

Phase 2 Green Paper Project: Support and aspiration



Dudley: how education partners have worked together to develop a ‘preparing for adulthood’ local agenda and used it to engage with strategic partners.

Key learning points

- Build trust between partners by discussing mutual challenges and initially working together on practical transition issues.
- Identify key strands of a local agenda and allocate lead responsibilities to different partners.
- Focus initially on possible employment and independent living outcomes in adult life as a precursor to re-planning curriculums to make use of the flexibilities offered by study programmes.
- Use a variety of ways of engaging parents and their children in this new agenda.
- Work out a specific strategy to engage strategic decision makers in local authorities, the health service and in your own organisation.

Who we are and what we did

The partners are two further education colleges (Dudley and Stourbridge), one tertiary college (Halesowen), two post-16 special schools (Old Park and Pens Meadow) and an independent specialist college (The Glasshouse). We had already collaborated on a short project to share information and work together more closely. This took us to the point that most young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were attending their likely post-16 destination in advance of starting their course. In this second and longer (8 month) project, we developed a more comprehensive local ‘preparing for adulthood’ agenda. In the first project we had already worked closely with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council’s children’s services, including Connexions: a key feature of the second project was joint working with adult services, embracing both supported employment and independent living.

Why we did it

In our first project, we had seen the need to improve transition at 16 and to develop new provision and support arrangements across the Borough. Working together on this agenda, together with national developments on preparing for adulthood, led us also to want to improve

progression into adulthood, including supported employment and independent living, and to link this with re-planning our curriculums so that our students could benefit from the new flexibilities offered by study programmes. Our joint aim was to work together to improve outcomes for young people in the Borough to help them to prepare for adulthood through:

- an improved curriculum offer which better meets the needs of learners;
- developing post 19 opportunities and pathways into education, employment or independent living;
- continuing to develop our understanding of the needs of young people and their parents/carers.

How we did it

At our first meeting to plan the second project, we identified the following key issues and opportunities:

- Need for earlier information about likely educational next steps.
- Need for schools and their students and parents to have a regularly updated picture of future further education, employment and independent living options.
- Lack of (or possibly lack of knowledge of) available post-education supported employment and independent living options (with only 6% locally going into employment at present).
- Problem of former students' "regression" if transitions from education to adult life are delayed or destinations do not involve active engagement in the community, and the fact that local authorities should want to invest in improvements so as to reduce future social care costs.
- Need to consider students with moderate learning difficulties as well as severe learning difficulties and to know more about destinations of former school students who do not go on to college.
- Opportunity for in-depth discussions about aspirations and options with students and parents through 'Achievement for All' structured conversations pilot at Pens Meadow and Old Park Schools.

We divided the project up into a number of key strands and allocated lead responsibilities for each strand to different partners. The key strands and the actions we took were as follows:

(1) Supported employment

We visited the ROSE Project at Havering College in East London and also looked at what Queen Alexandra College are doing and at the supported employment partnership between North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot) and Surrey EmployAbility. Locally, we identified a number of supported employment providers including Employment Plus at the local authority and Beacon Employment. We arranged for a representative of the ROSE project to do a 'taster' staff development session for 9 of our staff. We reviewed the potential for closer joint working with the head of Employment Plus, Dudley Council's supported employment service. Our ambition longer term, working with the local Employment Forum, is to develop a coordinated strategy working with different partners for different groups of students:

- With Employment Plus for students who will be eligible for their services.
- With a partner such as Beacon Employment, who deliver DWP programmes, for students expecting to be 'actively seeking' work.
- Growing our own college provision for those who fall between the gap.

In the meantime, we have agreed that Employment Plus representatives will come into each of the 3 colleges in the autumn to do presentations to college staff and then to work with them to identify students who would be suitable for future referral to Employment Plus's services.

(2) Independent living

We visited Amersham & Wycombe College and met a representative of Buckinghamshire Council to learn about the college's study programmes for achieving better progression into independent living, based around college facilities for practising independent living skills. We identified the potential to develop our own study programmes based around similar facilities at Halesowen and Dudley Colleges. We also learned from a parallel project in Oxfordshire which provided opportunities to gain independent living experience away from home (at Hereward College) and we are now exploring the possibility of similar opportunities locally at The Glasshouse College. We had a number of discussions with Dudley Council's adult services and learned about their Project 100 three year plan and the construction of a 6 unit independent living 'pod'. Although the number of places in supported living facilities is limited, we also identified the potential to draw on the wider local authority housing pool to create additional independent living options.

(3) Curriculum development

We saw it as important that preparation for employment (including through Supported Internships) and independent living should be significant features of study programmes for and students with moderate and severe learning difficulties and also that study programmes should take account of changes in benefits rules, with the introduction of Universal Credit. We identified opportunities to supplement classroom teaching with developing independent living skills in our own facilities and in the community, and to link teaching at college and instruction in students' own homes. Dudley Council colleagues emphasised the need to embed English and maths more effectively in study programmes. We intend to build this learning into the design of our future study programmes.

(4) Involving students and parents

We have begun to involve parents in this new curriculum focus through their visits to the colleges and through exploring travel to college options while their children are still at school. Halesowen College is running a July parents day similar to what Stourbridge College already does. We piloted 'Achievement for All' structured conversations at Pens Meadow and Old Park Schools. Pens Meadow School and Stourbridge College developed a two day programme for school students to spend time at college to address parental concerns. The annual parents and students event held in March at Old Park School was extended to include schools for students with moderate learning difficulties, and The Glasshouse College is now planning a similar event in the autumn. We discussed these arrangements with our local Transition Group and it is now a standing item on its agenda, and we plan to develop a series of events in future years, some at particular schools and colleges and others at more 'neutral' venues.

What impact we've achieved within the project

In discussion between the partners towards the end of the project, we identified the following benefits achieved so far:

- Further strengthening of working relationships – between schools and colleges and with the local authority's children's and adult services
- Changes in our own perceptions and aspirations for young people
- School students and parents having opportunities to consider alternatives through options evenings, visits to colleges and so on
- Increased awareness of other schools' and colleges' processes, systems and timescales
- School staff having named contacts at colleges
- More school students going to college
- Greater awareness of developments nationally – e.g. on study programmes and education health & care plans – and in other local areas
- Better informed planning of future curriculums
- Awareness of independent living facilities in other areas and how such facilities could be developed locally
- Ideas about how the local residential provision (at The Glasshouse College) could be utilised to support the learning needs of students from other colleges and schools
- Staff learning from visits to other schools and colleges and considering how to do things differently
- Teaching staff being more aware of job coaching and associated supported employment processes which will improve their effectiveness in planning and delivering study programmes
- Development of a forum in which issues can be raised constructively
- Commitment to keep meeting and to maintain the work of the project group.

Engaging with strategic partners

However, as the project progressed, we came increasingly to realise that we could only achieve our larger ambitions with the support of senior level partners in our local authority and the health service. As a first step, we arranged through our local authority post-16 commissioner to hold a presentation and discussion with the Directors of Children's and Adult Services at Dudley Council. In our presentation, during which different lead people spoke on different project themes, we outlined where we had reached in the project and proposed that we:

- Work together collaboratively on Education, Health and Care Plans, linking together health, education and social services.
- Build on the good work already started to ensure our young people are supported to achieve a full life in the community.

- Develop appropriate college courses and study programmes through:
 - Supported employment and apprenticeships
 - Health needs being suitably recognised and appropriately resourced
 - Housing that enables independent or supported living
- Work with the local authority at a strategic level in our next steps.

Feedback from this meeting was very positive - see letter from Director of Children's Services in the Annex to this case study. Our post-16 commissioner summarised it in more detail as follows:

- We all made very strong presentations, pitched at the appropriate level and generating very useful discussion.
- Both Directors were impressed with the work to date and made a strong commitment to support this going forward, including identifying other local authority colleagues who can support the agenda.
- It would be helpful to open up the membership of the partnership to include other special schools and some secondary mainstream schools.
- There are clear linkages into adult services, including the Borough's housing agenda, which the Director of Adult Services would like to explore.
- The Glasshouse College offer to make their residential facilities available to support independent living during holiday periods, when their own students have returned to their home locations, sounded really positive and could link into other college and school developments.
- Study programmes are key to developing new, innovative provision for learners - e.g. English and maths curriculums targeted to client group and incorporation of supported employment.
- There is a need to develop more local provision for both educational and social reasons, including the fact that it is difficult for young people to re-integrate back into their local area when they return from long term residential settings.
- Better information and advice for parents is an important strand, with a need to manage expectations and ensure that they are aware of the increasing range of provision becoming available in Dudley.
- There is potential to offer short breaks as respite so as to support parents whose children remain in the local area.
- The Council would like to work with the partners to gain national agreement to waiving the English and maths level 2 requirement for Apprenticeships for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- The Council is willing to develop 16 hour plus local authority job roles, with help for young people to apply for council vacancies.

How we plan to maintain progress after the end of the project

We have agreed a Legacy Plan to continue working together as a partners group in close conjunction with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. The first steps are for:

- The partners to provide the Council with a set of prioritised proposals for joint action.

- The Directors of Children's and Adult Services to discuss internally how the Council would like to take forward the development of a pathway from age 2 to adulthood.
- The Council to respond formally to the partners' proposals as regards future arrangements for joint working, including a proposal that the local authority should take a lead in convening a widened group.
- The partners to work with the Council to develop an apprenticeship route for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Dudley, preferably as part of a national programme.

For project resources and for further information please contact: Sajada Sajid at Dudley College (sajada.sajid@dudleycol.ac.uk) or John Cunningham at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (john.cunningham@dudley.gov.uk).

Annex

Letter from Director of Children's Services, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

14 June 2013

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Copy to: Andrea Pope-Smith
Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

To members of the LSIS Dudley Cluster

I am writing to thank you for the excellent input and presentation you provided to Andrea and myself on Thursday. The enthusiasm of the group was impressive and the impact of the collaborative work you and local authority officers have implemented is certainly being realised with earlier sharing of information and more targeted support to young people to help improve transition. It is really encouraging that you have already agreed to continue to meet and extend the representation of the group which will help take this exciting work to the next stage and I look forward to receiving your document detailing the journey so far with priorities going forward.

As we indicated at the meeting, both Andrea and myself are completely committed to improving transition throughout all phases and fully support the development of comprehensive Dudley Pathway from age 2 to adulthood for all young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. This will also link in well to Education, Health and Care Plans being implemented from 2014. We are also keen to ensure there are a range of progression routes for all young people whether this be into further education, employment or supportive employment or for those where this is not possible we hope we can improve their independence and living skills as they move into adulthood.

After we have had a chance to discuss your document internally we will identify appropriate lead officers to support the work going forward. As mentioned at the presentation we should be in position to provide a formal response to the group in September.

Once again I would like to thank you all for your hard work and we look forward to continuing to work with you.

Kind regards

Jane Porter
Director of Children's Services