

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

Determined to Succeed and Young People at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) February –October 2005 Part of the National Evaluation of Determined to Succeed – Phase 1

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Determined to Succeed (DtS) is a strategic initiative which aims to make a major contribution to the creation of an enterprise culture and economic growth. Following the recommendations of the Review of Education for Work and Enterprise set up in September 2001 the Scottish Executive set out its Determined to Succeed (DtS): Enterprise in Education (EinE) strategy. The results reported here are key findings from a small-scale qualitative study carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) between February 2005 and October 2005 which examined the potential contribution of DtS to improving the outcomes of young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) in both mainstream and non-mainstream settings. This research constitutes an additional element of phase 1 of the national evaluation of DtS, which is published separately.

Main Findings

- Young people at risk of becoming disaffected from education are not a homogeneous group, but include a variety of individuals with different and sometimes complex support needs. Provision needs to be tailored to their needs and allow participants to take ownership of the activities they engage in
- The skills and qualities of project staff are key to re-engaging, motivating and helping disaffected young people to progress
- DtS had enabled some local authorities to expand, or initiate, new activities and projects aimed at young people at risk of becoming disaffected. Others were planning to put more emphasis on such provision in the future
- Four out of eight authorities were found to have established joined-up approaches to addressing the issues of the “at risk” group
- DtS was thought to have had an impact on many of the case study providers delivering services to the “at risk” group, having increased the demand for their services and provided additional funding to support activities
- A range of positive outcomes for young people were identified by both the provider staff and the participants interviewed, including the achievement of qualifications, personal development, the development of skills and impacts on future choices
- The main challenges identified in setting up relevant provision included problems in securing adequate long term funding, a lack of facilities and resources, and difficulties gaining credibility with other organisations.

Background

Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and at risk of becoming economically and socially excluded have an increasingly prominent place on the policy-making agenda in Scotland. Headline figures from the Scottish Labour Force Survey indicate that there are some 35,000 young people in Scotland who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Reducing this proportion is one of the Executive's Closing the Opportunity Gap targets.

Determined to Succeed (DtS) is a £86 million Scottish Executive strategy which aims to prepare all young people for the world of work through enterprising and entrepreneurial learning, work-based vocational learning and appropriately focused career education. DtS can add value to wider strategies not only through the behaviours it promotes, but also because of its aspirations to embed enterprising teaching and learning practices into mainstream and non-mainstream settings.

The NEET issue is a complex one, and DtS is not intended to be the primary means of addressing NEET. It does, however, form part of a wide range of policies which have the potential to improve outcomes for all young people – including those who are at risk of becoming NEET.

About the study

The overall aim of this study was to identify the characteristics of effective practice in the delivery of activities engendered by DtS to young people at risk of becoming NEET. This was done through exploring existing evidence on good practice and exploring the range of activities taking place in local authorities as a result of DtS.

The study adopted a qualitative methodology focussing on eight local authorities. Across these eight areas, interviews were conducted with:

- six Directors of Education (or their Deputies)
- eleven local authority staff with responsibility for overseeing and developing strategies relevant to young people at risk of becoming NEET
- eighteen provider staff involved in delivering projects or programmes to the target group
- twenty four young people involved in such projects or programmes.

The NFER research team also drew on evidence from the wider phase 1 evaluation of DtS which is published

separately, including interviews with DtS coordinators in all 32 LAs and 61 school staff across 18 schools. The NFER research team also carried out a focused review of recent literature in order to draw out key messages relating to good practice in the delivery of activities aimed at disaffected young people/those at risk of becoming NEET.

Key findings of the research

Findings from the literature

A review of previous research and good practice guides related to the provision of learning activities targeted at disaffected young people indicated that projects need to offer activities which are meaningful and relevant to the target group and which they can participate in on a voluntary basis. It also showed that projects which are more likely to keep disaffected young people engaged give them ownership, provide an alternative learning environment from school, and address the needs of the individuals in a holistic way.

The review showed that the skills and qualities of project staff are key to re-engaging, motivating and helping disaffected young people to progress. To this end, they need appropriate support and training to achieve maximum impact. Previous evaluations have also shown that projects are more likely to achieve and sustain successful outcomes which set clear targets, offer opportunities of recognising young people's achievements, work together with other agencies and support participants in their transitions into other education, training or employment options.

The Local Authority perspective

Three of the eight authorities contacted as part of this study had specific DtS targets relating to the "at risk" group, while two others had no targets but had implemented some activities as part of DtS aimed at disaffected young people. Six authorities reported that they had implemented at least some new activities aimed at the "at risk" group in response to DtS. Most of these were aimed at expanding vocational learning opportunities. Authorities which reported higher levels of young people "at risk" of becoming NEET were more likely to have implemented targets or activities aimed at the target group in response to DtS.

Responsibility for monitoring and addressing the needs of the target group were shared by a variety of organisations and agencies across the eight local authorities. Half of them appeared to have established joined-up approaches to addressing the issues of the "at risk" group. Interviewees in three of the eight authorities contacted were aware of formal LA-wide systems for identifying and monitoring young people deemed to be "at risk" of becoming NEET.

Case study findings – Provider and young people’s perspective

About half of the projects visited were specifically targeted and designed for young people in the “at risk” group. The remaining projects were not intended to be solely targeted at these young people, although it was perceived that these particular pupils would benefit most from the provision. Young people were generally recruited onto projects through schools. Providers were offering a range of types of provision, including alternative curriculum projects, vocational education programmes and pupil support programmes. Although awareness of the DtS strategy was relatively low among provider staff, for many providers, DtS was thought to have impacted directly on their provision for the “at risk” group.

Most of the providers had established links with other organisations, most commonly to help with the delivery of their provision, to provide additional support to young people, and to help with the recruitment of participants. Providers were generally satisfied with the support they received from their local authority, although a few interviewees reported that they would like more recognition, and further promotion of their work.

Providers identified a range of challenges that they had encountered in setting up and running provision for young people in the “at risk” group. These included problems in securing adequate funding, a lack of facilities and resources and difficulties gaining credibility with other organisations.

Although all of the providers implemented some form of individual-level monitoring of participants’ attendance and behaviour, formal evaluation and review of their provision were less common. A range of outcomes for young people were identified by both the provider staff and the participants interviewed, including the achievement of qualifications, personal development, the development of skills and impacts on future choices.

Factors, such as learning in a different environment, receiving one-to-one support and having the opportunity to build positive relationships with adults were perceived to facilitate successful outcomes for young people. The home backgrounds and personal circumstances of young people were identified as the main barriers to the achievement of successful outcomes.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

This study has confirmed many of the findings of previous research relating to good practice in the delivery of projects

and activities for young people at risk of becoming NEET. It has also shown that the “at risk” group is not homogeneous and that it includes young people with a variety of, and at times complex, support needs which have to be addressed in different ways.

The study has shown that even though the DtS strategy did not contain any specific recommendation relating to the “at risk” group, it had at the time of the study enabled some authorities to expand, and in some cases initiate, new provision. However, this was not the case in all local authorities. This appeared to be linked with various factors. Some authorities were still at an early implementation stage and had focused most of their resources on building up DtS strategic and operational structures. There was evidence that some of these local authorities were planning to put more emphasis on addressing the needs of young people “at risk” of becoming NEET in subsequent years. In other areas, this lack of focus was linked with a view that DtS activities should be offered to all pupils and not just to the disaffected ones. However, some of these authorities contended that even though not targeted at them, many of the DtS-funded activities or curricular changes were particularly suitable or beneficial for the “at risk” group.

Recommendations

Provision aimed at the “at risk” group needs to be both flexible and diverse. It cannot rely on one type of provider alone, but should involve a variety of organisations and agencies which have the skills and expertise to address young people’s needs in a professional way. Schools, providers and other agencies should work closely together to provide a continuous and consistent service to this vulnerable group of young people.

The Scottish Executive may wish to consider working with local authorities to establish more joined-up approaches and strategies for monitoring and addressing the needs of the “at risk” group before and after leaving school.

The Scottish Executive may want to consider the extent to which all LAs should be required to develop DtS actions to implement specific provision aimed at young people at risk of becoming NEET. It may also consider putting in place additional support structures for those LAs with less experience or expertise in this area.

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The research report “Determined to Succeed and Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET”, which is summarised in this research findings, is available on the Scottish Executive Social Research website at: www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

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