

Improving Choice in post 16 education for Young People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

An evaluation of the
East of England Pathfinder
June 2006

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1 Executive summary

Improving Choice is an East of England Pathfinder that set out to develop local post 16 provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) whose only alternative if they wished to continue in education would be to attend a specialist, residential college. It set out to establish an innovative process and a new and creative way of partnership working. Providers signed up to the model to improve choice for learners with LDD, to test a variety of models and packages of education and support that would enable them to study in their home area and to open doors to a future that matches their aspirations. The Pathfinder was not to be about learners enrolling on a programme called Improving Choice but about a method of working which would ensure that all young people could access existing and new programmes of study, which would have high standards and good quality.

£3.6million development funding was made available to the region by the LSC. Development work pre-dated the LSCs strategic review of provision and funding for learners with LDD and informed its work. The report on this review *Through Inclusion to Excellence* makes recommendations that will take forward the work of Improving Choice.

The key message from the evaluation is a very positive one. It is clear that, while there have been many challenges to the smooth progress of the Pathfinder, the overriding message is one of wholehearted commitment of the vast majority of those involved to the philosophy behind Improving Choice and a clear view that the momentum achieved with the Pathfinder must be embedded and developed.

31 young people participated in Improving Choice in 2005-2006. Six case studies, included in full as an appendix, illustrate positive outcomes despite some challenges along the way.

Overall, Improving Choice has developed appropriate, individual packages for a wide range of young people and has changed expectations so that, for example, at one school, where it has been the norm for young people to take up specialist college placements, only about 50% of the year group are seeking residential placements in 2007.

Each area developed its own action plan, which took account of local needs. While each plan was different a number of key themes emerged. These included:

- **Partnership working**, which was critical to the success of the Pathfinder. Buy-in at strategic level across all agencies proved essential and, in addition to partnerships established across agencies at steering group level, a range of innovative partnerships evolved. These included:
 - Inter-agency planning meetings
 - School-college partnerships
 - The development of partnerships with parent
- **The role of post 16 learning providers.** While many providers have wholeheartedly embraced the opportunity to take forward the Pathfinder, not all providers are fully involved. Different models of provision have been developed but it is clear that all depend for success on a culture that embraces a policy of inclusion for all young people. Once again, senior management support was found to be an essential ingredient of effective involvement in the Pathfinder.

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- **Engaging with parents:** Parents who had sought local provision were very happy with Improving Choice. There were, however, barriers, for example where a residential placement had been planned for some years and where parents wished to see concrete examples of how Improving Choice provides support, which at this stage of the Pathfinder was difficult.
 - **Engaging with schools:** There are examples of schools fully engaging in Improving Choice and contributing to its success in a range of different ways. However, not all schools feel so involved. They report feelings of frustration, anger and fears that Improving Choice may limit options. Some areas are developing ways of engaging more effectively with schools and it will be important to develop this work further.
 - **The role of Connexions:** The evaluation found that Connexions have a difficult and central role in the Pathfinder as they form a key link between providers, parents and young people. They have made significant contributions to the Pathfinder but have some concerns and face a number of difficulties. There is a clear need to support Connexions to contribute to the development of this agenda.
 - **Brokerage:** The role of the broker, where in place, has contributed greatly to the effectiveness of Improving Choice. The role has developed differently across the region, but it is clear that they do need to be able to work independently of agency criteria. Evidence suggests that brokers are most effective where they work as part of a team and facilitate communication.
 - **Assessment:** An assessment framework was developed for Improving Choice. It was designed to be integrated into the transition planning process and to gather sufficient information to share with post 16 learning providers so that they could assess whether they could offer a place to a learner with complex needs and put in place the support they would need to succeed in that placement. Overall, evidence suggests that, if integrated into the transition planning process and completed by people who have been trained and are clear about their responsibilities, then the assessment framework would appear to be a valuable tool in supporting transition. It would, however, be appropriate to evaluate the assessment process at a time when it has been used more fully to inform placements.
 - **Staff development:** Different approaches to staff development include the establishment of a Development and Training Unit, a wide ranging training programme focusing on different disabilities and an approach targeting specific staff, involving a learner with a disability. Ongoing programmes will clearly be necessary to ensure the adoption of inclusive practices across all providers and partners and to increase awareness of person centred approaches.
- Those who contributed to the evaluation were clear about the need to take this work forward and embed it as an integral part of provision and support for learners with LDD. There is no clear model of how to do this, but some areas are seeking to integrate the work into transition strategy groups or with 14-19 groups. Evidence from the evaluation illustrates the importance of using predictive data to inform planning and suggestions are made about how the LSC should provide support for this work. Overall, the evaluation reflects the huge progress that has been made in creating appropriate local post 16 provision for young people with complex needs and the will to embed the work. In taking up the opportunity to engage in Improving Choice, providers and their partners embarked on a complex journey and there are, of course, areas where ongoing development is needed. The report makes a range of recommendations for the LSC, their partner agencies and post 16 providers about how this might happen.
- One key message underpins these recommendations. Throughout the evaluation, it has been highlighted that change and development will not take place without strategic leadership in all the organisations involved - this will be essential to the successful implementation of the recommendations. In taking forward the work of the Pathfinder, all organisations will need to share responsibility for creating cultures that support learners with LDD, taking account of their vulnerability.**

2 Introduction to the Evaluation

Improving Choice¹ is an East of England Pathfinder that set out to develop local post 16 provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) whose only alternative if they wished to continue in education would be to attend a specialist, residential college. Representatives from The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) across the region and their colleagues in partner agencies, who had been concerned for some time about the limited range of local options, put together a proposal to develop appropriate provision. In 2004, the LSC made £3.6 million of development funding available for a one year period to support a Pathfinder that would run over three years. Provision was to be created by September 2005. The Pathfinder became known as Improving Choice.

Development work on Improving Choice pre-dated the Strategic Review of the LSCs Planning and Funding of Provision for Learners with LDD across the Post-16 Learning and Skills Sector and has informed the work of the National Review Group chaired by Peter Little, which carried out this review. This strategic review resulted in a report, *Through Inclusion to Excellence* which makes recommendations to transform and remodel provision for learners with LDD. Implementation of strategies set out in *Through Inclusion to Excellence* will take forward the work of Improving Choice.

At an early stage of the life of Improving Choice, the regional steering group agreed a definition of what it was, and what it was not:

“The Pathfinder is about establishing an innovative process and a new and creative way of partnership working. Providers have signed up to this model to improve choice for learners with LDD, to test a variety of models and packages of education and support that will enable them to study in their home area and to open doors to a future that matches their aspirations. The Pathfinder is not about learners enrolling on a programme called Improving Choice but about a method of working which will ensure that all young people can access existing and new programmes of study which have high standards and good quality.”

This evaluation has been commissioned so that good practice can be identified and lessons learnt from the Pathfinder, which will inform the emerging regional strategy for learners with LDD.

The evaluation took place between the end of April and the middle of June 2006. More than 50 representatives from Improving Choice steering groups and others

employed in the Pathfinder, representatives from Connexions, post 16 learning providers, partner agencies and schools contributed to the evaluation, which was carried out by a mixture of telephone and face to face interviews supported by background reading. In addition, case studies of six young people were carried out over the year and their parents contributed to the evaluation. This work also took account of the evaluation of the brokerage role in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough carried out by Paradigm for the local steering group.

All respondents to the evaluation demonstrated huge commitment to supporting transition for young people with LDD and those involved in developing the Pathfinder had put enormous amounts of work and dedication, usually on top of the ‘day job’ into taking advantage of the chance to create new opportunities for this group of learners. It was a privilege to talk with them and to be caught up in the enthusiasm with which they embraced the Improving Choice agenda.

A number of key factors that have impacted on the success and the challenges for Improving Choice programmes were identified during the evaluation. After an introductory section that looks at the background, the impact on the young people and the local action plans, the evaluation explores these critical factors, in particular:

- Partnership working
- The role of post 16 learning providers
- Engaging with parents
- Engaging with schools
- The role of Connexions
- Brokerage
- Assessment
- Staff development
- Taking the work forward

3 The Impact

While there have been many challenges to smooth progress of the Pathfinder, the overriding message from the evaluation is one of wholehearted commitment of the vast majority of those involved to the philosophy behind Improving Choice and a clear view that the momentum achieved with the Pathfinder must be embedded and developed.

Respondents commented on improved partnership working and dialogue to address issues, on changing cultures and expectations and on the positive impact on the young people already going through their programmes. One person described the philosophy as 'fantastic and visionary.' There was a clear message that future LSC structures must support the development of the Improving Choice agenda, as it develops into a 'Through Inclusion to Excellence' strategy, and a recognition of the damage that would be done if this did not happen.

4 Background

4.1 The Legislative and Policy Context

The Improving Choice Pathfinder reflected a developing view, which is gathering momentum and is supported by legislation and policy, that young people with LDD have a right to a place in their local community and to access the same opportunities as their peers. Within education, The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA), which amended and became Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act, made it illegal for schools and colleges to treat a disabled person less favourably than a non-disabled person for reasons related to his or her disability and required them to make reasonable adjustments to provide for learners with LDD. Removing Barriers to Achievement (2004) set out the Government's commitment to inclusion in schools. The overarching report 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People' (January 2005) notes that opportunities for young people to improve their life chances should be provided through inclusion in further education and employment preparation and mainstream leisure and cultural activities and youth services. 'Through Inclusion to Excellence,' the LSC's report on funding and provision for learners with LDD makes recommendations for taking forward the inclusion agenda.

Alongside this, an increasing focus on person centred planning which had been set out in 'Valuing People,' the Government's strategy for learning disability in the 21st century, highlighted the need to plan holistically to meet individual needs across the whole spectrum of a person's life.

The importance of a properly planned transition from school to adult life for these learners formed a thread of these papers and others, and evidence abounded about the poor quality of transition experienced by many young people and their parents.

Underpinning all of this, the Every Child Matters; Change for Children agenda sets five outcomes for all young people, including those with LDD:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic wellbeing

4 Background

4.2 The Regional Context

Within the East of England, the lack of local provision for young people with more complex needs meant that for some young people there was no alternative other than to take up a place at a specialist college often hundreds of miles from their home, if they wished to continue with their education. As an example, in 2005, 86 young people from Hertfordshire and 76 from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were placed at specialist out of county colleges.

While many local colleges did offer courses to learners with LDD, they were rarely able to tailor provision to meet the needs of individuals with more complex needs. For some young people a specialist placement was both necessary and appropriate and matched the wishes of the learners and their parents/carers. In other cases the young people and their families would have much preferred a local option but had no expectation that this would be possible. Additionally, some young people who did not wish to take up a specialist placement, did not do this and took the alternative of staying at home.

The Pathfinder provided each of the six LSC local offices in the East of England with funding to develop an action plan to address local needs and work with partner agencies to develop packages of provision to enable these learners to study locally. Pump-priming funding would enable them to put the required infrastructure in place; the LSC's matrix funding would support individual learners on placement. Each LSC formed a steering group with partner agencies to take the work forward.

Regionally, a steering group, developed from the group that had put together the original proposal, was established to support developments. It was evident from the beginning of the Pathfinder that a regional managerial structure with clear responsibilities to manage the development of the Pathfinder should be put in place but this did not happen until November 2005 when an LSC manager took on these responsibilities. Effects of the lack of a clear regional management structure from the beginning included an uncertainty in some local areas about the relationship between local and regional plans and about how far local action plans were

bound by regional criteria, lack of clarity about budgets and delays in making appointments and taking forward some planned actions.

In both local areas and the regional steering group, work was undertaken in addition to existing roles and commitments. Because of the changes described in the next section, in which many steering group members were involved, these roles were, at the time, in themselves, particularly challenging and demanding. Huge commitment was demonstrated but many respondents to the questionnaire noted that the time of people key to the success of the programme was, of necessity, spread too thinly.

4.3 The Context of Change

The Improving Choice Pathfinder started at a time when all the key partners were involved in changes to their organisations and structures. The creation of Children's Trusts impacted on structures in local authorities as children's services were created. Connexions funding was transferred to Children's Trusts and in some areas their personal advisers were integrated into local authority teams. The LSC itself is currently undergoing major changes as it reshapes into area partnership teams and regional arrangements. The knock on effect of changes in all these organisations has meant that the smooth progress of the Pathfinder has been disrupted as key staff have changed jobs and moved on.

5 Impact on the Young People

5.1 The Numbers

31 young people have participated in Improving Choice in the year from 2005-2006. These included young people with autism, physical disabilities, communication difficulties, epilepsy and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

5.2 The Case Studies

Case studies have been carried out on six of these young people, in five of the LSC areas, and they, and their parents, have agreed that these can be shared as part of the evaluation. They are attached in full at Appendix 1.

The young people were visited in the autumn term at the beginning of their programmes to establish their aims and goals and again in the summer term to see how far their Improving Choice experiences had matched their expectation. Their parents added their views at both stages. Trudi, Michelle, Kelly, Big Daddy, Andrew and Jim all chose their own pseudonyms for the case studies.

Four of the young people live with their families; two live with groups of young people in supported housing. All have support from other agencies in their lives outside of college.

Aims and goals: Five of the six young people were able to express their own views about their goals for the future:

- Big Daddy wants to get a job mending lawnmowers, get his own place and get more friends.
- Andrew wants to make friends and get a job
- Michelle wants to work hard at college with 1:1 support, have a laptop for her homework, work in a church when she leaves college and continue to live at home
- Trudi likes to take things one step at a time but she feels she would like to learn to manage her own care and tell people what she wants. She wants to continue to live with her family.
- Jim had recently said he would like to work in Tesco's

Four of the young people are on college-based courses; of these one is on a course established as a part of Improving Choice while the other three have support to meet their individual needs and enable them to access existing courses for students with LDD. A fifth student is on a course, which is based part-time at school and part-time at college and the sixth is funded through a college to follow a programme based at a school.

All the learners have support geared to their individual needs. Support includes:

- **Communication.** Two of the young people have no speech and four have communication difficulties related to autistic spectrum disorders or have speech and language difficulties. ICT aids have been tried with both learners who have no speech. Kelly has rejected her communication grid and prefers to use her word cards. Currently Trudi prefers not to use her communication board, which is operated by a headswitch - it is complex and slow. However, the college is in the process of seeking help to make the board more personal to her. Both girls have their own very good alternative communication strategies. Andrew has 1:1 support focusing on his communication for two days each week and his timetable has been rearranged to accommodate this.
- **Work experience.** Two of the learners have 1:1 support to access work experience; each has two placements.
- **Personal care and 1:1 support.** Kelly, Michelle and Trudi need 1:1 support. For Kelly, continuity of support is provided by support staff who work between school and college. Michelle is supported by a team of people, to avoid the risk of creating dependency on one person and there is a complex rota of support. Since Trudi found it hard when her first teaching assistant, with whom she had developed a close working relationship, left, she is now supported by a team of two assistants.
- **Social skills and adjusting to college:** For most of the young people, the step to college has been a big one. In two cases their adjustment has been supported by shared staffing with, or staff secondments from, the young people's schools. One student was subject to bullying and because of the nature of his

5 Impact on the Young People

communication difficulties this was not realised for some time. When the situation became apparent, the college immediately took action to provide support for him. For Michelle, the transition from school was particularly difficult and college staff worked closely with her mother, visiting at home to establish and deal with some of the problems she was facing. A key problem related to her transport and there were often difficulties in persuading her to get in and out of her taxi - after a crisis, her taxi was changed and Michelle has been much more positive about college.

Outcomes for the learners: All 6 young people have successfully completed their years programme, although there have been some challenges along the way. In the interval between the first and second visit to them they had settled into their placements. All indicated that they were enjoying their courses (although Trudi found hers too easy) and an increase in confidence was evident in most of the learners. Only one of the young people will move on this year. Big Daddy will leave to take up a full-time place at college, an outcome with which he is delighted. The other five young people will move onto second year programmes geared to their individual needs, including a more demanding course for the student who needed more challenges, and planning for progression will take place during the coming year.

The parents views: All the parents have been pleased with the placements and the progress their sons and daughters have made. Michelle's mother feels that she has been progressing in leaps and bounds and Big Daddy's father feels that his progress is remarkable. In many cases, the parents have worked very closely with the colleges and have been key partners in ensuring the success of the placements. Some of the parents do have specific concerns, for example about the future and the need for ongoing support beyond Improving Choice, and one parent expressed concerns about continuity of provision and support when staff absences occur and a perception and tendency to identify barriers rather than find solutions. However, overall they have been very pleased with provision and support.

5 Impact on the Young People

5.3 The Wider Group of Students

Evidence gathered during the evaluation suggests that the Improving Choice Pathfinder has created appropriate, individual packages for a wide range of young people. Most of the young people were those who had rejected the idea of a residential placement and some are those who had not participated in education for some time. Examples include:

- A young person with mental health problems who has not been accessing education and does not wish to go to college. A work experience placement has been organised and it is hoped that her confidence will be developed so that she can take up a place at college
- A young person with significant social difficulties who has a package including 1:1 support at school and community based programmes developed by Mencap and the college with a view to accessing college in the longer term. Health and housing also contribute to the holistic package
- A learner from a mainstream school who had been bullied and had significant social needs. He is engaged on a mainstream course with Improving Choice support and is being supported to learn to use public transport, access the community and develop friendships.
- A learner who had been excluded from college who is gradually being supported back into the same college
- An individual package for a learner with epilepsy who has seizures at nights. His programme starts at 11 am and continues into Adult Education courses at 4pm. Direct payments are supporting the development of his independence

5.4 Changing expectations, developing capacity

In addition to providing opportunities for specific young people, Improving Choice is seen to be changing expectations for young people and their parents. More are looking to local provision. At one school where the norm has been for young people to take up specialist college placements, out of a leaver group of 15 in 2007, only 7 are seeking residential placements

It is important to note that the work of Improving Choice has focused on the development of local options while continuing to support specialist college placements for those who need them. Some scepticism has been noted and a view expressed that, because of Improving Choice, many specialist college applications may be turned down for funding. However, some respondents are giving serious consideration to why young people seek a residential placement. One Personal Adviser (PA) recognised that it is often to develop independence skills and that an imaginative approach to the curriculum can enable learners to develop these skills in their home area, where they will be practising these skills in adult life. In some cases, where learners return home at the end of a residential placement, they do not maintain or develop the skills they have learnt. Contextualised local learning, on the other hand, can provide continuity of learning and support and the opportunity to sustain skills learnt

In another area, a PA commented that there had been a total change in culture at the colleges and in the way they are constructing packages, taking a person-centred approach to help people achieve their goals. Many colleges feel there has been a wider impact on their ability to provide for learners with LDD but there is also an acknowledgement that this is a journey in which there is a long way to go and not all colleges are demonstrating the same level of commitment and understanding of what is involved.

6 The local action plans

Each Learning and Skills area was charged with working with their partners to develop an action plan to meet the needs in their own area. The plans have been developed and modified over the course of the year. The following notes some of the key points of the action plans that have been taken forward over the year.

6.1 Bedfordshire & Luton

The focus has been on developing capacity through an extensive training programme covering a wide range of disability related issues. At the time of the evaluation, 340 people had been trained.

The management of the programme has been devolved to a training organisation. A manager from that organisation chairs the steering group, which meets monthly.

They have recruited a liaison officer who works on a two day a week basis to develop links with schools, colleges and Connexions.

6.2 Cambridge and Peterborough

Provision has been developed around three locality hubs and includes three colleges. Two have worked in close collaboration with special schools. Each hub has its own steering group, with an independent chair from one of the partner agencies.

The brokerage role has been developed as a key part of the programme.

6.3 Essex, Southend and Thurrock

There has been a key focus on resourcing the transition process and developing strategies, and embedding Improving Choice in other developments that are taking place across Essex. A broker has been recruited.

An LSC representative chairs the steering group.

6.4 Hertfordshire

There has been a focus on the development of partnerships, work on developing assessment processes and the development of programmes to support individual learners.

The work in Hertfordshire has been embedded into existing groups and has facilitated taking forward work on transition, which was already a priority in the area.

The steering group, which grew out of an already established group, is jointly chaired by an LSC representative and the Head of Adult, Family and Community Learning

6.5 Norfolk

In Norfolk, the majority of the work has been on developing provision, with an intention to make Improving Choice self-sustaining and build capacity and expertise. There has been a focus on the development of centres of expertise. One college is developing as a centre of excellence for learners with autistic spectrum disorders and improving employment prospects through social firms and enterprises.

The steering group, which manages the work, is chaired by a college Principal. Each college has appointed a member of staff with responsibility for taking forward Improving Choice.

6.6 Suffolk

Two key elements of Suffolk's programme have been the establishment of a Development and Training Unit and a brokerage programme. Some research was also undertaken with a view to making recommendations for sustainability.

The steering group is chaired by an LSC representative.

7 Themes of the Pathfinder

7.1 Partnership working

Improving Choice set out to change cultures and support people from different agencies to work together and create programmes, ways of working and individual packages to enable young people to study locally and work towards their goals and aspirations. It was recognised that education was one strand of a whole life package. Partnership working is thus clearly a key factor in the success of the Pathfinder. Buy-in at strategic level across all agencies was recognised as essential and the importance of having people on the steering group at a senior enough level to make a difference in their own organisations was noted.

While partnership working has sometimes been challenging, a frequent response noted the value in getting partners together around the table to address issues. Conversations may be difficult but problems were aired and addressed so that work could move on. One respondent noted the ease of working with individual partners and contrasted this with the challenge of enabling partners to work together to question existing practice and arrive at creative solutions.

In two areas partnership working evolved from existing groups established to develop work that supports young people with LDD in transition. In a third, efforts were being made to embed Improving Choice in other activities that were taking place to develop a transition strategy and structure. These approaches will contribute to the sustainability of Improving Choice. Some respondents commented on the 14-19 planning groups and noted the importance of developing links with these groups; however, while clearly important as a framework for the work, people were often unclear how these groups would support work with young people with LDD and links appeared more difficult to make.

Steering groups in general included representatives from the LSC, the local authority childrens and adult services, Connexions and colleges. In some areas Health, voluntary organisations or parents representatives were a part of the group. Schools were also invited to be members of steering groups but often did not take up their places. In about half of

the areas, representatives from organisations other than the LSC were invited to chair steering groups, creating a sense of shared ownership.

Generally, key, committed people from within the steering groups took forward the agenda and those already involved in developing transition played a major role in shaping Improving Choice.

What worked well

There were many examples where Improving Choice had created partnerships that had broken down barriers and extended choice and support for young people with LDD. A small sample of examples follows.

- In one area, regular planning meetings have been created around one college and the process is being replicated in all others in the county. The college will chair and minute the meetings, which will be attended by Connexions PAs, the transition broker, social services representatives and other involved professionals who will identify and jointly plan to meet the needs of the most complex young people.
- One school has created a new partnership with a college based on piloting the assessment framework with pupils with complex needs in year 11 and 13. They are developing a much greater dialogue to support the young people, planning taster days and plan to establish a formal link to address the recognised need for capacity building.

7 Themes of the Pathfinder

- In one area, the Pathfinder was felt to have established a collaborative, dynamic, pan-county approach where none had existed before. College representatives and other colleagues who had felt they were working in isolation now feel they can share concerns and ideas. While the steering group will cease at the end of the year, operational and planning groups will be maintained.
- One Connexions manager had been able to establish working relationships with colleges and put in place support for their learners with LDD. This had not happened before.
- A number of colleges have formed links with special schools. One college has seconded two staff from a special school with expertise in working with young people with complex needs. This has been directly beneficial to the young people and in developing college staff skills. Another college is being supported by a special school teacher to work on the communication needs of a learner with no speech.
- Colleges have also worked in close partnership with parents to plan to meet the needs of their sons and daughters.
- Health is not represented in all areas but, where they have, their involvement has been extremely beneficial. One health representative forms a link for other partners on Improving Choice, signposting to the right person and ensuring there is a response. She has contributed, for example, in making links with physiotherapists and the right person to support the development of a healthy living package for one learner as part of his Improving Choice support.
- In one area adult care services have offered to second a member of staff to work for three years on a social firm project

Respondents overall valued the contribution Improving Choice had made to developing partnership working, often remarking that this was the most important outcome. Many comments supported this view and the following represent a small sample:

- **One person described the Improving Choice meetings as fantastic and commented on peoples willingness and commitment to make things work,** noting how transparency and shared information enabled better planning.
- Another commented on how supported she felt by other members of the steering group and on the value of working with like-minded people to focus and take developments forward.
- In one area, where colleagues felt that a college may previously have just said no, they have now moved to a can-do culture, thinking of how to address barriers and work together to make things happen.

As already noted, partnership working is crucial, invaluable and also challenging. Improving Choice steering and working groups create forums where partner agencies can work together to develop solutions to problems without being constrained as they usually are by their own agency funding and eligibility criteria.

7 Themes of the Pathfinder

Challenges to Partnership working

There remain some challenges to partnership working - not all partners are equally involved in all areas and because people are taking on this work in addition to their usual jobs, time and expertise is spread too thinly.

A second challenge relates to agencies financial contributions to the support of young people on Improving Choice programmes. It had been anticipated that partners would agree joint agency funding to create holistic packages for learners. For some social care departments, organising and supporting placements jointly is the norm and there are examples of packages that create coherence in support between home and learning. In at least two areas, the broker has a key role in creating such packages.

However, it was more often noted that there had been no financial contribution from agencies other than the LSC to support young peoples learning packages. Budgets are tight and being reduced across the board and agencies, in particular adult care services, that may be hard pressed to meet their statutory commitments, will only contribute financially where the benefits can be demonstrated. Historically it is well documented that the LSC has, in supporting out-county placements, paid for the medical and personal care services that enable students to access learning. In developing local provision, these costs need to be met. Although it may have been inappropriate for the LSC to meet these costs in the past, that they did so for some young people who took up out of county placements (and who will now benefit from support through Improving Choice) is a historical fact that has been taken into account by other agencies when planning to meet young peoples support needs. Respondents pointed out that partner agencies need to be aware that they will need to plan to meet these costs and that criteria for agency responsibility need to be jointly negotiated and agreed, so that individual budgets can be developed.

The intention to work with partners to create individual budgets for learners reflects current Government thinking. Some respondents commented on the work of the In Control project, with which some areas in the region are involved. This model constructs individual budgets and allows people to plan their own support. It works to the same philosophy as Improving

Choice and provides a model from which much can be learnt. The model could inform the funding of learning packages, but additionally, aligning FE and care and agreeing the place of learning as part of a person centred package could allow for the development of collaborative packages.

- Plans are in place for joint working based on learning from In Control and Improving Choice to develop an approach to individual budgets in post 16 learning.
- One LSC area is drawing partners together to look at collaborative funding by identifying and exploring the range of sources of funding available and agreeing how collaborative packages can be developed.

A further challenge to the development of collaborative funding packages lies in Fair Access to Care criteria. People assessed as requiring a social care service as an adult are placed into one of four categories of need - critical, substantial, moderate or low. It is the norm in the region that only adults whose needs are assessed as being critical or substantial receive funding for services. Some of the young people whose educational packages may be funded through Improving Choice do not fall into these two bands of need, but they may still require support that may not be deemed to be the responsibility of the LSC if they are to access learning. This is a fundamental challenge, which must be addressed at strategic level if young people are to be able to develop plans that are truly person centred and holistically address their needs.

One representative made the point that the structure of Improving Choice means that the costs are likely to be to childrens services but the benefits are apparent only when the child has moved into adult services. Timescales mean that these outcomes are yet to be seen. This impacts on strategic developments, as well as individual packages. For example, in one area joint agency funding is being sought to sustain a broker's post beyond the life of the Pathfinder. It would be Children's Services who would fund the post, but Adult Care Services that would reap the benefits in terms of outcomes for the young people.



7 Themes of the Pathfinder

7.2 The role of post 16 learning providers

Post 16 learning providers deliver the programmes planned through Improving Choice and are consequently critical to the success of the programme. They have been funded to develop provision for those learners whose needs could not have been met locally in the past. Many providers have wholeheartedly embraced the opportunity to take forward this development and committed themselves to developing provision and supporting individual students - one LSC commented on a tutor who collected one student himself and took him to college before transport had been arranged. However, not all providers are fully involved. Reasons cited include lack of facilities, a menu of opportunities or infrastructure; inclusion of learners with LDD is not always seen to be a priority.

The following sections illustrate practice.

7.2.1 The Provision

Three main models of provision are being developed:

Model 1 - College based provision: Most of the providers involved in the programme are colleges. College based models include the development and delivery of new programmes for learners with specific needs that historically could not be met locally, and the construction of individual packages to enable students to access their provision. In one area the provision has developed on a link course basis with the feeder school. One college, which has developed provision for young people on the autistic spectrum, describes the provision as individual programmes around a group of learners rather than a course. In addition to support at senior management level, key factors to the success of provision include:

- Close partnerships with feeder special schools, including, in one college, staff secondments, and in another, staff working across the two establishments.
- A recognition that schools may have greater expertise in specific disabilities and a willingness to learn from their experience
- Close partnerships with parents

- Strong and committed staff teams with good leadership and support
- Careful planning and lead in time for individual learners.
- Work experience opportunities, often in social firms to develop the skills for employment and begin to develop progression routes

In one area efforts have been focused on developing centres of excellence for learners with specific difficulties, which will take their first students in September 2006. One college is developing as a centre of excellence for learners with autistic spectrum disorders. There has been a project leader for a year and a seconded member of staff who has worked for three days per week on developing the curriculum.

It will offer a discrete one or two year transitional course tailored to individual needs and will also support students on mainstream courses. It is using ICT to support learners in an unthreatening way, with a blackboard site with use restricted to students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). It is intended that students transition to college will be supported by familiarising themselves with the site before they come to college. The college has a group called RUG (Really Useful Group) for students with ASD. It has a room available at all times where students can go during their free time at college to relax, study or use facilities including personal computers and college Intranet access to the Blackboard site.

There will be an employment focus and the college is working closely with adult care services to establish social firms. In developing this aspect the importance of marketing and involving employers has been recognised and successfully undertaken. Four college enterprises - greenhouses, a shop, an art loan scheme and a DVD swap - will offer training opportunities.

Liaison has been a key feature of the work in developing this provision and links have been made with schools, voluntary organisations and employers.



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Model 2 - supporting community based provision:

In a second model, colleges have a more distant relationship with the delivery of programmes although they have been involved in steering groups and the development of action plans. One college has acted as a conduit for funding individual packages of learning, which are delivered to young people in schools or in the community. Feedback suggests that the programmes are meeting the needs of the learners and they are making good progress. Some of the learners attend college for some sessions and there may be more direct involvement in the future. For some of the young people, a college placement will be the planned next step. This model has proved very successful for those young people with complex needs who make slow but clear progress and need a very gradual and supported transition from school to adult life.

In this model, a number of different people need to be involved in planning, including the college, the school, the broker (if in post), the PA and other supporting agencies and providers of opportunities as well as the young person and their parents/careers. It has become apparent that it is important to ensure that there is clear communication between these partners and that the role and responsibilities of the various partners, including the college are clear. All partners need to have a real involvement in planning to meet the needs of individuals so that they can respond and develop their involvement appropriately.

Model 3 - The role of the work based learning

provider: There is one example in the region where it is a training provider that is delivering to the three learners supported by Improving Choice. These three young people have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and have faced individual barriers to accessing learning in college. This model illustrates the positive contribution that work based learning providers can make in providing for young people, especially those who may reject a college environment.

As part of this model, colleges have been funded to provide facilities, for example a flat, a kitchen and a floristry shop for learners with LDD. Recently

proposals have been submitted for a carpentry workshop and a newsroom. This will develop capacity to cater for the broader group of these learners in college and, it is hoped, provide opportunities for collaboration with other providers, although this has not yet happened. The facilities do not focus on those with more complex disabilities who may need a specialist college placement.

Breadth of provision

Overall, the range of models caters for a wide group of learners and highlights the broad spectrum of need. In addition to young people who may have challenging behaviour as well as other learning support needs, it includes young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, a group that is assessed as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities but that may not fall within the scope of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). This group includes young people who are often harder to place at specialist colleges and as such may have no access to further education. The focus of Improving Choice is on those with complex learning difficulties, rather than the larger group of learners with complex social and behavioural, needs. The involvement of the work based learning provider highlights that it is important to ensure that neither group is overlooked in a continuum of provision. The young people on whom the Improving Choice initiative focused are likely to be those with low incidence needs and a debate could usefully take place to consider how the needs of those with complex but more frequently occurring needs can best be addressed. It will also be useful to consider how work based learning providers can contribute to supporting the Improving Choice agenda.

All models depend for success on a culture that embraces a policy of inclusion for all young people, however complex their support needs and disabilities. Some colleges are further along the road to achieving this than others. While there is a high level of commitment, physical, attitudinal and policy barriers have in some areas been noted and these need to be addressed through commitment at a senior level.



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7.2.2 Senior Management Support

Support for Improving Choice at senior management level in colleges as elsewhere has proved to be an essential ingredient of effective involvement in the Pathfinder.

- In one area, a college Principal chairs the steering group. He has briefed other Principals in his area and obtained their commitment to taking the Improving Choice agenda forward.
- One college lecturer commented that their Principal and senior managers are supportive of Improving Choice and are writing its principles into the colleges Equality and Diversity statement
- In one area, where colleges are starting to work collaboratively, Principals have welcomed the Improving Choice initiative and one is taking the lead on behalf of all four on LDD issues.
- One Principal invited the member of staff leading on Improving Choice to make a presentation to all staff.

In one local authority area, where it was reported by partner agencies that the Principal had given a verbal directive that provision for learners with LDD would not grow, while staff on the ground were committed to the philosophy of Improving Choice, there appeared to be more barriers, to which solutions could not be found, to the effective development of the Pathfinder. These included lack of space for wheelchairs, lack of staff time and communication difficulties.

7.2.3 Therapies and Support Services

One of the oft-quoted challenges was the lack of availability of, rather than funding for, therapies and support services. A number of areas are taking steps to address this.

- One college is making contacts with voluntary agencies and private practitioners and developing a therapeutic database for use across the county. It has 60 confirmed entries. One voluntary organisation has been particularly instrumental in wanting to provide services and hopes to work with colleges in the county to employ a therapist. That organisation has also suggested staff training days and equipping college staff so that they can contribute to offering therapeutic support.

- The same area has made contacts with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) who, while reluctant to offer specific services are happy to maintain links and offer training.
- One college pays learning support assistants at a higher level if they will take on personal care functions.
- One college will access a speech and language therapist who works in a school and will look at developing speech and language strategies rather than therapies.
- In one area a representative of a sensory support team, which is a part of childrens services, has been involved in the Improving Choice steering group. She set up a conference bringing together two colleges and voluntary organisations. An action plan was agreed and a group set up to take forward issues around sensory support for young people in colleges.

7.3 Person Centred Planning and Advocacy

Person centred planning is essential to the development of appropriate individual packages. The assessment framework was based on this and designed to help assess how providers could support young people to achieve their goals. Providers and their partners have taken this forward in different ways. One college has developed an electronic learning plan based on the principles of person centred planning, which has proved to be extremely powerful. Another is using a memory stick to store learners plans and information and ensure they have ownership.

In one area, a voluntary organisation has worked with partners to support person centred planning, develop circles of support and facilitate the bringing together of disabled and non-disabled young people to encourage peer support and lasting friendships. There have been significant achievements in activities including person centred planning but a number of barriers have prevented the creation of opportunities for disabled and non-disabled students to meet together socially and for disabled students to participate in mainstream courses. It is important to embed and take forward this work and a number of ways forward have been suggested, which focus on clarification of roles, planning and supporting the development of inclusive practices and values.



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7.4 Funding Criteria and Referral Processes

The issues around agency criteria to access their services have already been discussed. Additionally, concerns were expressed about lack of clarity around when colleges should apply for Improving Choice funding and when the expectation would be that a learner would be supported by Additional Learning Support (ALS) funds. While the referral process for specialist colleges and Improving Choice is streamlined in some areas, it appears that in others they are separate and one PA spoke of a young person who was considered first for a residential placement and rejected, then considered for Improving Choice support and rejected because the panel felt that the college could support through its ALS funds. The college was at the time considering whether or not it could do this.

Such drawn out processes add considerably to the young person and family's stress at the already difficult time of transition from school and it seems evident that one referral process should consider what funding stream would be appropriate to support the learner. It is noted that Improving Choice funding, which was never intended to be seen as a funding stream, does not necessarily mean more money than ALS and a simpler, integrated funding system would be in the learners best interest. One respondent suggested that a funding management system rather than funding streams would be most appropriate.

7.5 Progression routes

Respondents noted that Improving Choice had enhanced the quality of provision and it was now important to ensure that outcomes and progression routes were developed that meet expectations. Some respondents anticipated a higher level of independence and ability to access a wider range of community activities at the end of their programmes for those with more complex needs. For many of the young people, employment is the goal and, for many, given the right level of support, this should be achievable. Work experience forms a part of many

programmes, and the role of social firms in providing opportunities is noted in many areas; links have been made with some that exist but the availability of this provision is very patchy across the region. One area has a strong focus on developing social firms and is forging strong links with employers, but in others, this part of the action plan had not been taken forward as far as had been planned.

It is crucial that appropriate progression routes are developed if the impetus and achievements gained through Improving Choice are not to be lost.† Keeping the young people in their local communities provides an opportunity for supporting them into tailored and appropriate outcomes. This is an area where multi-agency planning is essential and where learning can be shared by schools, colleges, employers and those involved in supported employment and social firms to inform developments.

The report to ministers and the Learning Disability Task Force entitled 'Improving Work Opportunities for People with a Learning Disability,' which was published shortly after this evaluation was completed, highlights the importance of real employment opportunities and the role of schools, colleges and Connexions in preparing people with learning disabilities for work and helping them find employment. It also suggests the development of a broad framework that sets out the mutual objectives of public agencies and clearly defines their roles and responsibilities in promoting employment for this group of people.† This approach to developing progression routes would benefit the learners supported through Improving Choice.

It is important too to note that, for many young people, one of the goals will be progression into supported living forms and this element, again with multi agency support, needs to be built into the planning.

As many of the learners will be on course for two years it will be important to these areas forward in the coming year.

7 Themes of the Pathfinder

7.6 Engaging with parents

All the parents of the young people in the case studies had sought local provision for their sons and daughters and were very happy with the provision that had been made for them. Most had worked very closely with the providers to ensure the right support was in place and are closely involved with the programmes.

Professionals suggest that parents are often responding well to the new agenda of Improving Choice. One felt that as many as 80% were pleased with the developments. For the many parents who do not want their children to leave home to go to college, Improving Choice has been a very positive development.

Other professionals highlighted significant barriers that need to be addressed.

- Some parents have been exploring options and planning for a residential specialist college placement from year 9 or before, in some cases this means for the last five years. They have come to believe that this is the only appropriate option for their son/daughter. In these cases, Improving Choice is seen in fact to remove the one choice the parents want.
- Some respondents expressed the view that other parents may seek a specialist college placement to meet social needs and their own need for a break after many years of caring, or as a route into long term care. While this is clearly not an educational need, these parents and some professionals supporting them may question the validity of funding criteria that are specific to education.
- Some parents expect their sons and daughters to stay at home and have anxieties or feel threatened about new opportunities in their community being opened up to them.

Professionals also reported feedback from parents that they wanted concrete examples of successful local placements and of the programmes that their sons and daughters would follow. They did not want their children to be guinea pigs. At this stage of development it has been hard to provide these examples. Some areas have found it harder than others to focus on developing individual person-centred programmes and have wanted to select from a pre-determined menu of options that did not exist. In these cases it has been difficult to positively engage parents. There is a clear need to provide information to parents and carers and positively engage them in developing appropriate programmes. It is also important to create an approach where person centred planning leads to the identification of opportunities based on individual goals, rather than selection from a prescribed list.

Two examples were noted where action had been taken to engage with parents:

- At one school, parents had been involved in piloting the assessment framework. They were invited to a coffee afternoon where the process was discussed, contacted individually and felt involved and consulted. There is a view that this process will lead to a properly informed decision about the appropriateness of a local or residential placement
- One area held an event for 20 or 30 parents and young people. The event involved Improving Choice managers and a representative from LSC national office and colleges. Breakout groups chaired by colleges agreed questions for discussion with the whole group. Parent governors who could share the messages formed an important part of the group.

7 Themes of the Pathfinder

7.7 Engaging with schools

There are examples of schools working in close partnership with colleges to develop provision and this has been an essential factor for success. Other schools have delivered programmes funded through Improving Choice and one has supported a college in their use of communication aids. One successfully bid to run a Development and Training Unit as part of the Pathfinder. An example of a positive contribution by a school to piloting the assessment framework has already been cited. Those schools that are involved in the Pathfinder are responding very positively - one school commented that they are looking at their leavers differently now, the choices are different and include packages to meet individual needs and this is just as it should be.

Feedback from some schools and partner agencies suggests however that not all schools feel so involved. One headteacher, whose involvement in delivering a programme had been positive, expressed frustration at a lack of communication and involvement with ongoing planning. Schools are nominally represented on steering groups, but in practice many do not attend. Many schools report a lack of knowledge about the Pathfinder and lack of clarity about what it involves. One headteacher felt that it had little or no impact. One expressed frustration that their offer to contribute to training was not taken up. Another reported a colleagues anger that young people with BESD were not included in the Pathfinder in their area. Like parents, some schools believe that a specialist college placement is right for their leavers and regard Improving Choice as limiting options. One headteacher clearly stated that those young people who apply for a specialist college placement do so, not because of their educational needs but because of the need for a residential placement. The range of post school college provision in the schools catchment area more than adequately meets the educational needs of its leavers, some of whom have very complex needs, but the residential options are not there. There is thus a divergence with the philosophy behind Improving Choice that assumes the right of every young person to a place in their local community, or at least a view that local

infrastructures need to take account of the need for residential provision if this philosophy is to be implemented. The criteria for specialist college placements themselves are seen as a barrier and this reinforces the noted need for multi-agency planning and agreement on how a young persons holistic needs can be met. Agreement also needs to be reached about how the needs of the family are taken into account.

Some areas have taken action to seek to engage more closely with schools:

- In one area a liaison officer has been appointed whose role will focus initially on developing links with special schools and engaging them in the Pathfinder.
- In at least one area, Improving Choice representatives have attended special school heads meetings to update and seek engagement in the programme. Feedback suggests that to date these meetings have provided an opportunity for the heads to express their frustrations and more work clearly needs to be done on engaging schools.
- One area is putting in place a jointly funded post between Connexions and Improving Choice of a transition and curriculum adviser and a post of co-ordinator for special schools
- After consultation with one school, one Connexions manager is writing to all special schools to ask them to nominate a named person as a liaison point for Improving Choice. Liaison over Improving Choice will be included in Partnership Agreement negotiations.

7 Themes of the Pathfinder

7.8 The role of Connexions

Connexions have a key role and responsibility in transition planning for young people with LDD. They are involved in reviews, support decision making, provide information and usually provide the link between the young person and their family and the post-school placement. As such, their role in providing information to parents and young people about opportunities available under Improving Choice and to providers about the needs of the young people coming through the system is central.

In the five areas where Connexions LDD managers are in post, they are involved in the steering groups and at least two of the managers have, or have had a key role in shaping and developing the Pathfinder and establishing partnership working.

Personal Advisers (PAs) work with young people and their families on the ground. Some reported an initial scepticism about the likelihood of Improving Choice succeeding and a concern that it would mean that specialist college placements would no longer be supported. However, they do recognise that many parents and young people would like a local placement and that the Pathfinder is providing opportunities for young people who wish to stay in their home area. Some PAs note the problems faced by young people who go away to a specialist college and come back to a void at the end of their course and highlight the importance of Improving Choices contribution to supporting young people to develop independence skills in the area in which they are to be used.

PAs do however have concerns about some aspects of Improving Choice. The views of parents and schools that some young people would best be placed in a specialist college have already been noted. One Connexions manager noted the amount of time and effort her team put into changing hearts and minds on this issue. While Connexions PAs provide impartial information about the range of options and positively promote Improving Choice as one of these options, they may be faced with resistance to considering this option and may themselves have their own concerns. These are likely to relate to the fact that planning has

taken place over a number of years leading to a specialist college placement and that it is not in the young persons interests to overturn this planning at a late stage. In two areas some concerns relate to the quality of local provision and the availability of appropriate levels of support. One PA expressed the view that, despite a recognition that there are issues about returning home at the end of a residential course, independence is best gained in a residential setting, where the course does not finish at 3 pm, and that young people with more complex LDD deserve this opportunity to develop their potential.

Some PAs also feel that stricter criteria and processes for placement mean that their professionalism is being questioned and that other agencies feel they promote residential placements. They are clear that they only recommend a residential placement when local options have been considered, often over a period of years, and assessed as inappropriate. However, increasingly placement panels return recommendations for more detail and in one area may refer the recommendation to the transition broker for a further, more in-depth assessment. PAs may feel caught between parents and schools who are fighting for a specialist college placement and the LSC panel members who, they feel, focus on local options without the personal knowledge of the young person that the PA has built up over time.

PAs have a clear role in ensuring that parents and schools fully understand the criteria for placement and, in making an objective assessment of the young persons needs, to inform the placement panels decision. Schools and partner agencies have a role in supporting PAs to do this. They need to ensure that PAs have all the in-depth information they require to inform their assessment and they need to recognise that they must work within the criteria for placement. Local colleges too have a part to play by ensuring that they make their assessments of whether or not they can offer the support needed by a learner based on full information and understanding of their support needs, recognising where, and why, they may not be able to do so effectively.

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PAs have also highlighted the difficulty in promoting Improving Choice when there are not concrete examples of provision and, in one area, where facilities and processes do not appear to be in place to construct individual packages. They would like a menu of activities.

Many respondents clearly valued the role of Connexions and their contribution to supporting young people in transition, noting the size and breadth of their caseloads. Others, however, questioned whether they have the time and expertise to work with those young people with the most complex needs.

Connexions have a difficult and central role in taking forward the Improving Choice agenda. PAs need to be supported to promote the agenda and to be fully involved and contribute to the partnership working essential to the development of opportunities for young people with more complex needs.

The Youth Matters Green Paper, published in July 2005, sets out to develop a new strategy for providing opportunities, challenge and support to young people. It specifically includes young people with disabilities in its remit. One of its underpinning principles is to improve outcomes for all young people, while narrowing the gap between those who do well and those who do not. Youth Matters also sets out a new future for Connexions. Funding and responsibility for that organisation will pass to Children's Trusts. Care will need to be taken to ensure that, in new structures, Connexions are equipped to support young people with LDD to develop their potential and achieve appropriate and improved outcomes.

7.9 Brokerage

At the time of carrying out the evaluation, three LSC areas had appointed transition brokers, one an inclusion officer who fulfilled a similar role and one a liaison officer. Of these, three of the appointments were recent and one person had only been in post for a very short time when interviewed.

The brokers role has contributed greatly to the effectiveness of Improving Choice and has oiled the wheels of effective placements. Paradigm has carried out an in-depth evaluation of the role in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. In that evaluation it is noted that 'professionals spoke of how the broker challenged them to think in different and creative ways; enabling them to work together to develop a learning package that could best offer the young person the opportunities they sought whilst ensuring safety and healthy outcomes for the young people taking part.' Feedback from other areas too highlights that colleagues find the role to be valuable and it is clear that the personalities of the broker make an important contribution to the success of the role.

Some questions have been raised about the difference between the role of the Connexions PA and the transition broker. This is however clearly differentiated in one area where Connexions work with the young person to identify an appropriate placement and the broker puts together packages of care, seeking to access different funding streams, e.g. through the PCT, to enable the learner to access college. This broker brings people together and offers clinics to PAs to, sometimes, seek more detail, clarify roles and move things forward. Another broker notes that he works intensively over a short period of time while the PA has a longer term role in planning and decision making.

One broker is working to identify and plan for young people who may benefit from local placements with additional support from Year 9. This aspect of planning is essential if appropriate provision is to be properly developed but care will need to be taken to ensure that the role is integrated and responsibilities agreed with others in the team supporting the young person.



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One broker is hosted by Connexions, one by Childrens Services, two by Adult Services and the liaison officer is placed with the training organisation that manages Improving Choice. Wherever they are placed, brokers need to be able to work independently of their host agency's criteria (for example working with the full range of young people who may benefit from support through Improving Choice rather than simply those who have been assessed as eligible for a service from social care) and after some early concerns, they do appear able to do this.

There is some lack of clarity in some areas about the role of the broker, which may be seen to traditionally focus on social needs, in an initiative that specifically relates to educational placements, which must be at the centre of the holistic package. Brokers thus need to be able to work with learning providers to construct appropriate packages as well as with the agencies that will fund the support to access learning and they require an understanding of educational opportunities. Funding is also geared to an initiative that promotes local options and it is important that this does not constrain the person-centred approaches required for effective brokerage. Working within the framework of Improving Choice, it may be easier to ensure this approach where the broker works with the young person once a placement has been identified, as cited in the example above. However it would be helpful to give consideration to how the role of a broker can be developed that sits outside all initiatives and agency criteria so that they can be truly independent and able to focus on packages appropriate to individual need, whatever they may include.

Evidence suggests that the broker is most effective where they work as part of a team and facilitate communication. The role is most highly valued where they bring people together, challenge practice and support colleagues to develop creative packages. In so doing they make an invaluable contribution to Improving Choice.

7.10 Assessment

An assessment framework was developed in one LSC area for use across the whole of the region. It was designed to be integrated into the transition planning process and to gather sufficient information to share with post 16 learning providers so that they could assess whether they could offer a place to a learner with complex needs and put in place the support they would need to succeed in that placement.

Reference has already been made to the pilot that is being carried out in one area with young people in years 11 and 13. This has been positively received by parents and has created links, partnership and dialogue with colleges. The school has noted that it will need to make some changes to accommodate the framework in its procedures and ensure there is no duplication in paperwork. They are considering how to build in modules of work so that students can be involved in the process. That school would like to use similar paperwork for all its learners and one college has echoed that they would like to receive similar paperwork for each learner.

Because of the timescales of Improving Choice, the paperwork has had to be completed more quickly than the ideal model because people are taking up college places in the coming academic year. Most respondents feel that the paperwork works well and receiving colleges are generally pleased with the information they receive and feel that it enables them to make their assessment.

Some see the framework as time consuming and find its structure difficult or woolly. It is designed to be completed on a partnership basis and it is recognised that roles and responsibilities in completing the form need to be clarified and agreed. Those contributing to its completion require training.

If integrated into the transition planning process and completed by people who have been trained and are clear about their responsibilities then evidence so far suggests that the assessment framework will be a valuable tool in supporting transition. It would, however, be appropriate to evaluate the assessment process at a time when it has been used more fully to inform placements.



7 Themes of the Pathfinder

7.11 Staff Development

The importance of equipping staff to work with learners with more complex difficulties has been widely noted and local areas have responded in different ways to this. One area put in place a very extensive training programme focusing on different disabilities and person centred planning. Those respondents who have been through the programme and commented on it have found it very valuable in extending their expertise in working with a wide range of young people with LDD. A second established a Development and Training Unit, which has, as part of its role, undertaken a mixture of strategic planned and reactive training and supported professionals in their work with individuals. Other areas have also, in different ways, focused on addressing staff development issues relevant to the needs of their specific students. Often funding is devolved to colleges and training audits have been undertaken. One college is learning from its feeder special school, at another, learners with autism are contributing to developing staff awareness of the condition, with a focus on those who will come in contact with these learners. Some staff are undertaking qualifications, for example the Birmingham web autism course.

It does appear that ongoing programmes of staff development will continue to be necessary to ensure the adoption of inclusive practices across all providers and partners and to increase awareness of person centred approaches.

Staff development has been taken forward in different ways in one a wide range of agencies and personnel have benefited but most have focused on supporting those working with Improving Choice learners.

8 Structures for taking the work forward

There was widespread recognition of the need to take this work forward and embed it as an integral part of provision and support for learners with LDD. It fits clearly with current Government thinking and the recommendations and proposals included in 'Through Inclusion to Excellence.'

In many local areas the steering groups that have supported Improving Choice will draw to a close at the end of the current academic year. Where this is happening, most areas are giving thought to structures that will support the ongoing work and include it in broader initiatives to support young people. No clear model has emerged. One respondent noted the need for commitment at Director level and a structure that included the Directors of all relevant services, including childrens and adults, so that the Improving Choice would be developed in the context of lifelong learning. Some areas are seeking to integrate the work into the work of transition strategy groups and others looking at links with 14-19 groups.

Improving Choice recognised that planning to meet the needs of learners with LDD is essential and must take place over a period of time at strategic and individual level. Some areas have built strands into their programme to address this and the assessment framework supports longer term planning. In order to achieve effective strategic planning that focuses on putting in place arrangements to meet the holistic needs of individuals as well as groups of learners it is essential that the Improving Choice agenda is embedded into the appropriate local strategic planning structure, that the LSC as well as local authority and other partner agencies contribute to these and that predictive data sets are shared to inform the development of provision.

Many respondents noted that it is essential that the LSC itself has in place structures to support the development of the work established through Improving Choice and that, without them, there is a grave risk that progress and confidence in the regions will to address the needs of learners with more complex difficulties will be lost, with a damaging ongoing effect on learners, their families, providers and supporting agencies.† The regional steering group has noted from its own work and contact with local areas the importance of a regional structure.† Given the emerging regional structure of the LSC, it is crucial that new arrangements embed and provide support at senior level to the ongoing work which

- Manages and facilitates the development of strong local partnerships, supporting those that already exist
- Builds on the best practice from the Pathfinder and creates a culture across the region which wholeheartedly promotes the inclusion of learners with LDD
- Ensures consistent and high quality standards in working with this group of learners
- Through partnership teams, works towards obtaining multi agency commitment, including financial commitment, to addressing the holistic needs of learners with LDD
- Facilitates a regional response to developing government policies and works with agencies including East Together, The Regional Partnership, to address regional and shared issues such as low incidence disabilities.
- Develops a Centre of Excellence standard with funding support for those organisations that meet it.

9 Conclusions

- Improving Choice has facilitated huge progress in creating appropriate local post 16 provision for young people with complex needs. There is already evidence of a positive impact on young people. Partnership working has created new opportunities and those involved have demonstrated a level of dedication and commitment to making the Pathfinder a success, which goes beyond what may have been expected.
- There is a will to embed the work of the Pathfinder and a recognition that support will be necessary at a senior level from the LSC and partner agencies. There are concerns about the consequences if the support is not established to enable the work to be developed and embedded.
- The road to true inclusion is a long one and, for many institutions and organisations, requires a change of culture. Some are further along the road than others and work needs to be developed to ensure that a consistent culture and ethos is embedded across the region.
- A number of different models and examples of good practice have been developed in the lifetime of the Pathfinder and partners would benefit from an opportunity to share experiences and learn from one another.
- There are particular issues around funding streams and criteria that can form a barrier to accessing appropriate person centred packages that include education. These need to be addressed on a multi agency basis.
- Many partners are fully engaged in Improving Choice, including some schools and parents. There is, however, considerable work to be done to fully engage schools as partners as the agenda moves forward and to address the concerns of those parents who feel inadequately informed or do not accept the philosophy behind Improving Choice. This again requires multi-agency consideration of how holistic packages can be developed and the place of residential provision within those packages.
- The brokerage role has demonstrated that it has huge potential to support the development of creative approaches and packages. It would be helpful to develop a consistent regional approach to this role and disseminate learning across the East of England
- Connexions has a central role in Improving Choice which can be difficult and sometimes contentious. The PA's role needs to be clarified and developed as part of the Improving Choice team and they would benefit from training and support to effectively carry out their role.
- It is clear that Improving Choice does support the achievement of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. In addition to curriculum activities that are designed to support the young people to achieve independence skills that take account of the five outcomes, some providers are making links with agencies, for example Health, to support them in these areas and are working to develop appropriate progression routes so that young people can make a positive contribution and, as far as possible, achieve economic wellbeing. The continued development of Improving Choice on a multi-agency basis will provide a framework to ensure that these outcomes are embedded into individual programmes.
- The agenda developed through Improving Choice, that will be taken forward by 'Through Inclusion to Excellence,' is in harmony with the range of Government policies referred to earlier in this paper. 'Improving Life Chances for Disabled People' forms an overarching framework for these policies. It sets out a vision that 'disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and will be respected and included as equal members of society.' Improvement Choice supports the achievement of this vision.

10 Recommendations

Throughout the evaluation, it has been highlighted that change and development will not take place without strategic leadership in all the organisations involved - this will be essential to the successful implementation of the recommendations. In taking forward the work of the Pathfinder, all organisations will need to share responsibility for creating cultures that support learners with LDD, taking account of their vulnerability.

10.1 For the LSC

- To celebrate the success of Improving Choice and build on this to promote and take forward the inclusion of learners with more complex LDD
- To consider how it can put in place a regional structure to embed and develop the good practice established through Improving Choice.
- To make use of the Improving Choice steering group as a reference group to address shared regional issues and support local partners to be pro-active, to support the achievement of high standards and find solutions to barriers to working in partnerships that create local provision for learners with LDD
- To establish networks to share and develop good practice and facilitate the development of regional responses to identified issues, shared standards and to reach a regional agreement on roles, for example of the broker.
- To ensure that the learning from Improving Choice informs the ongoing development of provision and the regional strategy for learners with LDD.
- To ensure that the principles from Improving Choice are appropriately embedded within the new 14-19 Diploma Pathways
- To share the outcomes of the evaluation with national office and circulate the report widely to partners in Improving Choice across the region to inform future work
- To develop quality criteria for a Centre of Excellence status in consultation with providers, partner agencies, learners, parents and carers.
- To ensure a unified and transparent approach and process for the interpretation of funding criteria for learners with LDD.
- To work with partner agencies to ensure that the assessment and planning process and shared predictive data inform the development of post 16 provision for learners with LDD.
- To invite QIA to commission a support programme to raise the quality of provision and develop whole organisational approaches to including learners with LDD
- To publish the case studies to raise awareness of how young people can be included in local learning settings, and work with partners to develop ways of engaging parents in the inclusion agenda.

10 Recommendations

10.2 For Partner Agencies

- To work with the LSC to agree how the principles and processes derived from Improving Choice can be embedded in local strategic structures and support the recommendations of Through Inclusion to Excellence to ensure the development of appropriate, holistic person-centred packages of support and provision for learners with LDD.
- To work within these structures to agree, in accordance with any national guidance that may be issued, how to address issues around criteria for services and funding and to address on a multi agency basis the financial commitments necessary to make holistic individual packages of support a reality
- To ensure that the assessment and planning processes required to inform the development of post 16 provision are embedded into transition planning and that information is collated to inform strategic planning.
- To develop mechanisms of support for professionals, including Connexions PAs, to facilitate their appropriate involvement in taking forward the Through Inclusion to Excellence agenda.
- To work with schools and providers to consider how best to make use of their expertise in informing the development of inclusive opportunities in post 16 learning.
- To put in place programmes of staff development to ensure that all staff understand the principles of Through Inclusion to Excellence and inclusive approaches and that those professionals working directly with the young person adopt person centred and holistic approaches to planning, ensuring that parents and carers are fully included in the process.

10.3 For Post-16 Providers

- To work with schools and partner agencies to ensure best use of all organisations expertise in informing the development of inclusive opportunities in post 16 learning.
- To use predictive data to inform the development of provision
- To put in place programmes of staff development to ensure that all staff understand the principles of Through Inclusion to Excellence and inclusive approaches and that those professionals working directly with the young person adopt person centred and holistic approaches to planning
- To work with schools and partner agencies to ensure that processes are in place to gather information to inform planning at strategic and individual level and to be proactive in creating such processes

Appendix: The case studies

LSC area: **Norfolk**

Name of learner: **Andrew**

Course: **Skills for Working Life**

About Andrew

Andrew is in his first term at college. He used to go to a residential special school at some distance from his home, which he said he enjoyed. Before coming to college he thought about another college in Norfolk and considered going to a residential college, Toynton Hall, where he was offered a place, but he wanted to live nearer to home.

His mother has organised a house for him to live in with two other boys, supported by Social Services. The house is about eight miles from the college and Andrew says he likes living here. He travels to and fro by taxi. At home he is practising his independence, sharing the cooking and household tasks with the other boys, overseen by a support worker. His mother told me that he is teaching the others in his house to sign. He sees his mother regularly and also keeps in touch with his father. In his spare time he says he likes to chill out.

Andrew is a friendly, open young man who responded readily to questions about what he is doing at college. He has communication difficulties; he does get muddled sometimes with what he says and needs support because of this and also, for example, in being sure he knows where to go on the large college campus. Sometimes he signs to support his communication. He usually agrees with things that are said to him and his tutor said that sometimes other students tease him. She hopes during his time at college to support him to learn to say no when appropriate. However, Andrew has settled into college very well, appears to be happy and is making his own friends.

Andrew's dreams and goals

Andrew's main aim at college is to make friends and he feels he is getting on well with the other students. When he leaves college he would very much like to get a job.

About College

Andrew is on the Skills for Working Life course and is part of a group of between 8 and 10 students. He has a communication worker for two days a week and attends college for four days. The main course has been retimetabled to fit into three days so that, on the fourth day, Andrew and a couple of other learners can have 1:1 support, working on communication and reinforcing their learning. Andrew said he would like more communication support and the college's intention is that matrix funding will be used to put this in place.

Andrew was able to list the different things he was studying at college including literacy and numeracy, horticulture, animal care, managing money, cooking, sport, team building, IT and Introduction to Work. He said that he likes Maths best. His timekeeping and attendance is good.

Andrew's mother's perspective

Andrew's mother hopes that being at college will help him develop the independence skills he learnt at school. She wants him to be with a group of people who do not all have communication difficulties so that he can get used to communicating with a wider group of people than he was with at school and to recognise that he will need to make an effort to do this. She wants him to develop his potential and to be able to do something constructive with his life. She explained that Andrew has been at special schools since early childhood and has always come home at weekends. His new house will give him a base of his own near to the support of his family.

25th October 2005

Appendix: The case studies - Andrew

Update May 2006

Andrew is coming to the end of his first year at college. By and large he feels he has enjoyed his time here and has found the course to be good. He talked about trips out. One was to Lowestoft with his group, where they went to Tescos and Andrew worked on the till, baked doughnuts and croissants and had fish and chips in a restaurant. His course group had also been on a coach trip to Thrigby Hall where they had seen zoo and farm animals, but it was too wet to try the Adventure Park.

Andrew talked most about learning about farming at college. Animal care has been important for him - he talked about the cows, that he likes, and the pigs, that he doesn't like, but seems to prefer the guinea pigs and rabbits. He has had 1:1 support from a speech therapist for two days each week and has found this useful. He has carried on with his reading, which he enjoys and also followed PE, Introduction to Work and Catering courses.

Andrew feels that he has done very well this year and is proud of his achievements, in particular that he likes everything and has got a bit more confident. He has got to know college well and got to know the teachers and other staff. He was less sure about the other students, but said he has made some friends.

Andrew said that he couldn't remember any bad bits but he did talk about significant teasing which made life difficult for him. The college has now put support in place so that Andrew is never on his own and somebody is always subtly keeping an eye on him. Andrew feels he can now walk away when being teased. However, the fact of the teasing led him to talk wistfully about being at Toynton Hall, where he felt this would not happen and where it would be quieter.

Andrew continues to live with two other boys in his house and likes this. He is hoping that one of the boys he lives with will also come to college next year. He continues to come to college by taxi. Tuesday is his day off from college and he does things like going to Dereham, looking at the trains and vintage cars.

Andrew has not yet had any work experience. He would like to have a job and maybe would like to be a nurse. He likes to care for people and talked about helping people if they fall.

Andrew's mother's perspective

By and large, Andrew's mother is pleased with the progress he has made at college and feels that on the whole it has been positive. Her hope is that Andrew will learn to understand his role in society and that college will lead onto some form of employment.

The problems with bullying had been the most difficult aspect. Although some problems had been expected, this was not one of them. Having been taught to help people at school and having been in an environment where this was the norm, Andrew likes to please and had not understood what was happening. He had not told anyone about it. He is now not sure how to view people and whether he can trust them. When what was happening had become apparent, the college had taken immediate action and ensure that he is always supervised.

Andrew's mother is pleased that he has made enough progress to progress onto Year 2 and expects during that year to start to think about the future.

May 2006

Appendix: The case studies

LSC area: **Suffolk**

Name of learner: **Big Daddy**

Course: **School-based Post 16 Specialist Provision**

About Big Daddy

Big Daddy is one of three students on a College individual special programme course at a school for students with exceptional/complex needs. He had a difficult school history and came onto his current course after leaving the school. He has settled well into his course and, although he has a history of violent and aggressive behaviour at school and home, his behaviour has improved considerably over the last few months. Big Daddy is aware that he has been in trouble but feels he avoids trouble now. He is sensitive about being teased and picked on and this can make him very angry. However, he says he ignores this, if it happens, now. He described a number of incidents to illustrate this. His skills in getting on with others are improving and his teacher gave examples of how he has not reacted to difficult situations that would have caused him to respond badly in the past. He appeared to be relating well to the two other boys in his group. He is supported by a team of people including a clinical psychologist, a community nurse, an Improving Choice Transition Broker and a Connexions Personal Adviser.

Big Daddy was described as boisterous with a good sense of humour and when I met him he was cheerful, relaxed and happy to talk about his experiences and his ideas for the future. Although he found it hard to concentrate until he thought our interview was going to end, he chatted easily and told me how important it was that he had lost 4 stone in weight, explaining it was important to be fit to avoid trouble. He is tall and aware of his own strength. He likes football, biking and work. He also enjoys nightclubs and youth clubs and acknowledged that he likes to have a laugh and a drink with friends at the weekends, although this is giving rise to some concerns.

He has some very specific interests, including lawnmowers, which we talked about, and mobile phones - he was keen to show me his phone and how it operated.

Big Daddy lives with his parents, brother and sister. He is the middle child. His home is in a village where he is well-known to the local people. He has a lot of practical skills, enjoys fixing things and talked of how he could repair lawnmowers, taking them to pieces, rebuilding them and selling them. He says he learnt his skills from his father who was a car mechanic and he explained that his grandfather had built lawnmowers, although he had not been a part of this. He can fix bikes too, if he needs to. He has also done up a motorbike. He has some jobs cutting lawns and cleaning cars.

Big Daddy is good at, and enjoys, maths and, in his teacher's view, could work to GCSE level on this subject. He is good at English too but says he would only choose to read books about things he is interested in, e.g. lawnmowers and how to fix things.

Big Daddy's dreams and goals

Big Daddy is clear about his goals for the future. He wants to learn to drive, get his own place, get a job and get some more friends. He believes these things will happen. He would like his job to be mending lawnmowers. He is unsure about going to college as he feels he knows how to repair lawnmowers but recognises, and is weighing up, the benefits of getting some qualifications in this area of work.

Big Daddy told me that he has his name on a housing list and we talked about developing the skills he would need to look after himself. He acknowledged that it would be possible to learn some of these skills if he went on to college.

His Improving Choice Transition Broker is exploring a lot of options for him and has introduced him to a work placement in a project in a walled garden, where he will work, fixing lawnmowers, mowing the lawn, weeding, strimming and doing other similar jobs. He had visited the project the day before I met him and is looking forward to starting work experience here next week and doing it for a month before a decision is taken about whether it will be for the longer term.



Appendix: The case studies - Big Daddy

About college

The course Big Daddy is on is funded through a local College but is based off the college site at a School. It is hoped that, with the support of Improving Choice, he will be able to integrate into a college-based course in the next academic year and build on the very real progress he is making on his current course.

Big Daddy enjoys the course he is on, particularly because of the people. He comes by taxi every day arriving at 10.30 or 11 and has a timetable which includes literacy and numeracy, IT, work experience, careers planning and preparing for employment, recreation and independent living skills. For Big Daddy, the main point of his course is to prepare for work. The only thing he doesn't like is going to the library once a week.

Big Daddy's father's perspective

Big Daddy's father believes that managing his behaviour is the most important thing for him and has to come first. He feels he needs to develop independent living and social skills so that he can get through life as best he can. He is supportive of a move to college but does not expect great academic achievements.

11 November 2005

Update, May 2006

Big Daddy has made excellent progress during since we met in the Autumn term. He has continued with his work experience at the Walled Garden, going there once a week. He enjoys being out in the fresh air, digging, cutting the lawns and repairing lawnmowers. He has also started on a second work experience placement at a garage, where he will be working on old Volvos. He is supported on both placements by a member of staff from school.

His informal programme at school also includes regular reading and discussion of daily papers (the Independent or the Guardian) and reading novels. He and his group have currently moved on to *Of Mice and Men*. Bike rides are a favourite activity, following some very difficult routes.

Big Daddy keeps the accounts for the tea money and his teacher believes he has the potential to take GCSE in Maths in the longer term.

Big Daddy's journey from home is a long one but he now comes independently one day a week, riding his bike to his local station, catching the train to the station local to his school and then cycling to school. This is to increase to two days a week.

Big Daddy has a range of short, medium and long term goals for his programme. These include reducing his impulsiveness and doing work experience, gaining financial independence and moving into employment. He seems to be on course to achieve his goals. He believes he has more control over his behaviour and certainly coped well with the news that his work experience was to be cancelled that afternoon because of staff sickness, despite the fact that he had brought his toolbox in with him. He is learning some lessons the hard way, for example not receiving his EMA when he didn't attend for two hours one day.

Out of school, big Daddy leads a busy life. He buys old lawnmowers from the tip and does them up to sell, through the newspaper or outside his door. He says he regards himself as a Dellboy character, but one who sells good things not bad. He gets a great deal of satisfaction from stripping down the engines, cleaning and replacing parts and rebuilding them. He also has a gardening job, cleans cars and enjoys playing with his two year old nephew. He still goes clubbing once or twice a week and talked about drinking, recognising that this can be a problem but feeling he is getting control over it - his teacher also felt this to be true.

Appendix: The case studies - Big Daddy

Future Plans

Big Daddy will finish his course at school at the end of this term and plans to go to Otley College on a motor engineering course. While he had some reservations about college in the autumn, he is now full of enthusiasm and plans a 4-5 year programme leading to qualifications for employment. He has visited the college, had a trial day and been offered a place. The details of his support are being negotiated by his Improving Choice broker. When he went to the college he had to do a test, which he was not expecting, but did well. He now can't wait to start - in fact Big Daddy liked the college so much that he knocked on the Principal's door and told him how good he thought it was.

Big Daddy's father's views

Big Daddy's father feels that the progress he has made has been remarkable. He is doing well, is more mature and recognises social boundaries. He is optimistic about his place at Otley College, but recognises that he will need ongoing 1:1 support. He wants the course to prepare him for work and help him learn more about mechanics. He very much hopes that the course will lead to employment and is anxious and concerned that Big Daddy is not disappointed at the end of his course - as has happened in the past. There are some issues over transport to college, but the Improving Choice broker is working on these.

Overall, Big Daddys father feels that he has achieved more than he had ever believed possible.

18 May 2006

Appendix: The case studies

LSC area: **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**

Name of learner: **Jim**

Course: **Pathfinder Course**

About Jim

Jim is a calm, well-behaved and mild-natured young man who is in his first term at College. He used to go to a local special school. He liked it there, but thinks that college is better. He usually communicates with yes and no, but when interested in something will say more. Symbols and pictures help him communicate and make choices. He is working just below entry level. He does many things in a routine manner, but since he has been at college, his tutor has noticed that some things are beginning to make him laugh.

Jim enjoys doing jigsaws and when I met him was engrossed in a very complicated puzzle which he was completing with no reference to the picture. He didn't want to say much but was happy to indicate what he liked and didn't like. His favourite activity at college is golf. The students go once a week to the driving range and his tutor says he has a very nice swing. He also enjoys painting, drawing and swimming.

Jim moved into a house with four other young people in September and is living there with support. One of the young people went to the same school as him. He has regular contact with his family, and his dog. He says he likes it at his new house. He helps with the housework and likes to eat pasta. He likes videos and goes to the cinema.

Jim's dreams and goals

Jim wasn't able to say very much about his goals and his tutor felt that thinking about this would be an area where he would need a lot of support. She feels that the goals for him are to achieve as much independence as possible and that he would benefit from the opportunity to try out different activities to see what he likes doing. It is intended to introduce him to a Social Firm in due course

About college

Jim is doing the Mencap Essential Skills course. His timetable includes communication skills, personal care, art, literacy and numeracy, ICT, independent travel, work related learning and daily living skills. The students go to an Olympic gym, aromatherapy sessions and a spa at a day centre.

He is one of a group of five learners on a course established as part of the Improving Choice Initiative. There are three staff working with the group, two of whom are seconded from his old School. This has eased the transition for the young people and their expertise in working with young people with autism is crucial. The group is never left unattended but are slowly beginning to go some places in the college on their own.

Jim has done work experience, gardening in a sheltered environment near the college and enjoyed this. He has also had work experience, with support, on a golf range. This was a very good experience for him.

Jim's mother's perspective

Jim's mother has done a huge amount of work in exploring options for him and to support the development of the course. She was very keen for Jim to have the opportunity to go onto further education like his brother. She wanted him to be with young people and continue his learning rather than go to a day centre. She had visited and considered many different types of provision for Jim, but until this course was developed, felt there was nothing at all suitable for him in the county. She is very clear that he needs a special kind of person who understands autism to work with him to support and reinforce his learning.

Appendix: The case studies - Jim

She wants him to keep on with his literacy and numeracy, to have the opportunity for sporting activities and to begin programmes that will continue into his adult life, developing lifeskills and the skills for supported work.

Jim's mother is very pleased with the way in which the provision at College is developing, and is concerned only that staff development and training is put in place to develop expertise in working with young people with autism and that the level of staff support is sustained.

9th November 2005

Update June 06

Jim is happy and settled at college. He seems relaxed and clearly enjoys being there and in particular enjoys going out on the trips he makes with his group. He likes going on the bus and the train and has been to St Ives, St Neots and London recently. The trips always have a purpose - in London he visited a museum and, with his group, has been shopping for his lunch. He is pleased that he now has a bus pass.

Jim has two work experience placements, which he enjoys. One is at a nursery where his tasks include doing the watering and making hanging baskets. He made one hanging basket for his mother, all in blue colours. His second placement is at a nature reserve where his special job is to help feed the animals. He has helped to mend a fence.

Jim is always supported on his work experience. He needs the reassurance that somebody is there and needs to be kept busy and on task. Given this, he does very well.

Jim is not so keen on reading and writing - he is more of an outdoor person and is better with practical work. Literacy and numeracy are embedded in other aspects of his course. He does have his own computer that he can set up and a camera that he is learning to use. He still enjoys his jigsaws and copes well with the fact that he sometimes has to put them away before they are completed because of other students. He rarely gets angry but has a certain look!

He knows his way around college and can take messages. He is keen to help and is fascinated with motorbikes..

Jim continues to live in a house with four friends, sharing the household tasks including cooking and vacuuming. His support worker said he is brilliant at cooking and making sandwiches.

Future Plans

Jim will stay at college next year, reinforcing the skills he is developing. It is hoped that he will have a third work placement in addition to the two he now has. There will be a focus on going out, using a traffic light system based on photographs of the local area to develop skills.

Jim is supported in his planning by Connexions and Speaking Up. He had recently said that he would like to work in Tesco's.

Jim's Mother's Perspective

Jim's mother is very pleased with the way things have gone, feeling that Jim has done quite well, continuing with the kind of work he was doing at school. A key factor in the success has been the fact that staff were seconded from his previous school - this helped, provided continuity and supported college staff develop their understanding of autism.

Jim's mother hopes that, beyond college, his work experience placements will lead to opportunities that can build into a package of purposeful activities that will fit in with his ongoing supported living.

She does have her concerns about the coming year, in particular that students with more complex and difficult behaviours may be enrolled onto the course. Aggressive behaviour would be frightening for Jim. The college feels they would have strategies in place to ensure that any such behaviour did not impact on the rest of the group. She is also aware that he will continue to need ongoing support, including on work experience, and continuity of staffing. She is pleased that one of the seconded staff is staying on to provide this.

Appendix: The case studies

LSC area: **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**

Name of learner: **Kelly**

Course: **Improving Choices**

About Kelly

Kelly is a cheerful young woman who has a good sense of humour. She usually communicates by choosing between yes and no or between two words on cards. She very much enjoys working with words and is very capable at doing this. She can order months and days of the week and pick out peoples birthdays. She can recognise initial letters of words. She has a good understanding of what is going on around her, but her level of understanding can sometimes be overlooked. Kelly doesn't like change in people and takes some time to adjust to new people. She is very clear about her likes and dislikes and will work very well with somebody she likes, but not with somebody she doesn't like.

Kelly does walk, but because she is very vulnerable on her feet and has broken some bones, she tends to use a wheelchair to get around. She needs somebody to be with her at all times and if she is walking, really needs two people. Kelly has Angelman's Syndrome; part of this syndrome means that she adopts habits, for example chewing or blowing raspberries, that may last for a short period of time before changing to a new one.

Kelly doesn't eat much at school, but does enjoy her jelly and custard. She makes up for eating little at school when she gets home.

Kelly lives with her parents and brother. She likes to watch television and said she liked East Enders. She loves swimming and goes to the cinema sometimes, or to the pub. She is sociable, enjoys her friend's company and especially likes boys. She is a great people watcher and pays attention to conversations.

Kelly's dreams and goals

It was not really possible to establish Kelly's views for the future. The plan is that, at the end of the current year, she will go full-time to college, which she very much enjoys

About college

Kelly is on a transition year during which she is spending three days a week at school and two at college. She is part of a 'Level A' group of six students on a course called Improving Choices. Five of the six went to a local special school. She has 1:1 support and her key support worker is based at college but also comes into school with her, providing continuity.

Kelly's mother and school and college staff all agree that she loves going to college. Her timetable includes arts and crafts and science. She wasn't very enthusiastic about these subjects but clearly loves music and dancing, which is also part of her college curriculum. Currently, in crafts she is working with her learning support assistant, for example picking out beads for necklaces and contributing to making address books and Christmas cards.

The college is working with the school and developing the Individual Education Plan she has at school and is developing her word recognition. They have ordered a touch screen computer for her that will enable them to make up their own worksheets with pictures and words. The computer will 'talk' and it will be possible to build up sentences so that Kelly will be able to make choices and state them.

Her tutor is keen to develop Kelly's skills as far as possible and recognises that they will need more resources - they are finding out what as they go along. They are aware that the level of her ability may be underestimated and note that she can recognise some coins and colours. They have noted that she likes to put things in her mouth and are considering how to incorporate taste into her programme. They want her to be able to join in with the other students as much as possible.

She uses the coffee shop and refectory with the rest of her group and enjoys this.

Her tutor advised that Circles is working with Kelly to develop social activities.

Appendix: The case studies - Kelly

Kelly's mother's perspective

Kelly's mother wants Kelly to be somewhere she can keep learning and building on the skills she has learnt at school. She feels that Kelly loves college and recognises that this is partly because she likes her 1:1 support worker.

She expects Kelly to go to college full time next September - this might have happened this year if it had been possible to arrange something earlier. Kelly's mother feels that the current structure of the course, spending part of the week at school and part at college is right because she needs a gradual transition into college.

Kelly's mother feels that she is very happy with her programme, so she is also happy.

21st November 05

Update June 2006

Kelly is very happy indeed at college. She confirmed this using her yes/no word cards, big smiles and clear body language. She was particularly happy, and hugging people a lot, on this particular day because a friend who isn't usually there and one of her teaching assistants whom she particularly likes were both in her group. Kelly confirmed that she likes being with her friends at college, likes learning, massage and dancing, but not art. She also says she works hard at college.

Kelly is very interested in what is going on around her and learns from other people's conversations and confirms with her yes/no cards what she has heard. She does this accurately. A communication grid with a voice had been obtained for Kelly, but she wouldn't use it. She does not like ICT and enjoys using her word cards. She can communicate very well. Her level of involvement in learning depends on her concentration and whether she is being diverted by what is happening around her.

Kelly is funded at G# which covers the 1:1 (and 1:2 for aspects of her personal care) support she needs.

Future Plans

Kelly will continue to attend college next year, this time on a full-time (3 days per week) course. Her tutor says that her course will include working in a shop that the college will be opening for next year, carrying on with the cafe (which provides, in a classroom, coffees, teas and cakes at break for staff) community and leisure, with some sessions of swimming at her old School and Daily Living Skills. On the fourth day it is hoped that she will be able to use Direct Payments to employ somebody (it is hoped that this will be her current teaching assistant) to undertake leisure activities with her. The fifth day is still to be planned but her mother says she is happy for her to be at home if necessary on this day.

Kelly's mother's perspective

Kelly's mother is pleased that Kelly is so happy at college. She has loved going from day one. She is not sure how much she is learning, or whether she gets as much input as she did at school, but feels that the fact that she is happy is most important. She knows how much Kelly loves to use her word cards and recognises the role of the school based teaching assistant in encouraging staff at the college to use them.

Sometimes there have been problems at college with organisation, for example if her support worker is ill there are no back up plans and she may be asked to keep Kelly at home or to come in and collect her. She would like more communication and feels that the college can be negative and focus on barriers.

Kelly's mother has been pleased with the support she has had from Circles in terms of planning and producing information to share with people, but arranging to put plans into practice has been difficult. There was a very positive meeting identifying what Kelly would like to do but because it wasn't yet clear exactly when she would go into college, it hasn't been possible to sort out the support she wants to get through Direct Payments. Last minute changes to the plans for next year's timetable have been frustrating for the college staff too and have made planning difficult, as has a lack of clarity about responsibilities and time to organise a whole programme.

15th June 06

Appendix: The case studies

LSC area: Hertfordshire

Name of learner: Michelle

Course: Full time Entry Level Studies Course

About Michelle

Michelle used to go to a special school in Essex, travelling there and back each day. She said she didn't like school much, but her mother said she was OK once she was there. She did enjoy her link course at Writtle College, working with animals and doing horticulture. She thought that her teachers were OK and she had found it a little bit hard to leave.

Michelle can read and write well and enjoys and is clever at making things. She has made a number of items including a bird box and a boot jack. Michelle likes to be generous and give some of the things she makes away.

Her favourite activity is painting and her mum showed me one of her carefully designed and very detailed, patterned pictures. She couldn't think of much she didn't like, apart from cooking, although her mum felt she did quite like this.

Michelle also talked about being naughty some times, especially in the mornings. She likes a clear routine and for things to happen at the planned time, so that, for example, she didn't want to stay late in the evening at her father's because she would miss her shower time.

Michelle said she is a bit nervous about going to college, although she has already started to make friends with some of the students. She heard about the college through her school. She had also considered another local college, but they were not able to offer a full time course or put the additional support she will need in place. The college she is attending was prepared to offer her a place on a full-time course and to put 1:1 support in place. They are offering a course that will develop her social skills and independence and enable her to do some horticulture and work with animals. Michelle's mother feels the staff ratio is good and was impressed that, when they visited, everybody seemed to know Michelle.

Michelle's dreams and goals

Michelle wants to do lots of work at college and says she is a hard worker.

She wants to buy her own lunch because a packed lunch is babyish and she wants to make friends.

She wants to have 1:1 support at college; she isn't sure what her helper will do, but knows she needs her support.

She would like a laptop to do her homework.

When she leaves college she wants to work in a church; she would like to be a vicar. Her mother says she likes the peace and quiet she finds in church and pointed out that the painting she had shown me was reminiscent of a stained glass window. Also the vicar lets her ring the bell at church. Michelle sees herself living at home - she hasn't yet stayed away from home overnight, except for one night when she went to stay with her dad and didn't sleep at all.

About college

Michelle will join the full time Entry Level Studies course at college. This case study was completed before she started on her course and it had not been possible to talk to her course tutor. However, LSC Matrix funding had been agreed to provide emotional support and structure and to enable Michelle to have 1:1 support at all times both in and between sessions and at break and lunch times.

Appendix: The case studies - Michelle

Michelle's mother's perspective

Michelle has missed the first week at college. Her mother told me that this is because the funding for the extra support she will need had only been agreed the previous Friday. Michelle is bored and ready for something to do. People have been employed to provide 1:1 support to Michelle, but they needed time to be brought up to date before she takes up her place.

Her transition has not gone smoothly. Transport is causing particular concerns. The family had asked for the same taxi company to be used that had taken her to school for the last four years. This continuity would have helped Michelle cope with the transition. However, this hasn't happened and Michelle will have to go with a new company and a new escort. The escort has agreed to come and meet Michelle so that she will have met him before the first journey. So far, the family hasn't had any formal confirmation that transport arrangements are in place. Michelle's mum has spent a day on the phone trying to sort the arrangements out.

Michelle has been to the college to enrol. Another problem relates to the student card; Michelle needs to have a photo taken at the college for the card. The queues were too long for her to cope with while they were there and she doesn't like having her photo taken.

It has been hard to contact Michelle's Personal Adviser to get help to sort the problems out.

Michelle's mother hopes that the course at college will build on the progress she made at school and develop her independence so that she can in the future live with support, which she will always need, in the community. She hopes that she will learn the skills to get a job. Michelle has not had a social worker for the last five or six years, when the family was told that she no longer needed one and that any future problems would be dealt with by a duty officer.

23 September 2005

Update May 2006

The year has not been an easy one for Michelle but after some difficult times, she is now much more settled in college. When I visited her, she greeted me with a broad and happy smile. She was working with her group, reviewing progress and was able to say that, when she first started at college she;

- Didn't like new things
- Didn't like going to the canteen
- Didn't know many people

But now she says she;

- Will try new things
- Walks to the refectory
- Knows people and they are nice and friendly.

Despite the fact that she doesn't like eating with people, she did walk to the canteen with her group. Her group was going to Butlins for a few days soon and Michelle was anxious to join them for a day. Arrangements have been made for her to do this.

Most of the information about Michelle's progress during the year has been gathered from her tutor and mother.

It was acknowledged at the college that Michelle's transition time was too short and initially things had been difficult for her. She was also dealing with some difficult personal circumstances - for example, she is aware that her mother is going into hospital and is concerned about this. To try to help Michelle, staff from the college worked with her mother, visiting at home to work with the family to deal with some of the problems she was facing. Working together helped in finding out some of the reasons for her behaviours and thus helped address them.

One main problem related to her transport. The taxi that was organised initially was not the one that had taken her to school. The drivers/escort did not have enough expertise to support Michelle and there were difficulties in persuading her to get into and out of the taxi. This eventually resulted in a crisis after which the taxi was changed with very positive outcomes for Michelle.

Appendix: The case studies - Michelle

Now she is much more positive. She goes into more sessions and writes about them. She is pushing the boundaries about what she will take part in. Even if she doesn't go into a session, she is a lot more positive. She has always taken part in Community Skills where they plan and do different things - going to the cinema, to a pub or swimming. It is not clear why Michelle doesn't want to do some things - sometimes she will be very positive about an activity but then say 'but I am not going.'

Michelle still enjoys churches, the smell, the quietness and the stained glass windows and she would like to do some work experience bell-ringing. Her mother understands that work experience has been arranged for her at the Cathedral. It is clear that she wants to go to work and has strengths as a gardener. She now has a social worker, who is experienced in working with people with autism and, while there is nothing ready-made for her, her mother is confident that the social worker will be able to put together a package that will include work placements.

Michelle has been supported by a team of people to avoid the risk of creating dependency on one person. There is a complex rota of support Michelle knows who will be with her when she is not in lessons, but they move away in class. A schedule has been set up for her that describes what will happen at different stages of the day, starting from walking from the taxi into reception. Michelle crosses off what she does and the staff focus with her on the positives. She takes this home to share with her mother. She has a clear sense of what has worked well and knows when she has had a good day. The staff tell her very specifically what she has done well.

In the college's view, Michelle has taught them a great deal. The plan is that she will stay for a further year and during this year planning will take place for her future placement.

Michelle's mother's perspective

Michelle's mother is more than pleased at how things are going. She feels that Michelle has been progressing in leaps and bounds and that the staff have been brilliant. Sorting out the transport had been key and Michelle is now much happier. Michelle's mother felt she had to fight for this, but she is used to fighting to get what is right for Michelle. Michelle is very excited about her trip to Butlins. She still does have her moments, for example there may be tears when she leaves in the morning, but that is part of Michelle. She is fine by the time she gets to the end of the road.

EMA has now been organised for Michelle. Her social worker is planning for her place after college. While Michelle's mother was not happy with how her initial transition to college was organised and the support she got at that stage, she is now very happy with her progress.

June 2006

Appendix: The case studies

LSC area: **Essex**

Name of learner: **Trudi**

Course: **Starting Out**

About Trudi

Trudi has just started her course at college. She used to go to a special school in Essex. She had some special friends there but told me she didn't really like the lessons and was ready to leave and come to college.

Before choosing this college she had visited Lord Mayor Treloar, a specialist residential college, and liked some things about it but did not want to move away from home.

Trudi likes listening to music and watching television. She particularly enjoys Songs of Praise. She likes going out and goes to the pub at weekends. She likes the animals she has at home - two dogs, chickens and rabbits. Trudi is the oldest of four children - she has two brothers and a sister. She enjoys going on holiday and has been to Brighton.

Trudi has used a chameleon to communicate but it kept breaking down and this has been very frustrating for her. She will be getting a new communication aid called Future Pad very soon, and this is much more robust. She communicated easily today, with nods and shakes of her head, some prompts and the help of her learning support assistant. She wanted to tell me one other thing she liked doing, but I couldn't understand and we will talk about this next time we meet when she has her new communication board.

Trudi's dreams and goals

We talked about some of the things Trudi might like to achieve at college. She would like to learn to be more independent but isn't sure she will be able to do this. We talked about this and her learning support assistant suggested that the new lighter head controls she is getting on her wheelchair will be a help. She would also like to get some qualifications but had her doubts about whether she would. We talked about how her new communication board would help her.

She would like to learn about working with children and especially wants to be with her friends and to make more friends. Trudi is a sociable young woman who has included herself well in the student group.

Trudi likes to take things one step at a time and doesn't want to think too much about what her next steps will be after college. However, in the longer term, she doesn't feel she wants to get a job but she would like to learn to manage her own care and tell people what help she wants. She is a family girl, and sees herself living with her family in the future.

About college

Before she started full time at college, Trudi did a link course one day a week from her school to help her get used to college. Despite this, she finds attendance for five days a week tiring. She feels she works hard at college but told me she did not always enjoy hard work!

Trudi is one of eight students on the Starting Out course. This is a full time 25 hour course including the ASDAN award, Towards Independence and literacy and numeracy courses, which are embedded in the curriculum. It is a one year course and there are a number of different college options for her at the end of this year. When her new communication board arrives, she will have access to Microsoft Word and the college will be able to better assess her ability level.

Trudi has 1:1 support all the time. She is funded at G#5 on the LSC funding matrix and this has provided the Future Pad and a hoist, which is accommodated in the medical room. Improving Choice funding has covered staff training in the use of the hoist and salary costs for a member of staff to support Trudi's transition to college. The course tutor also hopes to do some training on care values. The local authority funds her transport to college with an escort.



Appendix: The case studies - Trudi

Trudi's family's perspective

For Trudi's father academic success is not an expectation. His main hope is that she will develop her social skills while at college and have the chance to join in with other people, both disabled and able bodied.

23 September 2005

Update May 2006

Trudi's course this year has included literacy and numeracy, lifeskills, citizenship, games and working skills. The group goes out quite a lot and have done a survey of restaurants, which Trudi enjoyed. She also joins college trips, using either her taxi or the college minibus. She has done well, achieving the qualifications she felt she would not - in fact there is a general consensus that the course has been too easy for her, and sometimes Trudi has been bored.

In addition to succeeding on her course, she feels she has developed her independence skills. This has been helped by her new wheelchair which converts from manual to electric and which she can control with a headswitch. She is now able to get around on her own, joining her friends and going places in breaktimes without the support of her teaching assistant, participating independently in social activities and taking her own decisions about where she will go. She has made friends and goes out with them sometimes outside of college.

She has her new communication board, also controlled by a headswitch. However, she has not had much training on how to use it and it is complex and slow and she prefers not to use it. The college have negotiated with a local special school and a member of their staff has been in once to see Trudi and will work on the board to make it more personal to Trudi, reprogramming or looking at the need for new software.

Trudi is very good at communicating without her board with nods and shakes of her head and facial expressions.

Trudi found it hard when her first teaching assistant, with whom she had developed a very close relationship left. She has two assistants now - and it is felt that this is more appropriate. She keeps in touch with her first assistant, currently following her progress on a holiday

abroad. She is very much a part of the college group - the other students look out for her.

Plans for the Future

Next year Trudi will move onto the Bridge course, which is an entry level course. She will continue to have individualised support and the nature of the support she will have to help her access the curriculum is currently being discussed. Trudi wants to do something that is not so easy.

Trudi still does not want to think beyond the near future. She does still feel that she wants to manage her own care and live at home with her family. She has recently had a review and it was agreed that she does need a person centred lifeplan and arrangements for developing this will be put in place. She will also have the opportunity to see a Connexions personal adviser.

She is to have four weeks respite care over the summer - this is a new step for Trudi so she seemed a little apprehensive.

Trudi's mother's views

Trudi's mother is very pleased with her progress at college. She knows that Trudi does have her unhappy moments but recognises that things cant be perfect all the time. She has been very impressed with the college and how they have provided for Trudi. She goes into classes sometimes and sees how interesting staff make the lessons.

She is concerned that Trudi is not making good use of her communication board and feels she needs to be encouraged with this. She recognises that because Trudi is so good at communicating without it she needs a lot of motivating to use the board. She is happy with the plans for her to go onto the more advanced course next year.

Trudi's mother has been a key partner in the success of her placement at college. She has worked with staff at the college, for example in researching communication aids, and her input has been greatly valued by the course tutor.

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Margaret Palmer, July 2006



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