

**EMERGING INSIGHTS INTO NEET PREVENTATIVE
WORK ACROSS TYNE AND WEAR**



**Flexible Curriculum 2 (FCP2)
14-19 Progression and Employability**

**ONE Northeast Funded Learning and Skills Project
Commissioned by TyneWearPartnership (TWP)
through
Tyne and Wear Learning Partnership**

**Final Evaluation Report
August 2008**

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Acknowledgements

Our thanks and appreciation go to Henry Edwards (Project Manager), Steve Young (Project Administrator) and the FCP2 Area Managers (Melanie Bear, Dave Hunt, Peter McKenna and June Williams) not only for arranging the interviews but also for providing data. Thanks also go to other colleagues involved in the management and delivery of FCP provision, who provided valuable time for interviews and in the construction of case studies.

Thanks are also due to representatives of the Learning and Skills Council (North East Region), TyneWearPartnership (TWP) and One North East (ONE) for sparing the time to give us their valuable feedback and input on emerging themes during the Away Day. Finally, a big thank you is due to the Progression Workers, learners and other management and delivery staff in schools, FE colleges and WBLPs for giving up their time to share their views and experiences of FCP2.

FCP2 – Project Summary

The Flexible Curriculum Programme 2 (FCP2) project was funded by the regional development agency (ONE) through its Tyne and Wear commissioning arm (TWP). It operated between 2005 and 2008 (three learning years). It built upon and extended the activities of Flexible Curriculum Programme 1 (FCP1) 2003-2005.

The project aimed to break down artificial barriers between academic and vocational learning with a specific remit to improve progression opportunities and pathways for young people at age 16. Single programme funding was used to provide improved and more accessible vocational progression routes over and above those already in place and to equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed to enable them to progress into further learning and/or employment.

Flexible vocational and occupational learning was undertaken at a variety of establishments including work based learning providers (wblp's), colleges of further education (CFE), secondary schools, Connexions and other statutory, voluntary and community organisations, employer premises etc.

Activity was organised according to three themes:

1. Vocational learning provision and progression pathways – Strand 1
2. Engagement of marginalised and disaffected learners – Strand 2
3. Support for progression (progression workers) – Strand 3

Mini-projects were designed by 14-19 partnerships at local authority level, to address local needs in relation to the three themes with a minimum of 10% expenditure for each strand. Learning occurred at over 50 venues across the sub-region and a very large number of organisations partners were responsible, individually or collectively for the defrayment of funding.

Gateshead Council – through its 14-19 team undertook a co-ordination role, managed the project as a whole and acted as the accountable body.

Foreword by Chair of Tyne and Wear Lifelong Learning Partnership

This evaluation marks the end of five years of successful collaboration between the LAs of Tyne and Wear in the delivery of the Flexible Curriculum Programme. For the purposes of the evaluation, there was an explicit brief to concentrate particularly on the implications of the end of the project on provision for marginalised and disaffected young people at risk of NEET.

The evidence collected, including the case studies, provides powerful messages for a range of audiences. These will include:

- External funding agencies
- DCSs and those involved at LA level in planning and commissioning the delivery of Children's Services and 14-19 provision
- Local partnerships struggling with complex issues relating to the educational and social needs of young people at risk of marginalisation and disaffection – those most likely to be disengaged at age 14-16 and appear as NEET after age 16

Newcastle University has concluded that FCP activity has amply addressed three important principles of work with young people unlikely to make effective transitions at age 16:

1. Employability and progression interventions work best when planned and delivered collaboratively by inclusive local 14-19 partnerships of providers and supporting services working at LA level to address local needs
2. Effective progression at age 16 into learning and employment is the result of
 - Widened curriculum opportunity and accessibility, especially that of flexible and "bite size" vocational and occupational learning
 - Personalised support provided by key workers especially that provided at key transition points
3. Flexibility of curriculum opportunity and continuity of support for progression are critical factors for vulnerable and marginalised learners who are at risk of making weak transitions at age 16

The report also warns that to preserve the legacy of effective work established in FCP, LAs must align a proportion of core resources held in schools and colleges with other central LA resources to provide robust systems of learning provision and progression support that are beyond the scope of the single institution or service. This pooling of core resources is absolutely critical in creating sustainable systems of learning provision to meet the diverse needs of marginalised and disaffected groups through engagement programmes and the Foundation Learning Tier Pathways.

This approach amounts to the establishment a coherent system of targeted engagement provision, organised and funded by a local engagement partnership. Such partnerships are already emerging in each of the five areas. The key strategic challenge for the future, is therefore to combine the core resources available to Children's Services (eg

Connexions, Inclusion services, Youth Support Services and Voluntary Community Providers etc) with those held by schools (AWPU) for 14-16 learning provision. External funding can support innovation, as it has in FCP provisions but is an unsatisfactory mechanism for supporting coherent engagement provision in the longer term. There is a timely opportunity for LAs to establish robustly funded engagement partnerships at a time of great change when LAs will soon hold joint responsibilities for the commissioning of 14-19 provision and the development of the Children's workforce.

TWLP is very encouraged that:

The Partnership work that has developed as a result of FCP2, in conjunction with the diverse range of innovative projects that was created, will mean that all of the 5 areas are in a good position to address the current and future 14-19 reforms. All of the respondents were extremely positive about the Flexible Curriculum Programme and felt that it had produced an extremely worthwhile range of activities that addressed local needs. In fact one respondent commented that: "it was the most successful school age programme in recent years". We hope that this is a fitting legacy for the investment made in the project by TWP.

At the conclusion of the project and on behalf of Tyne and Wear Learning Partnership please can I thank:

- TyneWear Partnership and ONE NorthEast for supplying the funding
- All delivery partners for their efforts in delivering the projects to young people at local level
- Prof. Ann Briggs and her team from Newcastle University who undertook the evaluation
- The area managers and project team at Gateshead Council who undertook the task of designing and administering a very complex project with great efficiency

Raj Singh

Chair - Tyne and Wear Learning Partnership

Structure and Purpose of the Report

The final evaluation forms a body of research evidence which:

1. Captures the emerging patterns of targeted NEET preventative provision in each of the five areas of Tyne and Wear and how they have been influenced by FCP and
2. Captures the developing local partnership arrangements to lead, manage and fund this targeted and specialist provision.

The final evaluation report offers a set of emerging insights from the FCP2 projects, which can be shared between the local areas. It adopts the following framework.

1. Funding models
2. Staffing models
3. FCP2 and the 14-19 Curriculum
4. Partnerships
5. Benefits and outcomes.

Hard Outcomes RDA

The following hard outcomes were reported by the partner agency (LSC) in the project closure report to the regional development agency (RDA).

FINANCE		
	Forecast	Actual
Total Single Programme Revenue		
Expenditure	£4,085,000.00	£4,085,000.00
Other Funding:		
LSC	£450,000.00	£450,000.00
Other public Sector	£3,950,000.00	£3,905,000.00
Income Generated by Project:	£0	£0
Total Project Cost	£8,440,000.00	£8,440,000.00

The revenue expenditure is the total RDA funding defrayed by the project partners over the three years of the project. Revenue was allocated to each of the five Tyne and Wear Authorities according to pupil numbers registered in the Connexions CCIS.

Other public funding includes matched funding provided by partners for supporting 14-19 activities (Young Apprenticeship and Increased Flexibility Programme) and the resources of partners themselves.

SKILLS AND WORKFORCE		Forecast	Achieved	Forecast	Achieved	Forecast	Achieved	Forecast	Achieved
NTF1	(i) Job creation	11	4.5	0	6.5			11	11
	(ii) Jobs safeguarded	21	21					21	21
NTF2	Employment support								
NTF3	(i) Business creation								
	(ii) Businesses attracted								
	(iii) Businesses surviving 12 months								
	(iv) Businesses surviving 24 months								
NTF4	Business support								
NTF4a	Knowledge base/business creation								
NTF5	Leverage								
	(i) Total amount levered	.76	.76	2.56	2.56	1.05	1.05	4.37	4.37
	(ii) Total Private Sector leverage (£m)								
	(iii) Total Public Sector leverage (£m)	.76	.76	2.56	2.56	1.05	1.05	4.37	4.37
NTF5a	Brownfield land								
NTF6	Skills	1,997	1,426	1,997	2,568	1,460	1,659	5454	5653

Twenty five posts were created or safeguarded – two thirds of these were progression workers.

The project either met (in the case of jobs created/safeguarded and leverage) or exceeded (in the case of skills the contracted outputs totals) its targets.

An area wide beneficiaries report has been produced each year by the project administrator setting out key statistical data relating to the numbers of people achieving skills outputs within the following categories: -

2007/08 figures show:

Length - number of hours e.g.

under 6 hours	50
6 hours	305
7 – 36hours	369
37 – 105 hours	466
and over 106 hours	204

Level e.g.

low level – 975
high level – 720

Types of certificates/qualifications accessed e.g.

Duke of Edinburgh Award – 41
BTEC level 1 – 119
No qualification including food hygiene, employment support/advise and guidance – life skills/first aid, various/ NEET activities/other – 428
BTEC level 2 – 102 etc

Percentage of accredited courses accessed, learners per year group yr 10, 11 etc.

Types of provision – Catering, Hair and Beauty, Engineering etc and provision accessed relating to the 14 diploma routes ICT, Engineering, Construction etc.

Soft Outcomes

The soft outcomes achieved form the basis of this report.

Evidence of benefits and impact in terms of 'soft' outcomes were equally (in some cases much more) valued by respondents during the research and were recognised by both the learners and project staff. Interview and case study data indicate that learners had engaged successfully with vocational programmes sufficiently to progress to further vocations learning.

Executive Summary

Funding/Activity Models

- Funding was used by the partnerships as either a NEET *preventative* strategy and/or a NEET *remedial* strategy. Some chose to focus solely on working with schools (preventative), whereas others also worked with the voluntary youth sector in order to target those young people already NEET. Some Local Authorities incorporated both strategies.
- While devolving budgets directly to project providers empowered them to provide flexible responses in line with their own unique local circumstances, it is clear that this caused some problems in terms of managing and maintaining the complex range of FCP2 programmes within the audit requirements of the Regional Development Agency. The project has had very robust audit systems, and although the time taken in maintaining them has been considerable, this challenge had been overcome.
- Given the rapidly changing policy and reform climate, it is still not clear where discretionary external funding support such as that provided by the RDA for FCP will fit into the emerging patterns of core support for engagement programmes. Although respondents across the five areas reported recent bids to ESF to continue the some aspects of the work, future sustainability will depend critically on the reconfiguration of mainstream funding direct from schools and Local Authorities. This assumes that LAs will fit the valuable elements of provision that have emerged into future national and regional policy developments and requirements.

Staffing Models

- The development of staffing to provide co-ordination of activity and learner support was a key focus of the funding. Some authorities employed specific managers to oversee the local projects, whereas others worked with the staff already in place e.g. Connexions managers and Administrative staff and the Local Authority 14-19 managers.
- Four of the authorities employed specific Vocational Progression Workers who could work flexibly and intensively with the targeted young people. The fifth authority felt that they had staff already in place e.g. Personal Advisors in Connexions and Learning Mentors in schools.
- The VPW role was deemed by many to be valuable and distinctive. Such workers had a smaller caseload than Connexions PAs and could therefore provide very intensive progression support. Nevertheless they were able to work across a range of schools and external providers according to need.

Partnerships

- The range of activities and projects offered was very considerable and underpinning all of this was a commitment to partnership working. All of the authorities welcomed the fact that FCP2 enabled them to engage with the curriculum in an innovative way. Programmes could be personalised to suit either group or individual needs. Projects/activities included:
 - the funding of Hub schools providing centres for Health and Beauty, Construction and Catering courses
 - sending pupils to existing courses at local colleges and skills centres, (e.g. Childcare, Horticulture, Construction, Mechanics, Health and Beauty)

- creating personalised programmes for young people that would engage and motivate them
- Taster sessions (horse/animal care, construction, IT, motor vehicle maintenance, etc)
- CONNECT- bite size chunks of bespoke provision offering a flexible menu of re-engagement activity and support

14-19 Curriculum

- Provision for NEETs and potential NEETs (aged 14-16) is of particular concern in the North East region which has amongst the highest 16-18 NEET.
- Respondents emphasised the future importance of robustly funded and locally organised pre-16 systems of alternative provision based upon the FLT as a springboard into post-16 entry / L1 programmes such as E2E.
- It is recognised that continued funding for marginalised youngsters aged 14-16 is highly desirable. However, there was a recognition that this would be more effective if the diversity of local providers, services and signposting agencies involved with the “at risk group” could work within a more rational local funding organisational framework.
- Respondents emphasised the need for robust local engagement consortia working in parallel with Diploma consortia but specifically working to meet the diverse learning needs of young people requiring a flexible menu of provision at entry and level 1 (FLT).

Benefits and outcomes

- Interviews with key respondents suggested that FCP2 programmes have had very positive impacts on the learners in terms of (re)-engagement, behaviour, confidence, self-esteem, motivation, aspirations and progression.
- Learners said that they feel more confident and happier on FCP2 programmes than in conventional purely school-based provision, and have plans to progress into other vocational learning opportunities. This reflects the level of personalisation achieved in many of the programmes, and the level of engagement of young people with what they perceived as adult-focused work-based programmes.
- FCP2 has been responsive to the needs of individual learners, as shown both by the range of programmes available and by the levels of support made available to disaffected and marginalised learners by funded Progression Workers.

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July 2008

FCP2 Final Evaluation

Jill Clark, Ulrike Thomas, Colleen Cummings and Professor Ann Briggs from the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT) at Newcastle University were commissioned by Gateshead MBC in the summer of 2008 to conduct a final evaluation of the Flexible Curriculum Programme. The purpose of the evaluation was to build on the interim evaluation findings and form a body of research evidence which:

- Captures the emerging patterns of targeted NEET preventative provision in each of the five areas and how they have been influenced by FCP and
- Captures the developing local partnership arrangements to lead, manage and fund this targeted and specialist provision.
- Provides a final report that will function as a set of emerging insights, which can be shared between the five local geographical areas: Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

The methodology employed was a combination of desk study and qualitative research, involving interviews with key respondents engaged in FCP2 projects with reference to key beneficiary data and literature made available to us by the FCP2 management team. A literature search conducted through the interim evaluation is included in the final report to underpin the evaluation, in particular to set FCP2 in its national policy context. Documents provided to the evaluation team by FCP2 personnel included:

- Case studies of 14 projects across the 5 areas.
- A project database with detailed information about the project beneficiaries - i.e. young people - including output achievement and progression data.
- Data about NEETs from Connexions.
- Access to the findings from the earlier FCP2 evaluation reports.
- Access to FCP2 administrative and audit information.

A range of other documents has been collected from the FCP2 project sites including testimonials from schools and individual young people and other project information.

Interviews with a range of people engaged in FCP2 projects were conducted in North and South Tyneside, Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland across 10 case studies as outlined in Table 1 below. This focused sample of respondents enabled the evaluation team to identify positive features and areas of difficulty across the FCP2 provision, and to elicit 'on the ground' perceptions of possible ways forward.

Table 1: Fieldwork completed

C = Interviews completed. *RU = Respondents unavailable.

Case study	Area manager	Project manager	Progression Worker	Other staff	Young people
North Tyneside					
Longbenton Community College	C x 1	C x 1	C x 1		3 male
Connexions		C x 1	C x 1		
Sunderland					
Hylton Red House School	C x 1	C x 1	*RU	C x 3	8 female
Box Project		C x 1	*RU		*RU
South Tyneside					
Boldon School	C x 1	C x 1	*RU		5 male 1 female
Connexions		C x 2	*RU		
Gateshead					
Connect Project	C x 1	C x 1	C x 1		1 male
Collective Project		C x 1			
Newcastle					
Connexions	C x 1	C x 1	None employed	C x 1	
Charles Parsons Special School		C x 1			

Additionally, discussions on emerging themes and findings were completed with representatives from the LSC, the Tyne Wear Partnership and One North East during an Away Day. During this day, detailed discussions with the research team took place around the emerging themes, and it proved to be a valuable opportunity to explore and validate the findings.

We have undertaken an analysis of the interview and other sources of data outlined above and the results of these analyses can be found in the sections below. The evaluation will report under the following headings:

1. Emerging structures for the leadership and management of NEET preventative work in each local area and how these relate to the existing 14-19 and FCP arrangements in each area

2. The role of FCP Workers and how this relates to that of Connexions Personal Advisors and learning mentors and the balance between learner support and provision purchase
3. Examples of effective practice and how they might be sustained and embedded from a management and financial perspective.

Section 1: Funding/Activity Models

One of the strengths of the Flexible Curriculum Programme was that it allowed the 14-19 partnerships in the five authorities to use their allocated funds 'flexibly'. As a result of this, each of the authorities produced its own unique funding/activity model, based primarily upon the needs of the young people in the area, the type of provision and staffing already in place, and the targets of the 14-19 partnerships, i.e. in terms of capacity building within the 14-19 reform agenda.

Through interviews with various stakeholders and an examination of relevant documentation, detailed tables have been created, which identify how FCP2 funds were used by the five authorities, and their current position in terms of sustainability. This can be seen in Appendix 1. Some of the key themes that emerged with regard to the funding of FCP2 will now be considered, and exemplified with short case studies from each of the five areas.

Staffing

Staffing was a key focus of the funding. Whilst some authorities employed specific managers to oversee the FCP project, others worked with the staff already in place e.g. Connexions managers and administrative staff and the Local Authority 14-19 managers.

Four of the authorities employed specific Progression Workers who could work flexibly with the targeted young people. The fifth authority felt that they had staff already in place e.g. Personal Advisors in Connexions and Learning Mentors in schools.

Connexions employed three Progression Workers, who were each linked to three schools. The schools would nominate young people, some of whom were considered to be at risk, and the Progression Workers would get to know them and work with them at the work based provider setting. The average Progression Worker would work with three secondary schools, six different training providers, the college and the voluntary sector.

South Tyneside

The 'Collective' is an exciting partnership made up of eight leading work-based learning providers in Gateshead. Formed in 2003, this unique collaboration is the first of its kind in the region. By joining forces we believe we will be able to offer an even higher quality service to both individuals and employers.

The post of 'Collective Coordinator' was funded until the end of March through FCP2, and has been sustained through membership fees to the Collective. The role involves the delivery of 14-16 learning opportunities within Gateshead secondary schools. This included the project management of 'Saturday Tasters' which was funded through FCP2.

Gateshead

Reducing NEET Figures – How was funding targeted for this purpose?

Funding was used by the authorities as either a NEET *preventative* strategy and/or a NEET *remedial* strategy. Some chose to focus solely on working with schools (preventative), whereas others also worked with the voluntary youth sector in order to target those young people already NEET. As a consequence, the range of activities and projects that was highlighted in the interviews was vast.

All of the authorities welcomed the fact that FCP2 enabled them to engage with the curriculum in an innovative way, with programmes personalised to suit either group or individual needs. Projects/Activities included, for example:

1. The funding of Hub schools providing centres for Hair and Beauty, Construction and Catering courses.

Hylton Red House School was developed as the Hub school for the delivery of Hair and Beauty in the Sunderland area. Initially set up with charitable funds, FCP2 enabled the school to resource the hair salon with 'quality' supplies and to continue to employ a lecturer. Each year more and more pupils have been able to attend the various programmes offered, with a total of 12 schools sending pupils in the academic year 2007-2008.

Hylton Red House School, Sunderland

2. Sending pupils to existing courses at local colleges and skills centres, (e.g. Childcare, Construction, Mechanics, Health and Beauty, Horticulture)

Sir Charles Parsons School is a secondary special school for students with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties aged between 11 and 19. FCP2 funding enabled the school to provide off-site work-related opportunities. The school's partner was Newcastle College. Several students in years 10 and 11 attended a Horticulture course, which is a course that the school cannot offer in-house. An individual independent travel programme was created and students were able to attend and use the college's facilities.

Newcastle

3. Youth Centre projects

John was a year 11 student from a local secondary school, and was identified by the school as having poor attendance and behavioural issues. He is statemented with special educational needs involving literacy and is also part of the city council's 'looked-after' system.

John attended the Flexible Curriculum Programme regularly, often just attending school for this session. Throughout his time on the project the school group did team building activities, drugs and alcohol awareness, careers advice, guidance and CV writing, etc. John had to socialise with his peers and benefited from the relaxed atmosphere of the project and staff.

The Box Youth Project, Sunderland

4. Creating personalised programmes for young people that would engage and motivate them

An example was given of a pupil who was at real risk of disengagement and dropping out. The school had arranged for him to go to college but he got bored because the course was not something he was interested in. The Progression Worker in the school worked with him closely for a few weeks, and identified what he was really interested in, which was music recording. A programme was arranged with a local semi-professional recording facility. The young person spent 2 days a week there and this was paid for by FCP2. The person not only attended regularly, but in his own time. When he left school he went to South Tyneside college and he is undertaking a music programme there.

South Tyneside

Within North Tyneside, one Progression Worker described how she divided her time across three schools, supporting 150 students both in class and on placement. In two venues she supports groups to work towards an ASDAN qualification where students attend approximately six lessons per week and also went on placements. In one of these venues, the PW additionally supported students working towards their Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (COPE) which is an additional component to ASDAN. Students involved in COPE can achieve a level 1 (equivalent to GCSE grade E) or level 2 (equivalent to GCSE grade B).

The PW also supported students working toward their Dual Award Diploma in Applied Studies. If students achieve everything they have worked towards at Gold level they get the equivalent of 2 As and a B at GCSE. This work is part of the Princes Trust programme where students can achieve a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award. She also offered 1:1 mentoring support with 30 students across the 3 schools (referred in Year 10 because of wide ranging special needs including learning difficulties, poor social skills and behavioural difficulties). She mentored students every 6 weeks.

North Tyneside

5. Taster sessions (horse/animal care, construction, IT, motor vehicle maintenance, etc)

The aim of Taster courses is to provide young people with an opportunity to gain practical work experience in a particular occupational area before making important career choices. The tasters were in the following occupational areas: IT Computer Build, Hairdressing and Motor Vehicle Repair/Service. The Collective Coordinator recruited students for all three courses by promoting the courses within the secondary schools in the Gateshead area. All three courses were delivered on a Saturday morning and throughout each of the programmes students were supported

and guided through an NVQ linked programme by qualified and competent assessors.

The Collective – Gateshead

6. CONNECT- bite size chunks of provision

Gateshead Connect is part of the Flexible Curriculum Programme funded by One North East. Its aims are to support flexible learning opportunities in a vocational setting particularly for the most vulnerable in each year group, in particular long term non-attenders at school, those who have been involved in re-engagement programmes but had not benefitted and young people who had been involved in crime.

Connect provides 1-1 mentoring, access to vocationally linked curricula, exposure to SEAL and Learning how to Learn resources and a range of positive activity programmes. Taster courses – one day and half – offer ‘bitesize chunks’ of provision to give young people a flavour of what is on offer and these included Hairdressing, IT Computer Build, and Motor Vehicle Repair.

The project began in October 2006 and by June 2007 it had brought 5-20 providers on board and a cohort of young people who took up provision in September. The Every Child Matters framework was a key strategic driver for the project and they were keen to work with some of the most vulnerable young people who were referred to them through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The project engaged 12 young people referred in this way and focused in supporting them with ‘social issues’ and overcoming various barriers that they faced. Reviews were carried out regularly (every 3-4 weeks) to ensure that the curriculum on offer was personalised and meeting individual needs.

Gateshead

For a full breakdown of the activities funded through FCP2 please see Appendix 2 - 2007-08 Area Wide Beneficiaries Records FCP2 Internal Evaluation Report.

The cessation of FCP2 funding

FCP2 funding ended in March 2008 – the end of the financial year. The position in the five authorities with regard to current and future funding is outlined in the ‘FCP2 Funding Models’ tables (see Appendix 1) However, issues surrounding the duration of the funding, and the problems with regard to its timing were raised in all of the interviews undertaken.

Whilst the funding situation is always problematic with regard to delivering education and training to young people at risk of becoming disengaged, and there is a pervading sense of living “hand to mouth”, the problem appeared to be less acute for those working within the school sector. If willing, schools have the capacity to divert resources to vocational training and/or skill support e.g. Hylton Red House School, Sunderland, Farrington School through the Box Youth Project, Sunderland, and there appeared to be more

Government funding available, particularly for NEET hotspots, for example, the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme. However, there was a recognition that some schools would not prioritise funding for certain elements of provision, for instance, 'taster' activities, meaning that the provision FCP funded offered additionality.

The effect of the timing on the activities

The interim months between the end of the financial year (i.e. the end of FCP2 funding) and the end of the academic year affected the various sectors differently. Whereas all the schools were able to fund the final term from their delegated budgets e.g. Hylton Red House School, Boldon School, programmes relying solely on FCP2 funds have had to come to an end e.g. projects undertaken by the Box Youth Project and the taster courses in Gateshead:

Unless other funding is sourced young people will be denied this opportunity – how likely are schools/parents to pay for such provision?' No taster programmes have run since the funding ceased and a number of schools have stressed their disappointment. (Gateshead).

However, there are also examples of projects continuing using newly acquired funds. Thus, for example, despite the fact that Newcastle UXL's highly successful "Give it a try" project had to end when FCP2 finished, the Learning and Skills Council have agreed to build on this good practice by funding a new "Give it a Try" for summer 2008. Many of the authorities are hopeful that when new funding streams come on line, courses and projects can be resurrected.

The effect of the timing on staffing

With regard to staffing, the loss of FCP2 funding has had a more detrimental effect:

The Progression Workers were engaged as Key Workers, and their jobs ended with the funding. One has been retained as a Personal Advisor with Connexions. One has moved to a school and one is a personal advisor for Connexions in Sunderland. This was a downside because their role was very beneficial to the young people. Losing them has been very hard. (South Tyneside)

The funding issue was disheartening and has affected both morale and impetus. Although the 14-19 partnership had successfully bid for ESF funding, this did not come in time for the staff already in post as Progression Workers to continue in their jobs. If the new funding had been in place everything could have continued. (Sunderland)

This was also the case in another Authority – the Progression Worker there knew her job was on the line and was applying for new posts but had not at the time of the final evaluation secured a new job.

The CPD that the Progression Workers received during their FCP2 employment and the skills that they developed as a result of working with disengaged young people enabled

them to obtain new posts often in Connexions or schools. However, there was a general feeling that losing the Progression Workers was a waste, both in terms of the loss of highly trained and highly skilled staff, as well as for the young people themselves, many of whom had built up good relationships with the Progression Workers.

Bureaucracy

Although not a feature unique to FCP2, the vast amount of paperwork that had to be continually completed and sent to the various stakeholders did cause initial problems and put a strain on relationships. Many of the organisations and schools involved struggled with the fact that they had to fund the costs of projects and staffing themselves and then send invoices later. Receipts also needed to be submitted two months before the end of the financial year, which meant having to forecast expenditure. Concern was also voiced with regard to the cost of having to administer the programme – in many cases specific staff had to be employed to manage the finances. However, after initial teething problems, and through the hard work of highly motivated and creative staff, effective systems and procedures did emerge, many of which are being adapted for use with future funding streams:

The paperwork that the schools will have to use for the next round of funding has been kept the same for the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme. This should create fewer bureaucratic problems. (South Tyneside)

Key issues and lessons learned

- The timing and duration of programme funding still appears to be a major problem. Difficulties arise with respect to funding that ends with the financial year and consequently does not tie in to either the academic or calendar year.
- An important point to highlight is the *huge* amount of time and energy that goes into coordinating and bidding for funds such as FCP and the recent ESF money. Equally, expected outputs and outcomes can vary dramatically depending on the funding streams.
- Is it possible to address the delicate balance between accountability and an overly burdensome bureaucracy in a systematic way?
- Many of the interviewees felt that funding for programmes in general should be of a longer duration. As was the case with FCP2, by the time the funds were received, staff had been recruited and projects set up, the actual time remaining to work with the young people themselves had been significantly reduced. It was also felt that longer funding terms would help to attract staff.

Section 2: Staffing Models

The role of the Vocational Progression Workers

Vocational Progression Workers (VPWs) were employed using FCP2 funds by four out of the five authorities. The model for the deployment of Progression Workers varied across the four Local Authorities. Although they were all managed centrally by Connexions managers, in one authority the PWs were linked to specific schools and colleges and they would work with young people nominated by the school or college. In another, the Progression Workers were based in the Connexions office, which gave them access to additional resources and information. How the PWs were deployed and where they were based was essentially linked to the overall FCP2 model in place in the authorities i.e. whether the focus was on school-based preventative NEET work or whether both preventative and remedial NEET work was being addressed.

Wherever the Progression Workers were based, the flexibility of their role was considered to be the key feature of their success. This flexibility manifested itself in two ways. Firstly, they were able to move around their areas and support individuals and groups wherever they were needed, and secondly, they could personalise the curriculum to suit individual needs. Progression Workers were able to offer 1:1 support and keep young people on task.

Progression Worker X split her time between 3 schools. Her role involved supporting students in Years 10 and 11 who were completing vocational courses. She supported 150 students across the 3 schools in class and also on placement. In particular she worked closely with students to set targets for their school based vocational work and also their placements (students are in 10 different vocational placements – several of which are through Barnardos); she prepared files of work for moderation and developed key skills and social skills.

X also did 1:1 mentoring support with 30 students across the 3 schools (referred in Y10 because of wide ranging special needs including learning difficulties, poor social skills and behavioural difficulties). She mentored students every 6 weeks.

Vocational Progression Worker – North Tyneside LA

The Progression Workers were employed by Connexions and were based in the Connexions Office. Their caseloads varied but were generally in the 30-35 range with clients referred to them by the Connexions Personal Advisors, school staff and the youth and voluntary sector workers.

Progression Workers were not assigned directly to schools but did forge links with the schools in their geographical area. The approach was slightly different with the special schools where one Progression Worker had a city-wide focus. PWs were also assigned to specific Youth and Voluntary sector organisations.

The PWs set up courses, especially in the first year of the programme when they had money to do this. In subsequent years, the Progression Workers had to be trained to deliver courses themselves and underspends were used to pay for activities.

Progression Workers – Sunderland

The relationship of the Progression Workers to Learning Mentors and the Connexions Personal Advisors

Progression Workers were seen as fundamentally different from school Learning Mentors because they were not part of the staff, and so part of the system that the young people were disengaging from. The young people generally responded well to this and to having someone taking a positive interest in their wellbeing. The Progression Workers were also able to develop an independent advocacy role between the young people and the many organisations that they inevitably came into contact with.

Whilst Connexions Personal Advisors do have a similar role to the Progression Workers, they do not have the same amount of flexibility built into their work model. One Connexions coordinator felt that:

... the Connexions Personal Advisors won't be able to continue the work of the Progression Workers because they won't have the time. They won't be able to get the continuity of progression. The young people always knew there were 2 days a week when they could talk over their problems with their Progression Worker. This will not be possible in future, and although schools will have learning mentors in place, the role is different and is also part of the 'establishment'.

Problems occurred initially in some areas with regard to fears about role duplication. One respondent felt that partnership agreements should have been in place at the outset of FCP2 in order to outline the specific responsibilities of the Progression Workers and Youth Workers. Another respondent highlighted a 'lack of clarity about the role of PWs.' However, generally, these problems were addressed over time and the value of the role of Progression Workers was the main theme of the interviews.

Key issues and lessons learned

- The Progression Worker model was considered to be a key feature of the success of FCP2 by the four authorities that had created these posts.
- They were able to provide flexible, intensive and highly personalised and responsive support to many young people who, it has been argued, would otherwise have become increasingly disengaged with the education system.
- Interviews would suggest that their role differed significantly from those of learning mentors and PAs and it would consequently appear that there is a need for a separate Progression Worker post.
- The creation of clear job descriptions is beneficial if problems regarding role duplication are to be avoided.
- Even though particular Progression Workers are not in a specific project, FCP2 has enabled the skilling up of the workforce.

- The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme is being introduced in many of the authorities in September 2008 (see Section 4 'FCP2 and the 14-19 Curriculum), and one of the aims of this programme is to provide 'high-quality and regular support, advice and guidance from a trusted adult'. The role of the Progression Worker would appear to fit in well to this new programme, particularly as the funding is directed at 'NEET hotspots'. There is therefore potential for the posts to be continued or resurrected.

Section 3: Partnerships

Every respondent cited the development of the partnerships between schools, Connexions, Work Based Learning Providers, Local Authority staff and the voluntary sector organisations as examples of 'Good Practice'. As with the earlier themes addressed, partnership models varied in each Local Authority and had developed according to specific area needs. All provide examples of excellent collaboration that will benefit future projects wherever the funding comes from. There were two possible 'models' of partnership working which emerged from the interviews and during the feedback Away Day: 'delivery partnerships' and '14-19 partnerships'.

Delivery partnerships

Respondents told us that this partnership model includes a number of features which, if done well, can make it work effectively, including:

- Identification of the needs of pupils
- Identification of funding sources to meet these needs
- Good communication – at all levels and between all organisations
- Practical working arrangements that are agreed and understood by all partners, e.g. who is doing what, who is going where, etc.
- Reciprocal arrangements between all involved.

Within the Gateshead Authority, for example, the Connect Project is structured in a way which brings together a team from a variety of organisations in partnership: an education welfare officer, a Connexions officer and a support worker. Described as a '*novel way of delivery*' the overall aim is to find new ways of engaging disengaged young people:

We are trying to be innovative and create new professional relationships to bring in a wider range of provision.

Within another Local Authority – North Tyneside, a cluster system was in operation. The four different cluster areas had their own needs so they tendered to the Local Authority with a plan for what they hoped to achieve in terms of the delivery of the flexible curriculum. For example, in the North East of the Borough (Whitley Bay area), alternative curriculum provision was offered to a small number of young people so they had wider curriculum and progression choices (they went to the college for some courses) and in Wallsend there was a focus on Construction. Respondents felt that this cluster system worked well to support delivery partnerships:

Having Cluster Boards has promoted good partnership working, as has good open and honest discussion between services. Partnership working between schools and the youth service has been strengthened. Now North Tyneside has a nationally recognised infrastructure to take things forward.

Similarly within Sunderland, Hylton Red House School was the designated 'hub' school for delivering Hair and Beauty courses to Sunderland schools. Successfully obtaining FCP funding enabled the school to equip the on-site salon with high quality resources and employ a lecturer who was already established as an employer in the city.

Working in true partnership and collaboration with Work Based Learning Providers and employers in Sunderland have promoted the hair and beauty students' skills of participation, responsible action, positive interaction and achievement for all.

Hylton Red House School, Sunderland

The FCP funding also enabled 12 'spoke' schools to access the salon. One respondent from one school recognised the value of this structure which successfully promoted a genuine partnership among the schools:

From our school's point of view, it's great to have links with the other schools as well, which for us was a first. We'd actually like to keep that link going and tomorrow they are going to come and talk about the next year, because the Head came to the competition and she thought it was fabulous.

14-19 Partnerships

Respondents told us that this partnership model contains a number of features which make for effective partnership working, including:

- Bringing people together
- Sharing of good practice and expertise
- Having a practical focus for partnership working, e.g. future bids
- Providing a knowledge and experience base for current 14-19 reforms.

Overwhelmingly there was a feeling that FCP2 had brought many people and organisations together and a sharing of practice, whether this is among individual partners in one area, or across areas. FCP2 also provided a practical focus for partnership working, for example:

... getting people sat down at a table together to start talking.

FCP2 therefore had made it possible for these different groups of people to sit down together, who would not normally have done so. Importantly, the partnerships had also fostered an ethos of collaboration rather than competition:

In the past the 12 providers working with UXL were competing for work - now they are sitting down and sharing best practice. Trainers have started to work together so that when a young person finishes an E2E programme (one provider), they move on to an apprenticeship (another provider). The different trainers have worked together to facilitate this. The progression rate in one case has gone up to 80%. In the past this would have never happened and now more and more of the trainers want to work together in this way.

One tangible example of a sharing of information and good practice across partners is the Work Based Learning Directory in one Local Authority.

As a direct result of FCP2 a Directory of work based providers has been created that schools can access. A 14 to 16 directory and a post 16 directory have been created.

The profile of the local training providers has been raised, and schools are more confident in accessing them. The providers have also become more flexible.

South Tyneside Local Authority

A Voluntary Sector Youth forum was created, where all the voluntary youth organisations meet. There is an impartial coordinator who helps select the projects that would be suitable for the funding involved. Both the voluntary organisations and the Connexions/FCP managers valued the coordinator's impartiality and knowledge of all potential provision that the organisations can offer.

Local Authority

Such partnership working has also then led to a knowledge and experience base for the current 14-19 reforms:

The project has facilitated good levels of collaboration in the LA and assisted the LA to take forward further reforms.

The 'machinery of government change' was described as not so much a barrier to partnership working but more a dilemma. The emphasis – through the Learning and Skills Council has not been on the 'sub-regional' but instead on the 'local' which:

.... is great on the one hand, but this does not allow for cross-fertilisation of ideas – collaboration across the five areas has been a real bonus but there is the potential that in the future this dimension is lost as funding will concentrate on local areas.

Key issues and lesson learned

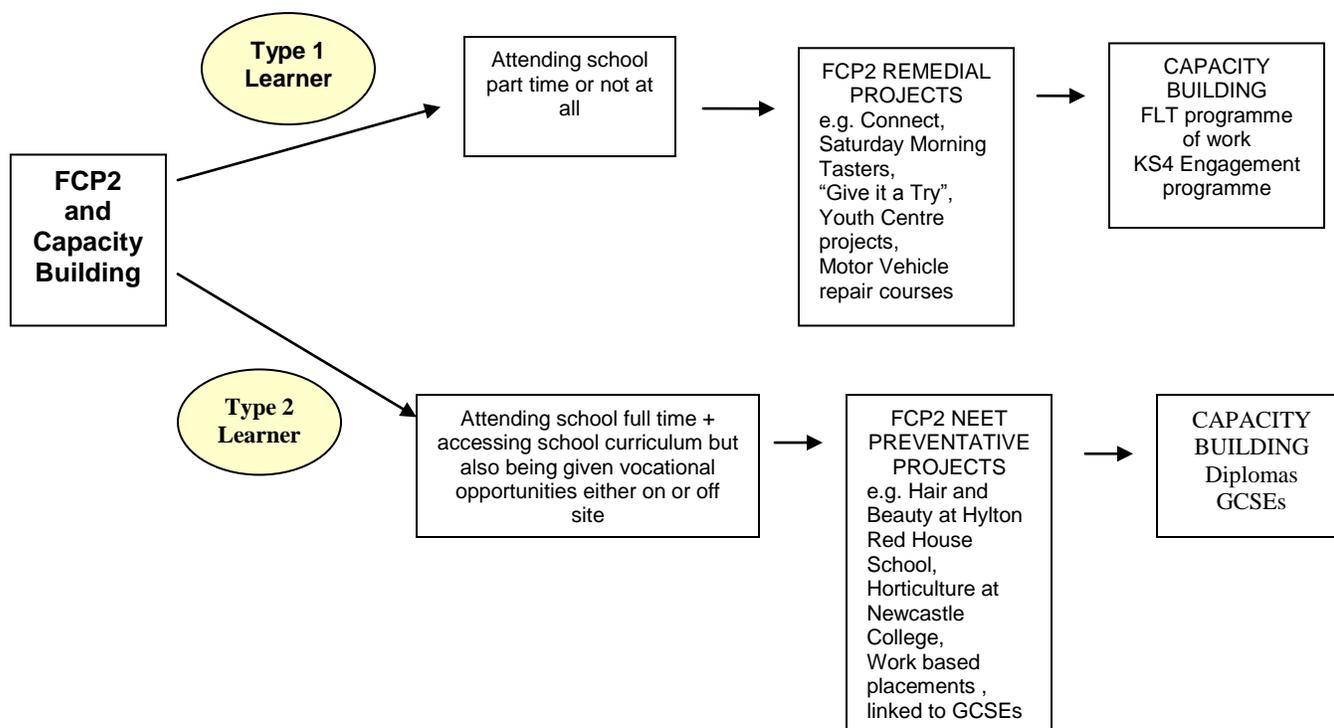
- The competitive tendering process, for example the recent bidding process for ESF funds, can create an obvious tension between cooperative partnerships competing for the same funds. Equally, the focus within FCP2 has been on area-wide approaches, whereas new funding regulations require a more localised approach
- Local 14-19 partnerships will need to continue to ensure that they establish an entitlement to a wide range of applied learning pathways providing progression to higher-level skills in accordance with the Policy and Strategy of the 14-19 Reforms. These include Diplomas.
- Some activities received some capital funding through FCP/FCP2 – for example the Hair and Beauty Studies Programme at Hylton Red House School. These capital facilities and supplies can be further used to not only consolidate existing partnership arrangements, but can be utilised greater to extend partnerships within the 14-19 curriculum reform, e.g. Diplomas linking the school and work-based learning providers and employers.

Section 4: FCP2 and the 14-19 Curriculum

The Flexible Curriculum Programme has made a significant contribution towards capacity building with respect to developments in the 14-19 reform Agenda. Tyne and Wear has had more success nationally than any other geographical area in Gateway Applications for delivery of the first round of the new Diplomas, and there is evidence that the provision already in place in many of the FCP authorities contributed to this success. (See section on the Diplomas)

As highlighted in earlier sections of the report, FCP2 funding was used to develop projects and staff that would address NEET preventative work and NEET remedial work. These two strands focus on two different types of learner. Figure 1 provides some examples of projects undertaken by each of the authorities, how they addressed the NEET situation and where these projects potentially fit into current curriculum developments.

Figure 1: FCP2 and Future Curriculum Developments



FCP2, the Foundation Learning Tier and the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme

Current developments in the educational provision for those young people disengaged by the school system include the introduction of the *Foundation Learning Tier* (currently being rolled out nationally and to be fully in place by 2010) and the *Key Stage 4*

Engagement Programme (currently running in 70 partnerships across the country with an evaluation due to be completed by July 2008).

An examination of the aims of both of these programmes (see below), demonstrates how well the projects undertaken by the Tyne and Wear partnerships and the experience gained will assist in the delivery of these new government reforms.

New units and qualifications at Entry and Level 1 will be developed so that by 2010 there is a complete set of provision at these levels within the QCF, allowing providers to tailor learning programmes to individual learners' needs. The intention of the FLT reform is to enable awarding bodies to develop units and qualifications in response to learners' needs, making sure they reflect the central aim of improving progression and personalisation for individuals. It will provide flexible routes to gaining full qualifications and will enable qualifications to be achieved in small steps.

Foundation Learning Tier, QCA

The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme is a personalised programme for those key stage 4 learners most at risk of disengagement. It comprises each learner's whole Key Stage 4 programme, placing an emphasis on the development of personal, social and functional skills. It includes a work-focused component, preferably taking place in a work environment, and is underpinned by high-quality and regular support, advice and guidance from a trusted adult.

14-19 Learning-Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, QCA

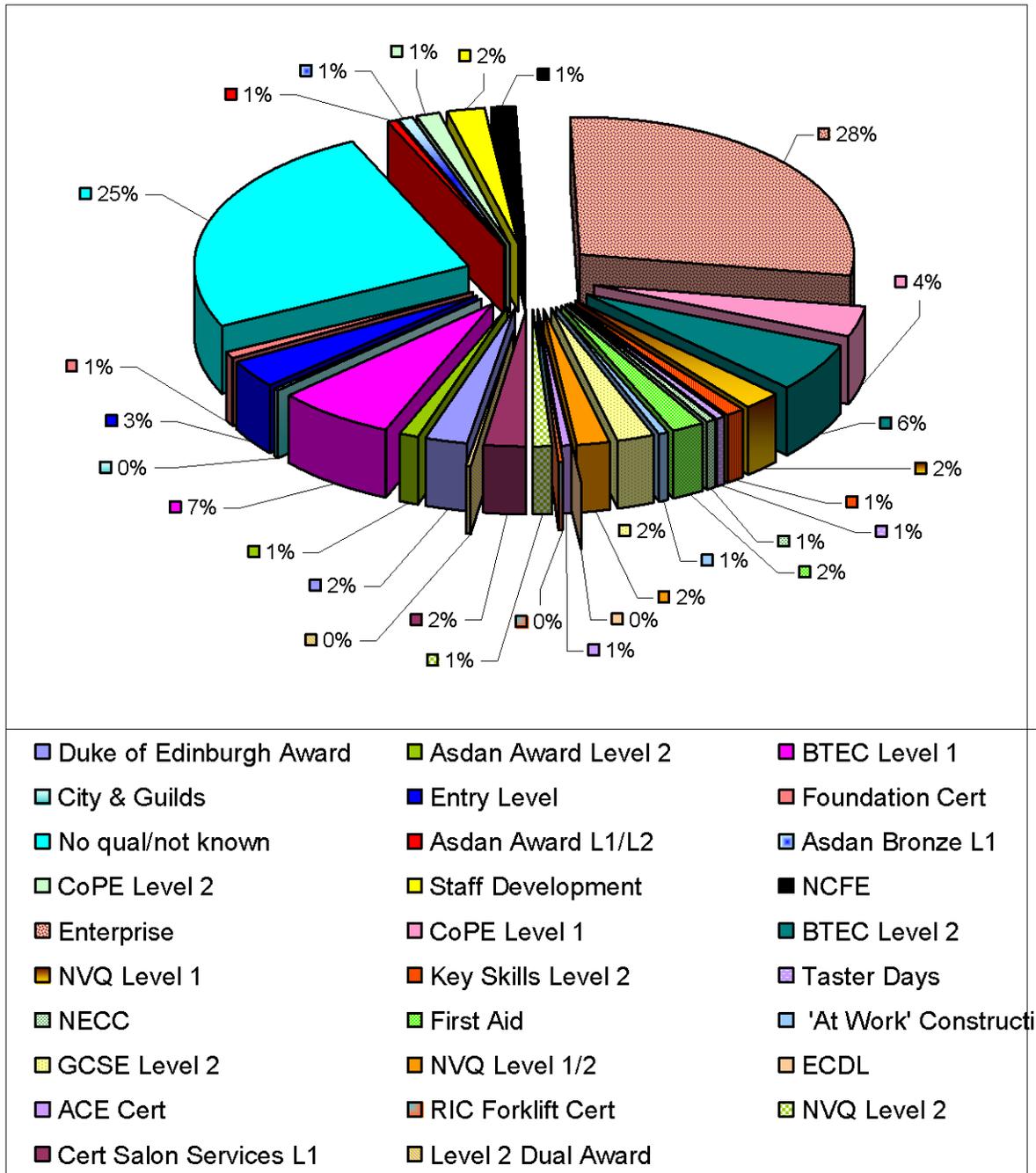
Thus,

- the development of partnerships,
- the creation of innovative projects that have been 'tried and tested',
- the resourcing of facilities,
- the employment of a skilled and flexible workforce

as have been developed through FCP2, will all benefit the authorities as they move forward. For there is still a large group of learners for whom the Diplomas are too theoretical and who will need to follow the Foundation Learning Tier and/or Key Stage 4 Engagement programme, progressing onto E2E courses and apprenticeships.

Whilst accreditation, through national qualifications, is considered to be an important feature of both the FLT and the KS4EP, there is also a greater acknowledgement of the importance of 'non-formal' educational awards, which develop skills such as employability, working with others, problem solving, self-awareness and independent living. As Figure 2 highlights, FCP2 funding enabled young people to follow both formal and non-formal qualification pathways. The 14-19 partnerships therefore appear to be well placed with regard to future developments in this area.

Figure 2: Percentage of accreditation/courses accessed



Source: 2007-08 Area Wide Beneficiaries Records FCP2 Internal Evaluation Report June 2008.

FCP2 and the Diplomas

Whilst the government sees the Diplomas as a means to open up vocational training in schools and thus engage with those young people who have traditionally disengaged from a more academic curriculum, some respondents were skeptical about the ability of the Diplomas to address the needs of the potential NEET population. Although initially highly practical in nature, the content of many of the Diplomas has become more theoretical. Consequently, the Diplomas may link well to some of the FCP2 projects being undertaken in schools e.g. work based placements in Construction, Catering, and Hair and Beauty, but it would appear that the NEET situation will continue to be better served by the Foundation Learning Tier/Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme and progression routes involving E2E and Apprenticeships, etc.

Delivering the Diplomas

Involvement with FCP2 has had many positive benefits for the five authorities with regard to their ability to deliver the new Diplomas:

- Relationships and partnerships that have developed between schools, colleges voluntary sector organisations and work based providers are being taken forward and have been of vital importance in writing the Gateway Proposals for the new Diplomas.
- Some of the courses already established will feed in well to the Diplomas, although the courses will now offer greater structure.
- Schools are now used to transporting pupils to different sites in order to access courses and training. This will be crucial in delivering those diplomas which schools cannot offer on-site.
- Some capital facilities established from FCP2 can be utilised in delivering the diplomas (see case study below).

Hylton Red House School was the designated 'hub' school for delivering 'Hair and Beauty' courses to Sunderland schools. Initially, funded from charitable sources, the school was invited to add to the collective 14-19 partnership bid for One North East Funding. Successfully obtaining FCP funding enabled the school to equip the on-site Salon with high quality resources and employ a lecturer who was already established as an employer in the city. The funding also enabled 12 'spoke' schools to access the salon. The Assistant Head Teacher who was also the FCP project manager at the school was invited to London to be on the Working Group of the new Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma. She has been able to help plan the diploma and believes this would not have happened without all the work done at the school. The current Hair and Beauty courses offered at Hylton Red House will feed in well to the new Diploma and there is now a suite of qualifications available that will suit all pupils.

Case Study: Hylton Red House School (HRH)

Key issues and lessons learned

- As the previous section highlights, the projects funded as part of the Flexible Curriculum Programme will feed in well to future developments in 14-19 education i.e. the Diplomas, the Foundation Learning Tier and the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme. However, the funding of these reforms remains an issue. For example the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme funding is only guaranteed for one year, which raises many of the concerns detailed earlier in the report regarding the duration of funding streams. (See 'Funding Models' Section 1)
- Whilst the Diplomas will undoubtedly open up vocational study and provide greater opportunities for many pupils, their ability to address the needs of young people who feel marginalised and disengaged from today's education system has been questioned. This group of people is in need of a highly personalised curriculum and highly personalised support which is what FCP2, through its employment of Progression Workers and the ability to create a flexible curriculum, was able to offer. The Foundation Learning Tier and KEY Stage 4 Engagement Programme would appear to continue this work.

Section 5: Benefits and Outcomes

The Interim Evaluation report (Hall and Briggs 2007) stated that the impact of the FCP2 was broad, and that it had impacted positively upon the providers, developing and strengthening partnerships between Local Authorities, work-based learning providers, schools, colleges and other education agencies, alongside voluntary and community sector representatives. This wide-ranging impact was reported to be just as positive in the final evaluation study, and is reported here with reference to progress towards the stated achievement aims detailed in the 2006-08 funding agreement:

Specific Outcomes:-

- Increased number of young people following the vocational pathways targeted by the project (both 14 – 16 and 16 – 18 elements).
- Improved progression and retention rates in work based learning (E2E, NVQ, and Apprenticeships) (as measured by ILR)
- Increased numbers of pupils retained within learning.

Soft Outcomes:

- Improved accessibility and uptake of work related and vocational options and facilities to all students aged 14-17
- Improved local availability of personalised/alternative provision options for vulnerable learners
- Improved post-16 progression, retention and achievement of students from programme (students in programme)

Wider results of the project:

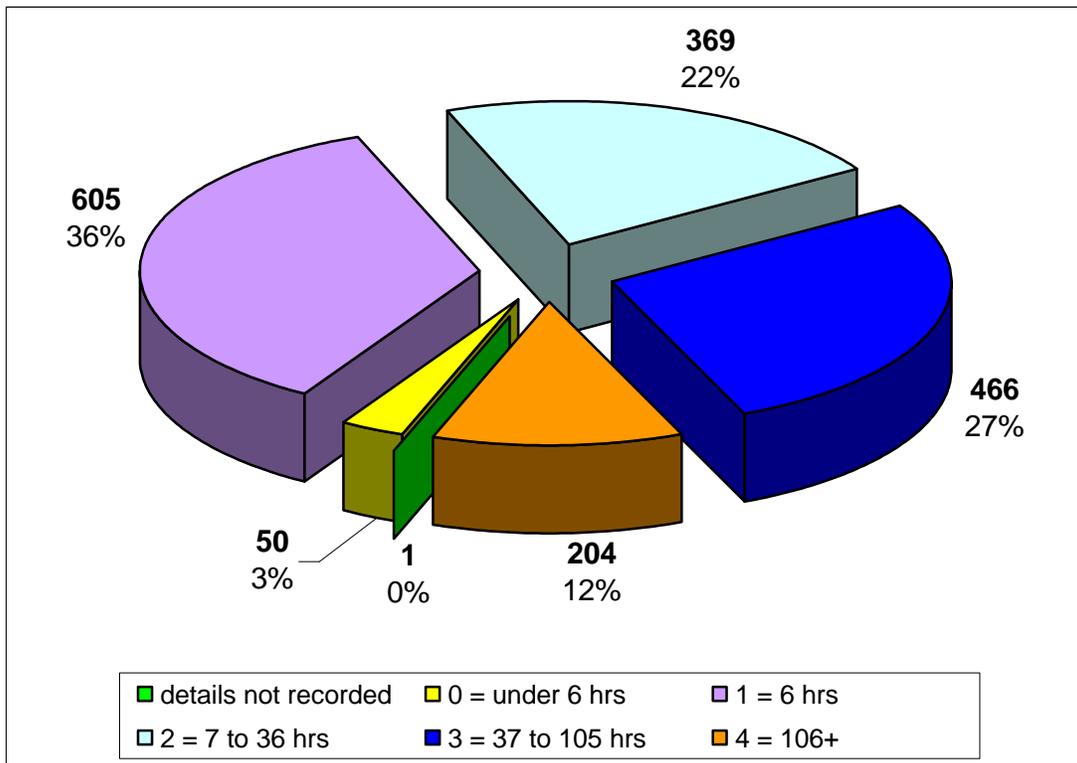
- Increased participation in post 16 learning of all forms. (as measured by Connexions Activity Surveys)
- Enhanced progression into employment with training (Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships)(as measured by ILR).

Source: 2007-08 Area Wide Beneficiaries Records FCP2 Internal Evaluation Report June 2008

Range of FCP2 Activities

Monitoring data confirms that in the year 2007-2008, a total of 1,695 learning outputs (including staff development) were recorded on the Tyne and Wear database. Although funders require a minimum six-hour input to record the learning opportunity on the project monitoring system, FCP differentiates between learning opportunities according to their length. Figure 3 below, therefore, shows the provision broken down into the 4 categories of output length from 6 hours to over 106 hours. It illustrates that 97% of learners accessed the minimum requirement of six hours of provision and only 3% of all registered learners did not achieve the minimum 6-hour learning opportunity. These figures are very similar to data from the previous year, and the information is also listed to indicate those outputs that were less than 6 hours where, in most cases, the students have declined to continue or complete the provision on offer.

Figure 3: Learning outputs recorded by length

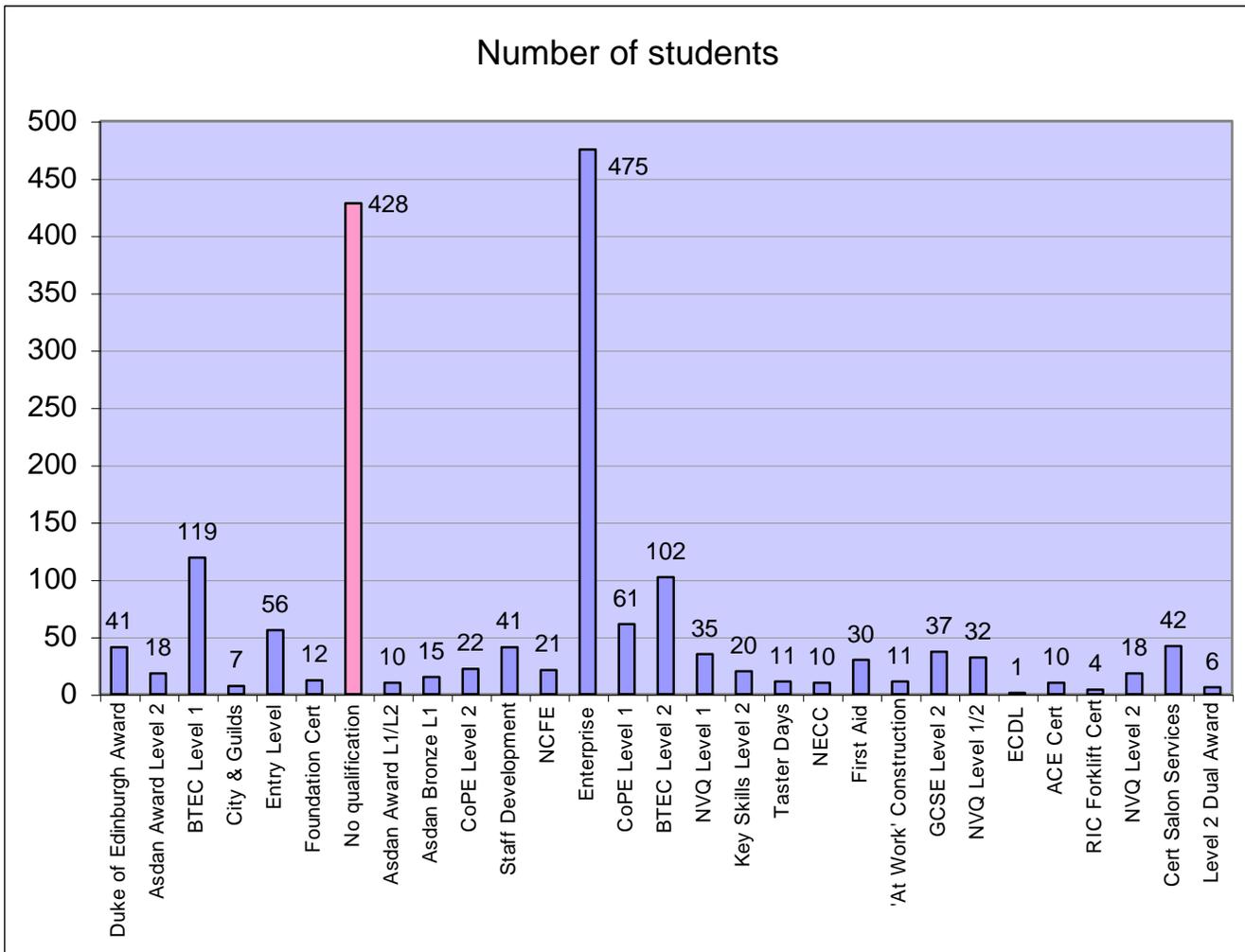


Source: 2007-08 Area Wide Beneficiaries Records FCP2 Internal Evaluation Report June 2008

In relation to the type and range of opportunities taken up, each of the five areas has provided a wide range of vocational learning opportunities, which means that learners in the five areas have had the opportunity to attend a wide range of alternative educational/vocational provision.

The following figure (figure 4) shows the type of courses, training, qualifications achieved or worked towards, units and vocational areas that learners have accessed through the funded provision.

Figure 4: Types of certificates/qualifications accessed



- No qual/not known (breakdown):
 - Employment support/advice and guidance – 44
 - Food hygiene course – 3
 - Life skills and first aid – 33
 - Various/NEET activity/other - 348

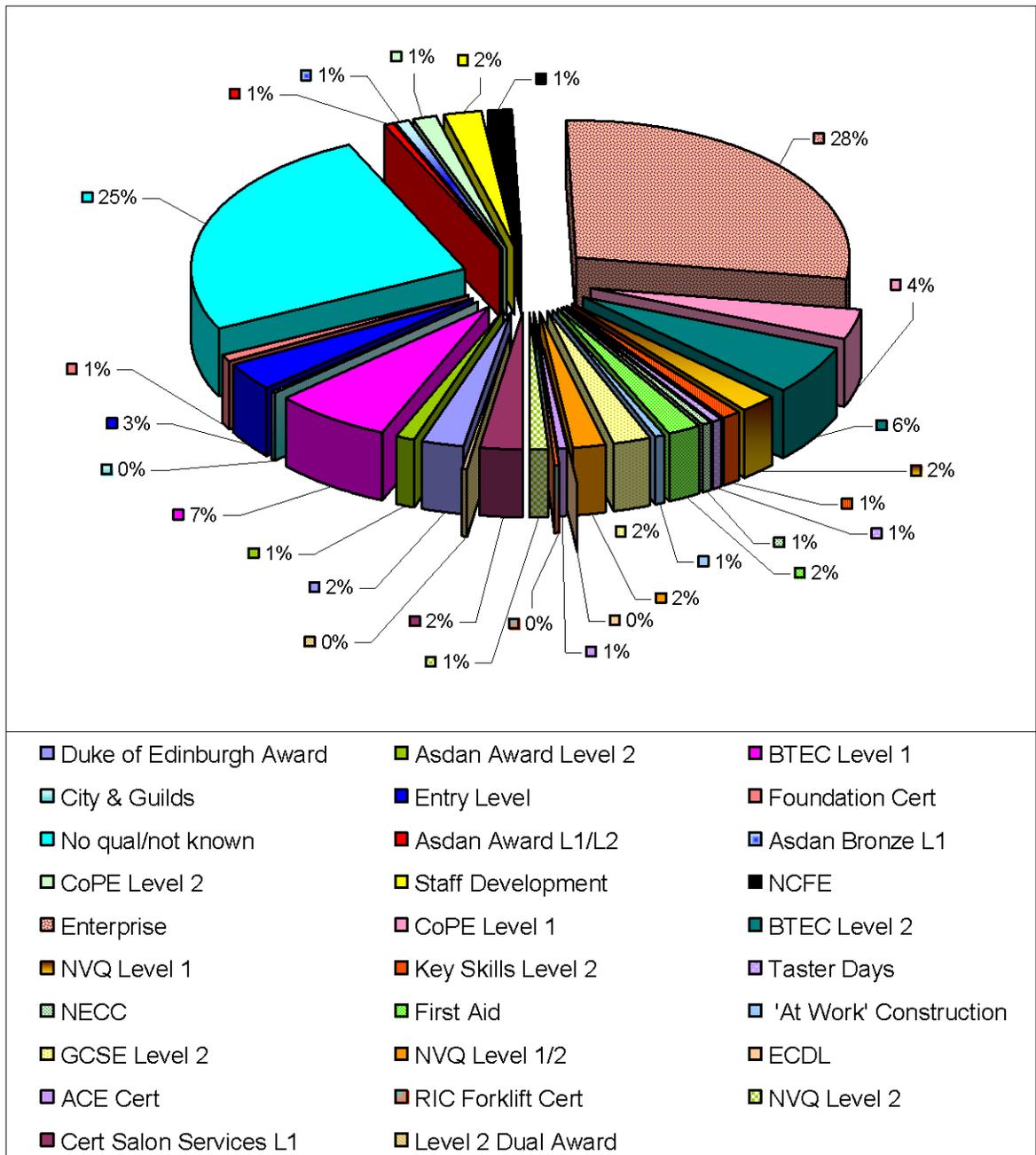
Source: 2007-08 Area Wide Beneficiaries Records FCP2 Internal Evaluation Report June 2008

The final year of the FCP2 project, therefore, has continued to offer a great variety of provision and level of accreditation catering to learners from a wide spectrum of abilities. The level and length of the provision has differed significantly dependent upon the type of course or activity taken. A range of courses, training and other work-based activities following a number of patterns of provision have been successfully taken up by learners. These have been introduced to meet the individual needs of learners that were not being met in the traditional school setting. Some of the activities were adapted from previous provision, but some have been created as a result of FCP2.

Impact on learners

The focus of the FCP2 project has been retained for providing flexible and target-focused activities that have been directed at each area's needs, in order to have maximum impact on the individual learners and cohorts involved. With reference to specific, or 'hard' outcomes collected through Beneficiary records, figure 5 (below) illustrates the percentage of learners that are working towards or have completed the subject area/level of accreditation.

Figure 2: Percentage of accreditation/courses accessed



Documentary and interview evidence suggest that FCP2 programmes have resulted in positive outcomes for non-academic students and the marginalised and disaffected. Importantly, it has impacted positively upon the lives and life-chances of the main beneficiaries, the young people, for whom 'soft outcomes' were reported as being equally as important a measure of impact for them.

David was a year 11 pupil at a local school who was identified as having behavioural difficulties and at risk of dropping out of school. He started the flexible curriculum programme at The Box Youth Project but in difficult circumstances he found himself on short term exclusions, and involved in the Youth Offending Team. After a short while at a friend's house, David found himself homeless and sleeping rough. The fact that David was attending the flexible curriculum programme meant his school could be contacted and David could be tracked down.

Along with a close liaison with the school, David found accommodation at a local hostel in the city centre and negotiated his return to The Box. At this time David received an all round holistic approach to care and the opportunity to talk about any issues he was dealing with. This was something that attending the Box Project allowed David to do. David was allowed to attend The Box even once he was excluded from school, where he participated in team building skills, key fund and careers advice and positive support. The FCP2 project also paid for David to get transport to attend his GCSE exams as he was struggling financially. Visits were also organized to local Colleges and help offered with bank accounts, etc.

The FCP2 project offered a support to David when there was very little continuity or stability in his life. The programme allowed for an informal setting to encourage David and also the opportunity to track his progress and make sure he was receiving the right level of help.

Box Youth Project, Sunderland

Learner respondents during interviews talked at length about the benefits they had experienced through their involvement with various FCP2 activities. Three year 10 students in one authority spoke in particular about their experiences of ASDAN at Longbenton Community College, North Tyneside LA, which involves around 6 lessons per week in addition to a day a week on work based placement. On placement, two students have gained experience in warehousing and retail and also in horticulture; and one had work based learning placements in bricklaying, joinery and car mechanics. Training takes place as various local providers including Northumbria Youth Action in North Shields, and Barnardos. They reported that they felt nervous at the start, but generally agreed that once they started the course they felt good from the beginning. They reported that the placement was 'fun' and particularly like the fact that they get to finish early and start late (09.30 on placement).

Parents/carers were generally supportive and explained to them that the vocational training could be beneficial in helping them find employment. They prefer being on placement to being in class – they were not keen on the ASDAN classes describing them as '*boring and pointless.*' They have covered issues such as rent and shopping – things to do with independent living and they were positive about the work based

placements noting that *'this will help for the future'* and were much more positive and upbeat when discussing this. They described the day on placement as being:

'better than school...you are doing something and not just sitting down.'

They will continue with the course (once again involving going on placement a day a week) in Year 11 and are happy to be given the opportunity to do this. With regards to outcomes, they said about their placements:

'You get skills' and *'You learn a fair bit.'*

There was recognition that the skills learnt and experience gained will put them in good stead for the future:

'it will help you get a job';
'you can say you are the one for the job';
'it helps when you are older.'

Their experience has encouraged them to reflect on what skills are needed for future employment. One student noted that he has learnt how to work differently. Also, adults on placement treat them with respect and talk to them like adults – they treat them differently to how some teachers treat them. They have also made some new friends from different schools - 50 young people from schools across North Tyneside are involved in the ASDAN work based placements).

Young people within other projects, such as the Gateshead Collective, described how they had benefitted from their experiences of the taster sessions:

I used to be shy but the course gave me confidence to interact with others

The friendly atmosphere helped me interact with others

The course helped me improve my communication skills

Good fun, interesting and something to do on Saturday mornings

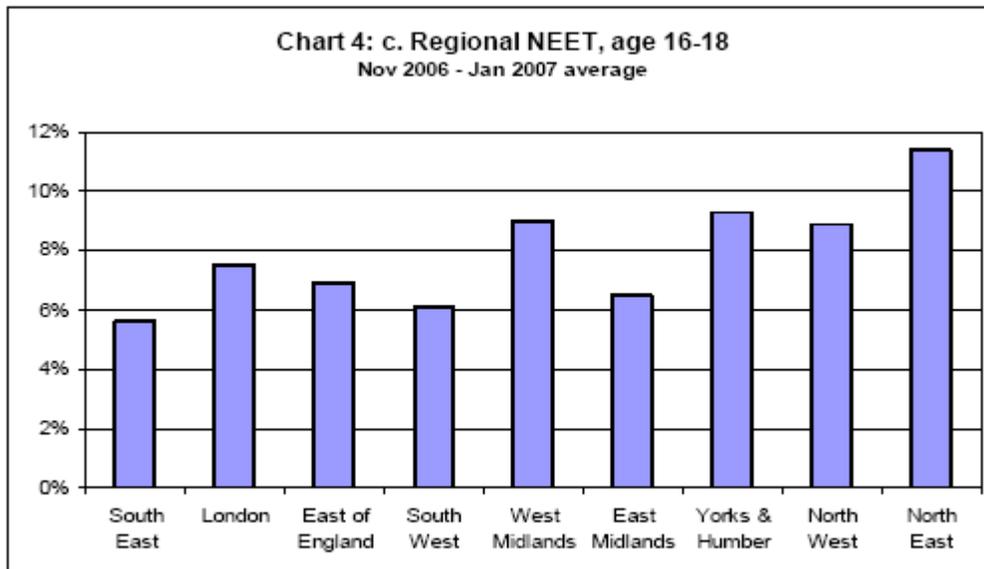
The course has boosted my confidence – especially speaking in front of others.

The numerous changing roles and accountability structures of the key agencies involved in FCP2 – for example the Local Authorities, Learning and Skills Council, Connexions, regional Development Agencies - present obstacles to accessing funding and managing projects, and maintaining a positive impact on young learners.

NEET

NEET statistics nationally highlight the North East region generally as being the area with the highest percentage of NEETs at January 2007:

Table 2: Regional NEET statistics, age 16-18



Source: CCIS data

A press release (26th June 2007) from the Department for Education and Skills (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2007_0115), makes the following points concerning NEET, which may help to contextualise the FCP2 NEET data:

- Reduction of 1.5 percentage points in the proportion of 16 and 17 year old Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) 2004-2005.
- The overall 2006 NEET figure for all 16-18 year olds is 10.3 %: down from 10.9% at end 2005.
- Rise in the proportion of 16-18 year olds in education and training to 77.3% at end 2006: up from 76.8% at end 2005.
- Increase in the total number of 16-18 year olds in education and training by 15,500 to 1,547,000 at end 2006: the highest ever.
- Further large rise in the proportion of 16 year olds in full-time education to 78.1% (up from 75.8%), since the end of 2005.

The Statistical First Release can be found here:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000734/index.shtml>

The figures provided by Connexions for young people not engaged in education, employment or training seem to show a continued gradual reduction in NEET since 2003 for 16-18 year olds in the FCP2 geographical areas. It was recognised by several respondents that no direct causal link can be demonstrated between FCP2 and the downward trend in NEET, given the difficulty of teasing out the impact of FCP2 from the wider network of provision within the North East – however, respondents did talk about ‘*plausible causality*’ in relation to impact and it would be surprising if FCP2 had not contributed to the reduction in NEET:

Table 3: NEET 16-19 Unadjusted figures

NEET 16-18: UNADJUSTED	Nov-03	Nov-04	Nov-05	Nov-06	Nov-07 - Jan-08	2004- 2007	2003- 2007
Gateshead	9.6%	13.8%	12.6%	11.6%	9.9%	-3.9%	0.3%
Newcastle	11.8%	10.6%	9.5%	8.2%	8.2%	-2.4%	-3.6%
North Tyneside	10.0%	10.6%	11.2%	11.2%	8.4%	-2.2%	-1.6%
South Tyneside	12.5%	11.5%	12.2%	10.4%	9.4%	-2.1%	-3.1%
Sunderland	13.4%	12.5%	12.3%	12.4%	11.9%	-0.6%	-1.5%
Tyne and Wear	11.8%	11.8%	11.3%	10.6%	9.6%	-2.2%	-2.2%
North East	10.1%	10.7%	N/A	N/A	N/A		
England	7.6%	7.1%	N/A	N/A	N/A		

Source: Connexions Service administrative data (CCIS)

Table 4: NEET 16-19 Adjusted figures

NEET 16-18: ADJUSTED	Nov-03	Nov-04	Nov-05	Nov-06	Nov-07 - Jan-08	2004- 2007	2003- 2007
Gateshead	13.4%	14.5%	13.8%	12.1%	10.4%	-4.1%	-3.0%
Newcastle	15.0%	11.9%	10.6%	9.5%	9.4%	-2.5%	-5.6%
North Tyneside	13.3%	11.4%	11.5%	11.5%	8.8%	-2.6%	-4.5%
South Tyneside	14.6%	12.3%	13.5%	11.2%	10.6%	-1.7%	-4.0%
Sunderland	14.1%	13.1%	12.9%	13.1%	12.8%	-0.3%	-1.3%
Tyne and Wear	14.1%	12.6%	12.2%	11.4%	10.5%	-2.1%	-3.6%
North East	11.7%	11.5%	11.5%	11.0%	10.0%	-1.5%	-1.7%
England	8.7%	7.7%	7.7%	7.1%	6.7%	-1.0%	-2.0%

Source: Connexions Service administrative data (CCIS)

The data presented in Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate a steady downward trend in NEET across the region for 16-19 year olds and clearly programmes such as FCP2 and the activities within it have a valuable part to play in this positive trend.

Evidence of benefits and impact in terms of 'soft' outcomes were equally (in some cases much more) valued by respondents during the research and were recognised by both the learners and project staff. Interview and case study data indicate that learners had engaged successfully with vocational programmes sufficiently to progress to further vocational learning. 'Give it a Try', for example, is an initiative which concentrates on young people who are NEET at the age of 16/17, and the following case study serves to illustrate the progression benefit that one student experienced:

The young person was not in education, employment or training after leaving school in the summer. The young person was invited to a 'Give it a Try' event and a referral was made for the young person to give motor vehicle a try at an E2E provider. Following on from the event, the young person came into the Connexions centre to talk with a Personal Advisor about training. The Give it a Try event offered the young person a vocational taste of work and training around a specific area.

Once he had 'tasted' the idea on the day, he showed excitement and discussed the help and support given by E2E provider and Connexions. The taster day appeared to have given the young person confidence in developing his ideas and thoughts about the future. The young person showed signs of being very open and keen and towards the end of the intervention; he appeared positive and discussed eventually running his own business.

'Give it a Try'

Robert is 16. He is currently NEET but hopes not to be for long. After moving to the area from Scotland about a year ago he was told there were no places for him in local schools. He became involved in the Connexions Connect project about a year ago. The EWO he was working with at the time influenced him to take part. On reflection he thinks he would have ended up being '*chucked out of school*' and he was open about the fact that he did not like school and did not feel that he learnt a great deal.

Robert spoke positively about his involvement in the Connect project noting: '*I've learnt more in connect than in school...it has been a big boost to my confidence. I would never have done this* (given an interview). He also said '*I am normally quiet and shy but now I can't stop talking.*'

He has 'made loads of new friends.' He has also, as a result, kept his distance from friends that have a less than positive influence on him (they drink excessively and take drugs. Robert has been involved with the Youth Offending Team but feels that engagement in Connect has helped keep him on the straight and narrow. He has received mentoring support which he appreciated and got to do a wide range of activities including rock climbing and horse riding. He has '*enjoyed every bit*' reporting nothing that he did not like about the project.

In September he plans to go to college to study public uniformed services (he wants to be a fire fighter and so this course is the right one for him). He has been offered a place and has visited both Gateshead and Newcastle College for a look around. He was accompanied on these visits by a worker from Connect – he appreciated this.

Robert reported that staff treated him with respect (something he did not experience at school) and they did not '*mess him around,*' but treated him like an adult.

The experience has been fantastic for Robert. He ended by saying: '*I used to want to be on the dole but now. I can't wait to start college.*'

Gateshead Connect Project

Conclusions

The partnership work that has developed as a result of FCP2, in conjunction with the diverse range of innovative projects that was created, will mean that all of the 5 areas are in a good position to address the current and future 14-19 reforms. All of the respondents were extremely positive about the Flexible Curriculum Programme and felt that it had produced an extremely worthwhile range of activities that addressed local needs. In fact one respondent commented that:

it was the most successful school age programme in recent years.

The feedback received from members of the project has been extremely positive demonstrating the valuable impact the project has had for learners at local level, whilst also illustrating effective and successful partnership collaboration across a Tyne and Wear-wide project. FCP2 has contributed across Tyne and Wear to the emergence of a wide range of off-site provision and promoted flexible collaboration between a wide range of delivery partners at local level. Young people in secondary schools have been provided with wider local access to new programmes and pathways, which would not otherwise have been available. Young people and their mentors appreciate these programmes and report that they provide the motivation and support for young people to continue in learning after the age of 16.

The emergence of the Diploma will ensure that much of the work of FCP and other programmes such as IF will be sustained. Local partnerships will ensure that the funding is made available through the Devolved School Grant and other mainstream funding for Diplomas and Young Apprenticeships. Local 14-19 partnerships will continue to ensure that they establish an entitlement to a wide range of applied learning pathways providing progression to higher-level skills in accordance with the Policy and Strategy of the 14-19 Reforms.

Getting the funding, curriculum, qualifications and support right for these young people aged 14-16 is of critical importance as they are otherwise likely to form the future NEET group. Yet this crucial work seems currently to depend on the availability of time-limited external funding sources such as FCP2.

Although it is for each of the five local partnerships to implement local succession and exit strategies within the current constraints of existing local resources and systems, we believe that there are wider systemic issues. An improved understanding of these issues would allow local partnerships to plan beyond the next pot of money and enable more stable forms of provision to grow.

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The Gateshead Connect “Alternative Education Project: An Evaluation of Working Intensively to Support Post 16 Transitions CWDC PLP Research Project” by Lee Peacock (Lead PA for the Connect Project).

Appendix 1 – FCP2 Funding/Activity Models

FCP2 Funding/Activity Model - Gateshead		
Local FCP2 Funding Model	Position at end of March 2008	Position from September 2008 - Future Sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 seconded posts - the Connect Project Co-ordinator and a lead PA. Also initially 2 Progression Workers, then 1 sessional Progression Worker <p>Projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work Wise weeks – employer links to vocational pathways through the Education Business Links service. A range of Saturday morning tasters (the Collective) Connect project = bringing together a team comprised of an education welfare officer, a Connexions officer and a support worker with the aim of finding new ways of engaging disengaged young people. Gateshead College for KS 4 motor vehicle repair course (subsequently young apprenticeship which attracted external funding – LSC (match funding) and increased flexibility project funding (although the latter has since ceased) Funding has also been used to pay the Northern Learning Trust so that they could offer 1:1 mentoring to 12 young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the funding ceased in March the decision was taken to continue offering support and provision until the end of the academic year – this was possible through ‘creative accountancy.’ Until more funding is secured, they will refer to mainstream Connexions support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gateshead has a bid in for ESF funding. If they are successful, the work can be sustained- certainly the post 16 element

FCP2 Funding/Activity Model - Newcastle

Local FCP2 Funding Model	Position at end of March 2008	Position from September 2008 - Future Sustainability
<p>Newcastle's bid focused on 3 strands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Funding -The money paid for the part funding of a UXL consortium coordinator post and a fully funded 'employer engagement Officer' (council). This post was to liaise with employers, training providers and schools and to coordinate provision within the other 2 strands. • Marginalised and Disengaged young people - A range of opportunities were offered., which focused on the development of employability and social skills. Some of the money had to be specifically targeted at NEETs e.g. UXL's project - "Give it a try". FCP2 funded the transport, a £10 voucher, and the provision provided by the WBLPs • Vocational Opportunities in schools - work related opportunities e.g. GCSE in Health and Beauty. FCP would pay for work based placements or one day taster courses. • The services of a finance officer were needed to manage the funding issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UXL have continued the post with their own funds. The EEO is now employed by EBP • The 'Give it a try project' and similar projects, had to finish with the end of FCP2 funding • FCP funded the first 2 terms and schools funded the third. • This was 'time' bought from an existing post. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 projects are starting, aimed at reducing NEET – this is co-funded by ESF and LSC and the funding of 3 CXS part time posts is written into this. The bids for this were put through the local authority. The constraints of the new funding mean that schools will no longer be given money to choose their own work based provider, the LA will tender the providers against a brief. • An Engagement Programme (DCSF) will be starting in September – aimed at school cohorts. The money is only guaranteed for the first year. • ESF Youth participation Programme starting August 2008. • The 'Give it a Try' project was funded by FCP2. The LSC have now agreed to build on this good practice by funding a new 'Give it a Try' for this Summer, under our partnership work on reducing NEET and working to achieve the September Guarantee.

FCP2 Funding/Activity Model -North Tyneside

Local FCP2 Funding Model	Position at end of March 2008	Position from September 2008 - Future Sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 4 different cluster areas had their own needs so they tendered to the LA with a plan for what they hoped to achieve in terms of the delivery of the flexible curriculum. For example, in the North East of the Borough (Whitley Bay area), alternative curriculum provision was offered to a small number of young people so they had wider curriculum and progression choices (they went to the college for some courses). In Wallsend there was a focus on construction. • The funding covered the salaries of Vocational Progression Workers and also the activities. Funding also paid for a VPW to be based in TyneMet college. • CPD training for the VPWs was also funded • An online guidance and advice service called the one stop shop has been introduced in the LA. • 2 videos on the web were funded through FCP2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work this year has been sustained until the end of June, through bridging funding arranged by the LA. • A couple of 'good' staff have left due to lack of security and continuity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is uncertainty around future funding (possibly ESF) and if key staff (in particular the remaining VPWs), leave, then any continuity and stability will be lost. • ESF funding would enable this to be developed further.

FCP2 Funding/Activity Model -South Tyneside		
Local FCP2 Funding Model	Position at end of March 2008	Position from September 2008 – Future Sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Progression Workers recruited, who worked with 3 or 4 schools • FCP2 funding was made available to schools, in order that they could provide an alternative curriculum for pupils who were disengaged. Some schools chose to send their pupils to colleges with established courses on offer courses. However many schools opted to create personalised courses, through negotiation with the young people themselves and the Work Based Learning Providers • Administration of the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None of the Progression Workers have remained in post. One has been retained as a PA with CXS in S. Tyneside, one has become a PA with CXS in Sunderland and one is now working in a school • The schools involved were aware that the FCP2 funding would finish in March and all have managed to fund the final term from their own budgets • Ceased with the end of project funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See previous column</i> • The Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme funding, which has been designated to NEET 'Hotspots', is in place for September. This is only guaranteed for 1 year and evidence will need to be provided that NEET figures have been reduced, if funding is likely to be continued.

FCP2 Funding/Activity Model - Sunderland

Local FCP2 Funding Model	Position at end of March 2008	Position from September 2008- Future Sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of a 0.5 FCP area manager • Employment of Progression Workers, based in Connexions • 3 schools funded to develop an alternative curriculum. These were known as 'Hub' schools, and were accessed by 'spoke' schools. The hubs provided centres for Health & Beauty (Hylton Red House), Construction (Biddick) and Catering (Sandhill) • Employment of staff for hub school centres • Costs of premises, • Resourcing of supplies/services • Administrative costs • Travel costs • Provision of Taster Days and short courses • CPD for staff involved with FCP2 • Funding of Voluntary Youth Sector projects, specifically targeted at reducing NEET statistics. e.g. Box Youth Project. The projects were selected through discussion with the Voluntary Sector Youth Forum, and predominantly involved working with school referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FCP Area manager post has ended • All of the Progression Workers have had to move on to different work. • Hub schools have had to fund the alternative curriculum work from their own budgets. • Specific projects, e.g. Hair and beauty, funded through school budgets • Some schools have found the funds to maintain the involvement of the Voluntary Organisations until the end of the summer • CXS has made money available to pilot work with NEET young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESF money has been secured, but a new project manager will need to be employed and new staff trained in order to continue to build on the FCP2 work. • The Hub schools are continuing to use their own budgets to fund the alternative curriculum. • Taster days have ceased. Hopefully they will be resurrected when the ESF contract becomes operational • The VYS Forum has been involved in bidding for funds in partnership with the Local Authority • If the schools or CXS do not make additional funds available, work with schools will cease.

Appendix 1 - 2007- 08 Area Wide Beneficiaries Records FCP2 Internal Evaluation Report

2007-08 Area Wide Beneficiaries Records FCP2 Internal Evaluation Report June 2008

Following the collation of the learner outputs from each of the five partners an 'at-a-glance' analysis of the numbers of learners, qualifications/provision and year groups have been carried out and an evaluation summary has been provided below.

This evaluation is provided for internal use as an indicator of the range of output data collected. It also helps to identify the achievement of project targets and offers an illustration into how and where current provision falls within the sector areas of the Diplomas. A full and descriptive report will be offered through an end-of-project external evaluation.

The information supports progress towards the achievement of the outcomes detailed in the 2006-08 funding agreement;

Soft Outcomes: -

Improved accessibility and uptake of work related and vocational options and facilities to all students aged 14-17

Improved local availability of personalised/alternative provision options for vulnerable learners

Improved post-16 progression retention and achievement of students from programme (students in programme)

Wider results of the project: -

- *Increased participation in post 16 learning of all forms. (as measured by Connexions Activity Surveys)*
- *Enhanced progression into employment with training (Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships)(as measured by ILR).*

Specific Outcomes:-

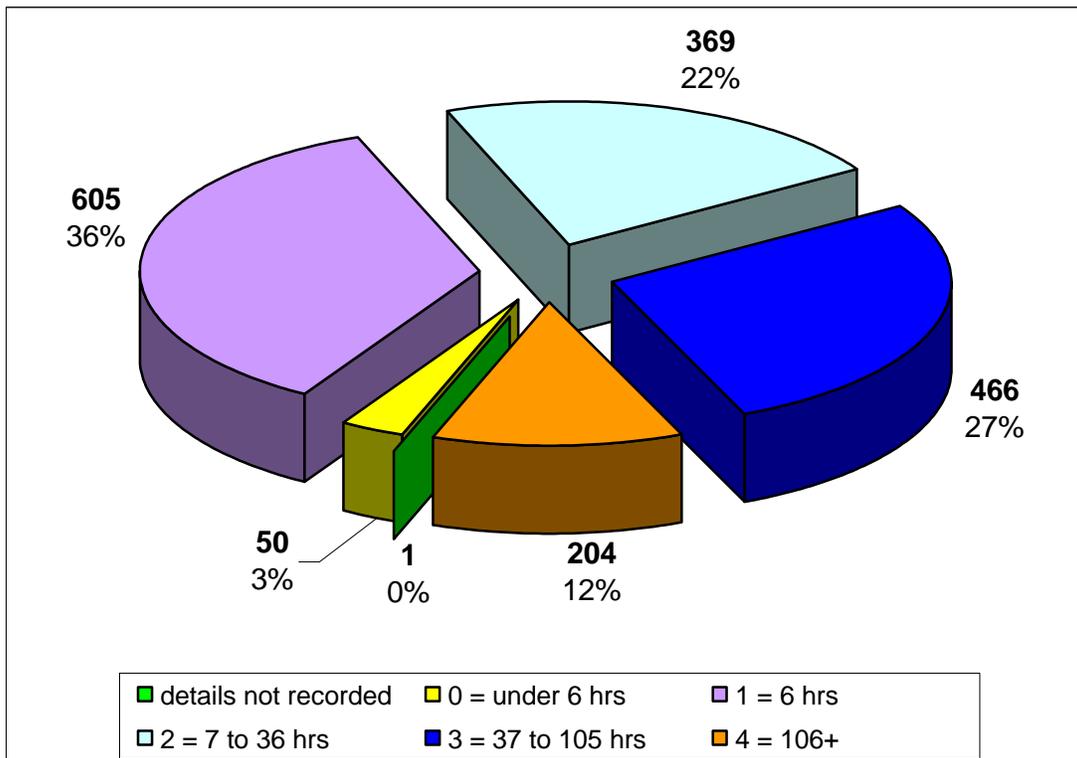
- *Increased number of young people following the vocational pathways targeted by the project (both 14 – 16 and 16 – 18 elements).*
- *Improved progression and retention rates in work based learning (E2E, NVQ, and Apprenticeships) (as measured by ILR)*
- *Increased numbers of pupils retained within learning*

* Information obtained from the Tyne & Wear Beneficiaries Records database compiled and stored by the central project administrator. More detailed information in the form of 'learner passports' is held locally by each area manager.

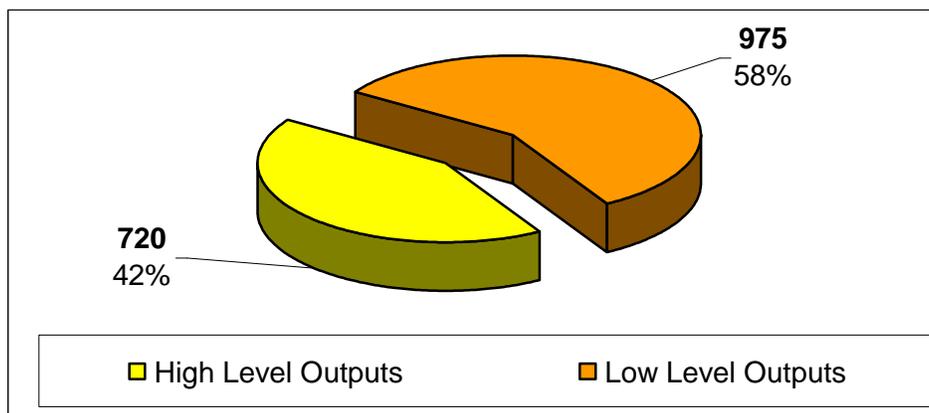
In total 1,695 learning outputs (including staff development) have been recorded for 2007-2008 on the Tyne and Wear database. Checks have been carried out to ensure that there are no duplicated outputs that have been counted in previous years of the project.

The chart below shows the provision broken down into the 4 categories of output length from 6 hours to over 106 hours. It illustrates that 80% of learners accessed between 6 hours and 7 to 36 hours of provision. Information is also listed to indicate those outputs that were less than 6 hours where, in most cases, the students have declined to continue or complete the provision on offer.

Learning Outputs recorded by length

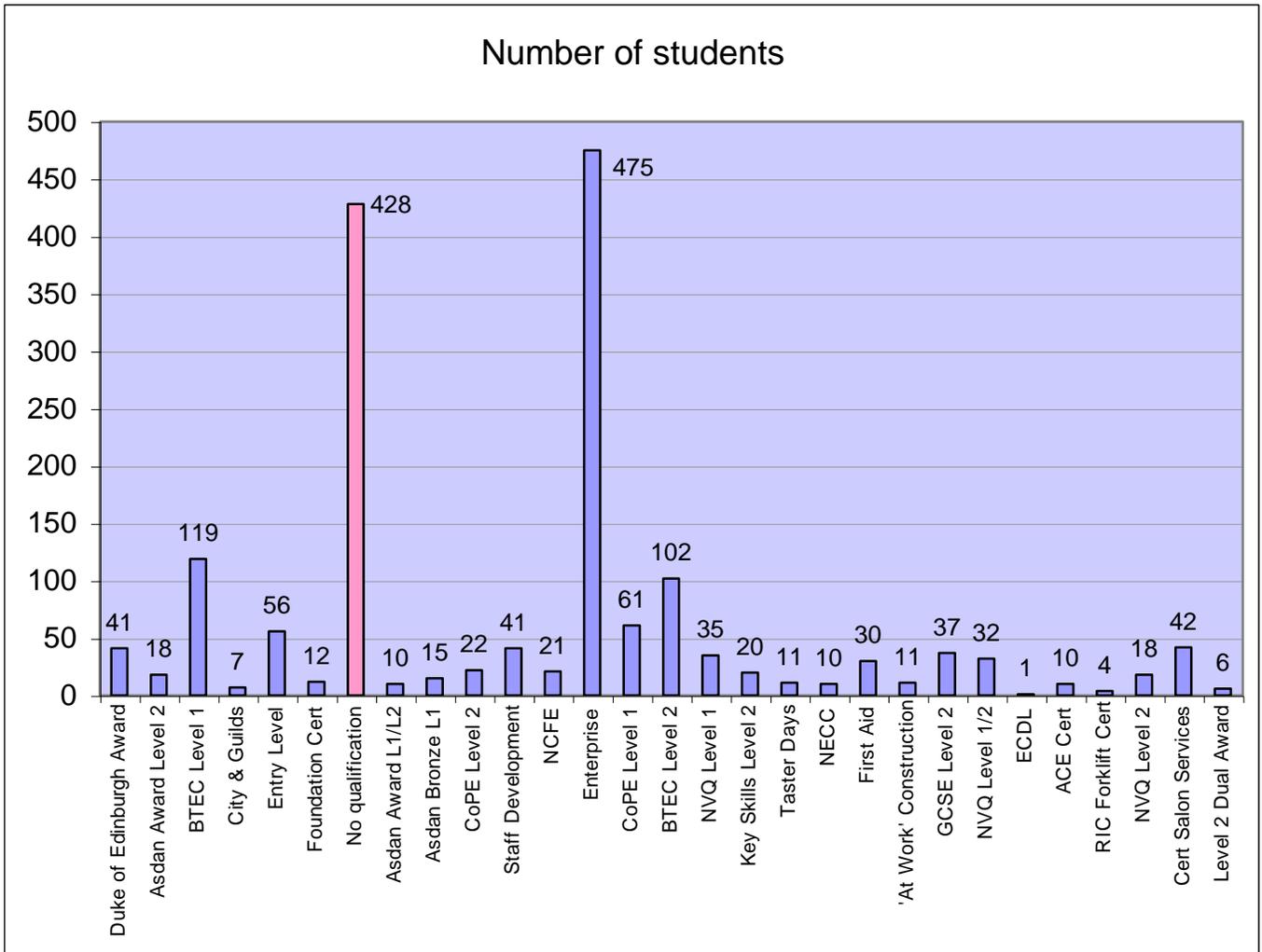


Learning Outputs recorded by level



The following chart show the types of courses, training, qualifications achieved or worked towards, units and vocational areas that learners have accessed through the funded provision.

Types of certificates/qualifications accessed

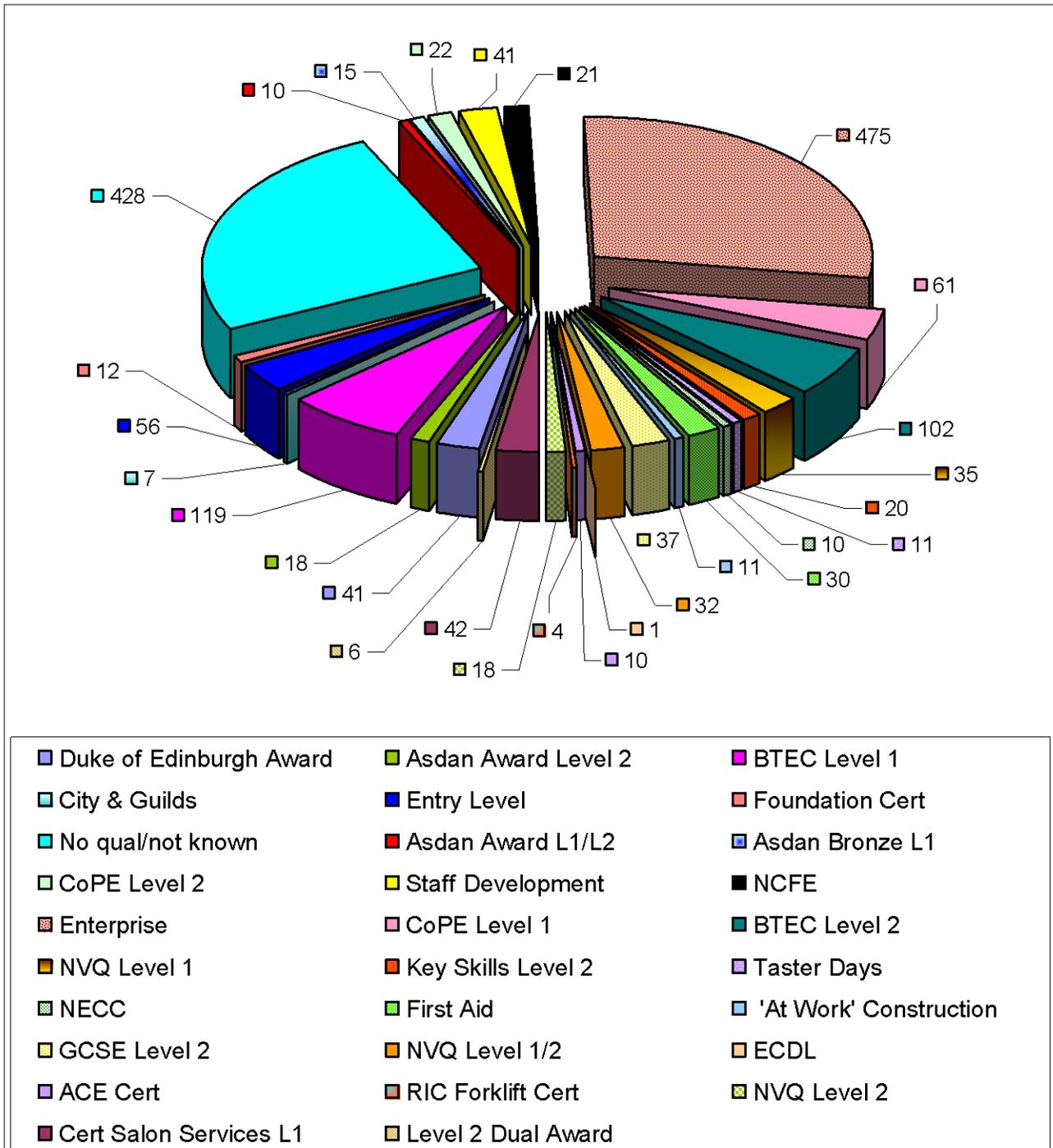


■ No qual/not known (breakdown):

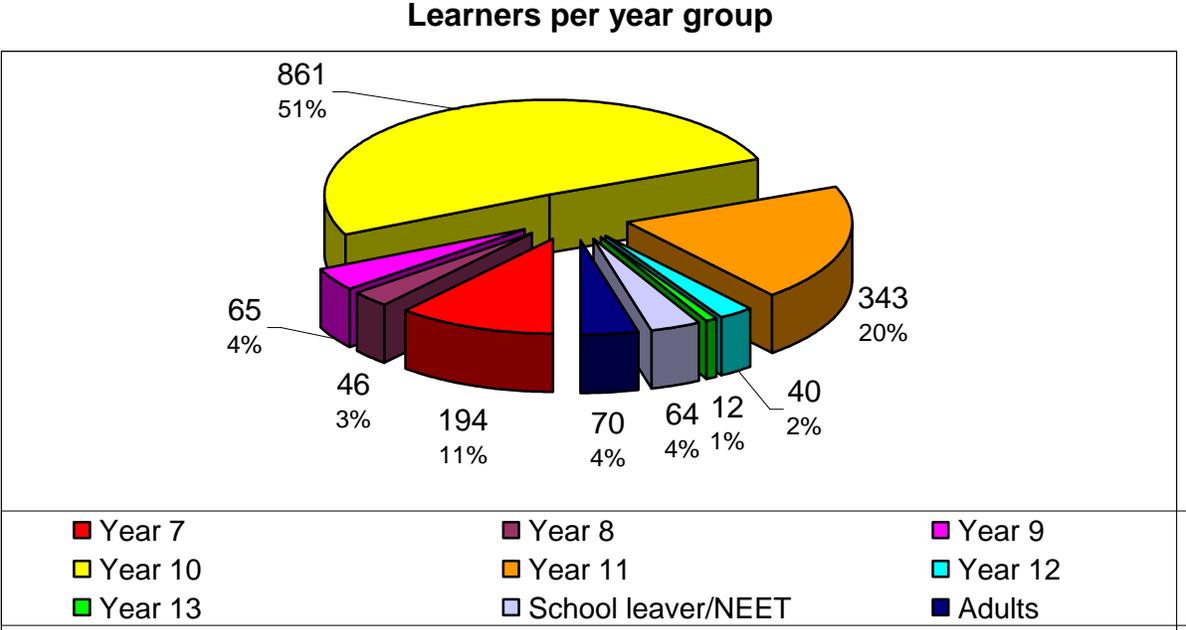
- Employment support/advice and guidance – 44
- Food hygiene course – 3
- Life skills and first aid – 33
- Various/NEET activity/other - 348

The chart below shows the percentage of learners that are working towards or have completed the subject area/level of accreditation.

Breakdown of accreditation/courses accessed

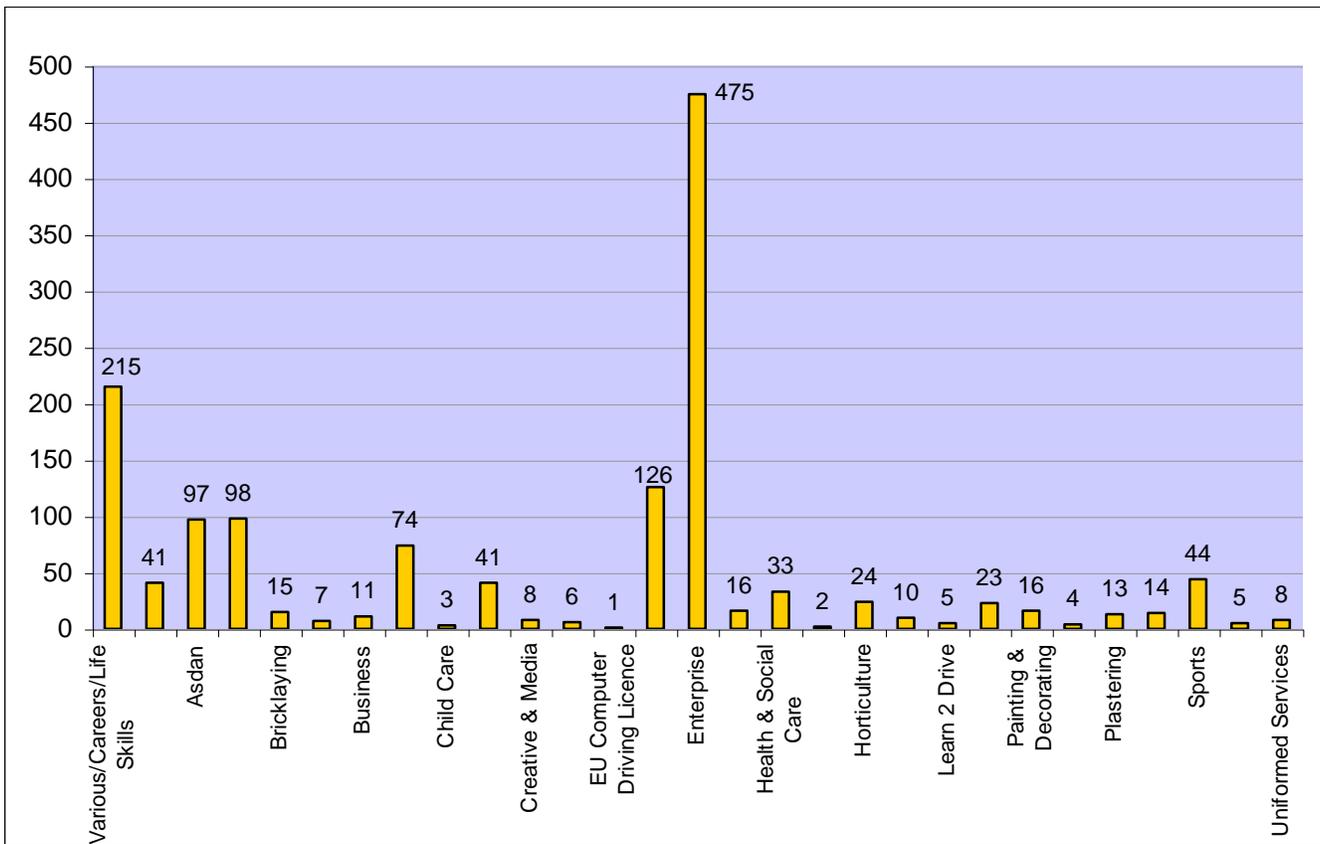


Although the main focus of provision has been directed towards year 10 learners, in this case 51%, the chart below also demonstrates the amount of learners and percentage from all other year groups/age ranges.



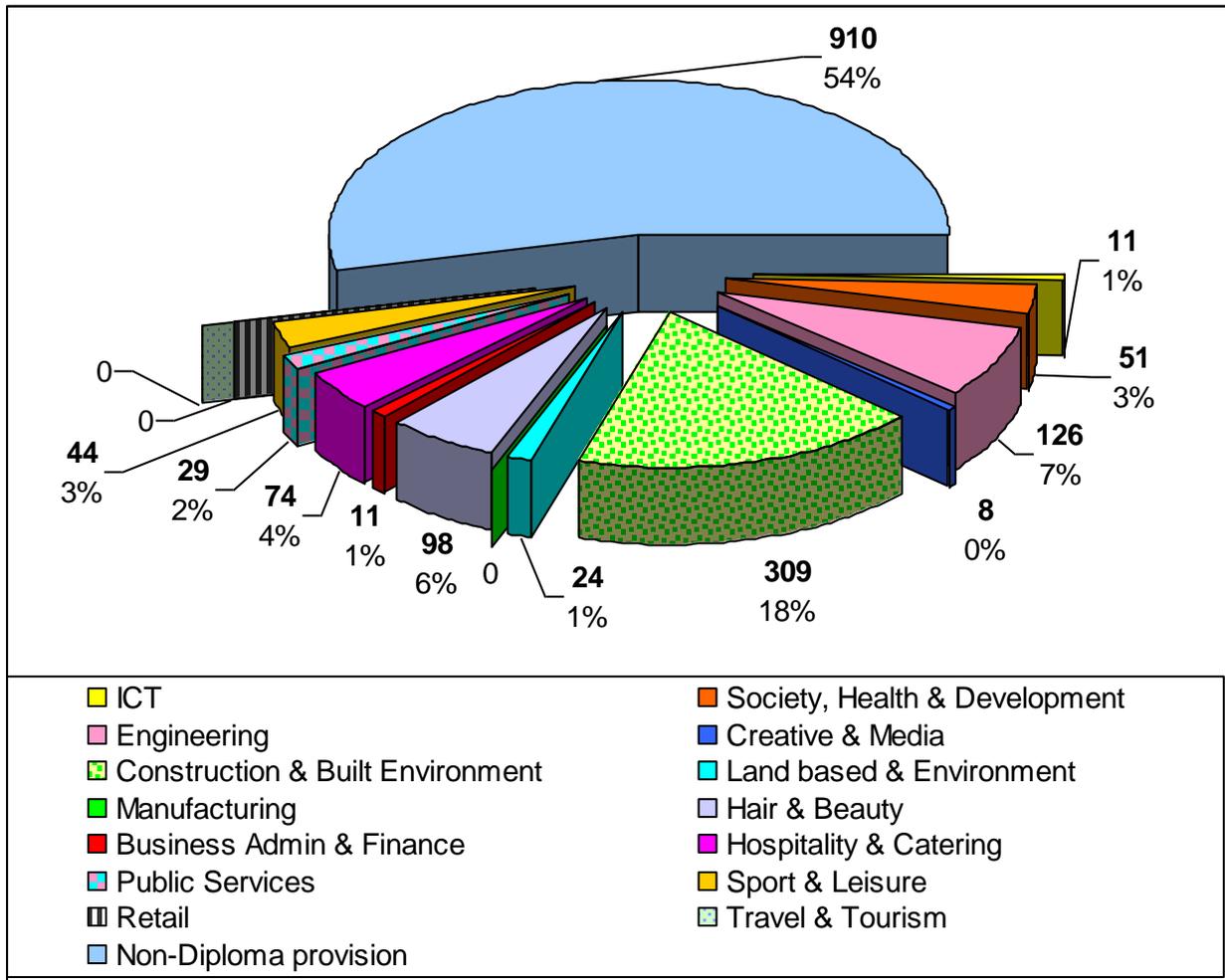
The different types of provision have been separated in the chart below to illustrate the breadth and depth of activities that have been accessed, demonstrating the individualised programmes that have been offered to cater to the learners’ needs. It is worthy of note that a number of students accessed more than one piece of provision, however their main learning opportunity has been counted against the output.

Types of provision (29 in total) and number of attendees



With the introduction and implementation of the new Diplomas it is useful to reflect how the project's provision relates to the individual sectors/subject areas. This only shows a small picture of the efforts to close the gap of the sub-regional sector skills shortages but is worthy of inclusion to act as a general indicator.

Provision accessed relating to the 14 Diploma routes



CONCLUSION

The final year of the project has continued to offer a great variety of provision and level of accreditation catering to learners from a wide spectrum of abilities. The level and length of the provision has differed significantly dependent upon the type of course or activity taken. The focus has been retained for providing flexible and target-focused activities that have been directed at each area's needs, in order to have maximum impact on the individual learners and cohorts involved and this commitment has continued to the end of the project. The feedback received from members of the project has been extremely positive demonstrating the valuable impact the project has had for learners at local level, whilst also illustrating effective and successful partnership collaboration across a Tyne and Wear-wide project.

Compiled by Steve Young, Project Administrator

With thanks to the respective Tyne & Wear area managers

Appendix 2

Evaluation Strategy

An initial evaluation was conducted in February 2006. This reported on the administrative arrangements and the first four months of project delivery. This report was a condition of extension of the one-year contract into a full three-year contract. An interim evaluation of the project was conducted by Ian Hall and Ann Briggs of Newcastle University School of Education and published in July 2007 (Hall and Briggs 2007). Three areas of investigation were identified in the brief provided by Newcastle University for the interim evaluation:

Added Value

Examine the extent to which the project is delivering added value to the development of the 14-19 agenda across Tyne and Wear determined by:-

- (a) How the project is currently helping each individual area to meet local needs in relation to the developing 14-19 agenda.
- (b) The wider impact upon and contribution to increasing participation and the reduction of NEET in Tyne and Wear.
- (c) The impact upon higher level skill development.

Use of Single Programme as a complementary source of funding in relation to proposed national changes to national funding streams

Investigate the appropriateness of the FCP funding stream as a complementary source of income to other funding sources explicitly designated to the 14-19 agenda:-

- (a) Increased Flexibility funding (IF)
- (b) Young Apprenticeships (YA)
- (c) Devolved school grant (DSG).

Exit strategy - The sustainability of the project in relation to changing local, regional and national policies and structures for the delivery of 14-19 learning

Examine the longer-term implications of the project for:-

- (a) The delivery of specialised Diplomas and Young Apprenticeships and other higher level national programmes and qualifications
- (b) Programmes to marginalised and disaffected learners – in particular entry level programmes and the foundation learning tier
- (c) The impact in relation to the perceived unique circumstances applying in Tyne and Wear.

This interim evaluation indicated that support for the development of higher-level vocational skills and pathways (strand 1) would be effectively addressed through mainstream 14-19 partnership activity. The five local partnerships were more concerned that the end of FCP funding in March 2008 would detrimentally affect local efforts to tackle those young people not in employment, education or training - NEET. In particular, areas were using funding either to support Progression Workers working with marginalised young people aged 14-17 or to purchase provision and placements that were not supported by mainstream funding (strands 2 and 3). Of critical importance were the local arrangements

emerging through the re-integration of Connexions services into Local Authorities (LAs) and the local partnership models in use to provide clear leadership for NEET preventative work in each of the five geographical areas.

The interim report also noted the wide diversity of local models in operation and the future opportunities – at that time partially unrealised – to integrate NEET preventative work through the national re-engagement programme and foundation learning tier. For this reason the FCP partnership decided that the final evaluation should concentrate more closely on the aspects of FCP which have supported NEET preventative work. This is timely given:

1. The recent announcement of significant ESF funding to support NEET prevention
2. The recent publication of substantial research conducted by the regional 14-19 forum on NEET in the North East.

14-19 Policy background

The Tyne and Wear Flexible Curriculum Programme 2 (FCP2) is located within a suite of 14-19 educational reforms, dating back to 1997, which involve collaborative activity for educational provision.

The White Paper Learning to Compete (DfEE, 1996), the Learning and Skills Act of 2000 (<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000021.htm>) and the Education Act of 2002 (<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2002/20020032.htm>), the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper (DfES, 2005a), the 14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan (DfES, 2005b) and Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (DfES, 2006) all propose collaborative provision of flexible academic and vocational pathways for learners aged 14-19. The expectation of these reforms is that non-statutory, voluntary groupings of local learning providers ranging from voluntary sector to schools, FE/HEIs, and others such as local government, Connexions /Careers Service, trade unions, training providers, employers and faith groups will collaborate to provide appropriate learning routes for young people from the age of 14 (Lifelong Learning, 2006).

The 14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan (DfES, 2005b, p. 4), details the aim of the reforms as:

A system of 14-19 education matching the best anywhere; a system where all young people have opportunities to learn in ways which motivate and stretch them and through hard work qualify themselves for success in life; one where educational opportunity and chances in life do not depend on accident of birth, but are uniformly available to all young people ... offering a new set of curriculum and qualifications opportunities, truly built around the needs and aspirations of each young person.

The centrepiece of the reform plan is the creation of a new national curriculum and qualifications entitlement, which will enable young people to progress further in learning and into employment.

The plan sets out three key priorities:

- developing the qualifications and curriculum
- supporting every area to deliver
- improving the system for today's young people.

The development of qualifications and curriculum is taking place at national level through the identification of functional skills in consultation with employers, the re-design of GCSE and A level, and the development of the content and structure of the General and Specialised Diplomas (see below). In terms of curriculum delivery, the Government acknowledges great variability between areas, which will be reflected in very different ways of delivering the entitlement. The Implementation Plan (DfES 2005b) therefore emphasises the importance of such pilot projects as 14-19 Pathfinders and the Increased Flexibility Programme in determining local patterns of provision. In the context of improving the system for today's young people, the Government wishes to ensure that year on year there are improvements in participation and achievement. Key to delivery, therefore, will be Local Authorities and local Learning and Skills Councils, together with the schools, colleges and work-based learning providers who deliver every day for young people.

An important aspect of the reform is the choice of routes to be made available for young people from the age of 14 onwards. A new General Diploma was planned, to be awarded to young people achieving the equivalent of five A*-C grade GCSEs including English and Maths. New Specialised Diplomas are designed to develop young people's knowledge, understanding and skills through a mixture of general and applied education. Fourteen sets of Specialised Diplomas, at three levels up to advanced level, will cover the occupational sectors of the economy. They will require young people to develop good basic skills, develop the broader skills employers want and act as a basis for further progress in learning. They will often contain GCSEs and A levels within them. The first five Diplomas will be available in 2008, the next five in 2009 and the final four in 2010. Following a three year programme of evaluation, the national entitlement will be introduced in 2013. By then, young people, wherever they are in England, will be able to take any one of the Diplomas (DfES, 2005b) and it is expected that between 40% and 50% of young people will follow the Diploma route.

More recently, in November 2007, the DCSF published the NEET Strategy, Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/neet_strategy_0803.pdf). The Strategy is structured around the four key themes that are essential to reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET:

- **Careful tracking** to identify early those young people who are NEET, or who are at risk of becoming NEET;
- **Personalised guidance and support** to enable young people to access suitable provision, and to tackle barriers to learning;
- **A flexible mix of learning provision**, both pre- and post-16, designed to meet the needs of every young person in every area; and
- An emphasis on **rights and responsibilities** so that there are clear incentives on young people to re-engage quickly if they drop out.

The Strategy sets out some key actions that the Department is taking to support these four themes:

- Further strengthen the tracking system, by requiring all learning providers to notify the Connexions service as soon as any young person drops out.
- Work with the Department for Work and Pensions to introduce voluntary (in April 2008) and then mandatory (in April 2009) early entry to the New Deal for 18-year-old jobseekers who have been NEET for 26 weeks;
- Extend the September Guarantee, which currently guarantees the offer of a suitable place in learning to all 16-year-olds leaving school, to 17-year-olds from September 2008;
- Trial extensions of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) to include young people taking Entry to Employment courses and other education provision approved by local authorities;
- Enable more young people to start programmes during the course of the academic year by promoting the use of flexible start dates; and
- Pilot a new variant of the Activity Agreement, which will offer personalised learning, linked to financial support, for young people as soon as they become NEET.

In addition, the DCSF announced in The Children's Plan that it will allocate £31.5 million over three years to the Entry to Learning programme. This will build upon the innovative and successful programmes run by voluntary sector providers to re-engage young people NEET by ensuring that re-engagement is accompanied by clear and personalised progression routes.

Flexible Curriculum Programme

FCP2 is a project for learners aged 14-19 operating across the five Local Authority areas of Tyne and Wear: Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. The underlying purpose is to promote better progression into post 16 learning through a flexible curriculum involving applied learning. FCP2 was commissioned through Single Programme Funding by the Tyne and Wear Partnership on behalf of the Regional Development Agency (One North East). The total value of the project is £4.05 million over three financial years (2005-06; 2006-07 and 2007-08). The contract is jointly held by the Learning and Skills Council (Tyne and Wear) and Gateshead Council, which acts as the accountable body on behalf of the five local councils. Each local council works with a large number of partners in its local area to offer flexible routes for occupational learning.

The project has a local emphasis responding to the differing needs of 14-19 partnerships operating in each of the five areas of Tyne and Wear. There are currently three strands to the project.

- Support for vocational pathways
- Support for marginalised and disaffected learners
- Workforce reform and the use of mentors

Local areas were given the flexibility to develop locally delivered programmes on the condition that a minimum of 10% of funding was devoted to each of the above strands. A fourth enterprise strand was added in 2005-06. This was delivered by Tyne and Wear Education Business Links Organisation (TWEBLO) but only operated for one year. As a result of the regional need to promote higher-level skills, to be delivered through the Specialised Diplomas from 2008 onwards, One North East requested that FCP2 contribute to the delivery of higher level learning programmes.