

Education and Lifelong Learning

Production of Case Studies of Flexible Learning and Support Packages for Young People who Require More Choices and More Chances

Kevin Lowden, Alison Devlin, Stuart Hall, George Head, Jon Lewin

The research aims and approach

The study, commissioned by the Scottish Government, was intended to inform a series of papers on 'Building the Curriculum' being prepared as part of the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE). The study had several key objectives:

- To identify and select five case studies of provision for young people who require more choices and more chances (MCMC)
- To gain a detailed understanding of the activities and achievements of the organisations, partnerships or programmes within the case studies
- To identify the factors influencing success in each case study and assess how any challenges had been addressed.

Five case studies were selected to illustrate a range of provision in different contexts, and identified as examples of good practice by a range of key stakeholders across Scotland. Within each case study the research methods varied to suit the different contexts but generally involved interviews with providers, pupils, and parents, and scrutiny of providers' own evaluations and monitoring information.

Main Findings

- Effective provision features flexible, creative and strategic multi-agency partnerships
- Effective partnerships typically focus on learner-centred, engaging and accessible provision, relevant outcomes and sustainable, credible programmes
- Effective provision is future-oriented, either through re-engaging young people with learning, or providing a pathway to employment, and draws on a range of models from a variety of sources
- Effective provision is driven by the needs of young people and they are involved in planning and development
- Benefits for young people include increased confidence, social skills, personal skills and motivation. Other benefits include a reduction in anti-social behaviour, allied to a growing sense of achievement, leading to more positive destinations
- There are added benefits for families in increased harmony and sense of achievement
- There are perhaps unexpected benefits for professionals in the form of innovative joint staff development
- Challenges for partnerships include sustaining stable but progressive provision in the often chaotic lives of young people, reconciling inter-agency tensions, and seeking parity between vocational and academic awards.

The five case studies

The case studies are not intended to be definitive or exhaustive, rather they aim to be illuminative, highlighting examples of good practice from across the range of provision, and to provide ideas and stimulate debate to help inform policy and practice. The five selected are as follows:

- **Falkirk Council:** Local authority-wide strategic approach, fully integrated with other services and involving multi-agency partnerships. Early identification of 'at risk' young people and a wide range of support services to address needs.
- **Kibble Centre and Reid Kerr College:** Specialist school with a reputation for social and curricular innovation, in partnership with a local college. Flexible and individualised curriculum.
- **Lochend Community High School and John Wheatley College:** Provision includes partnership 'Youth Start' programme offering selected pupils applied courses with intensive support, including anger management, counselling or esteem building.
- **MPS Training Ltd, Paisley:** Private specialist provision working with local employers and schools to re-engage disaffected young people. Strong focus on construction industry, but also includes an emphasis on academic achievement and providing broader key life skills to help access opportunities.
- **YMCA/Scottish Borders:** Innovative, intensive early-intervention mentoring programmes for vulnerable primary-age pupils. Particular focus on transition from primary to secondary school. Project works closely with young people, their families and teachers and offers longer-term monitoring and support through the initial years of secondary school.

Models of flexible learning and support for young people who require more choices and more chances

There was variation in the approaches, or models of provision, adopted by the case study providers, but characterised by partnership working and the adoption of approaches suited to learners' needs. These included:

- a) Schools mainly sending pupils to partner colleges or centres to participate in courses delivered by lecturers or trainers. Colleges involved in this model were often involved in supporting pupils with additional support needs, including those with social emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- b) Schools providing learning opportunities in-school for those requiring more choices and more chances, with support from local college lecturers or training providers, with some joint teaching. The type of support from colleges could vary considerably and ranged from the clearly vocationally focused to broader, personal development courses that used expressive arts, literacy and music to engage with young people and promote their life skills and confidence.
- c) Local authority strategic approach, involving joined-up multi-partnership working (including social work, college, university, employers, voluntary services and Careers Scotland) that provides supported flexible learning options. Such provision could also include monitoring of 'at-risk' groups from an early age and intervention where necessary, as well as transition support at key life events, ie the transition from primary to secondary school and transition from school to other contexts.

Across the various models, partnership working, particularly between schools, colleges and employers has led to the emergence of joint staff development and sharing of good practice particularly concerning teaching and learning methods.

Programmes included full- and part-time courses primarily for secondary pupils. However, one provider had strategies and approaches in place that could be deployed from early years education onwards. In some cases, teachers, lecturers and parents saw that the more vocationally-oriented and employability-focused content, which offered the possibility of getting employment, had proven successful in engaging many pupils and sustaining their participation. This raises some issues for the scope of learning that might be offered to meet the needs of those requiring more choices and more chances. It can be argued that such vocationally oriented

provision could be used to engage with target groups of young people and to deliver broader learning provision.

In some cases, programmes actively included articulation to Modern Apprenticeships, training and employment opportunities. These were particularly popular with young people and their parents and directly helped to access positive destinations and so address key factors affecting young people in need of more choices and more chances.

Other types of innovative provision engaged with young people by offering dynamic and participative teaching and learning approaches, and content that offered pupils the opportunity to demonstrate skills and attributes that they were unable to demonstrate within 'conventional' lessons. When this was provided by skilled and often inspirational lecturers and teachers, shy and reluctant pupils would engage and see their self-confidence and social skills develop significantly.

Outcomes of provision

In every case study there was evidence from pupils, teachers, parents and, in some instances, employers to indicate that many participating young people had demonstrated positive outcomes. These included:

- Improved achievement
- Self-confidence
- Improved social skills
- Reduced anti-social behaviour, in and out of school
- Improved relationships with peers, teachers and family members
- Improved motivation to learn
- Raised aspirations
- Positive destinations.

Pupils, teachers, employers and parents often reported the positive impact of provision on young people's vocational and generic skills, as well as improved self-confidence, which helped progression to positive destinations.

In one particular case study, interviews with parents and pupils highlighted that the improved quality of participating young people's behaviours and improved opportunities often meant that the quality of life for their parents and families was enhanced.

A common theme emerging from young people was that their participation and outcomes meant that this was the first

time they had received praise for anything they had done in school or education. Teachers have been able to see the impact on pupils' skills and motivation and this has promoted their awareness of the value of such programmes and teacher buy-in.

Key features of good practice

Those young people requiring more choices and more chances are extremely disparate, and so are their needs. This means schools and their partner organisations have to be flexible and creative in developing appropriate responses. However, there are certain overarching features that appear to characterise effective provision. The findings from this study show that good practice in provision for those requiring more choices and more chances is characterised by being learner-centred, accessible, participative, engaging, flexible, relevant and credible to young people. It addresses core personal and social competencies and promotes self-esteem and aspirations. It is responsive to the views of young people and involves them in the design of approaches and the setting of targets. It is able to offer appropriate assessment to recognise learners' achievements and to provide nationally recognised qualifications to provide credible accreditation for young people.

Such characteristics are synchronous with the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence* and it is arguable that where schools and their partners are able to deliver teaching and learning that embodies these principles, the needs of all pupils, including those requiring more choices and more chances, are more likely to be addressed.

Perhaps one of the most important findings was that good practice in provision for those requiring more choices and more chances, was facilitated by being embedded within a wider strategic framework involving various relevant local and national partners. These partners can include schools and colleges, community learning services, social work, educational psychological services, economic development and regeneration groups, and Careers Scotland. This strategic framework facilitates the sharing of ideas, deploying appropriate resources and skills to deliver holistic and flexible provision and to offer progression pathways. This holistic provision works best when all key stakeholders/partners are represented in the planning and decision-making.

The good practice that these case studies demonstrated was also characterised by being:

- Informed by monitoring that can inform strategies and approaches but which also provides 'early warning' data on attendance, behaviour and other characteristics, to

identify pupils at risk of falling into the more choices and more chances, category.

- Able to use target setting for pupils and Individualised Education Plans.
- Able to draw on youth work models that are informed by expertise from working with young peoples and the challenges they face on a daily basis.
- Able to offer progression routes sideways as well as upwards.
- Able to provide small tutor-to-learner ratios.
- Supported by parents. Parents are often very supportive when they see their child's prospects and motivation improve.
- Able to offer placements for teachers and other providers to visit examples of good practice so that successful approaches can be mainstreamed.
- Able to deploy staff who have appropriate skills to deliver content and are motivated to work with young people with complex needs.

Sustaining good practice

Effective approaches to promoting the sustainability of provision for those requiring more choices and more chances were characterised by providers and partners working together to explore ways to embed provision within existing structures and funding streams in a wider context of the Single Outcome Agreement. Where this was working well it was usually because of leadership and direction from strategic stakeholders. While the availability of funding was seen as a key factor in sustaining practice, local authority personnel and some headteachers highlighted that effective communication and allocation of resources were also important.

In addition to sustaining existing good practice, the case study partners were looking at ways to further develop and enhance provision for young people requiring more choices and more chances. These included: more personal support approaches that would track and support individuals after their participation in courses; more early intervention measures; and expansion of links to partners who can provide support and progression routes for those leaving provision.

Challenges facing provision

Providers and partner stakeholders were often working in creative and effective ways to meet the needs of young people. The research, however, highlighted that provision faced a number of considerable challenges.

- Young people can have chaotic lives, and provision must have the capacity to respond to such complexity, including intensive approaches and multi-partnership working. Deploying appropriately skilled teachers/lecturers/workers, requires co-ordination, time and resources and, for some groups, specialised skills.
- Promoting progression and positive transitions/destinations is extremely important but there can be challenges in ensuring that there is sufficient and appropriate follow-on and step-down support.
- *Curriculum for Excellence* has potential to help schools introduce flexibility to address the needs of those requiring more choices and more chances, but schools look to local and central government for support and permission to encourage them to 'take risks' to introduce innovative provision.
- Innovative provision that is particularly suited to addressing the needs of young people can be provided by partners whose organisational protocols and ethos can cause tensions with those of schools and local authorities, eg those youth work models that place an emphasis on the young person's agenda.
- Young people requiring more choices and more chances are attracted to more practical and applied learning with a clear vocational focus. While such education can engage with target groups, providers need to ensure that broader educational outcomes and generic skills are also addressed.
- There is a perception among many providers and strategic stakeholders that the range of qualifications and awards that are useful to accredit pupils' achievements such as ASDAN and Duke of Edinburgh Awards 'do not have parity of esteem with those in the SCQF Framework'. Some have, therefore, adopted a tariff score approach to recognise the accumulated qualifications and awards and allocated standardised points.

Issues for consideration

The case study providers are exploring the opportunities offered by *Curriculum for Excellence* to create a flexible and innovative curriculum that can engage with and address the needs of all pupils; in other words 'trying to build a curriculum around individuals'. *Curriculum for Excellence* has the potential to help schools introduce flexibility to address the needs of those requiring more choices and more chances but schools look to local and central government for support and permission to encourage them to 'take risks' to introduce flexible provision.

The provision highlighted in the case studies is very much a snapshot and it is clear that the landscape of policy and practice concerning provision for those requiring more choices and more chances is moving quickly. While the case studies demonstrated an impact on young people's abilities and capacities, it is apparent that there is scope for developments to enhance their provision further to meet the needs of young people better and reflect the ideal models and objectives being espoused by policy.

The research raises a number of questions and issues for consideration by providers, their partners and policy makers. These include:

- What can practitioners learn from the case studies? The research highlights strategies and models of provision that can, with some care, be adapted to suit other contexts. The findings, however, perhaps also emphasise that effective provision for those requiring more choices, more chances has also much to do with providers and their partner organisations taking risks to develop flexible approaches suited to a range of needs.

- How can we move towards a more integrated, as opposed to an alternative, delivery model? For example, young people requiring more choices, more chances are often attracted to alternative programmes of learning that are focussed on specialised or vocational topics. It is important that these young people also get the opportunity through learning that is integrated with wider curriculum goals to develop broader skills that will enhance their capacity to cope with and actively participate in a changing world.
- How can we move to a more personalised model of delivery? The case studies show that models of provision that take into account an individual's needs and circumstances and provide tailored support are effective, but this requires committing resources and often multi-agency working.
- Can we move beyond a reliance on initiative funding for the type of provision required to meet the needs of those requiring more choices and more chances? The Scottish Government and Scotland's 32 local authorities have agreed to work in partnership to develop services at a local level to deliver a personalised, effective flexible curriculum and deliver improved outcomes for all young people.

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Dissemination Officer
The Scottish Government
Education Analytical Services
1 B South, Victoria Quay
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