

National Improvement and the 14-19 Agenda: the importance of structured collaboration between providers

In order to establish what existing research had to say about improvement in the sector, in 2007 QIA commissioned a review of evidence underpinning the key themes of the National Improvement Strategy (NIS). The resulting catalogues of research and other evidence, continuously updated, form the bedrock of LSIS's approach to its improvement support for the sector. The evidence is based on research, policy or policy-related documents and materials produced since 2000. Each catalogue covers an individual aspect of the sector's work – including meeting employers' needs, reviewing performance and managing improvement, workforce development, curriculum delivery, self-improvement and success rates, disparities and progression issues for different learner groups. We will be reporting on some of this evidence in successive issues of *Inside Evidence*.

For this issue we have looked at some of the evidence in the catalogue covering the 14-19 agenda in FE. We found collaboration and partnership to be a key issue in effective delivery for learners.

Why is good partnership working so important and how can it be achieved?

The review found a number of consistent messages about partnership working. Collaborative partnerships were most successful when they built effectively on previous experience and drew on the individual specialisms of the partners involved. Best practice also involved schools, colleges and work-based learning providers liaising effectively with the local Connexions service as well as with one another. Together they provided career awareness events, discussions and taster days to help young people make well-informed choices about their futures. Working collaboratively with Connexions and support services also helped raise the aspirations of young people and helped them secure opportunities for progression.

Effective collaboration between schools and colleges also enhanced the range of curriculum available. Timetables provided common options slots so that learners from different schools could access off-site provision which did not cut across their other subjects. Joint staff training sessions between schools, colleges and training providers helped staff from colleges and other external providers learn from school how best to work with 14-16 year olds. Other strategies that helped to address retention and raise standards included a more structured and 'selective' process in which:

- schools took on a 'shepherding role' in directing learners to suitable courses
- learners' applications were accompanied by a report from school
- colleges carried out interviews with individual learners to address their commitment
- college staff attended Year 9 option evenings and provided taster days as part of the application process, and
- learners were allocated to courses based on entry criteria and a learning agreement which was signed by the learner and the parent/guardian.

Increasing attainment by age 19

73.9% of 19 year olds were qualified to Level 2 standard in 2007 (equivalent to 5 good GCSEs) compared with 66.4% in 2004

48% of 19 year olds were qualified to Level 3 standard in 2007 (equivalent to two A levels) compared with 42% in 2004

79.7% of young people aged 16-18 are now participating in education or training (the highest ever rate)

Evidence source: The Youth Attainment Statistical First Release (2009)

It was important that tutors were involved in planning provision with other providers from the start, to ensure they had a clear understanding of what was going to be delivered and how it could be used to support learning in school. Clear reporting and communication channels between schools and providers helped to ensure that individual learner progress was closely monitored and any problems dealt with immediately and consistently.

Collaboration with employers was important too. The NIS found that good links with employers both enhanced the curriculum and enabled young people to develop and apply generic work skills, and to develop specific vocational skills. Working with employers appeared to be most effective when they:

- were represented on the partnership steering group
- helped to draw up a service level agreement identifying the role and responsibilities of all partners
- provided a team of dedicated training mentors to work with learners on work placements
- provided sponsorship for resources, materials, training and recreational facilities
- were guided as to appropriate learning activities and experiences in the workplace, and
- were involved in the recruitment and selection of young apprentices.

Take action

Could you do more to ensure:

- all providers are involved at the provision planning stage
- young people work closely with careers advisers to ensure that they are given personalised advice and guidance, or
- efficient and functional channels of communication about individual learners are established?

Evidence source

National Improvement Strategy Theme 5, The 14-19 agenda www.excellencegateway.org.uk/research

The researchers produced catalogues of themed research relevant to the post-16 FE system in England. Materials from other sectors and countries were not included. All materials selected 'had to have been subject to quality assurance'.