow-up survey gave this as the 'most important reason' for taking part) participants recognised the importance of qualifications and that they generally had gaps in their portfolio which limited their chances of progression with their existing employer or finding a better job
- **studying while working** - (15 per cent) participants had generally not liked school and welcomed the opportunity to learn while continuing to earn and '*not be treated like a kid*'
- **chance to change jobs** - (11 per cent) some young people had specifically signed up to their Learning Agreement with the aim of getting a better job (eg through gaining IT skills to work in an office or the qualifications necessary to work on construction sites)
- **flexible study** - (nine per cent) in the survey liked the flexible nature of the form of study on offer.

Role of the payment

Relatively few young people (eight per cent) were solely attracted by the prospect of the bonus payment (where available). In the survey, only 15 per cent of participants in receipt of payments said they would have probably (ten per cent) or definitely (five per cent) not have taken part in the programme if they had not received a payment. Almost half (48 per cent) said they would definitely have taken part anyway and a further 38 per cent said they would probably have taken part. Those who said that they would not have taken part without the payment came from lower income households.

According to the survey, 87 per cent of young people in areas where bonus payments were made who had signed up for LAP and reported that they had studied for and completed a qualification, had received payments, while 13 per cent said they had not. Only around a half who had a payment said they had received £250. While there may be concerns around respondent recall and understanding, the results do suggest that payments may not have been made promptly in every case.

¹⁰ There were two separate sources of data on this question. In the general survey participants were asked why they took part (Appendix 2, Table 2) and in the separate follow-up survey participants were for the most important reason for taking part (Appendix 2, Table 3)

Payments systems

Where paid, bonus payments to young people were made at different milestones, such as when the Learning Agreement had been signed or when training activity had started. In the second year of delivery, changes were made to payment processes. While many initial payments had been made at the sign-up stage, a number of young people had failed to start their training, which may have been scheduled to begin a few weeks later. In order to reverse this trend, initial payments were transferred to the beginning of the training period.

Payment procedures to young people were reported to be efficient, since they were made at intermittent intervals and generally made electronically (in 90 per cent of cases according to the survey). Young people said in the survey that they mainly spent the money on transport; clothes; leisure and entertainment and making a contribution to household budgets.

In contrast, in areas where wage compensation was paid to employers, it was described as an 'administrative nightmare' to manage payments. Records of training attendance from training providers, as well as single claims from every employer on wages lost as a result of young people attending training needed to be collected and verified before payments could be made. The collection of accurate and timely data from both training providers and employers had been difficult and, consequently, significant delays in making payments had occurred. A simpler procedure would have been to offer employers a standard payment and to seek quarterly returns from training providers on young people's attendance records.

3.6 What did employers think about LAP?

Not all employers knew that one of their young employees was engaged in the LAP programme. Some young people did not want their employer to know, especially where they were thinking of changing job. Advisers accommodated their wishes and the learning activities took place outside work time. According to the survey of young people, the employer was party to the agreement in around three-quarters of cases and in the remaining quarter was unaware of the young person's involvement.

Participating employers interviewed for the evaluation generally welcomed the learning agreements. They felt that the LAP engaged young people in learning in a way that their school careers had not and helped them acquire job-specific, personal and social skills.

Employers signed up to Learning Agreements for reasons relating to: social responsibility, meeting skill needs or to enhance their existing training provision. Employers benefited from being able to take some of the risk out of recruiting an unskilled, inexperienced or possible immature employee. The Agreements paid for and provided a structure for training young employees, as well as encouraging employers to take a chance on employing them. Indeed some employers recruited young people with the Learning Agreement specifically in mind.

Many also had a genuine desire simply to help a young person or to be seen as a 'good' employer, to the extent that some were not concerned with whether or not the training was directly relevant to the young person's job role. Having a better skilled and motivated workforce with the productivity improvements that this entailed was a driver but a less immediate or attributable benefit of the Learning Agreement.

Whilst providing free training was seen as important, with a few exceptions, wage compensation or bonus payments to employers appeared to have little impact on their propensity to take part in the Learning Agreement. In contrast, employers thought that bonus payments to employees were important.

Employers felt that the process of taking part in the Learning Agreement was made very easy for them. In part this was due to the structure of the Agreements, which employers said created very little disruption to their businesses, and also the good quality information and support they received from Connexions staff. The Learning Agreements were therefore a straightforward means by which employers could support young employees.

There was evidence from the process and programme theory evaluation that young people who had support from their employer as well as PA support were reported to have higher retention and completion rates. The survey data supported this finding: young people whose employers did not know about LAP, or who did not offer much support, were much less likely to have successfully completed a qualification,

However, not all young people felt their employer had been supportive. Seven out of ten of those who knew their employer was aware of their involvement, said they had either a lot (40 per cent) or a fair amount (29 per cent) of support from their employer. Around 14 per cent said that they had received 'not very much' support and a further 17 per cent said they had received none at all.

4 What did the young people do while on the programme?

This section examines the practical details of the programme and in particular the role of the adviser, the learning in which young people engaged, whether the available provision met their needs and the data on learner completion.

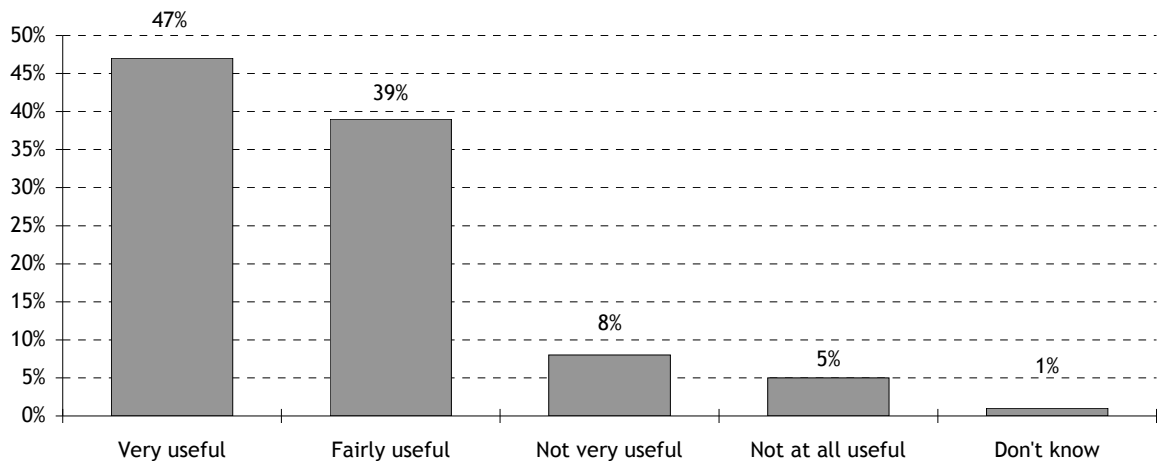
4.1 What was the role of the adviser?

The LAP advisers did not just get the young people to sign a Learning Agreement, they also played an important role in identifying and sourcing the learning that best met the young person's needs. They then played a support role, meeting with the young person regularly to see how they were getting on and sorting out any problems.

Young people generally met their adviser face-to-face at least once a month, one in five met them weekly while half met them monthly. In addition they had telephone contact at a similar level of frequency.

Nearly all young people found the contact with their adviser either very useful (47 per cent) or fairly useful (39 per cent), see Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 - How useful was contact with LAP Adviser*



Weighted base = 355

Unweighted base = 505

Base = All participants (JWT) sample

* missing 24 cases: not assigned a LAP adviser

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Advisers treated each young person on a case-by-case basis but the common factors identified as engaging young people were:

- **Being able to offer learning that leads somewhere.** This did not necessarily have to be related to the young person's current job - e.g. a key skills qualification (to gain entry to another course or type of work). Some learners were doing aspiration-led vocational qualifications, with a view to changing to a different type of work, although these were often more difficult to broker because of the need to have some form of voluntary work placement which could provide an opportunity for gaining work-based evidence.
- **Help with travel, or brokering learning that comes to the young person.** Advisers mentioned that travel was a key barrier for some young people in terms of both cost and the time it could take to make journeys using public transport. This was a particular problem for, but not limited to, rural areas.
- **Sourcing provision that can fit around work.** This was particularly important for young people who were doing learning that was un-related to their current job and/or did not want their employer to be involved. Many young people worked irregular hours and needed the flexibility of an open learning centre, or of assessor visits at times that fitted into their shifts, including early mornings, evenings and weekends. However, some providers were not able to offer this level of flexibility or were doing so as a 'loss leader'.

The factors which made brokerage easier were:

- **Strong partnerships with providers** and, in one area in particular, having dedicated Learning Development advisers who had specific responsibility for brokering less common provision and filling gaps.
- **Flexible provision** that could start fairly soon, hence roll-on, roll-off provision was preferred to college courses which had fixed start dates. Long delays while waiting for a course to start could deter some young people and their employers.
- **Employer support** was critical if the young person wanted to do a work-based qualification such as an Apprenticeship or NVQ related to their current job.

The following circumstances made brokerage more difficult, but not impossible:

- **When young people wanted to do an aspiration-led course**, that is, courses that would lead them away from their current job and towards an industry they aspired to work in. Voluntary work placements had been brokered in a small number of cases, but these were only usually possible for young people who worked part-time.
- **When the young person worked irregular shifts** (particularly if they also worked full-time hours). This increased the need for flexible provision including open learning and home visits from assessors.
- **When the young person's job role involved a limited range of tasks**, this could mean they did not have enough opportunity to provide the full range of evidence required for certain work-based qualifications. In this situation, young people had to do a lower level or more general courses, or none at all.

Advisers had sometimes been able to broker new provision to fill specific gaps in their area. This had been achieved via use of sub-contracting to bring in a wider range of providers than was originally contracted; transferring successful outreach models from partner organisations into the LA; and brokering between young people, employers and providers to provide shared opportunities for work experience. Generally, it was felt that providers had become more flexible as the LA pilot had progressed, in terms of how they delivered courses (for example through the use of more drop-in sessions). The ways that provision was delivered, and the range of provision on the 'menu', had also broadened over time *because* of brokerage.

4.2 What learning activities did the young people undertake?

Young people undertook a mix of learning activities. The survey found that the most common form of learning was an NVQ (probably in many cases as part of an apprenticeship). Across the eight pilot areas four in ten learners were working towards an NVQ. The rest were doing a mix including City and Guilds qualifications, key skills and GCSEs (see Appendix 2, Table 4). Generally the qualifications being taken were at levels 1 or 2, although eight per cent of learners were taking a Level 3 qualification.

The type of learning undertaken varied by pilot areas. Information from the process evaluation and the management information reports indicated that some (Variant 1) areas focussed on shorter courses while some of the other areas (e.g. Variant 3) placed greater emphasis on longer-term apprenticeships. The survey results reflect this point: some 41 per cent of young people in Variant 1 areas were on courses which lasted less than three months compared with 37 per cent in Variant 3 areas; on the other hand 31 per cent of courses lasted over nine months in Variant 1 areas compared with 45 per cent in Variant 3 (see Appendix 2, Table 5).

The programme theory study on small learning steps among the LAP learners found that short courses were particularly useful for those who were waiting for a course to start (eg in the absence of 'roll-on roll-off' provision) and needed to be 'kept warm' with a discrete activity. Short courses allowed young people to develop confidence and gain experience. By building up slowly, young people could be encouraged to commit to a longer programme.

In the process evaluation, most areas had identified that private training providers could be more flexible than colleges, with regard to the delivery of LAP provision because they tended to be smaller organisations, focused on work-based training delivery and were not working primarily within the confines of an academic year timetable for delivery.

However, among respondents to the survey only 18 per cent of learners were working primarily with private providers, while 41 per cent were with FE, sixth form colleges or academies and 24 per cent were learning in the workplace (possibly supported by private or public providers) (see Appendix 2, Table 6).

4.2.1 Did provision meet young people's needs?

Within LAP, the responsibility for the procurement of provision rested with the local LSC. While many providers tried to be more responsive to individual needs, this had not proved cost-effective or practical in many instances and the low numbers entering the pilot in the first year meant that many providers which had shown great enthusiasm towards the initiative when it was first launched, were reluctant to invest large amounts of time and effort to develop tailored packages of learning for young people when they had other large contracts to deliver.

Frustration was felt by Connexions staff when they could not access a suitable programme of learning, despite having successfully recruited young people and their employers to the programme and having identified their training/learning needs. The reasons given for this were:

- specific courses not being available in the area
- courses being unavailable at the time they were needed; and/or
- courses not being offered on an individual basis.

Specific difficulties centred around September start dates for courses delivered by FE colleges and the lack of flexibility in the delivery of courses which were in high demand, such as construction skills programmes. Another area of tension surrounding the implementation of LAP was reconciling young people's demands for learning/training with those of their employers.

Concerns among pilot personnel over the lack of flexible provision continued during the second year of the pilot. However, some pilot areas did report that progress had been made in identifying providers who were better able to cater for the type of demand generated through LAP, and LAP advisers were more confident about working with individual training providers to broker provision, especially in areas where they had previously relied on consortia leads to organise training.

The process evaluation found that the lack of flexibility in LAP made the initiative more difficult to market and promote to young people and their employers; there were demands for more flexibility to be introduced to Section 96 (the LSC's list of approved qualifications for LAP delivery), especially for taster programmes, part NVQ qualifications, and short courses, such as food hygiene, food safety and first aid which would act as a 'hook' to engage young people. Vocational courses which advisers found unable to provide included: carpet fitting, horticulture, and landscape gardening. The demand for construction courses remained largely unfulfilled, due to the demand for places and the inflexibility of colleges towards offering roll-on roll-off programmes.

Learning point: *The creation of a Discretionary Fund (similar to that which is available within the Activity Agreement Pilots) would have enabled LAP advisers to broker provision, as well as given them the capacity to offer young people assistance with travel and equipment costs, where this was needed. A number of pilot areas reported that young people were unwilling to travel to access training and some of this reluctance was attributed to the costs that would be incurred, which could not currently be met within LAP funding.*

A study for the programme theory element of the evaluation also found that there was a lack of provision in some areas which meant that advisers could be negotiating with young people to do the provision that was available rather than what they really wanted.

The study found that having a choice of learning in itself was not necessary to engage all young people in the Learning Agreement. What was *most* motivating for young people was being able to access provision that helped them to work towards their future work or learning aspirations - offering them just one option was enough for some, if it was the right course for them.

If the provision that the young person wanted was not available, some chose not to engage with the Learning Agreement, rather than participate in other learning. However, other young people took up their second or third choice of course, if they felt it would still help them to achieve their end goal, perhaps helped by their adviser to see an alternative way forward.

Where work-based provision was not an option (either because of lack of provision, lack of employer support, or the young person was not working in the chosen area), it was common for some young people to undertake transferable qualifications, such as key skills, in order to work towards a longer term aim. In this case, what young people wanted was not on their menu of 'first choice' but they could do other courses as a fallback. It is important to note that, conversely, young people with GCSE passes at C or above in maths and English had very limited options under the LAP if they did not want or could not do work-based training in their current job.

4.2.2 What was the role of the adviser in brokering provision?

The same study examined the role of the adviser as a broker of training. It found several innovative examples of **new provision** or new approaches to delivering existing provision being developed and brokered.

Some young people were undertaking learning through the Learning Agreement as a stepping stone to something else. Often this involved the adviser in more than simply a brokerage role. Advisers were also mentors, and advocates, and gave young people in-depth careers guidance. Advisers need to have an appropriate skills set to undertake this diverse range of roles, including working with employers.

Several young people were approaching their learning in a strategic way, with an end goal of working in another industry, progressing in their current job role, or accessing higher level learning provision. Given the extent of planned progression, it was important that the Learning Agreement could support young people moving from Level 1, through Level 2 and beyond, in both work-based learning and other types of courses. Brokerage within the LAP, from one course to another, was important for retention and progression.

Advisers and providers alike felt that the LAP funding rules had constrained the provision that advisers could broker, and did not fit particularly well with the types of learning that some young people in jobs without training need. Advisers felt that short courses could be useful to engage some of these young people, in particular the least confident and least qualified, to help them achieve quickly and re-engage them with learning. NVQs at Level 2 were also reported to bridge the gap between Level 1 and Apprenticeships. Provision at NVQ Level 1 was reported to have expanded in all areas as a result of the LA pilot.

Young people's choice of course could be affected by a range of factors, including:

- **Young people factors:** these included prior qualifications, experience of school or college, whether they liked their current job, how far they had a longer-term goal, and how far this fit with their current job.
- **Provision factors:** these included location/ accessibility of the provision (in terms of travel), timing (in terms of how soon it could start), scheduling (in terms of flexibility of the course or meetings with an assessor), and course length. Young people generally appreciated being able to learn at their own pace. Some needed short courses as an initial step, or benefited from longer courses being broken down into shorter components.

- **Employment-related factors:** these included the degree of employer support, the young person's working hours (in terms of number and regularity), and the duties they carried out as part of their current job (which could determine whether a certain work-based qualification was suitable or not).

4.3 Did young people successfully complete their course?

The management information at the end of the two year period had recorded 1,705 young people had successfully completed their learning (and gained a qualification), that is a third (32 per cent) of those who had been actively learning (Table 4.1). Some of these learners have subsequently successfully completed their learning after the end of March 2008.¹¹

The completion rate in Variant 1 areas (at 42 per cent) was significantly higher than in Variant 2 and Variant 3 areas. This may reflect the type and length of courses undertaken in the different areas: provision in Variant 1 areas tended to be shorter than in other areas and more focussed on NVQs (see Appendix 2, Tables 4 and 5).

The survey data suggests that the proportion who signed a Learning Agreement who had achieved a qualification at the time of the survey was 23 per cent (30 per cent of those who said they had been working towards a qualification).

How many young people left early?

During the two-year period further 1,300 (25 per cent) had left their course before they had completed it (some to return to full-time education).

Table 4.1 - LAP completion and early leaving rates by variant 2006 to 2008

	Variant 1	Variant 2	Variant 3	All pilots
Completion rates	42%	21%	21%	32%
Early leaver rate	22%	23%	31%	25%

Source: LAP Management Information May 2008

¹¹ However, subsequent completion rate data on this cohort of learners is not available.

5 What is the impact of the Learning Agreements?

In this section we examine the evaluation evidence on the impact of the LAP programme on young people's learning activity (and more general labour market engagement) as well as the impact on participants' general attitudes to learning.

5.1 The Impact on LAP on learning activity

The quantitative evaluation was designed to estimate the short-term impact of LAP on the learning behaviour of young people in jobs without training. Through the survey of young people in pilot areas and similar areas selected to act as a control (ie controlled area comparison) we were able to match the young people participating in Learning Agreements with young people with similar characteristics and circumstances other than not having the LAP on offer.

To assess the immediate impact, the quantitative evaluation compared the experiences of LAP participants during a 12 month reference period that covered the time on LAP, with the experiences of the comparison group (to give an indication of what the same period would have looked like for participants if LAP had not been available.) A range of outcome measures were examined:

- studying for a qualification
- work-based training, including government-supported training
- other paid work (most recent job) (ie excluding those who entered work-based training) divided into:
 - those entering non-elementary occupations with in-work training
 - those entering elementary occupations with in-work training
 - those entering non-elementary occupations with no in-work training
 - those entering elementary occupations with no in-work training.
- voluntary work
- self-reported personal development activities.

The full results are reported in Appendix 2, Table 7.

By far the clearest difference between participants and their comparators was in the rates of studying for qualifications. During the 12 month period 61 per cent of LAP participants reported having done some studying towards a qualification¹², and this percentage was 30 per cent without LAP. Therefore, we estimate that 31 per cent (rounded figures) of participants were encouraged by LAP to take up studying who otherwise would not have.¹³

¹² Why are not 100 per cent of LAP participants studying towards a qualification? The difference appears to be mainly between the number who signed an agreement and the number who actually started learning. For instance, elsewhere the survey of participants found that 26 per cent of participants left the programme without starting to study and a further seven per cent were on the programme but not currently studying.

¹³ This impact of 31 percentage point increase may in fact be a slight underestimate because some studying under LAP will have occurred outside of the reference period and so be uncounted. We estimate that around 66 per cent of LAP participants do some studying as part of that participation, which is slightly higher than the 61 per cent doing studying during the reference period. Assuming that all of the five per cent of participants who do training under LAP outside of the reference period would not have done any training without LAP, then the impact of LAP could be as high as 37 per cent.

This overall impact on studying of 31 percentage points is driven predominantly by large impacts on studying for level 1 and 2 qualifications. LAP does not impact greatly on the prevalence of studying at higher levels.

The impacts on work and work-based training are considerably smaller, but nevertheless positive. Around 19 per cent of LAP participants engaged in some form of work-based training during the 12-month reference period, around three percentage points higher than this percentage would have been without LAP.

Beyond this, looking at participants' most recent jobs from within the reference period, around ten per cent of LAP participants were found to be in employment with training who otherwise would not have been (the assumption being that this ten per cent would either have been NEET or in work without training).

And on the other side of the coin, LAP appears to have reduced the percentage of young people in jobs without training by about ten percentage points. That is ten per cent of LAP participants who would have been in work without training are doing other things (which might be work-based training, a job with training, or studying).

5.1.1 Immediate impact by variant

Analysis of the impact by type of participants or variants of the financial incentive were hampered by small sample sizes (a consequence of the relatively low take-up during the survey period). However, the quantitative evaluation did find that the Variant 3 (agreement only) pilots appeared to have less of an impact on rates of study than either of the other two variants (bonus payment, and bonus plus wage compensation). Just 23 per cent of participants under Variant 3 studied for a qualification during the reference period who otherwise would not have done, compared to over 30 per cent in Variant 1 areas and 38 per cent in Variant 2 areas.

5.2 The short-term impact of LAP after participation

The survey design allowed us to investigate what happened to young people in the three months after they finished their Learning Agreement. However, the sample size of those who completed their Learning Agreement at least three months before the survey interview was very small (N = 65) and therefore we cannot say anything definitive about post-participation impacts. Nevertheless, an examination of the post-agreement participants *suggests* that, *relative to their comparison group*, LAP participants were more likely to be studying - around 34 per cent of participants were studying for a qualification, and we estimate it would have been 23 per cent without LAP (an impact of +11 percentage points).

So it appears that immediately after participation LAP created an 11 percentage point shift in the activity profile from employment and into education. But we would stress that the fact that these estimates are based on extremely small sample sizes means that this 11 point estimate should be recognised as very approximate.

How best to measure the impact of the Learning Agreement Pilots

The quantitative evaluation of LAP was originally designed to allow for impacts of LAP measured across the whole of the eligible JWT population. That is, outcomes for eligible JWT young people in pilot areas were to be compared to outcomes for similar JWT young people from comparison areas. After making sure that the pilot area and comparison area groups were matched on baseline characteristics, any differences in outcomes between the two groups would be attributable to LAP. This method gives an impact measured across a population, rather than an impact on those who took up a Learning Agreement.

An alternative approach was to concentrate only on measuring the impact of the programme on those who actually took up a Learning Agreement. Under this scenario those taking up a Learning Agreement are identified and matched to similar JWT young people in other areas. Their outcomes were then compared.

Both approaches have their difficulties. The second of these approaches (impact on participants) is often criticised because there is a risk of self-selection bias. What this means in this case is that participants, who have self-selected to take up an agreement and who may be more motivated than other JWT young people, will be matched to young people in other areas for whom we have little or no information on their motivation levels. If motivated participants are matched to less motivated young people then the impact of LAP may be over-estimated.

However, the impact on the 'eligible population method' (that is, the method originally chosen for the evaluation) also has difficulties. The principle difficulty is that, by comparing all of the eligible population in LAP areas with all of the eligible population in comparison areas, the impact of LAP is diluted. This is because the eligible population in LAP areas is made up of two groups: participants, who will experience an LAP impact, and non-participants for whom the LAP impact will be zero or close to zero. For a programme with low take-up (as is the case with LAP at the time of the quantitative evaluation) the impact on the eligible population is inevitably very small and is difficult to detect with any degree of accuracy from a sample survey.

A second difficulty is that, to interpret an 'impact on the eligible population' approach, there has to be agreement about what the eligible population represents. The evaluation study adopted a very strict definition of eligibility, based on being identified by Connexions staff as being JWT at least once during a period 1 April 2005 and 31 December 2006. In contrast, Connexions staff were able to use a more natural definition of eligibility, with, in particular, eligibility being defined at the time of contact rather than at any point during this 21 month period.

Because of these difficulties the quantitative evaluation concentrated on presenting estimates of impacts on participants rather than impacts on the eligible population. Source: NatCen (forthcoming), Evaluation of Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report, Appendix D

5.3 What is the overall effect?

To assess the overall success of LAP, there are two questions that need to be addressed:

- Does it have a significant impact on those who take part?
- Is the number of participants sufficiently high for the impact to be widespread?

The second of these questions is relevant because a programme with modest impacts may still be seen as successful if large numbers of the eligible population take it up. That is, modest impacts spread across a large number of people can still add up to a marked population change. In contrast, a programme with higher impacts but low take-up may, overall, have less impact on the population.

Based on the survey definition of eligibility¹⁴, we estimate that around nine per cent of eligible young people took up a Learning Agreement. However, only a proportion (32 per cent) of this broad eligible population had heard of the agreement and therefore could have been expected to take part. Of those who had heard of LAP, 23 per cent took up an agreement. Thus our estimates of 'take-up' vary between nine and 23 per cent.

Taking the main impact study finding (Section 5.1), that around 31 per cent of LAP participants undertook study towards a qualification because of their participation in LAP who otherwise would not have, these participation rate figures suggest that somewhere between three per cent (ie 31 per cent of nine per cent) and seven per cent (31 per cent of 23 per cent) of JWT young people would be expected to undertake studying if Learning Agreements were to be rolled-out nationally.

As take-up varied by pilot area (and the variant of financial incentive on offer), overall impact also varies as follows:

- Variant 1: Impact on participants = 30 per cent. The take-up rate is estimated as 14 per cent (based on the total sample) and 31 per cent (based on those having heard of LAP). Impact on the eligible JWT population is between 4ppts (30 per cent of 14 per cent) and 9ppts (30 per cent of 31 per cent).
- Variant 2: Impact on participants = 38 per cent. The take-up rate is estimated as seven per cent (based on the total sample) and 21 per cent (based on those having heard of LAP). Impact on the eligible JWT population is between 3ppts (38 per cent of seven per cent) and 8ppts (38 per cent of 21 per cent).
- Variant 3: Impact on participants = 23 per cent. The take-up rate is estimated as four per cent (based on the total sample) and 14 per cent (based on those having heard of LAP). Impact on the eligible JWT population is between 1ppts (23 per cent of four per cent) and 3ppts (23 per cent of 14 per cent).

¹⁴ In practice it has proved very difficult to generate definitive estimates of take-up because whether or not a young person is 'eligible' for a Learning Agreement depends on whether they are JWT at the point when they were approached by the programme staff. The samples used in the evaluation survey were those young people identified by Connexions as being JWT at some point during the period April 2005 and December 2006. Many of these may not have been JWT at the point in time when contacted by staff about LAP. So, those recorded as 'eligible at time of contact' by Connexions staff is likely to be a smaller pool than were eligible for the survey (perhaps considerably smaller).

In other words, while the average effect of the Learning Agreements had been to increase the proportion of young people previously in jobs without training to take-up learning towards a qualification by between two and seven percentage points, the effect would be highest (up to ten percentage points) in areas adopting the Variant 1 form of Learning Agreement (ie providing successful participants with a £250 bonus).

Variant 1 was the most successful, because it coupled high impact on participants with the highest rate of take-up. Variant 3 was the least successful, with relatively low impact on participants and the lowest rate of take-up. Although Variant 2 had the highest impact, the relatively low take-up dampened the overall effect.

5.4 What was the impact of LAP on attitudes to learning?

The programme also appears to have had a positive impact on participants' attitudes towards, and expectation of, learning. As well as the 'hard' outcome measures around employment and education the evaluation survey also included a range of attitudinal and expectation questions and these show that, in comparison to their counterparts in non-pilot areas, participants:

- were more likely to think they would be in learning - 36 per cent of LAP participants expected to be in education of some form one year on, 11 percentage points higher than the comparison group. In the programme theory study of Learning Agreement provision virtually all of the young people interviewed said, when asked, that they would be open to, or interested in, further learning. A number had even completed one LAP course already and moved on to a new one (indeed 18 per cent of LAP participants undertook more than one course)
- had a more positive attitude to learning and qualifications (see Appendix 2, Table 8)
- were more interested in finding a job with training than one that paid best (see Appendix 2, Table 9).

5.5 Self-reported impact

LAP participants were asked how taking part in the programme had helped them in a small follow-up survey of participants (which took place, on average, nine months after the first interview). Over three-quarters of participants found the programme useful (34 per cent 'very useful' and 43 per cent 'fairly useful') and enjoyable (21 per cent thought it was 'very enjoyable' and 53 per cent thought it 'fairly enjoyable').

Furthermore:

- A majority (66 per cent) agreed with a statement that the scheme helped them to find a suitable course to study.
- Participants were more divided over whether LAP had played an active role in enabling them to study whilst working: 48 per cent agreed with the statement that '*it would have been possible for me to study for a qualification while working without the LAP*', 47 per cent disagreed and five per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 42 per cent agreed that LAP had helped them with their current job, and 73 per cent said it would help them with jobs they would like to do in the future.

- 61 per cent said LAP had made them want to study in the future, and 16 per cent said LAP had helped them find the place on the course they were currently studying.
- 76 per cent said they were more aware of opportunities for learning and training after doing LAP.

Finally, the quantitative survey found that participants *appear* to attribute outcomes to LAP that are slightly more positive than the outcomes detected among the formal, comparison group. For instance, 47 per cent of participants thought they would not have been able to study whilst working without LAP. This figure compares with the earlier finding that just 31 per cent of participants were studying for a qualification as a direct result of LAP. The difference may mean that some participants attribute their studying entirely to LAP, whereas in fact LAP simply assisted them and they would have taken up studying without it.

6 Conclusions

Learning Agreements are pilot programmes targeted at young people in employment but not training or studying for a recognised qualification. They are designed to encourage young people to re-engage with learning by providing young people with an incentive of up to £250 (in three of the eight pilot areas) for successfully completing an Agreement to undertake a recognised course organised through a learning adviser. Employers are, generally, party to the Agreements and, in two of the eight pilot areas, received wage compensation for the time young people spent off work on their learning programme.

The evaluation of the Agreements has examined in detail the key concepts that underpin the policy, the process by which the pilots have been implemented and their (short-term) effect on young people's learning activities.

In this final section we highlight the key conclusions that can be drawn from pulling together all aspects of the evaluation.

6.1 Taking learning to young people can get them to engage

The overall conclusion from the evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots is that actively providing young people who are in jobs with no recognised training opportunities with the chance to work towards a qualification at no cost to themselves can induce a significant number (around a third) to work towards a qualification who would not do so otherwise. This conclusion is particularly important in the context of raising the age at which young people should participate in education or training to 18 (ie Raising the Participation Age (RPA)). Providing young people with the right learning opportunities and support once they realise the value of qualifications - even when their employers may not be totally supportive - could be the impetus they need to re-engage with learning.

Furthermore the impact is not just immediate. Involvement in LAP appears to engender a more positive attitude to training among participants and they are more likely to be studying after their involvement with the programme than like-for-like young people outside the pilot areas.

6.2 Low take-up limits the overall impact

However the overall impact of the programme depends on how many people take it up. Over the two year period less than ten per cent of the potentially eligible young people took part and less than a quarter of young people who had heard of the programme.

The overall quantitative effect of the LAP programme (ie the impact on participants multiplied by the number of people involved) on learning activity among JWT young people was significantly driven down by the low take-up. Thus the evaluation estimates that if LAP were rolled out nationally, the level of formal learning among the eligible population as a whole would be between three and seven percentage points higher.

6.3 Why was take-up low?

There were a number of reasons why take-up was low:

- **It took a long time to get the pilots up and running.** There is a key (and not new) message here for general policy development about the time it takes to:
 - recruit and train appropriate numbers of support staff

- identify and set up contracts with appropriate training providers
- establish effective intelligence systems and engagement processes to get young people involved.

Most pilots took the best part of a year to get up and running, with the effect that take-up was twice as high in the second year than the first.

- **Young people in jobs without training can be difficult to find.** Only a third of young people in the survey sample had heard of LAP. The sample, drawn from Connexions data, was designed to include all eligible young people. The survey definition of eligibility may have been wider than that applied in the programme and so some young people in the survey may not have been told about the programme because Connexions knew they did not meet the requirements. Other young people may have been contacted but did not recognise the description of LAP used by the survey interviewees. However, the numbers are such that it indicates a large-scale lack of awareness of the programme among the potentially eligible population.
- **LAP does not suit some young people.** Even when contacted a number of young people declined the offer for various reasons such as: they were happy with the level of training they currently received; the training they would have liked to do was not available; they were thinking of changing job or location; or they did not understand what was involved.

The overall impact of the programme depends on the combination of the impact of the programme on participants and the number of participants involved. Although participation was much higher in the second year than the first as initial teething troubles were overcome, the evaluation calculation of low take-up was based on a survey that took place between July 2007 and March 2008 – ie during the second year that the pilots were in operation. So although take-up rose in the second year it is likely that this was accounted for within the calculation of overall impact.

6.4 Importance of one-to-one engagement

The best way of getting young people involved was through direct contact by an adviser who was able to explain what the programme was about and sort out any difficulties. Working with intermediaries or through the employer proved less effective than tracking down young people and talking to them face-to-face or on the phone.

LAP advisers played a wider role than just getting young people involved. They mentored and advised young people. They brokered and managed provision. They negotiated with the employers. LAP advisers played an important role throughout the process.

6.5 Could take-up be higher if learning was more flexible?

The learning opportunities on offer were restricted (by being included under Section 96 of the LSC's Learning Aims Database). Pilots struggled to meet some young people's needs from the list of recognised qualifications available and the capacity of local provision. In some cases it was the flexibility of the provision was at fault - fixed start dates and minimum numbers meant that courses were not available when they suited some young people to start. This meant that the learning lacked the degree of personalisation and flexibility that was originally planned. Some young people did not take part as a result. Others took courses that were not their first choice. This evaluation has not measured the impact of Learning Agreements on other parts of the learning framework (eg whether

there was displacement effect as young people took up other types of learning available under LAP in preference to, say, apprenticeships). However, evidence from the evaluation shows that the risk of displacement was low - with little to suggest that young people chose a LAP rather than another route to recognised learning.

6.6 Employers are generally supportive

Most employers of the young people on Learning Agreements were supportive and helped their young employee. Others were either permissive or - perhaps in a quarter of cases - unaware about what their young employee was doing. While almost a fifth of young people in the survey said that they got no support from their employer at all, there were very few reports of employers being obstructive.

6.7 What was the role of the incentive?

Take-up of the agreements was significantly higher in the areas which paid the £250 bonus to young people and their employers. The areas without an incentive and which were relying on the 'agreement only' still managed to engage young people - illustrating the positive effect on participation of making it easy for potential learners to learn - in other words, supply-led demand. However, take-up in the 'agreement only' areas was much lower than in the pilots where young people were offered an incentive. Paying wage compensation or bonuses to employers appeared to make no positive difference to either their involvement or the level of take-up and the bureaucracy involved in accounting for the money proved to be a source of difficulty.

6.8 What about completions?

Perhaps the best indicator of success is not the number of young people who actually started leaning towards a qualification, but the number who successfully obtained a qualification. Here the data are unclear as the completion rates are not collected systematically i.e. by cohort. The management information, largely supported by the survey data, suggests that a third of active learners achieved qualifications. While this figure may rise in time eg to a half of the young people who actually started learning towards a qualification, it is still a low number overall - around 3,150 young people (ie only two-thirds of the 9,500 young people who signed agreement actually started learning and only a maximum of a half of those gained a qualification). Further work could be done in this area to get a better idea of the real impact of the LAP programme.

Appendix 1 - Evaluation methodology

The Process Evaluation

The aim of the process evaluation was to understand the local implementation of the pilots, map the context in which the initiatives are being piloted and highlight good practice. Data collection for the process evaluation primarily involved visiting the pilot areas three times during the course of evaluation.

Initial visits

Initial visits were made to all pilot areas in May / June 2006 and around 20 face-to-face interviews were conducted with project managers and other key staff. Individual area profiles were drafted, in consultation with local project managers, and updated at the end of second round visits. For most areas, additional information was gained from copies of local delivery plans, and publicity and administrative materials.

Second round visits

A second round of visits to the pilot areas, to interview project managers and a range of other local stakeholders, took place during the latter part of 2006 and early in 2007. In all pilot areas (both AA and LA), a roundtable discussion was held with project managers and local delivery staff and a maximum of eight face-to-face interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including education and training providers and representatives from Jobcentre Plus and the Local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In order to provide a better understanding of local implementation models, the number of interviews with representatives from key organisations was extended in six pilot areas. Most notably, there was an emphasis on expanding fieldwork in pilot areas that encompass large geographical areas, those that cover a number of local authority areas, those which are delivering both pilots and those where separate management and delivery arrangements are in place to implement each policy initiative. During the second round visits to the LAP pilot areas, more than 150 respondents were interviewed, including around 30 employers.

Third round visits

A final round of interviews with project managers and the second phase of the extended programme of fieldwork in six pilot areas were conducted at the end of 2007 and early in 2008. A total of 60 respondents were interviewed within LAP pilot areas during the third round visits, plus around 40 employers.

Quantitative Evaluation

The aim of the quantitative evaluation was to produce an estimate of the impact of the LAP programme on participants by comparing their outcomes with those of a matched comparison population. The key research question was whether LAP participants experienced better outcomes on average than comparable long-term JWT young people who lived in non-pilot areas. The objective was to produce separate impact estimates for each of the three variants as well as for LAP overall.

The sample was designed to be equivalent to the LAP eligible group in pilot areas, that is young people who were status-checked by Connexions between 1 April 2005 and 31 June 2007 and found to be in JWT in that period.

The sample for the survey was created by collating administrative records from each Connexions area. Connexions staff were asked to identify young people who were found to be JWT. In addition to JWT records, Connexions offices in LAP pilot areas were also asked to supply records for everyone taking up a Learning Agreement within the given period. This allowed the inclusion of additional LAP participants who, for whatever reason, did not have accurate information recorded at the time of the status check¹⁵.

Local Connexions offices sent letters to selected individuals inviting them to take part in the evaluation, but also giving the option to opt-out if they preferred not to be contacted. The contact details of the young people who did not opt out were passed to NatCen for contacting as part of the survey.

The main survey interviews were carried out between July 2007 and March 2008¹⁶, using a mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviewing. In total, 8,454 interviews were carried out¹⁷. For the main LAP survey, 4,774 interviews were conducted in the pilot areas (divided fairly evenly between the three LAP variants) and 3,392 in comparison areas. Of the 4,774 young people interviewed from pilot areas, 511 were classified as LAP participants. In addition to the main sample identified as JWT from Connexions data, 288 interviews were conducted with an additional sample of LAP participants.

Main interviews were mostly carried out by computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), although these were supplemented by face-to-face interviewing (CAPI) in order to ensure that the fieldwork could be completed to timetable¹⁸. Telephone interviewing meant that only young people for whom telephone numbers could be obtained were included in the survey sample; it also restricted the length of the main young person's interview to less than 30 minutes (the maximum length that was consistent with obtaining good response and data quality).

In addition to the main interview with the young person, 6,794 interviews were carried out with one parent in the family (47 per cent of those who lived with their parents). This gathered accurate data on family background and established parents' views of young people's activity choices and involvement with Connexions. Where a parent was not available, the young person was asked a shorter set of proxy questions. This yielded a further 5,006 proxy parent interviews.

In order to examine the experiences of participation in LAP in more detail than space allowed at the first interview, follow-up interviews with 191 survey respondents who reported participation in LAP were carried out in April and May 2008, after the end of the main fieldwork period.

¹⁵ This 'Additional LAP participants' group were not included in main analysis presented in this report.

¹⁶ Interviews for LAP Variants 1 and 2 and LAP control areas took place between July 2007 and March 2008. Slow throughput for LAP Variant 3 meant that fieldwork was not able to start until October 2007.

¹⁷ A further 5976 interviews were carried out with young people eligible for the AA pilots, as part of the parallel AA evaluation.

¹⁸ DCSF required that all interviewers should be CRB-cleared, but CRB is currently unwilling to provide clearances for telephone interviewers. As NatCen only had a limited number of telephone interviewers with CRB clearance (obtained before the CRB clarified its policy), it was able to use those interviewers for the research but could not replenish them. Therefore in peak quarters, when the volume of interviewing exceeded the limited capacity of CRB-cleared telephone interviewers, face-to-face interviews were also used.

Programme Theory Evaluation

Programme theory evaluation is considered a useful tool for conceptualising programmes, guiding evaluations, planning empirical research, and analysing *why* programmes are successful (or not). It seeks to identify the ‘theory of change’ that lies behind an intervention and assess to what extent, why and how this change has occurred. In doing so, any unintended as well as intended outcomes are considered. The results of this type of evaluation are *explanatory* rather than providing a clear-cut answer on whether a policy ‘works’, and can be fed back into the policy design in order to make improvements.

The guiding principle of this approach is that policy interventions are originally underpinned by theories. Pawson et al. (2004) sum up the basic ‘if-then’ logic of this as follows:

‘If we deliver a programme in this way or we manage services like so, then this will bring about some improved outcome.’

Pawson R, Greenhalgh T, Harvey G and Walshe K (2004),
Realist Synthesis: An Introduction, ESRC Research Methods Paper 2/2004

The theories that underpin interventions are informed by assumptions about a) the reasons driving behaviour and b) what might cause that behaviour to change. But these theories are also mediated by individual, social and institutional effects that influence how policy is delivered. Hence, a key focus of programme theory evaluation is to examine how policy mechanisms are *supposed* to work and compare this to how they *do* work. The evaluation can then assess whether there is any gap between the two and, if so, explore the extent, nature and causes of that gap, and resulting impacts on outcomes.

The programme theory approach to evaluation adopted by this study had two main elements. The first was to identify, assess and refine the theories that underpinned the LAP policy (the ‘theory elicitation’ stage). The second was to then test these theories via empirical research in a series of focussed studies.

Three studies examined key aspects of the Learning Agreements:

The first focussed on the ‘*Kick start*’ theory, ie that ‘in Learning Agreement Pilot (LAP) areas where there was no financial incentive, it was the support, advice and guidance provided by the Connexions worker that would be enough to ‘kickstart’ the young person’s interest in learning and induce them to sign up to a Learning Agreement.

The second examined two related theories:

- The ‘*menu of choice*’ theory: ‘If the policy provides a “menu of choice” to the young person there is a greater likelihood of being able to provide them with learning activities they need and want in order to progress. The subject of the learning offer may not be the most important or appealing aspect to the young person, rather the opportunity to learn in a setting that is “not like school” (eg at work or in an open learning centre) or using a mode of learning which is work rather than classroom-based.’
- The ‘*broker*’ theory: ‘for an agreement to work, the broker must access provision that meets young people’s needs, and to do this effectively a) they need to be fully informed about the range of provision available to them, b) they may need to negotiate with the young person about what provision best suits them/ is most appropriate and c) the provision needs to be responsive and available when and where the young person can do it.’

The final programme theory study examined progression among LAP participants and the theory that the agreement may encourage young people in jobs without training to take part in '*small steps*' of learning and thereby progress towards a more significant qualification.

Appendix 2 - Additional tables / data

Table 1 - Personal characteristics and household composition (per cent)

Characteristics	Participants	Non-participants	All JWT
Sex			
Male	54	63	62
Female	46	37	38
Age			
16	1	-	-
17	40	28	29
18	55	57	57
19	4	14	13
20	0	0	0
Ethnicity			
White	95	96	95
Asian	2	2	2
Black	0	1	1
Mixed race	1	1	1
Other	1	0	0
Overall GCSE Attainment			
5+ GCSEs at A*-C	31	30	30
5+ GCSEs at A*-G (<5+ at A*-C)	51	46	46
1-4 GCSEs at A*-G	8	11	10
No GCSEs	8	9	9
DK	2	4	4
Household composition			
Living with parents	90	89	89
Living with partner	4	5	5
Living with others	3	4	4
Living on own	3	2	2
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>357</i>	<i>3,792</i>	<i>4,149</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>493</i>	<i>3,617</i>	<i>4,150</i>

Base description: All JWT pilot sample

Source: NatCen, Evaluation of Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report

Table 2 - Motivation to take part (per cent)

	All
Why decided to take part in LAP*	
Help with education / training	48
Combine work and study	31
Help finding job / future career	19
Experience	14
Money	14
Something to do	7
Advice / support from Connexions	4
Other	4
Don't know	2
<i>Weighted base</i>	357
<i>Unweighted base</i>	493

Base = All participants (JWT sample)

* Participants could give more than one answer. Percentages sum to >100 per cent

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Table 3 - Motivation to take part (follow-up survey) (per cent)

	All	Most important
Important in persuading young person to take part:		
Chance to gain / improve qualifications	96	49
Flexible study	95	9
Chance to study whilst working	86	15
One-to-one careers advice	86	3
Chance to change job	78	11
Help finding course / college	70	3
Helped in job already doing	68	1
Help persuading employer to allow study	67	2
Bonus payments (Payment areas only*)	62	8
<i>Weighted base</i>	142	141
<i>Unweighted base</i>	197	195

Base = All Follow up Participants (1-3 missing cases, Don't know)

*Base = 172

~ Respondents could give more than one answer. Per cent sum to more than 100

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Table 4 - LAP courses by variant

	Variant 1	Variant 2	Variant 3	
	Bonus only	Bonus & wage	Agreement only	All
Type of course*				
NVQ	55	26	37	41
BTEC	3	5	6	4
Edexcel	*	3	0	1
City and Guilds	7	25	12	14
OCR	1	0	0	*
GNVQ	2	5	11	4
AVCE	1	0	0	1
A2	1	1	0	1
AS-level	1	1	2	1
GCSE	5	7	1	5
Key Skills	2	5	16	6
Degree or higher	1	0	0	*
Other - specific	9	9	6	8
Other - vague	13	14	10	12
Level				
Level 1	28	42	42	36
Level 2	43	37	24	37
Level 3	9	6	8	8
Level 4	1	0	1	1
Not sure / DK	19	16	25	19
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>257</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>347</i>

Base = All LAP courses (JWT sample)

* 6 missing cases – DK course type

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Table 5 - Length of study by variant

	Variant 1 Bonus only	Variant 2 Bonus & wage	Variant 3 Agreement only	All
Course length**				
1 month or less	16	16	16	16
2 months	10	17	8	12
3 months	15	10	13	13
4 months	7	6	7	7
5 months	9	1	4	5
6-8 months	12	9	8	10
9-11 months	14	17	17	17
12 months plus	17	24	28	20
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>257</i>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>347</i>

Base = All LAP courses (JWT sample)

** 41 missing cases – DK course length

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Table 6 - Location of study by variant

	Variant 1 Bonus only	Variant 2 Bonus & wage	Variant 3 Agreement only	All
Where studied				
Workplace	31	14	28	24
FE / Tertiary College	29	36	42	34
Private training provider	18	22	12	18
City Technology College / Academy	5	5	8	5
School	*	2	0	1
Vlth Form College	2	2	2	2
Adult Education Institution	3	2	2	2
Other	13	16	6	13
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>49</i>	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>65</i>	

Base = All LAP courses (JWT sample)

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Table 7 - Participation in education and employment related activities within the one year reference period (per cent)

	Participants	Comparison group	Difference
Studying for a qualification	60.7	29.8	30.9*
Of which:			
Level 4	0.2	0.2	0.0
Level 3	10.5	8.5	2.0
Level 2	21.4	12.9	8.5*
Level 1	20.9	5.9	14.9*
Level unknown	7.3	2.3	5.5
Work-based training	19.1	16.4	2.7
Other work - with in-house training	32.6	22.1	10.6*
Of which:			
non-elementary occupation	26.3	16.1	10.2
elementary occupation	6.3	5.9	0.4
Other work - without in-house training	45.7	56.1	-10.4*
Of which:			
non-elementary occupation	24.3	31.1	-6.8*
elementary occupation	21.4	25.0	-3.5
Voluntary work	7.3	6.0	1.3
Personal development activities	10.3	7.1	3.2*
<i>Weighted base</i>	490	490	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	490	2,996	

Base Description: All participants

* = statistically significant at the 10 per cent level

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Table 8 - Attitudes to learning

Statement	Participants per cent agree	Comparison group per cent agree	Difference per cent
I'm not interested in doing any learning	9.7	15.1	-5.4*
Learning is only worth doing if there is a qualification at the end of it	51.0	46.3	4.7
You need to have qualifications in order to have a job worth having	42.6	41.8	0.8
The skills you need at work can't be learned in a classroom situation	42.4	46.3	-3.9
I couldn't afford to continue studying after year 11	23.1	23.2	-0.1
Earning money is more important to me than staying on in education	40.1	45.7	-5.6*
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>490</i>	<i>490</i>	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>490</i>	<i>2,996</i>	

Base Description: All participants

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

Table 9 - Attitudes to work

Statement	Participants per cent agree	Comparison group per cent agree	Difference per cent
In looking for a job I am more concerned to find one with training than one that pays best	61.4	52.8	8.8*
I am prepared to take any job I can do	57.2	56.7	0.5
Once you've got a job it's very important to hang on to it even if you don't really like it	58.2	58.3	-0.1
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>490</i>	<i>490</i>	
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>490</i>	<i>2,996</i>	

Base Description: All participants

Source: NatCen (forthcoming), *Evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots: Quantitative Evaluation Final Report*

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