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collaborating for success

collaborative arrangements for
14–19 provision in the West Midlands

summary and analysis of research
findings from six case studies

Jill Hardman



**Collaborating for success:
collaborative arrangements for 14–19 provision in the
West Midlands**

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Executive summary

The findings from six case studies have been used to:

- examine how 14–19 collaborative arrangements have developed and changed in response to local circumstances
- assess the impact of the developments and changes on the curriculum offer, learner choice and participation
- identify the main success factors for starting and sustaining effective 14–19 collaborations.

The data are analysed using two frameworks. First, a development model for 14–19 collaborative provision is used to analyse partnership activity. The model originates from this research, being derived from an analysis of relevant literature and the six case studies. The research data have been evaluated in terms of three themes identified in the model: the collaborative infrastructure, delivery systems and curriculum provision.

Secondly, a step-change model of curriculum innovation is used to analyse the impact of collaboration across a learning area within the curriculum offer and on learner choice. This model is an adaptation of one commonly used for describing and analysing incremental and radical processes of innovation and change in, for example, business and technology. It is used here to assess the impact of the collaborative arrangements on expansion in the range of choices available to learners and on changes in the overall structure and nature of the provision ‘on the ground’.

Applying each of these models respectively to findings from the six case studies shows that the main focus of activity at a local level has been on:

- developing the effectiveness of the collaborative infrastructure
- improving the organisation of delivery and access to provision including information, advice and guidance (IAG).

A ‘beneficial cycle’ is noted whereby effective, collaborative activity in respect of access and delivery depends upon and also generates effective collaborative relationships and infrastructure.

Another observation is that so far 14–19 collaborations appear to have had a greater impact on expanding the offer available to learners than on reconstructing or reformulating the overall curriculum in the learning area. It is noted that there are significant structural and institutional obstacles to doing this, although it may prove to be the way forward in the future.

Summary of the main findings

Theme 1. Collaborative infrastructure

Main features of development

Local areas have well-developed, collaborative infrastructures with formal and informal arrangements for involving a wide range of stakeholders in planning, managing, developing and supporting the implementation of local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and regional 14–19 strategies. There are moves towards joint governance and brokerage systems.

Schools and colleges play a strong leadership role in planning and managing 14–19 provision. The role of private work-based training providers (WBTPs) and Connexions is variable. There is little or no direct employer or voluntary and community sector involvement. The voice of the learner, parents and the community in planning and management is relatively weak, and there are attempts to address this in some 14–19 collaborations. The role of the 14–19 coordinator is seen as crucial for developing and maintaining the infrastructure and for linking to wider networks.

The local areas depend on the local authority and LSC for funding, support and expertise to set up and sustain 14–19 collaborative activity. Strong partnerships between the local authority and LSC have a significant, positive impact on the culture and effectiveness of 14–19 collaborations at a local level. The involvement and commitment of executives across the whole range of stakeholders is vital.

Challenges

The main challenges facing 14–19 collaborations include:

- sufficient levels of funding to sustain and further develop the infrastructure and resources to enable all stakeholders to participate equally
- implementing national and regional policies to support cooperation
- collecting and analysing data to support tracking and monitoring of learners' progress across the 14–19 phase and effective, strategic planning and management, especially in relation to quality assurance and improvement at the level of the collaborative forum.

Less attention has so far been paid to evaluating the impact or effectiveness of collaborative arrangements or specific interventions than to getting them off the ground. Some progress is being made on the development of systematic quality assurance and improvement processes, although in most areas these are at an early stage.

There are difficulties facing collaborations that require data to support their planning and monitoring processes and, as yet, there is little evidence that can be used to evaluate the impact of collaborative arrangements or the expansion of learning opportunities.

This lack of strongly indicative data can be related to the:

- early stages in the cycle of 14–16 and 14–19 initiatives and the early stage of development of many of the collaborative arrangements that have been put in place

- problem of distinguishing the impact of specific interventions from other, often interrelated, initiatives
- incompatibility of data and reporting across the pre-16 and post-16 sectors
- lack of data reports relating to the specific area and partners covered by the collaborative forum.

Collaborations need to review what data they are using, which are available, what precisely they need and in what form; and where required, to set up mechanisms to produce it.

Success factors

Success in developing and sustaining effective 14–19 collaborative infrastructures is more likely where:

- fiscal and non-fiscal resources are accessible, sufficient, stable and sustained
- history and geography provide favourable conditions:
 - a 14–19 collaborations are built on the basis of earlier partnerships
 - b the local area is characterised by a collaborative culture and a strong networking tradition
 - c collaborations are established in geographically compact areas and with a partnership of manageable size
- collaborative engagement is broad and deep:
 - a all major stakeholders at appropriate levels are actively engaged in the collaboration and cross-tie this through links with other agencies and networks
 - b partners (particularly at a senior level) demonstrate a strong commitment to achieving shared goals that prioritise the learner
 - c learners are treated as key stakeholders in planning and managing provision
 - d 'penetration' of collaborative activity is increased within and between individual organisations
 - e private training providers are active as an associated body.
- there are people with appropriate skills to fulfil the roles required:
 - a individuals in key roles have strong communication and interpersonal skills, a consistently inclusive approach and a clear vision which others can share
 - b experts and advisers contribute leadership and support when required
 - c personnel with appropriate skills, time and support carry out practical tasks.

Theme 2. Delivery systems

Main features of development

All collaborative forums have agreed protocols and have developed a standardised, procedural framework for providers in their areas.

Much complex and time-consuming work has been done to facilitate pre-16 and post-16 learner access to a broader curriculum, with developments in:

- common timetables and timetable alignment

- travel arrangements; 14–19 collaborations have different travel strategies
- IAG for learners at key transition points; there is wide variation in the use and stages of development of electronic prospectuses and application systems, and involvement of Connexions is variable.

Challenges

The main challenges facing 14–19 collaborations include the areas identified above, namely:

- incorporating flexibility into timetables and delivery systems
- organising efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements
- developing information and communications technology (ICT) capability and using electronic prospectuses, application systems, individual learning plans (ILPs) and progress files.

Further challenges arise in respect of:

- independent advice and guidance, with a perceived need for more independent advice and guidance to ensure that the whole offer is equally accessible to all learners (eg learners at higher levels as well as lower levels of attainment) and that learning routes carry equal status
- equality and diversity; although efforts are made to ensure that the offer is inclusive by being broad enough to encompass the widest possible range of learners' needs, there was no evidence of positive action measures being taken to address gender segregation; some learners with learning difficulties and disabilities face problems finding work placements with employers.

Success factors

Across all of the case studies, success in this area of collaborative work depends upon:

- sufficient fiscal and non-fiscal resources in the form of:
 - a staff time and expertise to carry out complex and time-consuming tasks such as organising timetables, transport, online and paper-based marketing and publicity, application systems, prospectuses and directories
 - b funding to cover higher operational (eg transport), development and set-up costs (especially in relation to ICT)
 - c funding to develop staff skills (especially in relation to ICT).
- a common procedural framework; that is, protocols and standardised procedures that cover the collaboration as a whole and establish a common identity and a forum-wide approach
- independent advice, guidance and support for learners:
 - a effective monitoring of, and support for, learners at all of their key transition points
 - b positive support for learners to access education and training in 'non-traditional' vocational areas.

Theme 3. Curriculum provision

The impact of collaboration on the 'offer' can be assessed in terms of the:

- range of choices available and accessible to the learner
- impact of collaboration on learner outcomes
- range, depth, content, style and shape of the curriculum as a whole.

Main features of development

The range of choices available to the learner

The offer has been significantly expanded and diversified through the providers' collaboration, and there has been a corresponding increase in the numbers of learners involved in vocational, work-related and other alternative curriculum options.

The development of new learning lines and improved progression routes has resulted in a greater variety of vocational and academic pathways on offer to learners from Entry level to higher education (HE) level. The Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) and 14–19 Pathfinders have had a significant impact on the collaborative offer, strengthened by learner demand. However, the process of collaboration on the supply side can also significantly shape the curriculum offer, and in ways that might narrow learners' choices to some extent.

Collaboration both within and across sectors has led to curriculum and professional development. Joint working and staff development has improved the quality of institutional provision, impacting on staff skills and the individual provider's curriculum.

Choices for learners have been widened in terms of subjects and levels of study, learning sites and modes of delivery.

The impact of collaboration on learner outcomes

There are indications of benefits to learners who have taken up alternative options in increasing numbers in all of the case study areas. Research including IFP evaluations (Golden *et al.* 2005b; McCrone and Morris 2004; Devitt and Roker 2005a and 2005b) shows that collaboration can lead to improved participation through increased retention and progression, with higher achievements for some groups of learners.

The main data used in this research are derived from the Connexions activity surveys. There are differences between local area offices in the way these data are presented and the time period it covers; for some they are available from 2002-03, which enables some view of the trends over time. (Connexions 2005).

There are a number of factors that could impact on the trends in these data which vary between areas. Overall, the case studies suggest a positive outcome from implementing 14–19 strategies, particularly the 'September Guarantee' or the 'October Offer' initiatives; with a reduction in young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and an increase in those retained.

A reduction of young learners in employment with training seems to be a recurring pattern that is quite marked in some areas and the reasons are unclear. But this reduction appears to have been offset by an increase in learners in full-time education and training.

The range, depth, content, style and shape of the curriculum as a whole

The overall structure of curriculum provision 'on the ground' is still largely determined by what the providers are set up to supply, albeit with some variation where providers drop, expand or start programmes in response to the pattern of take-up or poor results. Furthermore, strategic restructuring of provision across the local and wider learning area is still at an early stage.

Strategically directed changes in the area offer are indicated in the case studies where:

- partners develop and align niche aspects of the provision
- institutionally independent ‘brokers’ can direct funding
- new provision is developed as a result of ‘regeneration’ or other budgets, or particular project initiatives, particularly where there are opportunities for innovative curriculum design.

There are fundamental structural and institutional obstacles to radical transformation or reconstruction of the curriculum across the 14–19 phase. The case studies indicate that most work is being done to develop synergy in the collaborative provision. The main leadership to improve synergy is provided by senior local authority and LSC staff.

Challenges

Planning and developing the range and depth of the offer at the level of the collaborative forum is difficult where:

- there are gaps between what is offered and what is demanded due, for example, to limitations in providers’ capacity to meet learner demand and/or a lack of suitable work placements with local employers
- both demand and funding fluctuate: some programmes may not be cost-effective and others may not be ‘learning effective’
- there are organisational problems involved in developing complex pathways, especially those combining different sites and modes of learning
- there are conflicting aims: for example, between planning to expand the offer and achieve greater choice of subjects and learning environments and planning to rationalise provision to increase cost-effectiveness
- there are conflicting needs and priorities, for example, between learners and:
 - a providers, in terms of their capacity and the types of facilities and expertise they offer, and also their future plans (ie the supply side)
 - b local employers, whose perceived needs may be, first, difficult to gauge and, second, not the same, in the short term at least.

Issues in planning a learner-focused curriculum for a particular locality can arise where:

- individual providers trying to protect other vested interests may not prioritise learners’ needs or produce the best outcomes for them
- agreements to enhance collaboration and to rationalise provision may not produce the best solution for some groups of learners
- learner demand is difficult to assess; learners are more likely to be asked for feedback on their experiences than be involved in the planning process
- government policies aimed at increasing competition between providers reduce partnership effectiveness and reinforce a focus on ‘institution first’.

Local LSC proposals for managing funding cuts across the sub-region are most likely to hit newly developed or innovative programmes.

Collaborative working for all providers is complex and costly, and many costs rise as programmes expand. 14–16 provision in colleges consistently outstrips cost recovery, and there is no indication that provision can be sustained, still less developed, on the basis of fee income.

Vocational education is expensive for schools when they send pupils to learn on other sites. (There is some indication they will receive more funding in the future.) In addition, there are costs attached to maintaining and developing the collaborative infrastructure, which sustains the provision in the first place.

Major challenges to strategic curriculum innovation arise from:

- the qualifications structure and the institutional and structural divisions between the schools, post-16 and HE sectors – as well as within them – most notably between vocational and academic routes
- the competitive tensions between (increasingly) independent providers seeking to protect their core business
- differential funding between sectors, short-term funding and diverse funding streams that inhibit long-term strategic planning.

Success factors

The underpinning factors for success in developing the curriculum offer include:

- building on collaborative relationships already established (eg on the basis of successful IFP or collaborative A-level provision)
- widening the range of providers to improve the variety and balance of provision
- ensuring that all collaborative programmes lead to qualifications, emphasising progression routes and increasing accreditation opportunities overall
- linking the offer to the regional and local skills agenda, developing a vocational strategy appropriate to the area and involving employers in curriculum planning
- putting the learner first:
 - a a clear strategic focus on learners' needs, interests and choices (including where and how the curriculum is delivered)
 - b strong emphasis on progression, with strategies to increase engagement, retention and achievement
 - c a skills-based approach to raising learner achievement
 - d ongoing support with particular attention to key transition points
 - e facilitation of learner 'ownership' and effective involvement in curriculum planning and evaluation
- focusing on quality improvement:
 - a programmes developed where provision is effective and innovatory
 - b investment in new provision where appropriate
 - c effective quality assurance and monitoring procedures
 - d collaboration used to support provider improvement

e a proactive approach to equality.

Recommendation

The following issues and questions raised by the research should be addressed.

1. Equal opportunities

Issues include: independent advice and guidance; management and implementation; roles and responsibilities; policies, action planning, monitoring and reporting.

- How effective is the provision of independent advice and guidance for all learners?
- How is the collaboration implementing its equality policies and its statutory duties to promote equality?
- What positive action measures should be taken to address segregation and disadvantage in vocational education and training in the 14–19 phase?

2. Quality improvement, quality assurance and evaluation processes at the level of the collaboration as a whole

Issues include: quality improvement and quality assurance protocols and procedures; data provision, analysis, sharing and reporting; benchmarking and target-setting.

- What data, procedures and protocols are required to enable the collaboration to set targets, monitor progress and evaluate its provision?
- How might the collaboration evaluate the impact and effectiveness of its internal structures, organisational relationships and processes, in order to improve these?

3. Developing the effectiveness of the collaborative infrastructure

Issues include: funding and strategy for building and sustaining collaborative relationships in order to develop provision for learners and respond to local needs; leadership and management by staff and partners appropriate to the needs of the collaboration and the sector; roles, funding and location of the coordinators at local and sub-regional levels.

- How can the needs of the collaboration in terms of its continuation and further development be (a) assessed and (b) resourced?
- What is the nature of the staffing required, eg role, skills and experience of the local coordinator?
- How should the impact of the collaborative infrastructure be assessed?

4. Equity and the 'organisational capacity' required for collaboration

Issues include: levels of resourcing required to participate in the collaborative infrastructure; impact of the differential capacities of organisations to engage on an equal footing – in the context of policies that increasingly require this.

- How are inequalities in the capacity of key stakeholders to participate recognised and addressed by the collaboration as a whole?

5. The learner's voice

Issues include: degree of impact through institutional and area surveys and consultation (eg regarding needs and feedback on current and planned provision); degree and mode of involvement in planning and monitoring processes.

- How can the voice of the learner, parents and community be effectively expressed and heard?
- How can the process be developed from one of consulting these stakeholders about a centrally set agenda towards one of genuine partnership, where they 'co-construct' policies and jointly own the outcomes?
- How is responsiveness measured and evaluated?

6. WBL providers' position in relation to planning and delivery of collaborative provision and employer engagement

Issues include: WBL providers' degree of collective association and organisation; status, involvement and impact within the collaboration; levels and sources of funding for delivery; capacity and facilities to meet demand.

- How far is the contribution of WBL providers maximised through the collaboration for the benefit of the learner?
- What is being done to engage employers directly?

7. Culture

Issues include: recognising and managing the tensions between institutional and learner needs; managing cultural change; maintaining learner focus in the context of increasing competitive pressures (such as those arising from education policies which encourage competition and institutional autonomy).

- What usually comes first when matters are deliberated or policies decided?
- Where does the collaboration as a whole, or its constituent parts, lie on the prioritisation scale?

Institutional needs

1 ← ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- → 5

Learners' needs

- What strategies are there for achieving cultural change, managing the tensions and maintaining learner focus?

8. 14–19 area curriculum strategy

Issues include: clear, shared curriculum vision, learner-centred and learning-led design; identifying and balancing conflicting needs of learners and other stakeholders while maintaining a clear learner focus; funding and resourcing curriculum development; access to curriculum expertise; managing curriculum change within and across institutions.

- What and whose needs are being met?
- What is the 'learning area' and how does it reflect the needs of different learners?
- What is the vision, and what are the design principles?
- How are conflicting needs of learners and other stakeholders identified and balanced?
- What can be done at local and regional levels to tackle the institutional and structural barriers to a flexible and coherent curriculum (such as sectoral divisions between schools, post-16 and higher education; and the vocational and academic divide)?
- What needs to be put in place (and by whom, what, where, when) in order to achieve a step-change in curriculum innovation?
- How is research and professional knowledge being used to inform curriculum strategy and implementation?

Introduction

Collaboration and partnerships are central to all recent government policies and initiatives to equip and inspire young people through coherent and effective vocational education and training.

Already many of you are blazing a trail in collaboration – to deliver an innovative, high-quality programme. We are learning from you. We know that organisations collaborating with one another can offer more to young people than they can in isolation.

Excellent examples of collaborative solutions on very different models across the country show what can be achieved.

(Kelly 2005)

Project aims

This project is designed to support LSC planning within a changing policy context and to inform future good practice in developing collaborative arrangements.

The main aims are to identify and analyse current collaborative arrangements for the planning and delivery of 14–19 vocational education in the West Midlands and to examine their development and assess their impact on the curriculum offer, learner participation and outcomes.

Through one case study from each of the six local LSC areas in the West Midlands, the project:

- outlines the types of collaborative arrangements for 14–19 provision that can be found in the region and how these have developed in their different contexts
- describes how the 14–19 offer has developed and changed in response to local circumstances
- evaluates the effectiveness of current arrangements in relation to learners' choices and opportunities
- identifies the issues and the factors that lead to successful collaboration and outcomes for the learner.

Background to the project

The context for this project is the *14–19 education and skills* White Paper (DfES 2005a) and the *Skills: getting on in business, getting on at work* White Paper (DfES 2005b) in which the government sets out a new curriculum entitlement for all young people to choose a learning pathway that suits them and enables progression to further education (FE), higher education, training and/or employment.

These new learning pathways should offer 14–19-year-old learners a wide range of different routes and choices in terms of learning lines, modes, sites and subjects and, at the same time, deliver a solid core of generic and functional skills. The entitlement, therefore, heralds some significant curriculum innovation (most notably the specialised diplomas) and it can only be delivered by providers working in partnership with one another, within and between the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors.

Across the country considerable progress has been made in developing 14–19 collaborative planning and delivery mechanisms, particularly where this has been stimulated by the area-wide inspections, 14–19 Pathfinders and the IFP. Presently, some 90,000 14–16 year olds engage in off-site learning for at least one day a week, and the government’s aim is to double this.

The 14–19 education and skills implementation plan (DfES 2005c) sets out the action plan and timetable to realise these reforms within the next 10 years, with the proposed new entitlement in place by 2013. The aim is to increase the participation and achievement of learners aged 17 plus from 75% to 90% by 2015, and to reduce the proportion of NEET young people by 2% by 2010; as well as improve the skills and employability of the young workforce overall.

These aims are reflected in the LSC’s regional priorities and targets. The West Midlands is one of the poorer-performing regions for educational attainment. There are also big variations across sub-regions in learner participation after leaving compulsory education, from 92.2% in Coventry and Warwickshire (highest in England) to 77.9% in the Black Country (second-lowest in England).

The West Midlands’ response to the 14–19 White Paper’s emphasis on collaborative working and improving the status of vocational education to achieve the improvement targets varies by sub-region and within sub-regions. There are a variety of collaborative arrangements such as collegiates and federations, which vary in their remit and organisation. Some of these are already national exemplars, such as the Birmingham and Solihull Success for All test-bed and the Wolverhampton, Coventry and Shropshire 14–19 Pathfinders.

The research is designed to give an overview and to capture not just the outcomes but also the issues and the processes involved in developing effective, collaborative arrangements across the region.

Methodology and approach

The study was proposed by the West Midlands LSC and supported by LSDA (known as the Learning and Skills Network from April 2006). The research was conducted by the chair and two members of the West Midlands Learning and Skills Research Network between October 2005 and March 2006. The network had previously conducted a two-year collaborative research project (also supported by LSDA) on 14–16 provision in six FE colleges in the West Midlands (Hardman 2006). The LSC regional research manager, the LSDA regional director and the researchers formed a small project steering group.

Most of the data concerning 14–19 collaborative activities and the arrangements in place up to 1 January 2006 were gathered through desk research and interviews.

Senior staff working for each of the six local LSC areas contributed to the initial sub-regional overview (see Appendix 1). Using data from this stage, an advisory committee of members with a broad range of relevant expertise in the region contributed to the selection of the case study areas.

The case study areas were chosen to illustrate the collaborative activities and/or arrangements in contrasting geographic, economic and socio-political contexts across the West Midlands. Each of the researchers took responsibility for gathering and recording data for two case studies. Using semi-structured interviews, respondents were asked for their views on, as well as for factual information about, the collaboration they were involved in. All reports were checked by the respondents, who were also consulted about presentation.

The case study approach

Case studies commonly adopt an ethnographic approach and are increasingly used in evaluation to inform practitioners and policy-makers because they are rooted in the practicalities and politics of real-life situations. As with all research methods, there are also limitations with the approach, for example, relating to its subjectivity. (For more detailed discussion about the methodology see, for example: Simons 1980; Yin 1994; Robson 1993)

Case studies offer several advantages. Participants' perceptions and reflections on their experience from their own standpoints can offer a range of different perspectives on the partnership process from which valuable lessons can be drawn. Even perceptions that run counter to the facts can influence collaborative relationships. Furthermore, participants' insights can reveal patterns, themes and structures that lie beneath the surface yet have significant impact on development.

Two of the case studies (Tamworth District Forum and Coventry North East Federation) explored respondents' views in greater depth.

Participants' views have been corroborated through observation, documentation or confirmation by others. Documents have been used where possible, although the range is far from comprehensive. Since much that is useful is not in the public domain, researchers were grateful for what contributors were able to provide within a relatively short time.

Quantitative data that directly relates to the issues raised in this study has been particularly difficult to come by. This is clearly not due to its paucity, because the LSC handles masses of detailed data on provision. But it does not appear to be easy to find data in a form that enables the impact or effectiveness of the individual 14–19 collaborative forums to be readily evaluated or compared.

One objective of the study, which was to identify trends and patterns of learner participation and outcomes through the individual learner record and other data sources, was not achieved. Data issues in relation to the planning, management and monitoring of collaborative activities are discussed below. See also LSC 2006 for discussion about data relating to NEETs.

The data were gathered within a short time frame that restricted the number and the range of contributors, and the individual case studies vary in the extent of their coverage and detail. Nevertheless, the case studies offer some understanding of organisational processes and structures. The qualitative data provides many useful insights but not sound evidence on which to make summative judgements about performance. Some conclusions can still be drawn, and these should remain open to further exploration since they are based on cases, not a representative sample.

A number of key issues and questions emerge from this research for policy-makers, providers and practitioners that need to be addressed as the work is taken forward.

The structure of the report

This report contains a summary of findings from the six case studies that address the research questions. It is presented in three parts.

- **Part 1** sets out the framework for analysis, explaining two models that are applied to the material.

- **Part 2** contains a summary and evaluation of the case study data, which is organised under three themes relating to the development model.
- **Part 3** assesses the impact of collaboration on the 14–19 offer.

There are six case study reports as well as an overall summary. All of the reports from this research are structured and presented using the same common framework, which is derived from the development model outlined in Part 1 of this report (see p19). The framework assists the process of summarising and comparing data drawn from a wide range of contexts and which vary in form and level of detail.

The findings are organised under three themes relating to the development model:

- Theme 1. Collaborative infrastructure: organisational relationships and structures, communications, management and coordination
- Theme 2. Delivery systems: access and operational arrangements
- Theme 3. Curriculum provision: the curriculum offer, content and choices; learning pathways and progression routes.

This report contains a summary of the main points from all six case studies relating to each of the above themes. The findings within all of the themes are reported under the following headings:

- Features evident across all case studies – this section covers established features that were found in all of the case study areas, although their form and significance may vary.
- Key challenges and emerging trends – this section features some particular challenges to collaborative work. Issues that were raised in two or more case studies are included. It also identifies some emerging trends. These are indicated through examples of what are frequently ground-breaking developments within the case study areas.
- Wider issues facing 14–19 collaboration in the sector – this section covers challenges to effective collaboration arising from the wider context, such as national policies and institutional structures that impact on the local areas and which need to be addressed at a higher level.
- Success factors – this section covers features underpinning successful outcomes in relation to each of the three themes, as identified by respondents.

Examples of successful or emerging practice from particular case study areas are cited where possible. This is not to suggest that similar examples cannot also be found elsewhere. Indeed it would be useful for partners to disseminate more examples in the region. Examples drawn from the literature review and findings from published research are integrated throughout.

Note on concepts and the use of terms

14–19 collaborative arrangements are frequently given different terms, such as ‘federation’, ‘collegiate’ or ‘consortium’, although these terms do not necessarily describe or relate to any particular form or type of collaborative organisation. Outside their use in a title, these concepts do carry distinctive meanings. So what *generic* term can be used to refer to all such arrangements, regardless of their individual titles? Foster had to search for an appropriate term for the collaborative arrangements he intended to propose (before settling for ‘managed provider networks’).

We prefer the concept of 'provider network' to 'alliance' (which implies unity against a common enemy) or 'confederation' (which is too grand and institutional). 'Consortium' is relevant too as a joint arrangement that a network can produce for specific purposes. 'Partnership' is also a good word, but we reserve that for local arrangements for shaping what is provided rather than managing it. 'Network' sits comfortably alongside the idea of learner pathways.

(Foster 2005, p42)

In this study, where particular arrangements are given a title, such as 'North Solihull Collegiate', that particular term is used. But where, as in this overall summary, collaborative arrangements and structures are referred to generically, they are termed 'collaborative forums'. (*Forum: a public or market place, a place of meeting for discussion, judicial and other business*, OUP 1996.)

Finally, although education and training organisations in the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors are often distinguished through the use of the respective terms 'schools' and 'providers', in this report, the term 'provider' is used to refer to both.

Part 1. The framework for analysis of case study findings

The problem of dissemination and learning transfer

There are numerous examples of 14–19 collaborations to draw upon. The problem for practitioners and policy-makers is how to understand and evaluate these examples and transfer the learning from one context to another; in other words, to ‘learn by example’ and also help others to do this.

Foster (2005) recommended that practitioners and policy-makers involved in developing 14–19 provision should both disseminate and learn from examples of effective and innovatory practice, and the government has established support for ‘learning visits’. There is evidence in the case studies to support the value to practitioners and policy-makers of being able to see innovatory practices *in situ* in order to transfer that learning to other settings, although this may not be a straightforward process.

A great deal of published material also exists that details examples of 14–19 collaborative arrangements and achievements derived from a range of different geographical, political and economic contexts. Again, it is not always easy to see how such exemplars might be applied elsewhere. (This is especially the case where the original achievements have been supported by special funding.)

There are similar issues for practitioners and policy-makers using the outcomes of this research. Each of the six case studies differs in the range and focus of activities judged as significant and therefore explored, and the depth and detail of data gathered vary in each. For example, each case study involves a different ‘set’ of respondents and the data reflects their particular knowledge and concerns. Two of the case studies explore the stakeholders’ views in more detail.

Further variations arise in how the data should be interpreted, since, for example, the significance of a collaborative activity in one context might be quite different when carried out in another. How can practitioners and policy-makers ensure that what has been developed and learned in one context can be appropriately or sensibly transferred to another?

The development model

The development model (see Figure 1 on p20) provides a map in the sense that it simplifies the cycle of development of 14–19 collaborative provision and shows how the different aspects are linked. It provides a means of locating the various types of collaborative activity that partners undertake and for understanding the relationships between them.

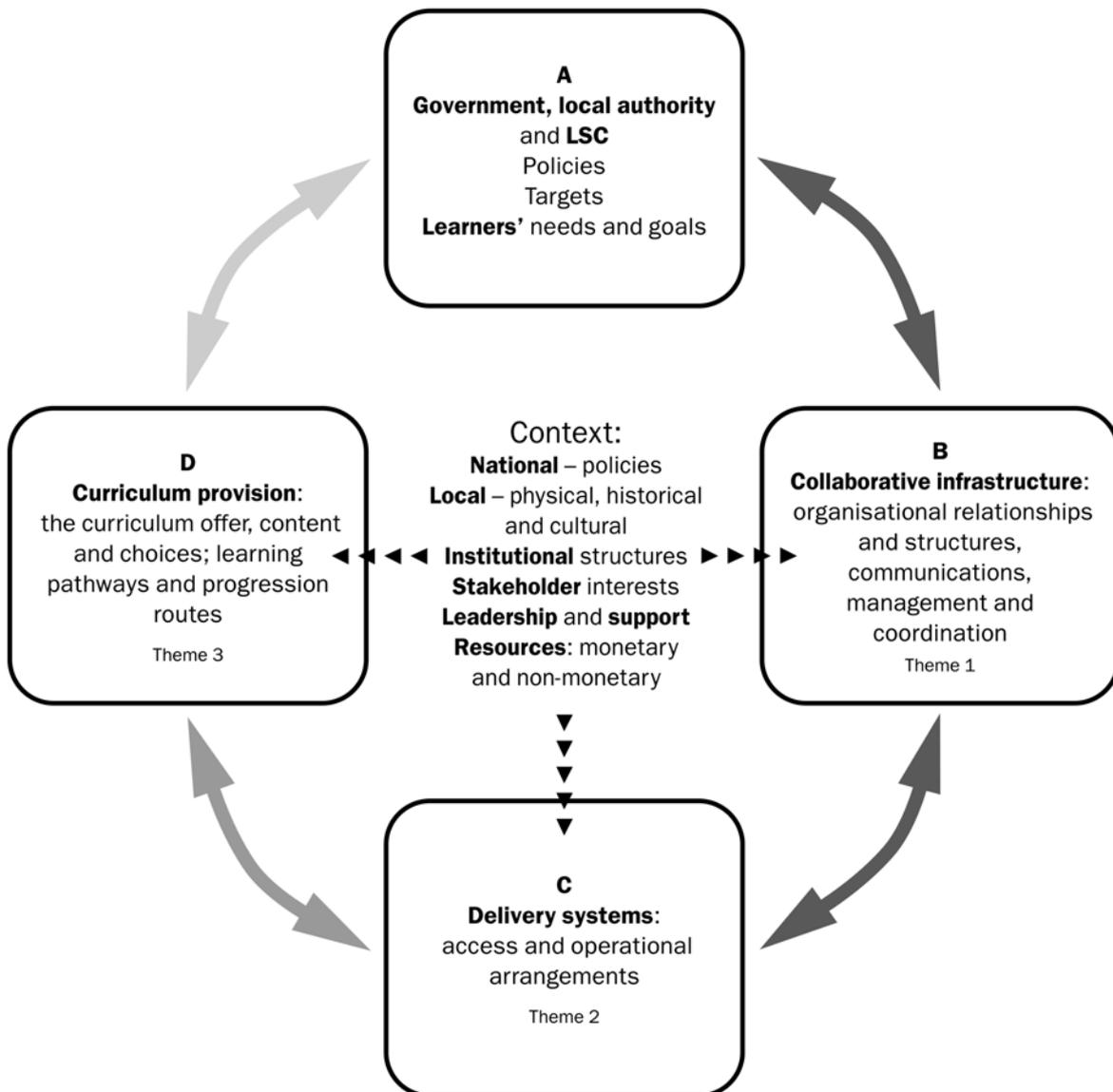
The model originates from this research, being derived from an analysis of relevant literature and the six case studies. Despite the variations noted above, each case study contributes data to illustrate a number of key themes. These data can be collated within a common framework. In Section 3, the development model is applied to the case study data. The framework has also been used as a common template for all of the reports.

The development model provides a framework for analysis, planning, evaluation and needs assessment. It is designed to help practitioners and policy-makers:

- draw together contributions that inform one particular aspect of collaborative development from each of the six studies (and other diverse sources)

- make sense of contextualised detail and draw useful lessons from other published research and wider literature
- analyse the developmental process
- assess where and how resources to support collaboration and collaborative provision might most effectively be directed, in any given context.

Figure 1 Development model: 14–19 collaborative provision



The deeper arrow shading indicates a stronger degree of focus and attainment at a local level in relation to each aspect of development, as reflected in the West Midlands case studies.

Using the development model

In its annual review of the implementation of 55 area-wide inspection action plans, the LSC noted that these 'continue to show a shift which first emerged in 2003 from purely process activities to those which make a difference, and a significant feature of the reports is the mounting evidence of improvements in achievement' (LSC 2005, p2).

This view carries some assumptions about the comparative value of certain kinds of implementation activities. The development model (see Figure 1 on p20) enables us to see how, where and what kinds of process activities should be viewed as 'those which make a difference'.

In the context of the development model (Figure 1), the achievement of goals captured by achievement data (A) is underpinned by other necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, outcomes. These outcomes relate to three areas: the prior development of collaborative infrastructures, the development of complex delivery and access arrangements and the transformation of the curriculum provision itself.

In contrast to the implied view of the LSC's summary quoted above, 'process' activities in all three areas are essential to 'making a difference' as measured by improved learner outcomes. Figure 1 illustrates how, in order to get A you need to develop B, C and D. Moreover, as the case studies show, the relationships between these aspects of collaborative activity are not necessarily linear. For example, from a starting point of aligning timetables (C), collaborative relationships (B) are also established. Likewise, projects to radically shape provision (D) have an impact on, and have outcomes for, C and D.

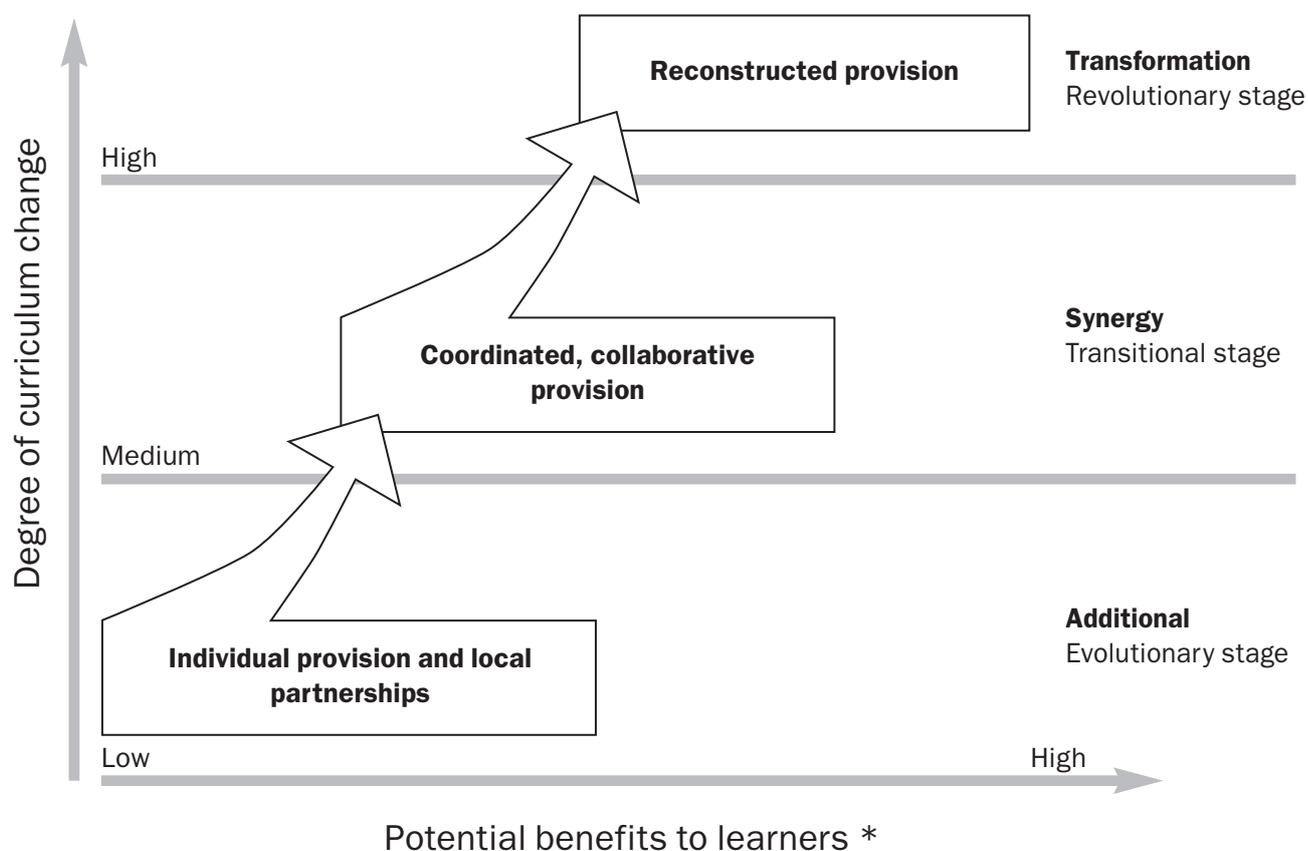
In respect of D, the model also allows us to see that collaborative activities aimed at widening access to provision can effectively expand the offer for the learner (and lead to improved achievement) without significantly changing the overall shape of the provision as it exists on the ground.

Figure 2 on p22 offers a step-change model of curriculum innovation. It has been adapted from a model commonly used for describing and analysing incremental and radical processes of innovation and change (eg in the business and technology fields). The model, adapted for use here, provides a simplified view of different 'stages' of development of the curriculum across a learning area. In reality, at any given time, a learning area will provide examples of developments at every 'stage'.

The model is useful because it starts from a view of the area's curriculum in terms of the shape and nature of the provision as it 'exists on the ground', rather than the shape of what the learner accesses. It illustrates how, in the early stages, the curriculum (or 'offer') can be expanded through providers adding further options by forming local partnerships and extending learner access to what is currently provided by them individually (evolutionary stage). Such expansion can take place without any significant changes in the provision itself, although there is movement towards the next 'stage' as the process leads to individual organisations' provision becoming modified.

In this research, the most progressive collaborations have a range of partners working collectively to achieve greater synergy through strategically developing, rationalising and coordinating their provision (transitional stage). Developments in this stage may include some elements of more radical transformation of the provision, although the progress of initiatives to reconstruct the learning area's curriculum remains limited under present statutory funding and sectoral regimes.

Figure 2 A step-change model of curriculum innovation



* Benefits to learners depend on the changes being driven by the principles of effective learning and learners' needs.

Stage 1 (evolutionary): The curriculum available to learners is expanded by providers individually diversifying their own provision, for example, schools adding vocational courses or forming local agreements to access parts of another's provision.

Stage 2 (transitional): The curriculum available to learners is expanded vertically and horizontally through improved access and IAG. Provision is developed, diversified and rationalised through collaborative forums, collective planning and management by the full range of providers and other agencies, changes in pedagogy as a result of joint development and collaborative working, and some investment in new facilities.

Stage 3 (revolutionary): This stage represents embedded, innovative developments, for example, in e-learning and science; integrated creative arts; and 'informed' design of curriculum content, modes and sites of delivery. Equal access to coherent learning lines and progression routes is integrated into community and occupational contexts. Another feature of this stage is collaborative, strategic curriculum planning and management.

Application of the development models to the case study findings

The development of collaborative relationships and curriculum provision is strongly influenced by the impact of national policies and local context (Edem *et al.* 2003). The former includes government ideology, legislation and funding decisions, economic and social conditions, and prevailing sectoral and institutional structures. The latter includes geographical, historical, socio-economic, political and cultural features; local institutions, patterns of stakeholder interests, and the monetary and non-monetary resources, including leadership, that are available (see the centre section of Figure 1 on p20).

Research and area-wide inspection reports indicate that both the configuration and level of development of the collaborative infrastructure as well as curriculum access and provision vary markedly from area to area. In terms of the model in Figure 1, developments in B, C and D vary markedly from area to area.

The case studies show that 14–19 collaborative work has largely focused on the development of both the infrastructure of collaboration and the organisation of delivery and access to provision (this, of course, includes IAG), in order to impact on the extent and shape of the curriculum offer. (Viewed in terms of the model in Figure 1, most focus at a local level has been on developing B and C initially, in order to achieve D.)

The main findings emerging from the case studies reflect this focus. There are some significant achievements in the establishment of an effective, collaborative infrastructure and in operational and access arrangements.

In terms of the impact of this work on the curriculum and learner choice, the outcomes can be assessed in at least two ways. 14–19 collaborations appear to have had a greater impact on expanding the offer available to learners than on reconstructing or reformulating the overall curriculum for the learning area. As noted above, there are significant structural and institutional obstacles to doing this, although it may prove to be the way forward in the future.

Part 2. Case study summaries and evaluation

In this section some key outcomes from the case studies are summarised and evaluated. The findings are organised under three themes relating to the framework:

- Theme 1. Collaborative infrastructure: organisational relationships and structures, communications, management and coordination
- Theme 2. Delivery systems: access and operational arrangements
- Theme 3. Curriculum provision: the curriculum offer, content and choices; learning pathways and progression routes.

The findings within all of the themes are reported under the following headings:

- Features evident across all case studies
- Key challenges and emerging trends
- Wider issues facing 14–19 collaboration in the sector
- Success factors.

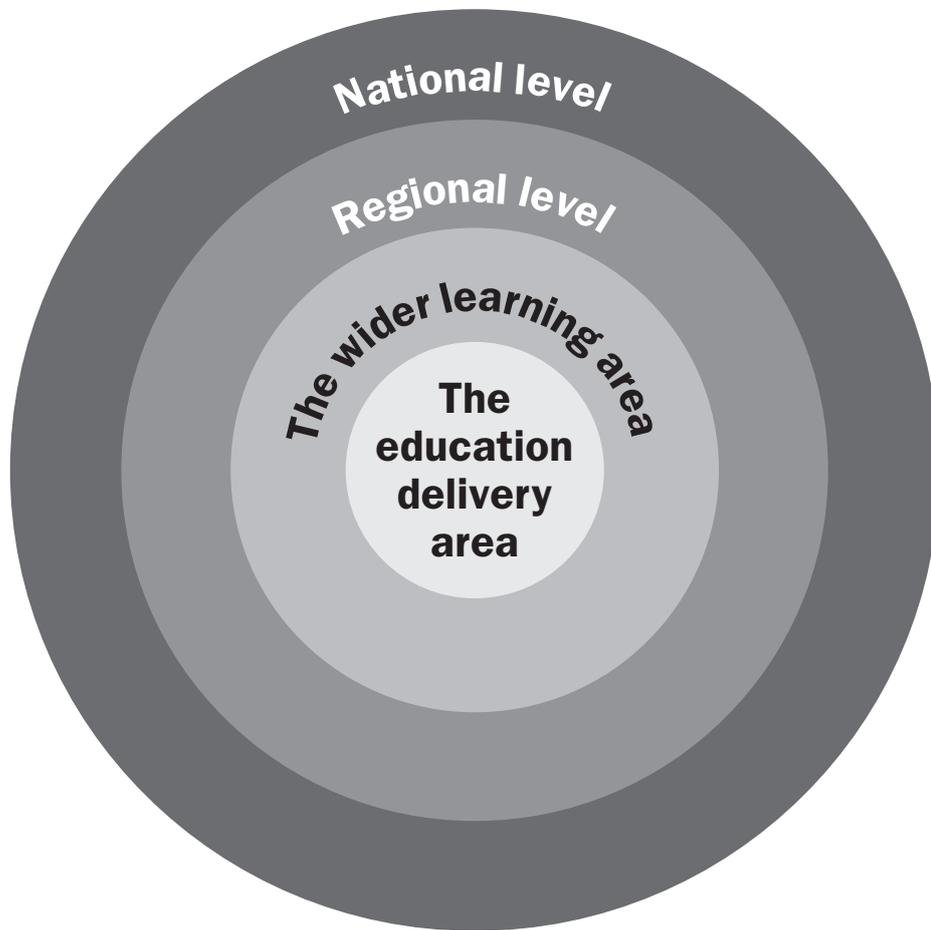
Defining the learning area

As pointed out in the Nuffield review of 14–19 education and training (Hayward *et al.* 2005) the notion of a ‘local learning area’ is problematic in an institutionally-focused system, and exacerbated where there are multiple administrative entities, each defining ‘the local area’ differently. For example, local authority and local LSC areas may not be geographically coterminous. The primary focus of the case studies is on the impact of 14–19 collaborative forums, therefore the local learning area and the education delivery area are generally defined here as being coterminous.

However, the boundaries are still not clear-cut in terms of the delivery of, or learners’ access to, the provision. For example, while Coventry North East Federation is geographically located in one part of the city, learners access an A-level curriculum that is delivered on a city-wide basis. In this case the education delivery area is situated within the ‘wider learning area’. A wider learning area might also be constituted by collaborative forums (such as Coventry North East and Coventry South West) working cooperatively to provide particular aspects of the curriculum. In some parts of the West Midlands, the wider learning area could cross a range of other significant boundaries. For example, when south east Staffordshire learners access provision in north Warwickshire.

The discussion in this section is largely centred on the collaborative forums that are the focus of each case study, and the local learning area refers to the geographical locality each forum covers. However, where, as in the example of Coventry North East cited above, it is not appropriate to distinguish them because the federation’s activities or arrangements are part of a city-wide intervention, the discussion will also encompass the wider learning area (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 The 14–19 local learning area within the national system



Source: Hayward *et al.* 2005

Theme 1. Collaborative infrastructure: organisational relationships and structures, communications, management and coordination

The establishment of collaborative partnerships to develop and implement strategy is a universal feature of all [area-wide inspection] reports, even if the membership, purpose and structure vary from place to place.

(LSC 2005, p10)

Features evident across all case studies

Sub-regional organisation

Each of the sub-regions has a different pattern and structure for 14–19 organisation at a local level (see Appendix 1). The case studies provide one example from each of the local LSC areas that participated in the project. However, it should be noted that even within the same sub-region there are significant differences in the way that local organisations have developed, and differences in their plans, activities and priorities.

The LSC's annual report on implementation plans notes that developments in the way partners work together to implement coherent 14–19 strategies is a key theme and is characterised by:

- strong partnership between key players, particularly the local LSC, local authorities and Connexions
- the development of a 14–19 strategy in all areas (LSC 2005, p3).

The case studies indicate that in all of the local LSC areas there are strategic planning and management structures in place to cover the 14–19 phase of education and training for the sub-region as a whole, to which the local area organisations are formally accountable.

All key stakeholders are represented on these sub-regional 14–19 directorates. Personnel at appropriate levels of authority are involved in overall management and monitoring of development and action plans for the sub-region and the local area organisations.

Local 14–19 area organisation: formal and informal collaborative structures

The features which are outlined below further substantiate a key finding of the 14–19 Pathfinders evaluation, which noted after the third year of research, 'a continued commitment to substantial collaborative working, local strategic leadership and the development of collaborative infrastructure between a wide range of partners' (Higham and Yeomans 2006, p1).

Local areas have 14–19 development plans linked to local LSC strategic plans and there are regular reporting systems between the local area and sub-regional organisations.

Steering groups at a local level are well established with regular meetings to strategically plan and monitor 14–19 collaborative provision.

Core sub-groups are established to plan and oversee operational arrangements relating to the curriculum. They cover key aspects such as the vocational and A-level curriculum, pre-16 and post-16 provision. The basis on which the sub-groups are organised to do this varies, although they all involve appropriately placed senior managers who meet regularly.

As the collaborative forums have broadened their scope, an increasing variety and number of working groups have been set up. These are established on a long-term or short-term basis and tend to involve a wide range of staff and managers at different levels of the partner organisations. As a result of this it has been found that working groups can increase the collaborations'

'penetration' of partner organisations, helping to raise awareness and facilitate the integration of collaborative work within the core business.

The role of key partners

An evaluation of the 14–19 Pathfinders considered the potential involvement of a wide range of groups (eg special schools, independent schools, employers, training providers, higher education institutions and young people) as a measure of a collaboration's 'inclusivity'. The findings suggest that it might be difficult to promote strong collaboration between more than three key partners. The researchers found that where in a minority of cases this had been achieved, new partners had been brought in on the basis of strong, already established collaborative relationships between schools and colleges (Coventry and South Gloucestershire Pathfinders had the most collaborative partners – six partners in each collaboration).

The researchers noted that, 'this highlights findings from the wider literature that time and money, both to develop and sustain collaboration, is an enormously important resource' (Higham and Yeomans 2005, p29).

The case study findings confirm this and also the general finding from IFP and Pathfinder evaluations: that schools and colleges play a strong leadership and management role within the local organisational structures. This is, of course, alongside the key roles played by LSC and local authority representatives. However, the role and impact of work-based training providers and Connexions seem to vary between the different areas, although where private training providers are collectively organised, their participation and influence in local partnerships is greatly enhanced. (This is considered in more detail in the section 'Work-based training providers' associations', below.)

Staffing

All of the collaborative forums are supported by LSC-funded local area coordinators who are employed on a full-time or part-time basis. They are generally linked by an overall 14–19 coordinator or strategy manager, who has a more strategic role. These local area coordinators sustain networks across the sub-region and act as the main conduit between local and sub-regional structures. Posts at this level have frequently been filled through secondments or other joint arrangements between the LSC and local authority.

Funding

The amount of funding available in each of the case study areas to support their 14–19 collaborative infrastructures and the provision itself is very difficult to ascertain. All of the local authorities and local LSCs have drawn on whatever budgets and diverse funding streams are available to them, although what they can access varies between geographical areas and many of these streams are time-limited. This makes long-term planning difficult, and raises questions about sustainability in relation to both the provision and the infrastructure. Clearly the work of accessing funds from multiple and diverse sources also carries its own resource costs.

Common protocols and procedures

All of the case study areas work to agreed sets of principles and procedures, although these vary in their degree of detail and formality and also in the degree to which they are seen as significant for the organisation and work of the collaboration.

In one area a coordinator produced, at an early stage, a complete set of guidelines and documentation for all providers involved in the area's 14–19 delivery. This is seen as providing an important mechanism for establishing a common sense of identity between disparate organisations. In another area a partnership procedures task group has been set up with similar aims; elsewhere, protocols have been established as and when required. In all cases, it does seem that the process of formalising agreements helps to consolidate collaborative relationships.

Quality assurance

The case studies show that all local planning groups use data to some degree to review the effectiveness of their provision at an organisational as well as a collaborative level. There is clearly much sensitivity, heightened where there are competitive pressures, for partners sharing their future plans and any information which might indicate weak or non cost-effective provision.

There was wide variation in respondents' views about the extent to which they felt partners were prepared to share data with one another. There was also a general view that in all cases, progress was being made in this respect.

Some common problems emerged, including the difficulties of tracking learners' progress across institutions and of understanding and comparing the different types of data produced and used in different parts of the sector.

Key challenges and emerging trends

Joint governance

Moves to institute joint governance of 14–19 collaborative provision are apparent in three of the case study areas. For example, collective ownership of the vocational skills centre (Tamworth District Forum) will require a joint governing body to employ staff, take responsibility for finances and provide strategic direction.

Progress towards instituting joint governance for 14–19 collaborative provision is most advanced in the Coventry North East Federation, where protocols have been carefully formulated and agreed, and where a joint committee comprising school governors and a college representative, with LSC representatives attending in an advisory capacity, meets regularly. The responsibilities of this committee are gradually being expanded, and it is now being used as a model for the other Coventry federations.

This stage of development is underpinned by established levels of trust and experience nurtured over time, and joint working between schools and between the schools and the college. It enables the collaboration to directly influence partners at a corporate level and, potentially, to employ staff and directly commission provision.

The 'brokerage' role

Two of the case studies (Wyre Forest District Consortium – ContinU and Sandwell Consortium) indicate the development of a brokerage role within the partnership. In these areas, on the basis of an overall map of the provision and its individual components, learner applications are received and matched up centrally. In one case study area this process is managed by an experienced team working under the auspices of the local authority. In another it is a county-wide project which, again, matches learners to appropriate provision and works with providers to develop programmes to meet the identified skills and learning needs of the locality. This can extend to commissioning provision where none is available. In both case study areas the brokerage system is considered beneficial to the learners and the providers.

Work-based training providers' associations

A number of case study respondents confirmed findings from other research (eg LSC Kent and Medway 2005), that private work-based training providers can find it difficult to participate on an equal footing with other agencies and public sector providers involved in 14–19 collaborative forums. The reasons include a lack of staff time and availability (exacerbated by the relatively high costs and low rates of return for delivery). In some cases there are barriers relating to cultural differences and a lack of knowledge by other partners about what work-based training providers can contribute.

Three case study areas – Sandwell Consortium (Black Country LSC), North Solihull Collegiate (Birmingham and Solihull LSC) and Coventry North East Federation (Coventry and Warwickshire LSC) – provide examples where private providers are formally organised within an umbrella organisation, which they fund to represent and negotiate with partners on their behalf, although individual providers may still work directly with the local forums. Similar arrangements for association and representation can be found on a less formal basis. For example, in Shropshire the largest training company also represents smaller providers.

Such associations and their representatives appear to make a significant difference to work-based training providers' impact on the planning and shape of the collaborative provision within the local areas. This is especially the case where their participation is formally established.

Quality improvement and quality assurance frameworks

All of the forums are working on quality assurance for their 14–19 provision with the aim of also improving it.

A local LSC-wide quality assurance framework has been instituted across all Birmingham and Solihull colleges. This links to the schools' self-evaluation and the colleges' and work-based training providers' self-assessment processes. A vocational skills and training centre (Tamworth District Forum) has adapted a quality assurance model originally developed by the Knowsley vocational skills centre.

An interesting possibility under discussion in the Coventry North East Federation is that the coordinator might play an active role in quality assurance and improvement; for example, by undertaking direct observation of delivery by providers to students involved in the collaboration's programmes.

The use of data

All partners are working to address challenges regarding transparency, data sharing and reporting, and are trying to establish an agreed, common format to enable them to manage and improve their provision both collaboratively and effectively. Two particular areas of data transparency were identified which impact on effective management.

The first relates to funding; specifically, which funding streams are being accessed by individual partners within the 14–19 collaboration. This is a complex issue, which was examined in a test-bed project report for Birmingham and Solihull LSC (Aleander and Feneley 2004). The findings indicate that in a complicated and fairly 'anarchic' system there are many obstacles to an open, collaboratively managed process of funding acquisition and distribution. The challenges at a local level start with agreement that 'funding and programmes are to be managed and administered in an open and transparent way with best practice in mind' and to share baseline information to enable this to happen (Aleander and Feneley 2004, p3). However, many of the key challenges to effective, strategic management relate to funding and other policies beyond local influence, and so this question is discussed in the section below, 'Wider issues facing 14–19 collaboration in the sector'.

The second challenge regarding transparency and data sharing relates to performance, and the retention, achievement and cost-effectiveness of programmes. There is evidence in the case studies that partners are working hard to overcome the technical difficulties and also the sensitivities surrounding these issues.

In one example (Coventry North East Federation), where quality improvement work is being taken forward, the 14–19 steering group has agreed quality improvement protocols. The group has begun work on establishing benchmarks in preparation for target-setting. Once agreed, the benchmarks will be the basis for regular review.

Employer engagement

John Brennan, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, quoted in the national press: 'If the government is to succeed in establishing vocational learning as a high-quality alternative to the academic route, available to all young people, then they must tackle the problem of low employer interest...' (Ward 2004).

All of the partnerships face the challenge of enabling employers to play an effective role in 14–19 planning and provision. The National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) evaluation of the IFP (Golden et al. 2004b) noted that employer involvement was limited. Barriers included the time available to tutors to develop the links, the lack of appropriate employers and the reluctance of employers to participate. Some were seeking to use avenues such as those provided by local Enterprise Business Partnerships.

In contrast to this, the 14–19 Pathfinder evaluation showed high levels of involvement by employers and training providers in over half of the projects (Higham and Yeomans 2005). In the researchers' 14–19 Pathfinder costing study, engaging employers was estimated at £7000 (based on simply carrying out a survey of local employers). However, this was almost twice the amount estimated for 'consulting/engaging others', which was noted as a separate item. Moreover, if employer engagement costs included a work experience or placement coordinator, they were considerably higher (York Consulting 2005).

MacLeod and Hughes (2005) concluded that 'funding arrangements to support employer engagement need to recognise that early stages of building relationships with employers can be potentially resource-intensive, with little prospect of immediate commercial return'. This study also pointed out that most attention to employer engagement has been focused on education and training providers (supply side) responding to employers as customers (demand side). In this case, however, the efforts (again by providers) are to engage employers as fellow providers on the supply side.

There may also be limits to the extent to which providers alone can directly encourage employers to work with them... Early policy statements by government ascribed responsibility for improving workplace learning (a prime purpose of employer–learning provider collaboration) to employers... more may need to be done by government to persuade employers of the benefits of working with learning providers.

(MacLeod and Hughes 2005, pp43–44)

In the majority of the case study areas involved in this research, direct employer engagement in the 14–19 collaborative forums was noted as being limited and difficult to achieve. Links are generally made and maintained through the work-based training providers. Two case studies provide examples of work on direct employer engagement. An annual Enterprise Business Partnership showcase event is organised to raise awareness of and highlight employer involvement (Sandwell Consortium and Black Country LSC). Tamworth District Forum is a striking example of direct employer involvement. Here, employers and business groups actively support the development of vocational provision in general and the vocational skills centre in particular, with mutually beneficial outcomes for learners, providers and the community.

It is interesting to note that work-based training providers do not find it easy to engage employers either. Almost 80% in one study said they wanted employers to be more involved in the design and assessment of their training programmes (McCoshan et al. 2005).

Connexions

The case studies show that the role and impact of Connexions on 14–19 collaborative planning and provision is variable. In some areas partners are actively working on embedding and formalising links with the service. One local LSC (Coventry and Warwickshire) provides an example of where the links are long established, strong and effective at every level.

The 'voice of the learner'

The voice of the learner, parents and the community (including the voluntary sector) in the planning and management of 14–19 provision remains relatively weak in collaborative forums. It is also a challenge within individual institutions that make up the partnerships, as shown, for example, in Ruddock and Flutter's work on consulting young people in schools (Ruddock and Flutter nd).

In the 14–19 Pathfinder evaluation estimate of 'inclusivity', the involvement of young people in planning and shaping the work of the projects was found to be extremely limited, despite the fact that Pathfinders were required to show how they proposed to take young people's views into account (Higham and Yeomans 2005).

The voice of the learner is an area that poses many challenges for partners involved in developing a responsive, collaborative infrastructure. Even where consultation does take place, Pollard and James (2004) highlight two key aspects that can impact on its effectiveness unless great care is taken. The first is authenticity – young people are quick to detect when consultation is tokenistic. The second is equity – 'consultation assumes social confidence and linguistic competence'; the silent or the silenced need to be heard.

Two case studies provide examples of effective work to engage with young people both to consult them about their needs and to elicit their views about what is being planned and provided.

- The Sandwell Consortium case study provides evidence of an engaging young people policy and action plan. Young people's focus groups also played a key role in drawing up the 14–19 learning entitlement and a range of documents.
- In Coventry there is a young people's forum and a citizens' panel supported by Connexions. Again, young people made a substantial contribution to the learner entitlement for Coventry and Warwickshire (LSC Coventry and Warwickshire 2006).

Inclusion

The stakeholders involved in 14–19 collaborations are also key members of other networks and mutually beneficial links are made across all of these. Increasing attention to meeting the needs of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities more effectively highlights the key role of partners experienced in this area in the 14–19 forums.

- A sub-regional coordinator for 14–19 learners with learning difficulties and disabilities has been appointed (Coventry and Warwickshire LSC) and the 14–19 strategic plan revised in the light of the city council's inclusion strategy for learners with special educational needs and the LSC's strategic area review (StAR) of provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- The social inclusion panel (Tamworth District Forum) is a multi-agency task group which works closely with the 14–19 collaborative forum to develop an effective alternative curriculum for learners who are not succeeding by Years 9 or 10.

Funding: sustaining the collaborative infrastructures

All case study areas are concerned about sustaining the collaborative infrastructure once the funding sources that have been used, for example, to employ the 14–19 coordinators, come to an end.

Higham and Yeomans (2006) identify a number of actions being taken to ensure that the 14–19 infrastructures are sustained. These include continuing to access alternative funding sources and partners committing themselves to funding a greater proportion of the costs. This takes two

forms, for example, agreeing to jointly fund posts and providing funding to pay for the release of staff involved in the collaboration's work.

Schools in the case study areas already recognise the need to contribute towards the costs of maintaining the coordinators' posts and some already do so. For example, in the Tamworth District Forum, the coordinator has been paid cover for 1.5 days a week to carry out the 14–19 coordination role through LSC funding, which runs out in 2007. He has combined this work with a school headship, from which he retires in 2006. In reality the combined role has only been possible because the school provides 'cover' in the form of an extremely able senior management team.

In the Coventry North East Federation, the schools and FE college have already agreed to each pay one sixth of the coordinator's salary and federation expenses. Elsewhere, however, small schools, particularly in rural areas, are less certain about their ability to sustain such costs, although the work of the local coordinators might be even more crucial here than in urban areas.

Wider issues facing 14–19 collaboration in the sector

Transparency in funding and sharing data

The wider political context has a significant impact on local-level collaborations trying to improve transparency and data sharing in order to better manage their provision in the best interests of the learner. But in respect of funding and performance data, obstacles to transparency are exacerbated by education policies that encourage increasing institutional autonomy and competition. As a result, Aleander and Feneley (2004) note, for example, that while many of the funding streams are actually designed to enable collaborative activity and an increased focus on the learner rather than the institution, this is not necessarily achieved in practice.

The first challenge relating to transparency with regard to funding was, as outlined above, the subject of a Birmingham and Solihull LSC test-bed project report on funding methodologies. The authors examined the range of discretionary (non-core) funding available to collegiate members in the Birmingham and Solihull area and the ways in which these funds were distributed. They were looking at ways a complex mix of funds might be "pooled", to enable them to be used in more efficient and truly learner-centred ways' (Aleander and Feneley 2004, p2).

The findings indicate a complicated and fairly 'anarchic' system, which presents many obstacles to a more strategically managed and agreed process of funding acquisition and distribution. The authors' recommendations include closer working between the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the LSC, and establishing a common framework of procedures and criteria for discretionary funding to resource learning for either young people or adults. Such a framework should be free of sector differences, like those that exist in funding frameworks covering schools, colleges and other providers.

These structural and sector differences also inhibit the effective use of data by collaborative management groups. The provision of a single database for all 14–19 learners, and compatible and comparable data to support effective cross-sectoral planning, monitoring and student tracking across the partnership, are required.

Resources

In the context of increasing demand, serious issues for partners working to develop and sustain collaborative provision arise from:

- the impact of short-term funding on long-term planning
- the impact of reduced funding on:

- a sustaining and developing the breadth and depth of provision required to meet the needs of all learners
- b sustaining the collaborative infrastructure for 14–19 provision (including the coordinator posts) where this is already established
- c building such an infrastructure where collaboration is currently weak or limited.

For example, researchers looking at just one area concluded:

Funding arrangements to support employer engagement need to recognise that early stages of building relationships with employers can be potentially resource-intensive, with little prospect of immediate commercial return. Funding risky and experimental activity is not a comfortable idea within public funding arrangements, but for every success there will be some failure and funding arrangements need to be developed that take this on board.
(MacLeod and Hughes 2005)

Resource demands of participating in collaborative arrangements

Of concern is the impact of differential funding across the sector on the quality of provision and also the capacity of partners to participate on an equal basis in collaborative forums.

The 14–19 Pathfinder costing study set out the main areas, outside those involved in the actual provision, that incur costs for partners committed to working together (York Consulting 2006). Some of these costs might be borne centrally, although an increasing proportion may shift to individual partners as central funding is reduced; the rest is a direct monetary or non-monetary cost for each organisation.

Sector differences, such as those that exist in funding frameworks covering schools, colleges and other providers, establish an unequal playing field for partners' participation that ultimately works against optimising the capacity of the collaboration as a whole.

Impact of new policies on 14–19 collaborative relationships

In 2003, LSDA research to inform the design of guidance on the conduct of StARs noted:

Current legislation creates major barriers to collaboration between schools and colleges; for example, by creating a single institutional ethos (eg FE incorporation, delegated legal powers to schools), creating competition (via performance tables) and ensuring different contracts of employment and pay structures between schools and colleges.
(Edem et al. 2003, p4)

Recent policy initiatives depend upon wide-ranging partnerships and complex, collaborative activity for their implementation. Although these initiatives present further opportunities they also pose challenges for those involved in developing 14–19 collaborative relationships and infrastructures, for example, in building and maintaining:

- high levels of trust and cooperation between partners – in competitive contexts such as the development of academies, school sixth forms and competitive rather than complementary sources of vocational provision
- the balance between competition and collaboration – in the context of demographic changes and the impact of falling rolls on smaller schools
- the focus on 14–19 education and training – in the context of broad, multi-agency forums led by social services, while also ensuring that 14–19 curriculum planning effectively incorporates the perspectives of social services and other agencies as required by *Every child matters* (DfES 2004)

- a culture of 'learner first' – shifting partners' priorities, approaches and attitudes from an 'institution-led' to a 'learner-led' position, eg in the context of league tables and current funding regimes.

Success factors

The processes which underpin the initiation and maintenance of effective, collaborative relationships are the subject of extensive research and theorisation. Some of the features, which are clearly identifiable from the case study examples and often explicitly stated by the interviewees, are set out below.

These features have, in turn, been subject to intensive study. Literature across the fields of psychology, sociology, economics and organisational science focus on the aspect of 'trust', for example. Some writers focus on the practical applications of this kind of research (eg Huxham and Vangen 2003; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; Balloch and Taylor 2001; Glendinning, Powell and Rummery (eds) 2002).

Commonly cited factors underlying continuing effectiveness of 14–19 collaborations include:

- an area characterised by a collaborative culture and a strong networking tradition
- 14–19 collaborations built on the basis of earlier partnerships (between schools and between schools, colleges and work-based training providers), for example, to enhance the post-16 offer or deliver pre-16 provision under the IFP.

These success factors are strongly corroborated by the case study findings. In addition to these, the following features are also identified.

Geography

The most favourable conditions for advancement – in respect of the organisational infrastructure, delivery arrangements and construction of the 'offer' – appear to lie where 14–19 collaborations are established in geographically-compact areas and with a partnership of manageable size.

Culture, attitude and approach

Effective collaboration is found where partners do (or take action to ensure that they can):

- share the same vision
- own the process
- put learners first
- focus on establishing cooperative and non-competitive relationships
- focus on collective responses and strategies to address needs
- adopt complementary roles in order to progress collective rather than individual aims
- share good practice
- maintain mutual respect, build and maintain trust
- remain solution-focused ('can do approach')

- demonstrate a strong commitment at executive and senior levels
- make non-monetary contributions
- take risks
- maintain a positive view of one another's contribution to the learner offer.

People's roles and skills

Respondents noted that the effectiveness of collaboration is enhanced where there are individuals in key roles who have strong communication and interpersonal skills, a consistently inclusive approach and a clear vision which others can share. In particular where:

- the coordinator is able to play a strong facilitating and/or leadership role when required and provides effective links between relevant agencies and providers
- advisers provide good leadership and support
- key personnel (including chairpersons) provide effective leadership and a clear vision sustained over time
- all partners concentrate on shared goals and cooperation.

Resources

The most significant monetary and non-monetary factors underpinning successful collaboration have been:

- effective use of diverse funding streams
- sustained financial support for 14–19 collaborative provision and infrastructures
- access to expertise through the LSC
- significant non-monetary contributions to sustain and develop collaborative provision and infrastructures.

Engagement of partners

Partnership working is most beneficial when:

- there is strong support from key stakeholders
- effective cross links between personnel involved in 14–19 collaborations and other strategic bodies at appropriate levels are in place
- there is effective support from local employers and business groups
- Connexions and work-based training providers are engaged in effective strategic and operational planning
- there are effective links between schools and all agencies, projects and providers supporting an extended curriculum for pre-16 learners
- there is increasing 'depth' of organisational involvement – such as middle managers and practitioners

- mechanisms are in place for ‘listening to the voice of the learner’.

Conclusions

Some general conclusions can be drawn from published research and literature in the field and from the case studies.

- The process of building trust and effective working relationships takes time.
- Working collaboratively can be resource-intensive and time-consuming.
- Partnership working involves risk and risk management.
- Collaborations are fragile and require nurturing.
- The role and skills of individuals can be crucial.
- Leadership is complex.

A consistent message emerging from the case studies is that 14–19 collaborative forums are most successful and effective when developed on the basis of what has already been established. This suggests that resourcing needs to be stable, and sustained over time. The role and skills of the coordinator are clearly crucial for sustaining both the collaborative infrastructure and its provision.

Theme 2. Delivery systems: access and operational arrangements

The case studies support findings from Higham and Yeomans's 14–19 Pathfinder evaluation (2006) in which they note that one of the thrusts of 14–19 developments has been to increase the range of sites in which students learn. Much collaborative activity has been undertaken to organise this, to ensure that off-site learning is effective and to look for ways in which it can be sustained.

Overall, Higham and Yeomans conclude that, 'strategic decisions which were widely supported could nevertheless fail to have an impact upon practice or be sustained if the operational steps needed to make them work were not taken' (Higham and Yeomans 2006, p43). Furthermore, they comment on the potential scale of the organisational infrastructures that may be required to ensure such implementation.

Features evident across all case studies

Timetabling

Common timetables aligned across schools, colleges and work-based training providers have been a significant achievement in the case study areas and are crucial for ensuring that learners can access the widest possible choice of options. The complex task of accommodating a growing number of Key stage 4 options available through the IFP and European Social Fund (ESF) was, in most cases, tackled on the basis of schools' earlier experience of aligning A-level timetables. For example, in Coventry, the city's schools aligned A-level provision 25 years ago.

The majority of the case study areas operate a 'block' system, whereby at least one day (20%) of the school timetable is allocated as a 'collaborative vocational day' and core subjects are not timetabled. Different days are allocated for Years 10 and 11 to accommodate the numbers of places required. In an area which does not operate a common 'block', there is some timetable harmonisation between schools, but less use is made of shared facilities (Sandwell South). Elsewhere, 14–19 collaboration is leading to alignment between providers across, as well as within, local areas (Sandwell North and West, Coventry North East and Coventry South East).

Colleges and work-based training providers have to manage a balance between Key stage 4 provision, which is relatively poorly funded, and their core businesses. It would appear that work-based training providers, possibly under greater pressure to work on an in-fill basis, can find it difficult to achieve the degree of flexibility they would prefer with schools.

The task of aligning timetables remains complex, and demands a high level of partnership working. An emerging trend is to extend the school day by offering, for example, additional A-level, 'twilight' programmes (from 4.15pm to 6.15pm) for gifted and talented pupils (Shropshire).

Travel

Most commonly pupils use transport organised and funded by the schools to travel between sites. However, the issues to be tackled in order to deliver the 14–19 curriculum vary in each of the case study areas. In the most rural setting (Shropshire), the common timetable has helped to ease huge logistical problems that were eventually and successfully addressed by the 14–19 coordinator. But even locally, the distances pupils travel reduce their time on programme. Where greater distances are involved, alternative modes of delivery are being developed.

Travel routes between schools and between the college, the schools and the training centre, in less-rural Tamworth, run across rather than along the main 'arteries'. It is highly complex to organise using the local travel companies, and tends to reduce timetabling flexibility.

Birmingham and Solihull collegiates work with an ‘independent travel strategy’ (learners go directly to the place of study and then return home). This frees more resources to extend the curriculum offer, although it also has an impact on the subjects that pupils select.

Coventry is developing a ‘Travel to learn’ website, with links to its electronic prospectus, to help learners plan their provision.

Information, advice and guidance

All case study areas report significant developments in the quality and extent of course publicity, guidance and information they produce, especially for pre-16 learners, but also for staff and parents. The extent to which this material is also available electronically varies greatly (see ‘Key challenges and emerging trends’ below). Many areas report the use of the Fast Tomato facility developed by Connexions.

Showcase events, open days, taster sessions and inter-site visits are organised regularly by colleges and schools. Again, in some areas, the coordinators do a lot of the organisational and administrative work required. There is evidence that work-based training providers are consistently involved in such events (although overall, they appear to have less involvement with Year 9 pupils). The direct involvement of Connexions in these activities appears to vary across the case study areas (or it was less consistently reported).

Application processes

This is another area where there have been significant developments aimed at simplifying the process and providing independent support for learners going through it. Centralised and electronic application systems such as CAP in Coventry are an emerging trend. Work by Connexions’ personal advisers in schools on the ‘September Guarantee’ (Coventry and Warwickshire) and the ‘October Offer’ (Tamworth) appears to have been particularly effective in reducing the numbers of NEET young people, although its impact can be limited by a lack of suitable places on offer. In Herefordshire and Worcestershire, ContinU’s diverse curriculum coordinators based in schools carry out a similar role.

Staff development

Staff and curriculum development are a resource priority in the North Solihull Collegiate. Professional development and training in relation to 14–19 provision takes place at both organisational and collaborative levels in all case study areas. Joint training events, briefings and staff conferences are organised regularly within the collaborative forums, and other development opportunities, such as joint delivery, appear to be increasingly used to enhance the curriculum as well as staff expertise. All such training and development appears to be highly valued by staff, who also benefit from the valuable networking opportunities they provide.

Key challenges and emerging trends

It is clear that the extension of subject choices available to young learners, in conjunction with an increasing range of different sites and modes of delivery, place a high premium on effective support for learners as they progress through the 14–19 phase (ie not just at specific points of transition).

Moreover, research into ‘learner identities’ and ‘learner careers’ tends to show that for most learners notions of routes, pathways and progression are generally meaningless (Bloomer and Hodgkinson 2000). The idea of a clear career path emerging from a set of clear, rational decisions is probably less useful than seeing this as a learning process itself; one that is influenced by learners’ own attitudes and aspirations, the opportunities open to them and others’ views of these.

Higham and Yeomans point out:

Support processes will need to engage with the learning identities and perceptions of learning careers held by students, respond to these through the provision of information and curriculum activities but also challenge and possibly disrupt them (as much for learners who see themselves on a straight road to university or into a family business as for those who have no sense of direction), although this raises fundamental ethical questions about the purposes of information, advice, guidance and student support.

(Higham and Yeomans 2006, pp33–34)

Information, advice and guidance

As noted above, as a result of collaboration, institutions generally receive publicity across the wider community. However, IAG remains largely with the individual providers. There is wide variation in the way the offer is made available to learners and also in the degree to which Connexions is integrated into the process.

A number of respondents expressed the need to develop and improve independent advice and guidance in the context of an increasingly complex offer. Among other points noted were perceived differences in the way 'home' and 'away' offers are presented to learners; together with a lack of information about the WBL route, especially for learners likely to stay on at school.

Electronic prospectus and application systems

All of the case study areas are preparing a common prospectus that can be accessed electronically. Work on this is at an advanced stage in the Coventry North East Federation. A highly successful website (Shine, at: http://www.coventryshine.com/home.asp?parent_id=1) has been developed here that is linked to the centralised application system initiated by Connexions. It is being used as a model by the other federations. Future plans include linking in information about job vacancies and the learning pathways associated with these.

In Sandwell South, the lead in developing an electronic prospectus and application system is being taken by a college. Its 'Learning gateway' website will be made accessible to all secondary schools in Sandwell. Other case study areas have similar ideas about building on websites initially developed by a local college (Tamworth District Forum and Shropshire North West Forum).

Learner transitions

Higham and Yeomans (2006) note that while the 14–19 phase is becoming more coherent, with more clearly defined progression routes, the structural divide at 16 retains strong significance. For young people it marks the end of compulsory schooling rather than a mid-point, and frequently involves big changes in both curriculum and the institution.

Apart from providing good initial information, some partners have been working in other ways to support learners at this transition point. For example, induction events (Coventry North East Federation) visits or tasters that involve team building and ice-breakers help to build the confidence needed for 16-year-old learners to move on and to enter new fields.

This strategy may help to increase post-16 retention. However, all case study areas face the challenge of needing to improve post-16 learner monitoring and tracking across the range of providers in the sector, so that support can be made available at other, crucial transition points. A unique learner identification system would clearly be useful here.

Flexible delivery

All of the case study areas are grappling with the challenge of organising access to the widest range of options for individual learners. This manifests itself in collaborative arrangements covering, for example, timetabling and transport, which are expensive to organise in terms of

partners' time and in the latter case, costly to provide. Alternatives such as moving tutors instead of students are used where possible.

For example, in one rural area (Shropshire North West Forum) engineering facilities have been set up in a school, which others can access, and the work-based training provider sends the trainers there. To enable young people 60 miles away to access its popular land-based programme, the college sends materials to be delivered in the local schools and assessors to support portfolio building. Clearly the development of online programmes to facilitate distance and blended learning provision is one way forward, although it is resource-heavy, especially in the introductory stages. Moreover, the scope for extending this mode of delivery, while maintaining the authenticity of vocational learning, is limited.

Wider issues facing 14–19 collaboration in the sector

Equality and diversity

Equality and diversity policies and guidance exist at organisational and collaboration levels in all of the case study areas and all make an effort to ensure that the offer is inclusive by being broad enough to encompass the widest possible range of learners' needs. However, the take-up of programmes offered by partners in the main vocational areas reflects the traditional, gendered patterns found elsewhere.

Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) research has found that IAG from both formal (careers, teaching staff, employers) and informal sources (family, peers) tends to reinforce gender-stereotyped views of vocational opportunities (Francis *et al.* 2005). Given such a powerful social context, the EOC questions a 'freedom of choice' model that does not also address the perpetuation of inequalities through some kind of positive action, such as non-traditional taster days and work experience offered as part of the curriculum for girls and boys (Francis *et al.* 2005; Devitt and Roker 2005a, 2005b).

There was no evidence in the case studies to suggest that attempts had been made to promote non-traditional subject choices or to target information to encourage consideration of a wider range of choices for girls and boys, as proposed by the Women and Equality Unit (2004).

Although there are examples of good college provision for learners at the foundation stage (Coventry North East Federation – and that planned for the vocational skills and training centre at Tamworth), it was noted that young people with learning difficulties and disabilities can face problems finding work placements with employers. This is a further, important challenge for collaborations seeking to fulfil their statutory duties.

Success factors

Staff time and expertise

Successful innovation and execution of what are often complex and very time-consuming tasks, such as organising timetables, transport, online and paper-based marketing and publicity, application systems, prospectuses and directories, depends on having access to the relevant skills, experience and expertise – and people with the time.

Successful outcomes in this field are largely dependent on two sources of input, from:

- the staff of partner organisations, who carry out tasks that benefit the collaboration as a whole

- staff such as the 14–19 coordinators, employed on a full- or part-time basis to work for the collaboration.

Inputs from both sources carry resource costs, although the contribution of partner organisations' staff appears in a non-monetary form.

Most significant for success is:

- the 14–19 coordinator's role and skills (and also other coordinators such as enterprise or Aimhigher coordinators)
- LSC and local authority expertise and support
- staff time and expertise contributed by partners
- voluntary time and expertise (eg contributed by governors).

In the present study, also required for success are:

- **financial resources:** to cover higher operational (eg transport), development and set-up costs (especially in relation to ICT)
- **a common procedural framework:** protocols and standardised procedures that cover the collaboration as a whole and establish a common identity and a forum-wide approach
- **good communication systems:** close communication links between partners, and staff with liaison and 'link' roles within organisations
- **independent advice, guidance and support for learners:** effective monitoring of, and support for, learners at all of their key transition points and positive support for learners to access education and training in 'non-traditional' vocational areas.

Training opportunities to develop staff skills (especially in ICT)

These findings are supported by the Pathfinder evaluations, which included in the list of key factors for achieving good practice in the 14–19 phase, 'the need to establish a robust collaborative infrastructure with skilled staff in order to be able to translate strategic vision into operational activities' and also noted 'the need to be able to model and estimate more clearly the costs of various kinds of collaborative activities'.

(Higham and Yeomans 2006, p59)

Conclusions: The 'beneficial cycle'

Interestingly, although successful outcomes depend to some extent on the prior existence of effective and collaborative working relationships, the process of partners working together to plan, develop and implement these operational arrangements also helps to nurture these further. There is a clear feedback loop apparent in the case studies, with examples of partnerships and collaborative relationships being initiated through starting work on joint arrangements and others already in existence being strengthened by the process. This process has been theorised by Huxham and Vangen (2003) who discuss it in terms of a 'cyclical trust-building loop'.

Theme 3. Curriculum provision: the curriculum offer, content and choices; learning pathways and progression routes

This section focuses on collaborative work to develop and transform the curriculum offer in order to broaden the range of learners' options in the 14–19 phase. The curriculum available to the learner can be expanded through offering choices in relation to learning sites, modes, content and environments, and the curriculum constructed by enabling access to different levels with clear pathways and progression routes.

The case studies support findings from Higham and Yeomans's 14–19 Pathfinder evaluation (2006): that good progress has been made in broadening the curriculum and promoting innovative, vocational learning opportunities, although a more variable picture emerges of engagement in work-related learning. Overall, Higham and Yeomans (2006) noted that in planning the curriculum, Pathfinders found it was crucially important to attempt to match provision to learner needs in relation to both *sites* and *modes* of learning, and they pointed out that this has implications for the design of the new specialised diplomas.

Features evident across all case studies

Increased range and depth of the offer

All case study areas demonstrate increased range and depth of provision as a result of collaboration and the development of new learning lines. Consequently, there is a greater variety of vocational and academic pathways on offer to learners from Entry level to HE level and all case study collaboratives ensure that their programmes lead to qualifications and progression routes. If progression programmes are not provided within the forum itself, they will be made accessible elsewhere.

Aspects of the offer developed through collaboration

Collaboration between schools to increase the breadth of the Level 3 and A-level curriculum and also to ensure the survival of minority subjects has been an early feature of many of the partnerships, for example, in Coventry on a city-wide basis and within the Tamworth district. In the latter case, a parallel 'post-16 consortium' offer has been formulated that provides around 15 courses alongside, and in addition to, the 20 or so options available to pupils within their own schools.

In a majority of the case studies there are also examples of extension programmes for pupils capable of study at higher levels. For example, in Shropshire, where the college is the main A-level provider, an additional 'stretch' A-level (AS Critical Thinking) is offered for Years 9 and 10 as a twilight course. Elsewhere, Key stage 4 learners are being challenged in schools by AS and HE modules, some (as in Sandwell) with banked CAT scores, as well as BTEC First Diplomas. Higham and Yeomans (2006) note that the pace of this kind of development has slowed. This is partly attributed to disappointing examination results, but also to difficulties of timetabling, organisation and progression in learning.

A number of the early area-wide inspection reports noted a narrowly academic offer and a preponderance of Level 3 programmes in some areas when a majority of learners might struggle to reach Level 2 at age 16.

All of the case studies show that there has been significant and rapid development of the pre-16 and post-16 vocational, work-based and work-related curriculum. For example, in Sandwell a highly academic post-16 curriculum in 2003 now includes 54 vocational Level 3 programmes alongside 64 A-/AS options. Tamworth's full vocational curriculum offer includes courses offered at school, the college and the vocational skills and training academy. The schools (all specialist)

offer vocational options in their niche areas, some of which are delivered in conjunction with the college. The college contributes to curriculum areas where it has particular expertise and good facilities. These inputs are complemented and enhanced on the vocational skills and training academy site, which also integrates foundation-level provision. The facilities will also be accessed by post-16 learners.

Impact of the IFP and 14–19 Pathfinders on the collaborative offer

The IFP has had a major impact on increasing collaboration between schools, colleges and work-based training providers and on enabling providers to broaden the 14–16 offer at Levels 1 and 2 in all of the case study areas. Sandwell's extended pathways scheme (SEP) is based on strong IFP provision. Moreover, the expansion is continuing. For example, Coventry North East Federation offered four new courses in the last academic year (2004/05). But overall, growth is circumscribed by providers' limited capacity in some subject areas, such as construction.

Three of the case study collaborations were situated in 14–19 Pathfinder areas: Shropshire, Coventry and the Black Country. The final evaluation report noted that in relation to the offer specifically, key legacies included:

- broader, more relevant curricula giving learners greater choice and access to a much wider range of sites and modes of learning, leading to increasing curricular differentiation from age 14
 - the development of a variety of forms of innovative learning for some learners.
- (Higham and Yeomans 2006, p2)

Increased range of learning sites and modes of delivery

Research into factors influencing young people's choices found that reasons referred either to the programme of study or to the type of institution, leading the authors of one piece of work to conclude that if the needs of all students are to be met adequately, different types of post-16 provision should be offered in more than one type of institution (Keys and Maychell 1998).

Indeed, Higham and Yeomans (2006) have noted that a significant thrust of 14–19 development has been to increase both the range of sites and the modes of delivery in this phase. Off-site learning has been stimulated by the IFP and other funding streams such as the ESF and the 14–19 Pathfinders.

The case studies reflect the Pathfinder evaluation findings – for example, that a great deal of off-site learning for pre-16 learners takes place in colleges. The schools themselves, of course, offer an extension to both the academic and vocational learning sites available to other partners within the collaboration. There is evidence that this option is also widely used in the case study areas, particularly where there are specialist schools.

Training providers offer an alternative site for vocational learning. However, as the case studies show, their use varies with their location, capacity and commercial priorities. The distribution of private work-based training providers varies widely in the case study areas, and so does their significance in terms of the 14–19 provision, which appears to be a lot greater where they are active as an associated body. Where training providers deliver programmes in schools, their offer may serve to extend the mode of delivery rather more than the learning site, although again, it can involve learners who travel.

An alternative site for vocational learning is a local skills centre, and Tamworth, where this is being developed in conjunction with the local college, provides a very good example of this.

In terms of extending modes of delivery, the case studies show that most providers have concentrated on deploying hands-on, practical teaching approaches. This development was

strongly and positively picked up by learners aged 14–16 in FE colleges in an earlier research project carried out in the West Midlands (Hardman 2006).

The case studies also provide examples of ‘hybrid’ modes of delivery, which include combinations of practical, vocationally-oriented learning, often with a work-based element, in addition to generic learning focused on personal and basic skills. The Student Apprenticeship programmes, such as those run in Coventry, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and Shropshire, offer examples of this.

Key challenges and emerging trends

Learner demand and providers’ capacity

Limitations in the offer and an inability to meet demand in some learning areas are issues for most of the case study collaborations. This is particularly the case where specialist facilities are required, and construction is widely cited. The Tamworth vocational skills and training centre is one response to this. But even where such facilities do exist, it can still be difficult to accommodate large groups of young learners who can only attend at particular times.

In response to local constraints, ContinU is taking a more proactive role in developing provision by directly seeking and managing new programmes where there is a lack of capacity. It has done this, for example, in the case of a Level 1 CACHE programme.

Developing the type of offer: combining different modes of delivery and learning sites

The development of new ‘hybrid’ learning lines is something of an emerging trend for pre-16 and post-16 learners, involving varying combinations of schools, colleges, WBL providers and local employers.

In Coventry, schools, the college and work-based training providers are working together to expand and reshape the Level 2 offer in Year 12 and to provide alternative progression routes to Level 3 qualifications. Student Apprenticeships are offered in early years, business and media, incorporating work experience as well as key skills.

30 Key stage 4 pupils aged 14–16 from schools across the Wyre Forest participated in the first year of a Young Apprenticeship programme as part of the ContinU consortium. They worked two days a week to complete vocational qualifications that include engineering and business administration. The programme was delivered by schools, the college, local employers and the District Training Company.

Developing this kind of complex curriculum poses considerable challenges. Apart from the organisational complexities, there can be particular problems in finding work placements with local employers.

For example, the college in north west Shropshire piloted a unique land-based programme for learners aged 14–16, offering accreditation in vocational areas such as game-keeping, agricultural engineering and equine studies. It was delivered in partnership with the local schools and those employers with whom they already had some contact (some had trained at the college themselves). But even though the skills are highly relevant to the geographical area, some students could not complete their programmes because the businesses are small, and many employers are reluctant to take youngsters on placement.

Innovation in curriculum delivery

Higham and Yeomans (2006) note that much staff and curriculum development takes place informally as teachers and trainers jointly deliver or work together on programmes. There is some evidence of this in the case studies. For example, schools in the Coventry North East Federation

are benefiting from the work-based training provider's experience in initial assessment and the development of learners' key and basic skills.

More broadly, the opportunities opened up by the newly established vocational skills and training centre in Tamworth include realistic work-settings for learners in a range of community-based services, which will also be located on the same site.

Wider issues facing 14–19 collaboration in the sector

The area curriculum: strategic planning

Many of the issues and challenges outlined above are concerned with developing a 14–19 curriculum strategy for the whole learning area covered by the partners' collaborative provision.

There are at least three levels of strategic curriculum planning to cover a learning area (see Figure 2 on p22).

- level 1: Mapping (adding together) provision based on delivery by individual providers, some in local partnerships
- level 2: Coordinating and rationalising provision by partners organised in collaborative forums
- level 3: Reconstructing provision involving strategic innovation in subjects, levels, sites and modes of delivery.

The case studies indicate that most work is being done at level 2: that is, to develop synergy in the collaborative provision. There are many obstacles to developing coordinated provision which is flexible, of consistent quality and fully accessible to all learners.

The qualifications structure and the institutional and structural divisions between the schools, post-16 and HE sectors – as well as within them, most notably between vocational and academic routes – are significant barriers in themselves. Then there are the competitive tensions between (increasingly) independent providers seeking to protect their 'core business'.

Underpinning all curriculum planning for the learning area, particularly where new investment is required, lies the issue of funding. Differential funding between sectors, short-term funding and numerous funding streams inhibit long-term, strategic planning to shape provision in order to meet the needs of learners, employers and the local economy.

Issues related to curriculum planning identified in the case studies are outlined below. These are significantly related to national policies and funding.

Matching the offer to needs – the process of shaping the offer

All of the case study collaborations in some way seek to ensure that their provision is demand-led and take steps to accommodate learners' choices. Difficulties inevitably arise because there are gaps between what is offered and what is demanded, and planning is difficult when demand (and funding) can fluctuate each year. As a result, some programmes may not be cost-effective and others may not be 'learning effective' because they are not the learners' first choice or there is insufficient time, or resources, to develop programmes effectively.

Future planning and the task of 'matching' become more complicated in the context of trying to meet the needs not only of learners but also of:

- providers, in terms of their capacity and the types of facilities and expertise they offer, and also their future plans (ie the supply side)
- local employers, whose perceived needs may be, first, difficult to gauge and, second, not the same, in the short term at least, as those of the local economy and the region
- the local economy and the region.

One of the characteristics that distinguishes the UK generally from most other European countries is its tendency to conflate the wider needs of employment with the narrower, often shorter-term needs of employers.

(Hayward et al. 2005, p39)

Respondents noted that the schools curriculum, in particular, tends not to be well matched to the needs of the local economy. However, with the notable exception of the Tamworth District Forum, the 14–19 case study collaborations have generally struggled to involve local employers in planning their provision.

The case study findings appear to show that to a great extent, although demand-led in terms of take-up, the offer is largely shaped by what the providers are set up to supply; albeit much expanded and diversified through their collaboration.

Indeed, the overall offer has been significantly shaped by the process of collaboration itself. For example, colleges may decide to focus on vocational programmes rather than compete with schools in the provision of A-levels. The college in Tamworth provides an example of this. It is the main provider of vocational courses and its work with schools has grown significantly as a result of the IFP. However, in the Shropshire North West Forum, the college is the main A-level provider. The college has decided that some parts of its curriculum, such as sport, are better delivered by a school. In the Coventry North East Federation, schools agreed that the college would be the main provider of Level 1 programmes.

Beyond this, other changes that lead to a strategic restructuring of the overall provision are indicated in the case studies where:

- institutionally independent ‘brokers’ can direct funding (such as in Herefordshire and Worcestershire)
- new provision is developed as a result of strategic use of ‘regeneration’ or other budgets (such as in Birmingham and North Solihull)
- new provision is developed as a result of particular initiatives (such as the Tamworth District’s bid to the DfES for funds to develop the Vocational Skills Centre).

Institution or learner first?

On being asked how the maturity of collaboration might be judged, one response was to question how far the interests of the learner came first. When this question was re-posed to others, the respondents considered the collaboration they were involved in to still be more institution-led than learner-led.

There is continuing tension and dialogue for providers trying to protect their interests and develop their niche facilities and expertise while also trying to ease the process of collaboration to organise their institutional ‘best fit’. While achieving this balance in order to ensure effective collaboration there is also the question of how to ensure that learners’ needs are met. (For

example, if it is sensible for a college to provide the Level 1 programmes, is going to college the best solution for every learner? – for some might it be too soon.)

There was a general view expressed by respondents that government policies aimed at increasing competition between providers will not only reduce partnership effectiveness but also reinforce a focus on ‘institution first’ within the 14–19 collaborations.

Moreover, from the point of view of the funders themselves, is there not also a tension between the imperative to ‘achieve greater choice’ while at the same time seeking to ‘minimise the risk of duplication, competition or confusion? Is it possible to achieve a cost-effective reconciliation of wide choice in types of provider of 14–19 learning with wide choice of subject area, qualification and learning pathway?’ (Davies and Fletcher 2004, p13).

Assessing learner demand

The challenge of establishing a strong ‘learner first’ orientation within collaborations is assisted where trends in learner demand can be clearly ascertained. North Solihull Collegiate is planning some research with Connexions to assist its planning of 14–19 collaborative provision.

Overall, however, young people’s decision-making is poorly understood. Few studies look at decisions 14 year olds make or how young people’s aspirations and attitudes are linked to decisions they make at later points in time; nor indeed how subject preferences relate to actual subject choices and how either links to post-16 decisions. As Wright (2005) and others point out, more research is required in this area.

Davies and Fletcher ask: is the communication process, ‘one of consulting stakeholders about a centrally set agenda? Or is it one of genuine partnership, where stakeholders “co-construct” policies and jointly own the outcomes?’ (Davies and Fletcher 2004, p10). This question goes to the heart of one of the principles of modern, strategic planning in public services: that success depends on effective partnership approaches and the active involvement of ‘the public’ as key stakeholders. In shaping the provision, what is the impact of the learner’s voice?

Funding and sustaining the offer

All of the case study areas have used diverse funding streams to develop and expand their offer and the collaborative infrastructure that underpins it. The respondents most frequently posed the issue of funding as being key to sustaining, if not expanding, the offer.

For example, one progress report (Coventry and Warwickshire LSC 2005) expresses major concern about:

- sustaining the broad range of 14–16 vocational provision after 2007 (when both ESF and IFP funding will no longer be available) because only a very basic programme could be sustained by school and local LSC budgets
- the end of funding for two 14–19 Pathfinder projects in Coventry, in September 2005, which has provided over £1m for new developments in support of key areas for improvement identified in the area-wide inspection; these include post-16 collaborative provision at Levels 1 and 2, which is considered unlikely to become cost-effective in the future due to economies of scale.

The costing study of 14–19 Pathfinders by York Consulting for the DfES concludes that the uncertainty of funding sources and dependence on multiple funding streams hinder future planning. ‘In order to address sustainability, funding needs to support collaborative working directly, rather than by implication through multiple funding streams’ (York Consulting 2005, page xi).

At an institutional level, an earlier study of 14–16 provision in the West Midlands found that colleges experienced great difficulty in long-term strategic planning although they were faced with significant investment decisions to expand and develop their facilities to meet the growing demand. ‘There are too many uncertainties about income – the short-term nature and diverse sources of the funding available and the variation in demand for programmes by schools each year, with the threat that courses may not be viable’ (Hardman 2006, p63).

The York Consulting study (2005) stresses that collaborative working is complex and costly, and even when embedded and rationalised there will always be additional costs. The organisation examined these costs under three headings:

- the costs of generic collaborative working
- the costs of the development of collaborative provision
- the costs of the delivery of collaborative provision.

York Consulting (2005) found that there is huge variation in costs in these areas (eg arising from the different types of collaboration, programmes and numbers of students) and also in the way costs are estimated. Although some cost savings might be realised, as a very rough rule of thumb, it was suggested that the extra costs of Pathfinder collaborations equated to annual costs of £100,000 centrally and £10,000 for each institution.

Value for money?

In the same vein, the NFER found that core funding received for IFP provision was often supplemented by lead partners and schools. Lead partners, for example, drew on their own budgets, accessed LSC and European funding and charged schools for delivery. Schools used their own budgets to cover additional staff and teaching costs. The NFER report noted that some ‘took into consideration the outcomes for individual students and consequently considered that it [IFP] did offer good value for money whereas others noted that it did not offer good value for their organisation’ (Golden *et al.* 2004b, page v).

The costs of vocational provision for schools

There is a major issue of school funding if vocational education pre-16 is to be really successful.

(14–19 coordinator)

Vocational education is expensive for schools, and respondents point out that they are not funded at the rate required. The costs are higher when schools send pupils to other sites, not least because they tend to be taught in smaller groups. Costs increase further when classes are not sent out to other sites entirely, and teachers are required to work with those who remain. Higham and Yeomans found that college fees for 14–16 year olds were typically around £550 to £600 per student per year, and training provider charges tended to be higher. They concluded that charges at these levels constituted a disproportionate element of the age-weighted pupil unit allocated to schools per student (Higham and Yeomans 2006).

There is a variety of practices to be found in relation to colleges charging schools fees for delivering programmes, but all colleges involved in the case study forums report that the delivery of 14–16 programmes costs more than they receive from schools and other sources.

As partnerships move from IFP-funded towards self-sustaining provision, the issue of sustainable fee income becomes sharper, particularly as growth in the college provision has consistently outstripped cost recovery.

These conclusions and the threats posed to further expansion of pre-16 provision have been confirmed by studies such as that carried out by York Consulting for the LSC after the first IFP cohort (Cowen and Dodd 2003) and by LSDA following the second cohort (Fletcher and Styles 2006). Fletcher and Styles conclude that the rate of college subsidy is probably unsustainable.

Cowen and Dodd (2003) found that indirect costs associated with IFP provision alone accounted, on average, for nearly 80% of the core funding colleges received. For a third of the sample, indirect costs were not covered by core funding at all.

When broken down into the three categories of set-up costs – support, development and ongoing management – the latter was the largest of these indirect costs. The NFER study confirmed this: ‘The amount of time required implementing a programme such as the IFP, which entails working in partnership between providers, and the logistical complexities of doing so, should not be underestimated.’ The study concluded: ‘Policy-makers may wish to take this into consideration when examining future provision of this nature’ (Golden *et al.* 2005a, page vii).

Staffing and staff development are two other indirect costs which our case studies suggest will have been rising as programmes have expanded.

Sustaining 14–19 provision

Higham and Yeomans (2006) identified a number of ways in which local authorities, the LSC and institutions were contributing to the sustainability of the collaborative offer. These include taking on a greater proportion of the direct costs, schools funding an increasing proportion of the costs from mainstream budgets and extending the search for cost savings, for example, considering the adjustment of staffing structures. Some additional sources of funding for partnerships will also become available, such as the LSC-controlled ‘flexible funding pot’ and the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2006–08. But it remains very unclear whether this funding ‘cocktail’ will be sufficient overall to sustain the current offer, let alone develop it further – and the obstacles to forward planning (outlined above) remain.

Success factors

The evaluations of two major national projects (the IFP and 14–19 Pathfinders initiative) involving the development of collaborative provision for learners aged 14–19 reported that as a result of collaborative initiatives supported by these projects, the following outcomes had been successfully achieved:

- a growing and stronger emphasis on 14–19 as a coherent phase with clearly defined and appropriate progression routes
- broader, more relevant curricula giving learners greater choice and access to a much wider range of sites and modes of learning, leading to increasing curricular differentiation from age 14.

(Higham and Yeomans 2006)

In addition:

- students in schools involved in partnerships with a college or other learning provider achieved better results than those taught solely in schools or in a single institution
- 90% of IFP students continued into further education or training post-16.

(Golden *et al.* 2005b)

The IFP had a significant impact on all of the case study areas; three of the case studies were also located in 14–19 Pathfinder areas and another was designated as a test-bed project. However, all of the case studies demonstrate how inclusive and effective modes of collaborative working by public sector institutions (eg the LSC and Connexions) and a range of different learning providers has produced positive results for learners.

Derived from the case studies, the main factors underpinning success through collaborative working are summarised below.

Building on collaborative relationships already established

- There have been effective developments on the basis of a successful IFP.
- There have been effective developments on the basis of collaborative A-level/Level 3 provision.

Widening the range of providers impacts positively on the range and balance of provision

- The wide range of providers actively involved in planning and delivering collaborative provision has expanded the offer and choices for learners.
- The offer encompasses all levels, from foundation and Entry level to higher education.
- All collaborative programmes lead to qualifications and progression routes, with increased accreditation opportunities for learners overall.
- Collaboration leads to an improved balance between academic and vocational provision.
- Collaboration underpins and ensures the survival of minority subjects and shares scarce staff skills effectively.

Focus on increasing engagement and achievement in learning for pre-16 learners

- There has been a positive impact on learners' choices at post-16.
- More learners are engaged in post-16 learning.
- There is increased retention and progression of post-16 learners to college and work-based training.
- Involvement of parents in the extended collaborative offer appears to increase the level of adult participation in learning as well.

Skills-based approach to raising learner achievement

- Wider learning pathways improve learners' achievements at Key stage 4.

Offer linked to regional and local skills agenda and employers' needs

- There is a focus on developing a vocational strategy appropriate to the area.
- Employers are involved in curriculum planning.

Focus on the learner

- Learners are facilitated to take ownership of their learning.
- There is a clear focus on learner choice and strategy regarding learner 'transition' in development of the offer (including where and how the curriculum is delivered).

- Provision is related to the needs and interests of learners.

Focus on quality improvement

- There is a focus on developing programmes where provision is effective and innovative.
- Collaboration is used to support provider improvement.

Investing in new provision

- There is effective use of diverse funding streams to develop new, high-quality 14–19 provision.
- New facilities need to be developed through school/work-based training provider/college partnerships to support demand (eg construction).

Part 3. The impact of collaborative arrangements on the 14–19 curriculum offer

It's crucial to distinguish between activity and outcomes when undertaking collaborative activity. The impact must be felt on the learner, and activity turned into better choice, participation and success.

(Atkinson 2005)

The impact of collaboration on the 'offer'

The impact of collaboration on the 'offer' can be assessed in three ways:

- from the point of view of the range of choices available and accessible to the learner (see Figure 1 on page 20, boxes C and D)
- in terms of the range, depth, content, style and shape of the curriculum as a whole (see Figure 1, box C); how comprehensive and coherent is the provision, how well does it match the needs of the economy, and how flexible and responsive is it to the needs of learners and employers?
- by measuring the outcomes for the learner in terms of participation, retention, progression and achievement, and the achievement of personal goals or policy aims (see Figure 1, box A).

In terms of the range of choices available to the learner, it is clear that the offer has been significantly expanded and diversified through the providers' collaboration, and there has been a corresponding increase in the numbers of learners involved in vocational, work-related and other alternative curriculum options.

In all case study areas, for example at Key stage 4, the programme of IFP courses has continued to expand each year and a broader A-level offer that includes minority subjects has been effectively sustained.

However, the process of collaboration on the supply side can also significantly shape the curriculum offer, and in ways that might narrow learners' choices to some extent. For example, providers' agreements to specialise could reduce choices in terms of geographical location, type of learning site and mode of delivery. Efforts to rationalise provision to reduce duplication and increase cost-effectiveness could have a similar effect.

The overall shape of the curriculum provision is still largely determined by what the providers are set up to supply. This is because they operate within the remit and criteria governing their organisations and have to focus on their core business. In a demand-led process, the provision might vary a little because providers drop, expand or start programmes in response to the pattern of take-up or poor results.

A strategic approach to reshaping the curriculum provision across the local and wider learning area is still at an early stage. The main leadership is provided by senior local authority and LSC staff, and change can be slow due to providers' lack of flexibility and, frequently, the need for a major resource input. Ofsted's survey of 14–19 provision found that there had been little systematic attempt to develop coherent progression routes for all young people (Ofsted 2005).

The impact of collaboration on learner outcomes

While the expansion of the offer through collaboration is easily seen and is documented in the local area prospectuses, the impact of this in terms of the outcomes for learners is more difficult to assess at the level of the collaborative forums.

The national evaluations of the IFP and 14–19 Pathfinders conclude that learner outcomes and achievements are improved as a result of collaboration (Golden *et al.* 2004/2005; Higham and Yeomans 2005/2006). There is much evidence that participation in vocational options has led to more learners staying in education post-16. At least two other major studies show that pre-16 experience of vocational options changed learners' attitudes and influenced their decisions to continue in post-16 education or training (McCrone and Morris 2004; Devitt and Roker 2005a and 2005b).

In the case study areas there are some early indications but, as yet, little evidence that can be used to evaluate the impact of either the collaborative arrangements or the expansion of learning opportunities on outcomes relating to:

- learner participation, retention, progression and achievement
- the achievement of personal goals or policy aims (see Figure 1, box A).

This lack of strongly indicative data can be related to:

- the early stages in the cycle of 14–16 and 14–19 initiatives and the early stage of development of many of the collaborative arrangements that have been put in place
- the problem of distinguishing the impact of specific interventions (eg specified in 14–19 implementation plans) from other, often interrelated, initiatives
- the incompatibility of data and reporting across the pre-16 and post-16 sectors, which increases the difficulty of impact measurement
- the lack of data reports relating to the specific area and partners covered by the collaborative forum.

Data issues

The main data that have been used in this research are derived from the Connexions annual activity surveys reported in local areas. There are differences between local offices in the way these data are presented and the periods for which they are available. (Connexions 2005)

The activity survey data provide an overview of the positive and negative outcomes for learners at the beginning of Year 11. Learner destinations that are counted as positive outcomes include: those who continue in full time education or work-based learning, jobs with training, jobs without training, voluntary work or part-time education and employment. Learner outcomes that are counted as negative include: those not in employment, education or training and those young people who cannot be contacted or have moved out of the area.

The end of Year 10 is a major transition point for young people. The data reflect the impact of the 'September Guarantee', an important initiative linking the work of Connexions, schools and colleges to help learners find appropriate places and progression routes at the end of compulsory

schooling. The trends in positive and negative outcomes, especially those designated NEET, are key indicators of both the effectiveness of the support offered and also the nature of the provision available to young people. As a recent study showed in respect of the Central London 'September Guarantee', it 'not only improves communication and the exchange of data between Connexions and schools and colleges, but also enables LSC Central London to plan appropriate provision to match the demand from Year 11 students' (LSC 2006, p33).

There are a number of factors that could impact on the data trends but, overall, the case studies suggest a positive outcome from implementing 14–19 strategies, with an overall reduction in NEET young people and an increase in those retained in education or training. There are variations in the trends between the areas (detailed in the individual case studies). In Coventry, over 93% of learners continued into post-16 education or training from Year 11 in 2004, which was the highest level nationally, with a reduction of over 3% in NEETs. The majority of surveys indicate a slight rise in NEETs between 2004 and 2005, although in most cases not to 2003 levels.

A recurring pattern in the majority of case study areas where the data are shown separately is the reduction of learners in employment with training. The fall between 2003 and 2005 is quite marked in some areas (Tamworth and Worcester) and the reasons are unclear. But this reduction appears to have been offset by an increase in learners in full-time education and training.

Undoubtedly, a good experience of Key stage 4 options for learners not suited to an academic route, together with appropriate support from Connexions (the 'September Guarantee' or the 'October Offer') plus access to a broad range of post-16 pathways should have had a positive impact on the young people's decision to stay in education.

Good communication flows of data like the Connexions activity survey are clearly essential to support partners in planning and monitoring their activities, as the LSC report (2006) points out, but such data do not appear to be routinely produced at consortium level.

Since most learner data are produced at the level of individual institutions and also differ according to type of provider, the Connexions activity survey data were requested for this research. These were provided for five out of the six case study areas but only three sets appear to refer to the specific area covered by a collaborative forum. In some cases it was clear that the areas (and partners) covered by the collaborations were not known to those who produced the data. In addition, although they were produced to a broadly common framework, the data were structured and reported in different ways, so it was not possible to produce a comparative overview. Of course it is produced and used for different purposes, but overall there does appear to be a serious lack of accessible data at consortium level to enable partners to monitor and evaluate their collective as well as their individual efforts.

The experience of gathering data for this research does highlight that perhaps collaborations need to review what data they are using, what are available, what precisely they need and in what form; and where required, to set up mechanisms to produce them.

However, the case studies also appear to show that partners at a local level have paid less attention to evaluating the impact or effectiveness of collaborative arrangements or specific interventions than to getting them off the ground, and quality assurance processes in relation to provision are at an early stage.

Individual providers are beginning to evaluate their collaborative activities as part of their own self-assessment processes. In Birmingham and Solihull the quality assurance process implemented for collegiate links with the school self-evaluation form.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings from six case studies have been used to:

- examine how 14–19 collaborative arrangements have developed and changed in response to local circumstances
- assess the impact of the developments and changes on the curriculum offer, learner choice and participation
- identify the main success factors for starting and sustaining effective 14–19 collaborations.

The findings have been examined using a development model that has been created to clarify the complexity of collaborative activity involved in implementing national, regional and sub-regional 14–19 strategies (see Figure 1). A further model concerning curriculum innovation across a learning area has been used to analyse the stages and development of the offer itself.

Applying these models respectively to findings from the six case studies shows that, at a local level, the main focus of activity has been on developing the effectiveness of the collaborative infrastructure and improving the organisation of delivery and access to provision including IAG. The case study findings show significant achievements in both of these aspects.

These achievements include the establishment and consolidation of a more effective 14–19 collaborative infrastructure and access and delivery arrangements that have opened up a broader range of options for learners. In respect of the first, there are also examples of joint governance and centralised brokerage and commissioning arrangements. In respect of the second, there is improved information and support to learners in transition and some ground-breaking work in the use of electronic communications.

The impact of this work on the curriculum offer and learner choice can be assessed in at least two ways. Evidence from the case studies appears to show that so far 14–19 collaborations have had a greater impact on expanding the offer available to learners than on reconstructing or reformulating the overall curriculum for the learning area. It is noted that there are significant structural and institutional obstacles to doing this, although it may prove to be the way forward in the future.

A consistent message emerging from the case studies is that collaborations are most successful and effective when developed on the basis of relationships and trust that have already been established, and that the role of the coordinator is crucial. Participation in collaborative activity is also resource-intensive. This suggests that resourcing needs to be sufficient, stable and sustained over time. It should also take account of partners' differential capacity to participate.

Issues for the future: key questions raised by the research

In the course of addressing the research questions through the analysis of case study data gathered from six collaborative forums, a number of issues have emerged. Despite the variations of context and concerns in each case study area, these issues are relevant to them all. Some may already have been highlighted or actioned within the case study area. However, all will certainly need to be considered in future development and implementation plans and addressed by policy-makers and practitioners throughout the region at a range of different levels and in ways that are appropriate to the particular contexts.

For all of these reasons, there is only one recommendation: to address the issues and questions in the following table.

<p>Recommendation The following issues and questions raised by the research should be addressed.</p>
<p>1. Equal opportunities Issues include: independent advice and guidance; management and implementation; roles and responsibilities; policies, action planning, monitoring and reporting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How effective is the provision of independent advice and guidance for all learners? ▪ How is the collaboration implementing its equality policies and its statutory duties to promote equality? ▪ What positive action measures should be taken to address segregation and disadvantage in vocational education and training in the 14–19 phase? <p>2. Quality improvement, quality assurance and evaluation processes at the level of the collaboration as a whole Issues include: quality improvement and quality assurance protocols and procedures; data provision, analysis, sharing and reporting; benchmarking and target-setting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What data, procedures and protocols are required to enable the collaboration to set targets, monitor progress and evaluate its provision? ▪ How might the collaboration evaluate the impact and effectiveness of its internal structures, organisational relationships and processes, in order to improve these? <p>3. Developing the effectiveness of the collaborative infrastructure Issues include: funding and strategy for building and sustaining collaborative relationships in order to develop provision for learners and respond to local needs; leadership and management by staff and partners appropriate to the needs of the collaboration and the sector; roles, funding and location of the coordinators at local and sub-regional levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How can the needs of the collaboration in terms of its continuation and further development be (a) assessed and (b) resourced? ▪ What is the nature of the staffing required, eg role, skills and experience of the local coordinator? ▪ How should the impact of the collaborative infrastructure be assessed? <p>4. Equity and the ‘organisational capacity’ required for collaboration Issues include: levels of resourcing required to participate in the collaborative infrastructure; impact of the differential capacities of organisations to engage on an equal footing – in the context of policies that increasingly require this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How are inequalities in the capacity of key stakeholders to participate recognised and addressed by the collaboration as a whole? <p>5. The learners’ voice Issues include: degree of impact through institutional and area surveys and consultation (eg regarding needs and feedback on current and planned provision); degree and mode of involvement in planning and monitoring processes.</p>

- How can the voice of the learner, parents and community be effectively expressed and heard?
- How can the process be developed from one of consulting these stakeholders about a centrally set agenda towards one of genuine partnership, where they 'co-construct' policies and jointly own the outcomes?
- How is responsiveness measured and evaluated?

6. WBL providers' position in relation to planning and delivery of collaborative provision and employer engagement

Issues include: WBL providers' degree of collective association and organisation; status, involvement and impact within the collaboration; levels and sources of funding for delivery; capacity and facilities to meet demand.

- How far is the contribution of WBL providers maximised through the collaboration for the benefit of the learner?
- What is being done to engage employers directly?

7. Culture

Issues include: recognising and managing the tensions between institutional and learner needs; managing cultural change; maintaining learner focus in the context of increasing competitive pressures (such as those arising from education policies which encourage competition and institutional autonomy).

- What usually comes first when matters are deliberated or policies decided?
- Where does the collaboration as a whole, or its constituent parts, lie on the prioritisation scale?



- What strategies are there for achieving cultural change, managing the tensions and maintaining learner focus?

8. 14–19 area curriculum strategy

Issues include: clear, shared curriculum vision, learner-centred and learning-led design; identifying and balancing conflicting needs of learners and other stakeholders while maintaining a clear learner focus; funding and resourcing curriculum development; access to curriculum expertise; managing curriculum change within and across institutions.

- What and whose needs are being met?
- What is the 'learning area' and how does it reflect the needs of different learners?
- What is the vision, what are the design principles?
- How are conflicting needs of learners and other stakeholders identified and balanced?
- What can be done at local and regional levels to tackle the institutional and structural barriers to a flexible and coherent curriculum (such as sectoral divisions between schools, post-16 and higher education, and the vocational and academic divide)?

- What needs to be put in place (and by whom, what, where, when) in order to achieve a step-change in curriculum innovation?
- How is research and professional knowledge being used to inform curriculum strategy and implementation?

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Appendix 1. Sub-region overviews of 14–19 collaborative arrangements

Appendix 1a. Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council

Area	Collegiate	Coordinator	Coverage		
			Schools	Colleges	Others
Central Birmingham	Central Birmingham	√	8 (1 special)	City College Birmingham; Joseph Chamberlain College; Matthew Boulton College; South Birmingham College	
East Birmingham	Birmingham East LAP	√	9 (1 special)	City College Birmingham	
	Birmingham East	√	To split from above	City College Birmingham	
North Birmingham	Great Barr	√	3 (1 city technology college, 1 special)	Sutton Coldfield College	
North East Birmingham	North East Birmingham	√	6 (2 special)	Josiah Mason College	
North West Birmingham	North West network A	√	4	City College Birmingham; Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies; Matthew Boulton College	Connexions
	North West bid A	√	6 (1 special)	City College Birmingham; Josiah Mason College; Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies; Matthew Boulton College	City training providers to be agreed
Solihull*	North Solihull	√	4 (1 city technology college)	Solihull College Solihull Sixth Form College	
South Birmingham	South Birmingham	√	14 (1 special)	South Birmingham College	
South West Birmingham	SW Birmingham (1)	√?	13 (1 special, 3 city technology colleges, 1 performing arts college) Education Action Zone	Bournville College; Cadbury College; Queen Alexandra College	
South West Birmingham	SW Birmingham (2)	√	To split from (1) above	Bournville College; Cadbury College; Queen Alexandra College	
Sutton Coldfield	Sutton Coldfield	√	6 (1 city technology college)	Sutton Coldfield College	

* Case study area

Summary of case study research findings North Solihull Collegiate			
	Collaborative infrastructure	Delivery systems	Curriculum provision
Key outcomes of collaborative arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full-time coordinator seconded from local authority ▪ Local area planning group with all key stakeholders represented ▪ Strategic management group ▪ Collegiate steering group ▪ Joint manual of procedures ▪ Quality assurance framework applied across partnership ▪ North Solihull management and governance agreement ▪ Partners access diverse funding streams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding for curriculum and staff development prioritised over travel ▪ Development of curriculum groups and shared continuing professional development ▪ Common 14–16 timetabled day across all schools ▪ Some data sharing between schools and colleges ▪ Common publicity materials on partners' websites ▪ Joint use of staff ▪ More regional focus ▪ Private providers involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared 14–19 route map ▪ Entry to Level 2 provision – 14 subjects – vocational and academic offered but not all run, depending on demand ▪ Trend towards work experience and work-related programmes ▪ Some focus on local needs ▪ Specialist 14–19, college-based centre for construction ▪ Offer led by learner choices ▪ Vocational offer impacted on teaching methods ▪ Impact of new City Academy and regeneration projects
Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of transparency and data sharing regarding funding streams accessed by partners ▪ Limited role by employers ▪ Links and relationship with Connexions not embedded ▪ Impact of new policies on relationships (eg balance between competition and collaboration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of mechanisms for effective data handling across partnership ▪ Limited data sharing between partners (eg achievement data) ▪ Variable role and effectiveness of Connexions ▪ Independent travel impacts on access to offer ▪ IAG: 'home' and 'away' offers not given equal weight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning to match provision to meet learner demand and providers' capacity and their offer ▪ Equality policies lack targets and lack impact on traditional gender segregation ▪ Little influence of employers on the offer

For the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint governance ▪ Joint decisions on accessing funding streams based on shared data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared data platforms plus rationalised data collection and reporting ▪ Unique learner ID ▪ Common prospectus and website ▪ Electronic ILPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey learners; ascertain trends in demand to assist planning ▪ Involve Connexions
Success factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geographical proximity plus a history of collaboration helped develop deeper relationships ▪ Shared vision ▪ Financial support from LSC and local authority ▪ Strong linking and leadership role of coordinator ▪ Support of 14-19 advisers ▪ Collaborating partners own the process; LSC moved into quality assurance role ▪ Move from <i>ad hoc</i> to more formalised working arrangements – the manual of procedures ▪ Quality assurance framework in place across all partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on curriculum and joint staff development ▪ Broader offer led to greater involvement of parents with providers ▪ Common 14-16 timetabled day improved access, retention and achievement ▪ Greater awareness and engagement of staff in wider curriculum at all levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The wide choice offered by the partnership ▪ Demand for learning extended by involvement of parents and families ▪ Collaboration underpins survival of minority subjects and shares scarce staff skills ▪ Involvement of private providers widens choice

Appendix 1b. Black Country Learning and Skills Council

Borough	Consortia	14-19 coordinator	Coverage	
			Schools	Colleges
Dudley			Majority tertiary provision – with three sixth forms in schools	Dudley College; Halesowen College; King Edward Sixth Form College, Stourbridge; Stourbridge College
Sandwell	North	√	1 lead school in each consortium	Sandwell College
	South*	√		
	West	√		
Walsall	Walsall	Coordinator based at Walsall College of Arts and Technology		Walsall College of Arts and Technology
Wolverhampton	Cross-city consortium	Peter Hawthorn	All	City of Wolverhampton College

* Case study area

Summary of case study research findings
Black Country Learning and Skills Council: Sandwell Consortium

	Collaborative infrastructure	Delivery systems	Curriculum provision
Key outcomes of collaborative arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sandwell 14–19 Forum: all key stakeholders represented ▪ Partnership procedures task group: developed common protocols and procedures ▪ SEP steering group ▪ 14–19 learner management team (funded by LSC and local authority) ▪ Effective participation by WBL providers ▪ Some employer engagement activities (eg business enterprise consultants and Education Business Partnership showcase events) ▪ Young people’s focus group ▪ Engaging young people action plan ▪ Gold charter for 14–19 learning – an award for work with young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timetabling: Some ‘blocking’ to assist student inter-site movement ▪ Transport: Policy to minimise learner movement and use of existing local systems ▪ IAG: Good-quality, standardised documentation for staff, learners and parents ▪ 14–19: ‘My Sandwell Learning Entitlement’ ▪ 16+ prospectus ▪ Wall planner ▪ Common 16-plus application form and centralised, objective ‘brokering’ procedure ▪ <i>The Sandwell learning entitlement for 14–19 year olds: a guide for colleges, schools and training providers and those supporting young people</i> ▪ Annual IFP (SEP) directory and guide ▪ Learning gateway website ▪ <i>Sandwell 14–19 learning: 14–19 partnership working toolkit: guidelines for learning agreements for pre-16 and post-16 learners</i> ▪ Service-level agreements; costing and pricing guidelines; guidance for off-site provision; guidance on insurance; information concerning child protection issues and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broad range and depth of provision – wide variety of vocational and academic pathways from Entry to HE level ▪ SEP scheme based on strong IFP provision: wide range of Level 1 and 2 courses ▪ Some distance learning, eg language college ▪ Range of WBL providers involved in delivery ▪ Two construction training centres ▪ Post-16 programme offer includes: 54 vocational Level 3 courses 64 A- and AS level courses ▪ Fast-track pre-16 programmes include AS and HE level modules ▪ Learners on foundation and Entry level progress to Level 2 ▪ Accreditation opportunities for broad range of skills, eg Sandwell skills passport
Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustaining collaboration with reduced funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transport to support growing use of shared facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of funding uncertainty on maintaining breadth and depth of

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Variability in robustness of consortia ▪ Increasing competitive pressures arising from falling rolls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timetabling underdeveloped between providers and problematic for WBL providers ▪ Limited data sharing by schools ▪ Limited learner tracking ▪ Variable quality careers education and guidance for learners by schools 	<p>provision achieved so far</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mismatch between regional skills needs and schools' offer ▪ Limited cross-sector curriculum planning ▪ Vested institutional interests
For the future		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of virtual learning environments to minimise learner travel and to accommodate off-site learning ▪ Learning gateway – common website for secondary schools ▪ Free transport for young learners (funded by local authority) 	
Success factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant contributions and commitment from wide range of stakeholders ▪ Collaboration built for IFP strengthened basis for partnerships ▪ Leadership role of consortium chairperson ▪ Balance between central and consortia-led 'drivers' ▪ Common protocols and procedures minimises stress between partners ▪ Mechanisms for listening to the voice of the learner ▪ Central role of work-based training providers in strategic and operational planning ▪ Good involvement from Connexions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whole curriculum provision mapped for all providers across the borough ▪ Centrally managed SEP directory and guide for staff, students and parents ▪ High-quality IAG documentation ▪ <i>14-19 partnership toolkit</i>: procedures and guidance facilitate collaborative delivery and avoid strain on the collaborative offer ▪ Centralised post-16 application system ensures more independent brokerage ▪ Learning gateway website available for all secondary schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extended offer and improved balance between academic and vocational provision ▪ Offer encompasses all levels from foundation/Entry to higher education ▪ Provision related to needs and interests of learners – 10% of the Key stage 4 cohort access IFP/SEP ▪ Increased retention and progression of post-16 learners to college and work-based training ▪ Wide range of providers involved in delivery: 15 schools; 1 general FE college; 5 work-based training providers ▪ New provision and facilities developed through school/work-based training provider partnerships to support demand (eg construction)

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increased accreditation opportunities for learners (eg Sandwell skills passport)▪ Skills development strategy to raise learner achievement
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Appendix 1c. Coventry and Warwickshire Learning and Skills Council

Forum	Coordinator	Coverage		
		Schools	Colleges	Others
Coventry federations				
North East	√	5 (11-18) 1 special	Henley College Coventry	Connexions City training providers
North West	√	5 (11-18) 2 special	City College Coventry; Hereward College	Connexions City training providers
South East	√	4 (11-18) 2 special	Henley College	Connexions City training providers
South West	√	5 (11-18) 1 special	City College Coventry	Connexions City training providers
Warwickshire areas				
Central	√	7 (11-18) 2 special 1 pupil referral unit	Warwickshire College	Connexions 8 main training providers
Eastern	√	3 (11-18) 4 (11-16) 1 special 1 pupil referral unit	Warwickshire College	Connexions 6 main training providers
Northern	√	3 (11-18) 10 (11-16) 5 special 1 pupil referral unit	King Edward VI College, Stourbridge (sixth form); North Warwickshire and Hinckley College	Connexions 6 main training providers
Southern	√	6 (11-18) 5 (11-16) 2 special 1 pupil referral unit	Stratford-upon- Avon College	Connexions 2 main training providers

* Case study area

**Summary of case study research findings
Coventry North East Federation**

	Collaborative infrastructure	Delivery systems	Curriculum provision
Key outcomes of collaborative arrangements	<p>Coventry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 14–24 strategic forum ▪ 14–19 coordinating group ▪ 14–19 strategic plan ▪ 14–19 strategy manager ▪ Four federations with annual plans ▪ Coventry and Warwickshire travel to learn strategic forum ▪ Sub-regional coordinator for 14–19-year-old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LSC-funded) ▪ ATP: development executive (LSC-funded) ▪ Diverse funding streams include Pathfinders <p>Coventry North East Federation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full-time coordinator (LSC-funded) ▪ Steering group chaired by headteacher ▪ Curriculum managers group ▪ Heads of post-16 ▪ Range of coordinators and working groups ▪ Joint committee of governors ▪ Agreed protocols ▪ Quality assurance and work towards baselines and improvement targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Travel to learn website: schools fund travel ▪ Timetabling: Level 3 provision aligned across city ▪ IFP provision ‘blocked’ (2 x 1 day); some alignment at post-16 for Level 2 ▪ IAG: ‘September Guarantee’ with effective Connexions support ▪ CAP (electronic centralised application process) ▪ Shine (website), basis for city-wide electronic prospectus ▪ Level 2 induction – Coventry University ▪ College open day ▪ Collaborative delivery between college and schools, and between schools ▪ Staff and curriculum development events and annual conference ▪ Common reporting calendar and some data sharing ▪ Annual audit of post-16 provision to rationalise programmes and ensure progression ▪ New fees policy between schools 	<p>At pre-16 an expanded offer and new learning lines, eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wide range of vocational opportunities through the IFP and school specialisms ▪ College delivering Level 1 programmes (including key skills) ▪ ‘Stretch’ courses at Key stage 4 including (post-16) BTEC modules for able students ▪ Work-based training provider delivered programmes for schools <p>At post-16:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some access to school specialisms (eg land-based) ▪ College a Centre of Vocational Excellence in electronic technology and links to school with IT specialism ▪ City-wide access to full AS and A-level programmes including minority subjects ▪ New vocational BTEC qualifications in sixth forms ▪ Full-time Student Apprenticeships combining work experience ▪ All provision linked to progression routes

Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of reduced funding on collaborative infrastructure ▪ Culture shift from institution first to learner first ▪ Quality assurance, evaluation (including cost-effectiveness) and quality improvement ▪ Equality in terms of status and involvement of partners ▪ Strengthening the 'learner voice' ▪ Maintaining collaboration with focus on the learner in context of increasing competition (falling rolls and government policies v City Academies) ▪ Employer involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of flexibility in the timetable (eg to accommodate WBL providers) ▪ Behaviour management and ensuring safety – support for off-site WBL providers ▪ Tracking post-16, Level 2 learners ▪ Address IAG regarding work-based training provision in schools, especially for more able learners ▪ Learners, parents and staff need IAG on area-wide job vacancies, employment trends linked to training, and qualification routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employer engagement and response to economic trends ▪ Offer matched more effectively to learners' and regional skills needs ▪ Collaboration at Level 2 to improve quality of provision and retention at post-16 ▪ Proactive equality and diversity strategy needed to address gender segregation and needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ▪ Sustaining and managing provision with reduced funding and impact of schools holding funds on vocational offer
For the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinator with strong quality improvement role funded by schools ▪ Use of <i>New Measures of Success</i> for strategic planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ City-wide support network of work-based training providers offering pre-16 programmes ▪ Fully electronic prospectus linked to centralised application process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexible curriculum to broaden the learning experience
Success factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong collaborative culture, relationships (including trust), communications and preparedness to take risks ▪ Manageable size of partnership ▪ Built on history of collaboration ▪ Support for collaborative infrastructure (monetary and non-monetary) ▪ Effective use of diverse funding streams to maintain area-wide collaboration ▪ Good working partnership with the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovatory electronic prospectus and application system (CAP and Shine) ▪ Basis of trust for data sharing and setting baselines and improvement targets at federation level ▪ Effective involvement of Connexions at strategic and operational levels ▪ Effective development of the 'September Guarantee' and the positive impact on learners ▪ Agreed protocols covering all aspects of provision ▪ Attention to facilitating and supporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear focus on learner choice and strategy regarding learner 'transition' in development of the offer (including where and how it is delivered) ▪ Involvement of work-based training providers to expand opportunities and choices ▪ Focus on developing programmes where provision is effective and innovatory ▪ Use of collaboration to support minority subjects and share staff

	<p>local LSC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Highly effective involvement of Connexions ▪ Leadership and commitment to vision sustained over time ▪ Effective role and skills of coordinator ▪ Commitment of school headteachers ▪ Increasing 'depth' of organisational involvement (eg middle management) to minimise competition between partners ▪ Involvement of work-based training providers and a positive view of the WBL route 	<p>transition points for learners</p>	<p>expertise in areas where skills are scarce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective development on basis of successful IFP ▪ Use of collaboration to support provider improvement ▪ Effective use of diverse funding streams to develop new, high-quality, 14-19 provision
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Appendix 1d. Herefordshire and Worcestershire Learning and Skills Council

Consortium	Status	Staffing
Hereford	Under development	
North Worcestershire (Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough)	Under development	Consultant (two days a week)
South Worcestershire (Malvern and Wychavon)	Under development in Wychavon. Low activity in Malvern	
Worcester City	Under development	Part-time consortium development manager
Wyre Forest*	Consortium developed (called ContinU)	Full-time consortium development manager

* Case study area

Schools' engagement in collaborative arrangements in the counties of Worcestershire and Herefordshire is shown below.

Worcestershire 29 schools	Herefordshire 14 schools
7 in established consortia 18 in developing consortia 4 not yet involved	14 in developing consortia

Summary of case study research findings
Wyre Forest District Consortium: ContinU

	Collaborative infrastructure	Delivery systems	Curriculum provision
Key outcomes of collaborative arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 14–19 provision ‘brokered’ (under local authority director of education) <p>Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full-time project manager ▪ Four area coordinators ▪ Between eight and 12 diverse curriculum coordinators based in schools <p>Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directorate (strategic), rotating chairperson, all key stakeholders represented ▪ Development group (operational), comprising deputies and senior managers ▪ Working groups (as required) ▪ Directorate–institution links via link governors ▪ Established links with work-based training providers and employers ▪ Development plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared 14–19 prospectus ▪ Non-independent travel ▪ Part of Fast Tomato website and resource ▪ Common staff training day ▪ IAG takes account of diverse evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learner self-referral and parental involvement ▪ Selection for allocation of places undertaken by diverse curriculum coordinators based on pupil characteristics ▪ High level of progression into post-16 education and training ▪ New learning lines ▪ Year 11 work placement scheme ▪ Focus on accredited pathways ▪ Planned routes to college, employment and university ▪ Young Apprenticeship programme involving partnership between all major stakeholders
Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited role by employers ▪ Links and relationships with Connexions informal ▪ Shift from brokerage role to provider ▪ Quality assurance across partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time lag and limited data sharing between partners ▪ Variable role and effectiveness of Connexions ▪ IT skills of staff may inhibit communications across the partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision fails to meet demand ▪ Offer does not reflect local employment needs effectively ▪ Traditional gender segregation ▪ Providers’ capacity and offer limited in key areas ▪ Schools restructuring – creation of schools for 11–18 year olds

For the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint governance and quality assurance structures and protocols ▪ Consistency and alignment in pre-16 and post-16 partnership structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Password-protected, web-based data systems plus rationalised data collection and reporting ▪ Common 14–19 timetable framework ▪ Multi-agency approach for IAG ▪ Embed in Fast Tomato 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 14–19 vocational centre with satellite centres, under joint governance ▪ Virtual learning environments
Success factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishment of centralised, brokering role. ▪ The steering group overseeing the project ▪ The common role of the area curriculum coordinators between schools and colleges ▪ An awareness of local needs and aspirations ▪ An ability to focus on the vulnerable ▪ The role of the diverse curriculum coordinators in following student progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The sharing of transport, which forges links between providers ▪ Close communication between providers reporting and monitoring attendance, and link role of diverse curriculum coordinators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ownership by the learner ▪ The wide choice offered by the partnership ▪ Indications of positive impact on learners' choices post-16

Appendix 1e. Shropshire Learning and Skills Council

Forum	Project worker (full time until recently)	Coverage			
		Schools	Colleges	Work-based training providers	
Central	√	7	Shrewsbury Sixth Form College; Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology	1	Previous history of collaboration through Shrewsbury Partnership for Education and Training Federation
North East	√	4	Walford and North Shropshire College	1	Good IFP and strong vocational offer at Grove School, Market Drayton
North West*	√	3	Walford and North Shropshire College	2	
South	√	3	Ludlow College (sixth form); Walford and North Shropshire College	1	
South East	√	4	Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology	1	

* Case study area

Summary of case study research findings Shropshire North West Forum			
	Collaborative infrastructure	Delivery systems	Curriculum provision
Key outcomes of collaborative arrangements	<p>Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shropshire Learning Network: overall strategic management ▪ North West Forum: all major stakeholders represented ▪ Curriculum collaboration group ▪ Collaborative vocational curriculum group to promote vocational provision <p>Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 14–19 coordinator ▪ North West Forum 14–19 project worker (one of five employed by local authority and funded by LSC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding prioritised for curriculum development and staff training ▪ Forum-wide IAG programme ▪ Links to Fast Tomato resource centre ▪ Annual vocational education showcase evening ▪ Booklet with Key stage 4 options and progression routes ▪ Taster sessions and inter-site visits ▪ Learning agreement for off-site learning signed by school, learner and provider ▪ Teaching assistants accompany pre-16 learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wide variety of vocational programmes offered for full range of abilities ▪ All programmes offered lead to qualifications and progression routes ▪ All specialist schools have access to one another's programmes ▪ New learning lines developed ▪ New collaborative programmes offer choice alongside IFP ▪ IFP choices offered in core provision have increased from seven to 13 ▪ Work-based training delivered and some work placements through WBL providers ▪ College's leading role in IFP and A-level provision (28 courses) ▪ 'Stretch' programme: A-level Critical Thinking for gifted and talented ▪ Work-based training delivered through college and private providers
Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of falling rolls on small schools ▪ Tensions and increasing competition between partners, eg regarding development of sixth forms ▪ Quality assurance limited by lack of data sharing and monitoring of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited data sharing between partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Programme planning in context of learners' choices and variable demand ▪ Gaps between the offer and takers ▪ Restrictions on access/places due to providers' limited capacity, or levels of attainment required by

	<p>students' progression and achievement at forum level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of short-term funding on long-term planning ▪ Loss of funding threatens sustainability of partnership structures and management of collaborative provision ▪ Inequalities between partners arising from differential capacity to participate in the collaboration ▪ Employers not involved 		<p>applicants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Putting equality and diversity policies into practice ▪ Employer engagement and matching employers' needs ▪ Some unviable A-level groups
For the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need long-term funding strategy to sustain collaboration and its provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development and use of Digital Brain virtual learning environment to aid off-site and split-site delivery ▪ Electronic prospectus 	
Success factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ History of collaboration through leadership initiative group and Excellence in Cities ▪ Good partnership between schools and college, strengthened by successful IFP ▪ Collaboration between forums to share good practice ▪ Mutual respect between partners in solution-focused 'can do' culture ▪ Leadership role of 14-19 coordinator ▪ Raised profile of Connexions and WBL providers ▪ High level of commitment and time by staff at senior levels of partnership organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Showcase event brings together course marketing, Connexions and information from peers ▪ Blocked timetabling embeds offer in school curriculum ▪ Independent IAG - close links with Connexions, Youth Service and Aimhigher ▪ Forum-wide approach to provision, standardised procedures and service-level agreements ▪ Learning agreement for off-site learning establishes rights and obligations of all parties ▪ Effective operational role by project worker, eg organising complex travel arrangements and overall prospectus ▪ Funding to support work-based training providers delivering 14-19 programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaboration led to expanded programme ▪ Growth in number of students following collaboration's programmes (from 90 to 138)

Appendix 1f. Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council

District	14-19 coordinator	College
Cannock	Full-time post	Cannock Chase Technical College
East Staffordshire	Full-time post	Burton College
Lichfield	Consultant (part-time)	Tamworth and Lichfield College
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Senior FE manager (part-time, remission)	Newcastle-under-Lyme College
South Staffordshire	Careers teacher (part-time)	No college
Stafford	Former local authority officer (part-time)	Stafford College
Staffordshire Moorlands	Consultant (part-time)	College is a WBL provider plus three schools
Stoke on Trent	Collegiate director (full time)	Stoke on Trent College
Tamworth*	Serving headteacher (part-time)	Tamworth and Lichfield College

* Case study area

**Summary of case study research findings
Tamworth District Forum**

	Collaborative infrastructure	Delivery systems	Curriculum provision
Key outcomes of collaborative arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 14–19 project coordinator (headteacher). LSC funded, works 1.5 days a week ▪ Stafford 14+ District Forum (strategic overview) ▪ Curriculum working group – for all key stakeholders (operational role) ▪ Coordinator at centre of local and regional networks ▪ Strong college engagement and leadership from principal <p>Vocational skills centre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project planning and steering group ▪ Joint governance from September 2006 ▪ Interim management structure for closing school ▪ Multi-agency involvement (social inclusion panel) ▪ Links with Connexions ▪ Schools’ agreed transfer of 1.2% of a unit of resource (min £375k pa) to fund vocational and skills centre ▪ Quality assurance: adaptation of Knowsley model ▪ Post-16: collaborations involve deputies, senior managers and school sixth forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vocational skills centre: courses delivered by college ▪ College absorbed first year of course and start-up and delivery costs ▪ Transport funded ▪ Post-16 students ‘bussed’ to off-site programmes ▪ Schools provide transport to vocational skills centre ▪ Post-16 timetabling: common ‘option block’ two afternoons a week ▪ Pre-16 timetabling: two groups of three schools each match timetables to access vocational skills centre in two blocks ▪ Prospectus: booklets for post-16 consortium provision and Key stage 4 IFP options ▪ Schools monitor own post-16 students ▪ Schools and college organise own open days and options events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broad range of vocational programmes offered in schools (all specialist), college and vocational skills centre ▪ Well-equipped training centre (£10.7m DfES-funded) developed on site of closed school ▪ Centre to provide 14 Level 2 vocational programmes plus evening provision for adults ▪ Employers influence training centre curriculum ▪ Site offers well-fitted training areas, realistic work environments and co-locates a range of education, training, community, leisure, health and social services facilities and agencies ▪ School linked to foundation and Level 1 programmes ▪ Good IFP provision led by college and involving all schools ▪ Post-16 consortium broadens A- and AS level curriculum: 15 options offered on top of those offered in own school ▪ TOPS consortium offers nine Level 2 programmes as alternative to GCSE retakes ▪ All pre-16 and post-16 programmes have progression routes into Level 3 academic or vocational qualifications

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connexions 'October Offer' for students at end of Year 11
Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Under representation of social services in 14–19 forums ▪ Quality assurance not linked to schools' self-evaluation process ▪ Inequalities arising from differential capacity of parties to become involved in higher levels of collaboration required ▪ Increasing tensions arising from schools wanting to expand vocational provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for independent IAG ▪ IAG largely in the hands of the individual providers ▪ Limited data sharing, which leads to quality assurance difficulties ▪ Lack of overall coordination of post-16 provision ▪ Timetabling too inflexible in blocks, eg for delivery of standardised curriculum at vocational and skills centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No action on gender segregation in vocational programmes ▪ Little contribution from private work-based training providers ▪ Some 'protectionist' attitudes which work against learners' interests ▪ Limited capacity of employers to actively engage in provision ▪ Lower progression and higher drop-out in post-16 courses ('fourth subject' effect) ▪ Some small, unviable A-level groups ▪ Gap between applications and places for vocational training
For the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Joint management board for new vocational and skills centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of college website and electronic prospectus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation of vision for innovative curriculum linked to health and community services
Success factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Built on effective IFP collaborations and history of post-16 partnerships ▪ Culture of collaboration: geographical proximity and close community with strong networking tradition ▪ Coordinator with a key leadership role ▪ Strong status and connections: forum at the heart of a wide range of local and regional networks ▪ Strong support from key stakeholders, eg local LSC and local authority ▪ Strong leadership role of local employer and support from local business groups ▪ Vision, commitment and risk taking by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'October Offer': improved targeting and tracking of Year 11 pupils ▪ All collaborative projects have link coordinators in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on developing vocational provision ▪ Skills-based approach to raising achievement ▪ Offer linked to regional and local skills agenda ▪ Employers involved in curriculum planning

	<p>stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Involvement of multi-agency social inclusion panel▪ Use of diverse funding streams to maintain collaborative relationships▪ Institutional 'fit' and focus on establishing non-competitive relationships▪ Collective response/strategy to address needs		
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Glossary

AS	advanced subsidiary
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
FE	further education
HE	higher education
IAG	information, advice and guidance
ICT	information and communications technology
IFP	Increased Flexibility Programme
ILP	individual learning plan
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSN	Learning and Skills Network
NEET	not in education, employment or training
NFER	National Foundation for Education Research
SEP	Sandwell extended pathway
StAR	strategic area review
WBL	work-based learning