

Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots

Programme Theory Evaluation

Working Paper 5

Activity Agreements and Small Step Progression

Becci Newton, Tom Levesley, Joy Oakley,
Harriet Fearn and Claire Johnson

Institute for Employment Studies



Research Report No
DCSF-RR098

*Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots
Programme Theory Evaluation*

*Working Paper 5 - Activity Agreements and
Small Step Progression*

*Becci Newton, Tom Levesley, Joy Oakley,
Harriet Fearn and Claire Johnson*

Institute for Employment Studies

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

© Institute for Employment Studies 2009

ISBN 978 1 84775 419 6

April 2009

Prepared by:

INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES
Mantell Building
University of Sussex Campus
Brighton BN1 9RF
UK

Tel. + 44 (0)1273 686751
Fax + 44 (0)1273 690430

www.employment-studies.co.uk

Copyright © 2009 Institute for Employment Studies

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the staff of the three Connexions Partnership areas who agreed to participate in this study and helped to provide the sample of young people. We would also like to thank Susanna Greenwood (DCSF) and Professor Ray Pawson (University of Leeds) for their advice, support and helpful comments throughout the project. Gerry Lyons showed persistence and dedication in the interview recruitment for the sample of young people. Gill Brown at IES provided administrative and secretarial support and also invaluable support as 'researcher safety buddy' during the fieldwork.

Finally, we would like to thank all of the young people and their Advisers who gave up their time to take part in this research.

Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource issues. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For 40 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has over 70 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet.

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 What is ‘programme theory evaluation’?	4
1.2 Background	5
1.3 Hypothesis and research aims	5
1.4 Methodology	6
1.5 Structure of the Working Paper	8
2 CONTEXTS AND STARTING POINTS	9
2.1 Experiences prior to the AA and why young people signed up	9
2.2 The framework of provision for Activity Agreements	10
2.3 Young people’s starting points and their activities	10
2.4 An initial model of what young people need to progress	14
3 PROGRESSION WITHIN THE AA	15
3.1 Brokering with young people	15
3.2 The role of sustained weekly support from an Adviser	17
3.3 Different types of small steps	19
3.4 Progression between activities	22
4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROGRESSION AND OUTCOMES	25
4.1 Progression as a turning point or continual process?	25
4.2 Ways of moving young people forward	27
4.3 Difficulties during the AA journey	34
4.4 Benefits from AA participation	35
4.5 Perceived impacts of the AA	39
4.6 What is seen to be distinctive about the AA?	40
4.7 The outcomes of AA participants	42
5 CONCLUSIONS	43
5.1 Refining the theory	43
5.2 Confidence is at the core of progression	44
5.3 Some implications for policy	45
BIBLIOGRAPHY	46
APPENDIX 1: TOPIC GUIDES	47
FOCUSED STUDY 5: TOPIC GUIDE, PARTICIPANTS REVISED VERSION	48
FOCUSED STUDY 5: TOPIC GUIDE, AA ADVISERS	53
APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORMS	57
INITIAL RESEARCH CONSENT FORM	58
ADVISER RESEARCH CONSENT FORM	59

Executive Summary

Introduction and research aims

The Activity and Learning Agreements (ALA) Pilots were launched in 12 areas of England in April 2006. Activity Agreements (AA) operated in eight of the 12 areas and were designed for young people aged 16 or 17 who were not in employment, education or training (NEET). Young people had to be NEET for 20 weeks to be eligible. They received a weekly allowance (three variants of which were being tested in different pilot areas) and in return received continuous support and agreed to take part in tailored activities designed to help them progress towards an employment, or education and training, outcome. Learning Agreements (LA) operated in eight of the 12 pilot areas, and were aimed at 16 to 17 year olds who were in jobs without training (JWT). Under a Learning Agreement, young people took part in agreed activities, which included undertaking a designated course.

This paper is part of the programme theory strand of the ALA Pilots evaluation. This is a realist evaluation method which focuses on identifying and testing some of the key 'theories' that underlie the ALA policy to explore which components of the policy work (or do not work), how, for whom, why, and in what circumstances.

This is the fifth paper resulting from the 'focused studies' element within the programme theory evaluation and explores the Small Step Progression theory. It is based on research undertaken among a sample of young people in three Connexions Partnership areas who finished their AA between December 2007 and July 2008. The aim of this particular study was to gather evidence in relation to the effectiveness of Theory 18 (see box below).

Theory 18 (the 'small steps' theory): If the young person can be motivated to take a series of 'small steps' they will gradually move closer to their goal. In the AA, activities should be designed to build on one another - progression for most young people will be incremental and therefore the weekly nature of the AA process can facilitate this by breaking it down into 'small steps'.

Methodology

The study was qualitative in approach and used a matched-case method, which allows analysis of responses from young people and their Advisers. The first stage was a series of in-depth interviews with 24 young people who had completed the AA. As part of these interviews, the research team asked young people for permission to contact their Advisers. The target of matched Adviser interviews for 18 young people was achieved. In addition to the interviews, an analysis of data from the Focused Study 3 (AA Provision) was conducted to provide further case information about the characteristics and activity programmes of young people requiring a Small Step approach.

Key findings

Confidence is the core of progression

Building confidence is a core element of building progression, both within the AA and towards a positive outcome. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including specific confidence-building programmes and participation in other more general activities, such as those with skills development aims, group work as a focus, interaction with adults and a wider range of young people, and travelling to and attending activities outside their 'normal' travel zones.

Young people grew in confidence through learning in a non-school setting where they feel they are treated more like adults. They can also become more open about their problems in this environment, which can help them to identify barriers to learning, or explore new career directions and enable progression.

Young people may need their confidence built and re-built throughout the time they spend on the AA and through different scenarios. The AA encourages experimentation with new things and this can lead to false starts and set-backs. The value of the programme is that the Adviser can configure new activities and support the young person to ensure that they overcome any difficulties they experience during their journeys.

One size does not fit all

The research demonstrates how young people join the AA at different points in their lives: some are ready to move forward while others are still struggling with their barriers and issues. The speed at which barriers can be overcome varies greatly. What is most important is that the AA has the flexibility to be personalised to each individual's needs and situations. No two paths are the same, although common features do appear, and what works is not a set programme but a series of 'tricks of the trade' that Advisers come to learn.

Depending on the young person's needs the Adviser may be working to build trust and confidence to take a small step forward and this may lead to further experimentation and more stretching activities. Some individuals require a lot of hand-holding while others are ready to move forward as soon as opportunities arise.

The key skill-set of the Advisers is in finding the right type of approach for each young person. Based on the individual's needs, including their health and home life, Advisers configure activities that allow them to explore their interests, increase their skills, and/or stabilise their situation.

One-to-one support and flexibility are important

Regular one-to-one work with an Adviser underpins confidence building. Reflection, review, and planning for the next step help the young person to gain a sense of progression which in itself builds further confidence and creates a virtuous circle. It is therefore the relationship with the Adviser *combined with* the personalised programme of activities that facilitates progression. Young people need both.

Small steps are needed by many

Most young people need a small step at the outset of their AA - several Advisers highlighted that they did not want to set young people up to fail at the first activity. For those with deeply entrenched barriers, something as straightforward as establishing a routine and turning up at the first few weekly meetings can be a huge success and instil confidence in the learner.

Use of the 'assess, plan, implement and review' system (APIR) and / or CV-building were also an important component of this small step as these provided an early benchmark against which progression could be assessed, as well as building understanding between the young person and their Adviser.

Once they get started, young people who have a clear and realistic work or learning goal are the least likely to need small steps. For others, developing a clear and realistic goal in itself is a key outcome of their progression and using small steps such as APIR, careers programmes, and work or learning tasters was an effective way of facilitating this.

Different types of small steps

Different ways of building small steps into young people's AAs included taking time to build trust; identifying and providing support for wider barriers as early as possible; starting off with intensive support to restore confidence; broadening focus or building in back-up plans to progress in different ways; promoting tasters as a way for young people to try things out before making a full commitment, and breaking down longer-term goals into shorter, more achievable steps.

A variety of outcomes

For those who join the AA with lesser barriers, the AA offers the opportunity to define a goal, to work towards it through a series of activities (as a means of confirming its fit), and young people can be enabled to achieve an EET (education, employment or training) outcome following the AA.

However, progression from the AA is more than achieving an EET outcome. For young people with significant barriers relating to their health / wellbeing or home life, progression is mediated by having to deal with or work around these issues; most often the AA culminates in soft outcomes such as increased confidence and capacity to move forward. The research evidence suggested that those young people with the most significant barriers needed longer than the 20 weeks available through the AA to achieve an EET outcome.

1 Introduction

The Activity and Learning Agreement (ALA) Pilots were launched in 12 areas of England in April 2006. Activity Agreements (AA) operated in eight of the 12 areas, and were designed for young people (aged 16 or 17) not in employment, education or training (NEET). Young people had to be NEET for 20 weeks to be eligible. They received an allowance (three variants of which were being tested in different pilot areas), and in return received continuous support and agreed to take part in tailored activities designed to help them progress towards an employment, or education and training, outcome. Learning Agreements (LA) were aimed at 16 to 17 year olds in jobs without training (JWT) and also operated in eight of the 12 pilots areas (ie both pilots operated in four areas and they each operated separately in four others). Under a LA, young people took part in agreed activities, which included undertaking a designated course. If successful, some young people received a monetary bonus (and in two areas their employers received wage compensation).

The evaluation had three main strands:

- a quantitative element, using surveys of young people to measure the impact of the pilots in comparison to a number of control areas
- a programme theory element, focusing on testing some key aspects of the policy to identify what works or not, and why
- a process evaluation, examining how the pilots have been set up and delivered and the main implementation issues.

1.1 What is 'programme theory evaluation'?

Programme theory evaluation is considered a useful tool for conceptualising programmes, guiding evaluations, planning empirical research, and analysing *why* programmes are successful (or not). It seeks to identify the 'theory of change' that lies behind an intervention and assess to what extent, why and how this change has occurred. In doing so, any unintended as well as intended outcomes are considered. The results of this type of evaluation are *explanatory* rather than providing a clear-cut answer on whether a policy 'works', and can be fed back into the policy design in order to make improvements. The guiding principle of this approach is that policy interventions are originally underpinned by theories. Pawson et al. (2004) sum up the basic 'if-then' logic of this as follows:

'If we deliver a programme in this way or we manage services like so, then this will bring about some improved outcome.'

The theories that underpin interventions are informed by assumptions about a) the reasons driving behaviour, and b) what might cause that behaviour to change. But these theories are also mediated by individual, social and institutional effects that influence how policy is delivered. Hence, a key focus of programme theory evaluation is to examine how policy mechanisms are *supposed* to work and compare this to how they *do* work. The evaluation can then assess whether there is any gap between the two, and if so, explore the extent, nature and causes of that gap, and resulting impacts on outcomes.

The outcome is not to provide an unequivocal answer about whether the ALAs 'work', but rather to highlight the components that inform the successful operation of the policy (as well as ones that hinder it). This will help to refine the theories implicit within the policy design to better articulate what works, for whom, how, and in what circumstances, so that this learning can be embedded into any subsequent revision of the policy, or nationwide roll-out.

The programme theory approach to evaluation adopted by this study has two main elements. The first is to identify, assess and refine the theories that underpin the ALA policy (the ‘theory elicitation’ stage). The second is to then test these theories via empirical research, of which this study forms a part.

1.2 Background

The theory elicitation stage presented 25 different theories and sub-theories which were formulated based on a review of related research and in-depth interviews with a number of key policy architects and stakeholders. These theories and sub-theories were collated under different elements of the ALA policy: financial incentives, agreements, personalised support, flexible options, brokerage, and progression. Earlier focused studies concentrated on financial incentives, personalised support, flexible provision, and brokerage. The final two papers explore the concept of progression.

1.3 Hypothesis and research aims

This paper is based on research undertaken among a sample of young people in three Connexions Partnership areas who completed an AA in the period between December 2007 and July 2008. The aim of this particular focused study was to gather evidence in relation to the following theory on progression within the AA:

Theory 18 (the ‘small steps’ theory): If the young person can be motivated to take a series of ‘small steps’ they will gradually move closer to their goal. In the AA, activities should be designed to build on one another – progression for most young people will be incremental and therefore the weekly nature of the AA process can facilitate this by breaking it down into ‘small steps’

While the theory does not specify that a positive outcome - of employment, education or training (EET) - is achieved, for the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) this was a key area of interest, and so the theory was explored through primary research with young people achieving (or having a planned) EET destination, and their Advisers. Secondary analysis of matched young people and Adviser cases from Focused Study 3 on AA provision and brokerage was used to complement this method.

The aims of the project were to explore the ways in which young people are motivated to progress within the AA, and particularly:

- how their goals and past experiences affect the AA paths they take
- the extent to which their activities build on one another and AA journeys are formed of incremental ‘small steps’
- in what ways the weekly nature of the AA facilitates their progress and in what ways small steps are needed
- their Advisers’ role in negotiating and supporting their journey
- what young people and their Advisers felt they achieved as a result of the AA.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research design

The study incorporated two approaches. New primary research was conducted, based on young person-centred case studies. In addition, supplementary data from Focused Study 3 were reviewed. The research design comprised:

- 24 in-depth interviews with young people who had participated in the AA and progressed into employment, education or training (EET) following it, or who had completed it and had a planned EET destination to start in the near future
- 18 in-depth matched interviews with young people's Advisers
- a review of interview data from the Focused Study 3 (AA Provision) which provided a further 26 cases of young people requiring a small step approach.

1.4.2 Area selection

The particular variant of AA on offer was not integral to this research since progression was unlikely to differ by variant. However, the process evaluation and previous focused studies had shown that Connexions Partnerships differ in terms of range and accessibility of provision. A priority was therefore to ensure coverage of a range of area contexts. Hence the research was conducted in three Connexions Partnerships: Area 1 was mixed urban/suburban, Area 2 was urban and Area 3 was mixed urban and suburban¹.

1.4.3 Generating the new sample

It was agreed with DCSF that the sample of young people should focus on those who:

- had entered an EET destination following AA, or had a EET destination planned
- needed a series of small steps in their Activity Agreement to build towards this destination.

In all three Connexions Partnerships, Advisers were asked to identify young people who had completed (or were nearing the end of) their AA within a specified timeframe, who had an EET outcome achieved or planned, and who had required an incremental, small step approach. The timeframe varied slightly, depending on the volumes of young people in each area, but concentrated on AA completers from the preceding three to four months.

¹ The areas selected for the previous Focused Study 3 (AA Provision), which provided secondary data for the current study, combined a rural area, an urban one and a mixed urban / suburban area.

Advisers were then asked to contact the young people they had identified to explore whether they would be willing to be contacted for the research, and if so, gain consent for their details to be passed to the research team. These leads were then followed up and interviews undertaken with those young people willing to participate. The interviews suggested that not all cases fitted the criteria that had been set: some young people did not appear to have needed small steps or, if they did, they were compressed into a short period of time on the AA. This is likely to reflect the purposive method used to generate the primary young person sample. However, there was value in including these cases in that a contrast was produced between those who needed small steps and those who did not. In many respects, this led to a greater understanding of the small step cohort. Throughout the paper, we refer to these as the 'Adviser-recommended cases'.

In addition to these new cases, evidence gathered as part of Focused Study 3 was reviewed and relevant cases analysed for this study, in order to broaden the evidence base available. In the following analysis, we refer to these as the provision sample.

An alternative to generating a new sample for the small steps study would have been to track the sample used for the provision research. A benefit of this would have been capturing more detail about young people's journeys as they made them. Instead, the small steps sample was asked to reflect on their AA journey, in some cases, some time after they had completed it. It is possible that there is less detail about their AA activities and journey than there would have been if a tracking methodology had been used. However, maintaining contact with one sample, and associated costs with doing so, meant a tracking approach was not practical.

1.4.4 Fieldwork

Young people had been briefed about the research by their Advisers, and had given permission for the research team to contact them. Interview recruitment was conducted by telephone. The fieldwork with young people took place between August and September 2008. The Adviser interviews were completed between September and October. Due to time constraints, no pilot took place, but instead the research team reviewed the process and outcomes of the first five interviews with young people and Advisers, to ensure the topic guide coverage and interview dynamic was working as planned. Similar topic guides were used successfully in Focused Study 3, so these were already well-tested. All interviews with young people were undertaken by IES researchers who had been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). An incentive of a £20 High Street voucher was offered to young people to take part in interviews.

The aim was to conduct 24 interviews with young people and 18 matched case interviews with their Advisers. These targets numbers were both met. One of Advisers interviewed discussed two different young people (so the number of individual Advisers interviewed was 17). There were a small number of no-shows and cancellations among young people. All were re-contacted to see if it would be possible to re-arrange the interview and some responded positively and were therefore included. Where we could not broker participation in the research, replacement appointments were found.

While it was intended that all interviews with young people be undertaken in person, just over half of them were, with the remainder being carried out by telephone towards the end of the project. Telephone interviewing was used to re-schedule some missed appointments as well as offering greater flexibility to young people in terms of fitting into their current work, training or learning commitments. While it might be expected that telephone interviews would not reap the same level of detail as a face-to-face discussion, for many young people they worked effectively. Careful management of the interview process by researchers was required to ensure this.

All the Adviser interviews were conducted by telephone, with activity maps for the relevant young people emailed in advance, to aid the discussion and provide a shared starting point.

1.4.5 Producing the activity maps with young people

Creating activity maps with young people required some skill on the part of the researchers particularly with the Adviser-recommended sample where young people had often left the AA some time prior to the research interview. It was often necessary to work backwards through their AA experience, to prompt for different activities undertaken and to prompt for when they had taken place: for instance, questioning whether an activity had happened earlier or later in their journey, and whether the activity had taken place before or after another.

In the provision study we had experimented with asking young people if they wished to complete the timelines for themselves. Most preferred not to, and as we did not have information about their basic skills levels, overall it caused less anxiety if researchers led this process. We continued to make the offer, however few young people took it up.

Activity maps by telephone

Undertaking the interviews by telephone meant that some of these advantages were not available. Reflecting upon the experience of working with young people on their activity maps, researchers felt that the process could only be managed by telephone once substantial experience had been gained of doing them in person. The process lacked the visual clues of pointing to one activity and placing another in relation to it. However, with careful and clear questioning (eg Did you do the forklift course before or after the health and safety course? How long before or after?), the process could be managed.

Interpreting the activity maps

In the activity maps, the young person's perspective is recorded on yellow 'post-its' while that of their Adviser is shown in light blue. Stars show critical turning points from young people's perspective and in the Adviser-recommended cases, the bright blue post-it shows the young person's EET destination.

1.5 Structure of the Working Paper

The remainder of this Working Paper is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of contexts, exploring young people's starting points and the drivers for their involvement in the AA
- Section 3 reviews young people's AA journeys, in terms of how progression was developed, and the role of the Adviser in providing individualised support for progression
- Section 4 explores the relationship between progression and the outcomes young people achieved as a result of the AA. The types of young people needing a small step approach (or not) are explored in conjunction with what sort of small steps they might need
- In Section 5 we draw conclusions and policy implications from the research.

2 Contexts and Starting Points

In this section we explore young people's educational and employment contexts prior to joining the AA. We then outline the broad types of activity envisaged on the AA, and their relative importance based on the young person's initial focus.

2.1 Experiences prior to the AA and why young people signed up

Young people's school experiences varied. Some had enjoyed it and done reasonably well; others liked the social element but had fared less well academically. A few had experienced significant difficulties such as bullying, and were relieved when school had come to an end.

Most young people had left school with no or low qualifications (GCSE Grade Ds and below). Many had difficulties with literacy, numeracy or both. It was notable that the Adviser-recommended sample contained a higher proportion of young people who had stayed at school until they reached 16 and completed their exams. More of the provision study sample had left school before the age of 16 either through exclusion or withdrawal, including a young person who was home schooled and others who were required to attend pupil referral units or college to finish their education¹.

Post-16, a number of young people had started college or sixth form courses in a variety of vocational and academic subjects, but had subsequently dropped out due to boredom or lack of support from their education provider. Others had tried work but these were generally jobs without training (JWT) and were low paid. Many had wanted to get a job but were unable either to find one, or to hold it down. Some had considered college but had either missed the application deadlines due to lack of motivation or did not achieve the grades they required to start their chosen course.

The Adviser-recommended sample contained more young people with some experience of education or employment before starting the AA, while more of the provision study sample had entered the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) category directly after school, and stayed there.

Young people's main reason for joining the AA was to get better access to help and support to reach their goals. The help that the young people wanted included:

- advice and support in finding and applying for courses or jobs
- trying vocational tasters / getting work experience
- increasing levels of confidence and motivation
- improving employability skills.

¹ This difference may relate to the different sampling methods and criteria used in each study. In the provision study, interviewees were recruited from a much broader sample of young people, obtained after a large-scale opt-out. In contrast, young people interviewed for the current study were purposively selected by Advisers (partly on the basis of having entered an EET outcome), and opted in to being contacted.

Others joined primarily because they were bored and wanted something to do. Some indicated that the incentive payment and the financial support offered by the AA helped them to reach a decision, but only a few indicated that the money had been the main motivator (see Johnson et al., 2008¹ which shows that the incentive alone is not the attraction of the AA. For many, the decision to join the AA was motivated by the incentive linked to the one-to-one support, activities, meeting new people or relieving boredom).

2.2 The framework of provision for Activity Agreements

The Activity Agreement is designed to be a *personally negotiated* action plan between a Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) and the young person, identifying specific steps they should take to move into education, training or employment (preferably with learning) in return for access to financial support. The AA itself can last up to 20 weeks and, within this time, the policy envisages that young people will require a range of activities to enable them to progress. The amount of time spent on activities per week can be built up over the 20-week period, at the discretion of the Adviser, and depending on the needs and progress of the young person.

There is a broad range of activities that can be done as part of the AA and these can be seen as 'journey-based' in concept²:

- Engagement at the outset (with reviews throughout) focusing on assessing the aspirations and needs of young people. This type of activity enables barriers to be identified and, where possible, overcome through the other types of provision.
- Personal, and skills, development to help break down immediate barriers to enable young people to interact with activities, and vocational options and training to develop valuable skills and gain certificates.
- Exit activities at the end of the AA aim to ensure young people have goals and plans to sustain their engagement.

Following AA participation, a destination is recorded in administrative records. This can be entry to employment, education or training, or continued NEET status.

2.3 Young people's starting points and their activities

2.3.1 Starting points

The young people started the AA with a number of different aims and goals and the types of activities that they engaged in were largely dependent on their starting points. These starting points fell into three broad categories:

- Work focused: mainly interested in getting a paid job. Some young people were sure of the career path they wanted. Others just wanted to earn money, either for themselves or due to pressure to do so at home, and did not have a specific career path in mind.

¹ Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots: Programme Theory Evaluation: Working Paper 1: Incentivising Participation in Activity Agreements, Johnson C, Newton B, Usher T, Hillage J; DCSF Working Paper RW028; January 2008.

² This 'journey based' concept of engagement-development-exit activities is similar to the approaches used in many Welfare to Work programmes as well as other programmes aimed specifically at young people such as Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP). See, for example, CRG Research (2006).

- Learning focused: young people interested in higher skilled work that they recognised would require extra training. Little or no pressure to work from home.
- No clear focus: not sure what they wanted to do. Often bored at home and may have complex and multiple barriers.

There was a distinct difference between the primary sample (the Adviser-recommended cases) and the secondary analysis sample (arising from the AA provision research), in that more young people in the Adviser-recommended sample said they had an aim to enter work or learning when they joined the AA (although the strength of their focus and whether they had a particular career or subject in mind varied in much the same way as those in the previous research). In the sample for the provision study, more young people lacked a clear aim for their future.

Each group of young people completed different core, peripheral and additional activities to help them reach their goals. In previous research on AA provision, Newton et al.¹ developed an adapted framework exploring the main and likely activities the young people completed, based on their initial starting points. This framework incorporated the role of the Adviser and how the Discretionary Fund (DF) was utilised for each group. This gave a much more comprehensive understanding of the 'journeys' young people undertook on the AA. This adapted framework is shown in Table 2.1.

¹ Newton B, Fearn H, Johnson C (2009) Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots: Programme Theory Evaluation, *Working Paper 3: Provision in the Activity Agreements*, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Sheffield.

Table 2.1 Overview of activity patterns, use of ADF, and brokerage role for different groups of young people

Types of young people	Framework of Activities							Adviser Role
	Engagement	Development	Personal Development	Study Skills	Employability Skills	Exit Activities	Use of DF (not inc tailored)	
Work Focused Older Limited work history Need money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction CV Assessment of strengths Action plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic skills Work sampling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence building Social activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training & short courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job search Interview skills Job clubs Work placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job and opportunity applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediate barriers (work clothes, equipment) Travel Bespoke/short courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work goal realistic and owned by young person Establish back-up plans Support & review experiences Practicalities
Learning Focused Reasonable schooling Job goal requires qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction CV Assessment of strengths Action plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence building Social activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training & short courses Research projects Learning tasters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job tasters Voluntary work/work placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College / training applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course equipment Travel Bespoke courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning goal is the right choice for future plans Build motivation & confidence Support & review experiences Practicalities
Lacking Clear Focus No clear goals Limited/no work history Low confidence/self-esteem Wider barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction CV Assessment of strengths Action plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers advice Intensive information, advice and guidance (IAG) Basic skills Work sampling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence building Team work Outdoor challenges Social inclusion activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning tasters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary work/ Job tasters 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel Bespoke courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage Establish routine Signpost & deliver support Work to establish a goal and pathway

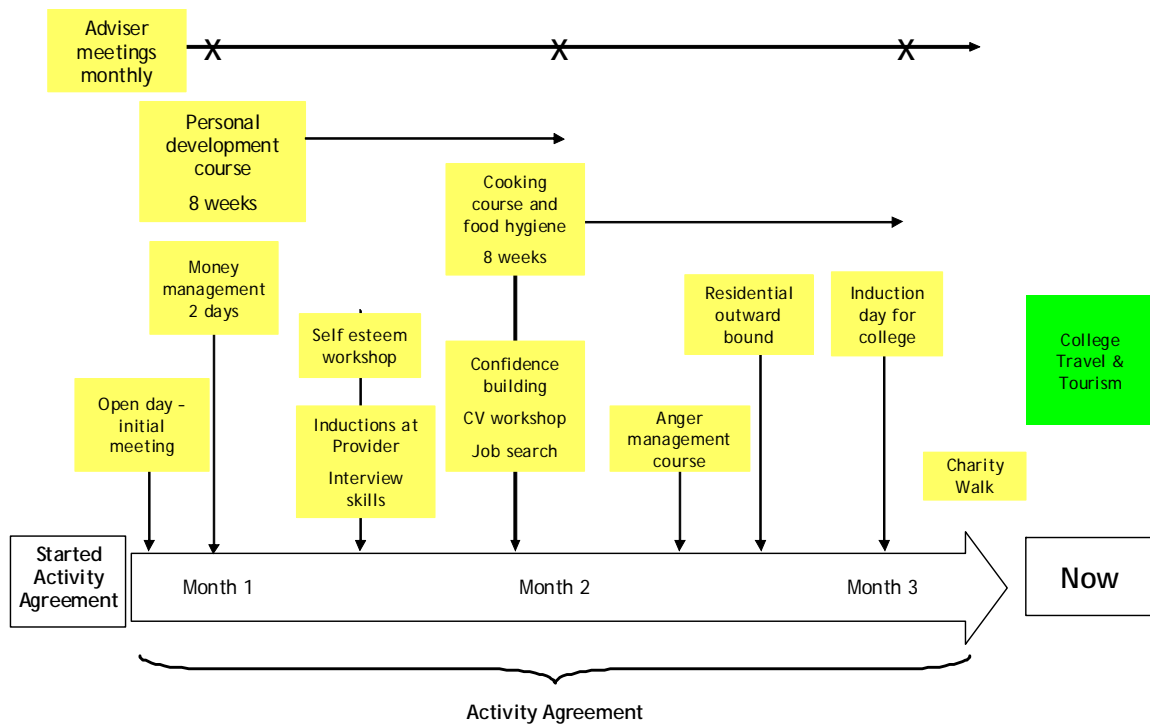
Key: ■ Core ■ Peripheral ■ Other

Source: IES 2009, AA Provision Study (Newton, Fearn and Johnson, 2009.)

2.3.2 Different journeys depending on focus

Young people completed activity “maps” during the interviews which were then checked for accuracy with the young person’s Adviser (with the young person’s consent). The idea of the maps was to explore how the activities were completed over the period of time spent on the AA, the links between them, and what outcomes were achieved. An example activity map is shown below.

Figure 2.1: Example activity map



Source: IES 2009

The ‘maps’ indicated that the ‘journeys’ the young people took through the AA fell into four broad categories (see Newton, Fearn and Johnson 2009, for further detail):

- Those which built up an incremental pathway towards an agreed work or learning outcome. These were generally young people who had a work or learning focus at the start of their AA (although they might not necessarily have a very specific objective within that aim, at the start).
- Those which were more ‘scattergun’ in their approach, with the young person trying out lots of different activities in order to form a clearer idea of what they wanted to do. This was most common among those who had no clear focus at the start of their AA. Often, these maps began to crystallise into a more coherent set of activities, from around 10-12 weeks onwards, as a clearer work or learning goal emerged, but sometimes they did not.
- Those which started off with a burst of activities (usually related to a specific course or job search activity) and then appeared to ‘tail off’ into few activities, bar Adviser meetings and job-search activities such as looking at vacancies and sending off CVs. This was more common among those who were set on finding a job. Some Advisers mentioned it could be difficult to keep some of these young people engaged if they would not consider doing any other types of activity.

- Finally, those maps which took several weeks to get started on activities other than the regular Adviser meetings. Often, these maps belonged to young people who had severe problems with self-confidence and self-esteem, who Advisers were concerned about in terms of their general level of engagement with the AA itself, and / or who faced multiple barriers to progression.

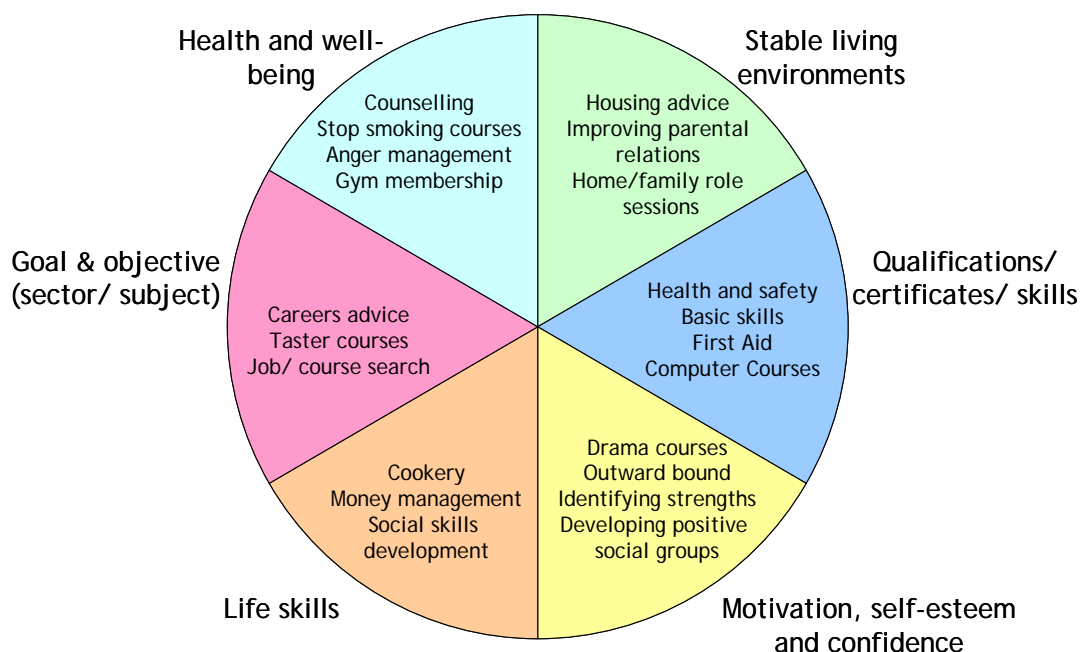
Identifying these journeys meant that the steps the young people took towards achieving a progression outcome could be analysed, and a better understanding of the key elements that achieved a successful AA outcome could be explored.

2.4 An initial model of what young people need to progress

While the activities completed by young people on the AA can be conceptualised as a 'journey' it is also possible to view them as components that help to build towards a progression or positive outcome. This concept is shown in Figure 2.2. Not all young people need each component.

During the initial engagement phase the Adviser's role is to diagnose the young person's strengths, skills, barriers, motivation, and the extent, and realism, of their aims for an end goal. Activities are then chosen to overcome these issues from the menu of choice available to young people and their Advisers. As noted in the provision study (Newton, Fearn and Johnson 2009) Advisers guided young people to complete activities to help them overcome issues that the young person may or may not have identified themselves. So, while activity programmes were similar in nature based on the young person's initial focus, there was usually some variation in the specific activities completed, based on the individual barriers that each young person faced.

Figure 2.2: Activities that support progression and areas that young people need support with



Source: IES 2009 (based on DCSF AA guidance documentation, DCSF)

3 Progression Within the AA

This section explores the Adviser's role in facilitating progression and supporting the young person to recognise what steps they had made. The section also examines how activities helped to develop the young people and their ideas for the future, how different types of small steps were utilised by Advisers and incorporated into activity maps, and the extent to which there was progression between activities.

3.1 Brokering with young people

3.1.1 Getting started: developing trust and goal setting

For Advisers, the first stage before brokering activities was **getting to know** the young people - their histories, their career intentions and their interests - from which Advisers could develop a suitable programme. Typically, therefore, Advisers and young people spent the first week or two (sometimes longer) in discussions to help the young person understand the AA, develop their CV, assess their skills or begin to explore the job market.

Marc joined the AA without a specific career goal in mind. He had tried with bricklaying after leaving school but it was not something he wanted to pursue further. He was hoping to gain skills and help to set a career goal. His AA journey included a four-week college placement, key skills course and personal development activities. Following his AA he was taking an apprenticeship.

'At first it was just getting to know the Adviser and going through what I want to do, what I'm interested in and everything and you just look on the Internet for jobs and stuff because at first I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do.'

Adviser: *'What we do is when people give us their options, their choices that they are interested in we will then explore that with them and what we will offer are taster courses just for them to get a feel of what it actually is, for them to know what the job is and what is involved.'*

As well as setting the context within which the AA would operate, this process helped to **establish trust** between the young people and their Advisers. This trust became more critical as the AA continued since the young person needed to know that the Adviser truly understood them, had their personal interests at heart and was not simply trying to coerce them into an unsuitable job or training programme.

'What we usually do when we first start working with young people, we build up a relationship and trust and in that period, talk about what they want to do and what they're interested in. After a couple of weeks down the road we'll do an activity plan with them.'

Adviser

Even when young people did have a specific aim in mind - a particular job, course or industry sector - Advisers would need to **assess how realistic** this aim was. If necessary Advisers would then help shape and refine the young person's goals, offer alternatives or provide back-up plans. This was crucial in competitive markets, such as the entertainment industry, but even when young people had attainable and realistic goals, there was always a chance that the young person would not achieve their aspiration, would lose interest or change their mind. For all young people, therefore, a **diverse range of activities in the early stages** of the AA was valuable.

'I am working with a young woman who has got a criminal record and wants to work with children, which obviously is going to be a really, really hard task and she probably won't be employed because of CRB check.'

Adviser

'Well, not a lot of young people that come on the project know exactly what they want and you've got to toy with different ideas and so on and find out what their interests are and what they're passionate about and then just try new things, like tasters and things for different course.'

Adviser

Having established achievable goals, in specific or general terms, most Advisers would then adopt the small steps approach to **break down these goals into manageable steps**. They would develop plans to move towards these goals but these were rarely stringent, narrow plans which set out the young person's activities over the next 20 weeks. Typically, the plans would be to provide direction towards an end point, would be tentative, flexible and only set out the first one or two activities.

3.1.2 Building a personalised activity programme

Without exception, Advisers endeavoured to ensure that the programmes of activities they developed for and with young people reflected the individual young person's needs. This individualisation was achieved through discussion and negotiation with the young person. There was, still, a great deal of common ground between young people's AA programmes - basic skills assessments and CV development were commonplace - but these ran before or alongside a wealth of activities to suit the individual.

The young person's trust in their Adviser was assured if the young person felt that the Adviser was working for them as an individual - and this could not be achieved with an off-the-shelf programme. Many young people in the research had struggled with the education system to date, in part because their school could not offer the same level of individual attention that AA Advisers did. Young people could allow themselves to approach activities with an open mind without being worried about what their peers might think. This suggests that **the one-to-one nature of the AA and its setting helped to facilitate progression**, through encouraging young people to be more open about their needs and aspirations:

'Some of these kids have never had a person who is purely there to support them. I think with [Adrian] he kind of said "Is it just for me?" and I said "the support from me is going to be around you not other people." So I think once he got over that, and after the second time I saw him, he then started becoming open and it has worked quite well.'

Adviser

Where young people had very specific work or learning goals, Advisers concentrated on providing them with training, key skill activities and, where relevant, the equipment, to move steadily towards these goals. Where the target outcomes were less clear, the focus might be on equipping young people with information about jobs and training, developing first-hand experience through tasters, and building confidence through personal and social development.

The distinction between these groups was not clear-cut, however, since a taster programme could equally be used to test a young person's goal against reality, or to introduce a young person to an area they may not have considered. Confidence-building and social skills - meeting and learning to get along with new people – also brought benefits to all young people regardless of how clear their goals were or whether they were oriented towards learning or work.

The common strand was that **Advisers rarely committed young people to a single course of action** - intensive courses over a number of weeks for example. Rather they would offer short, introductory activities which the young person could take further or try out and then move on to something new.

It was still entirely consistent to build core activities within this flexible and personal programme since some generic activities were needed for most young people. Developing a CV was often a first step for young people on their AA, usually for distribution to prospective employers and sometimes as an exercise in highlighting the skills and experiences that the young people already had. The CV was a tangible and immediate outcome which young people valued.

'[On being asked if developing the CV was important] Definitely, not just for him but for most young people, because when they've got it done and they see it, they have more skills and attributes than they think.'

Adviser

Assessing and, if necessary, developing and accrediting basic skills was another common early stage of the AA.

'Yes we did the assessment with Gill and that's something we do with every single young person because it's vital that we identify that early, because obviously that's the basis of their support.'

Adviser

3.2 The role of sustained weekly support from an Adviser

3.2.1 Building trust and developing understanding

The early interactions between Adviser and young person established an important relationship which continued throughout, and in some cases beyond, the life of the AA. By gaining the young person's trust, the Adviser could develop a thorough understanding of what the young person might benefit from¹. Regular, ongoing contact, usually through weekly, face-to-face discussions often supplemented by telephone calls and ad hoc contact, **maintained this trust** and helped the young person feel secure and valued, even if they made a mistake.

'It gives her a bit of structure and getting to know her forced me to get to know her a bit better and what she wanted; she could be saying she wanted one thing and it could be another thing to her. Just having those regular contacts is useful.'

Adviser

¹ Evaluations of the Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) and the Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) programme have both identified the importance of involving young people in decision-making in order for them to develop a sense of ownership, create more responsive programmes, and develop trust and confidence in the Project Worker or Personal Adviser.

3.2.2 Progression through challenging perceptions

Advisers recognised the importance of their role and the influence they had. They knew that it was important to steer, rather than attempt to push, the young person towards their goal. From descriptions by Advisers and the young people they worked with, it was apparent that the Adviser's role was to support and guide the young person but also to challenge and stretch them.

'So what we're going to do is keep on raising the bar and keep on making it difficult and that's a bit uncomfortable and you're just a bit out of your comfort zone and that's exactly where I want you to be. Because we can go here and then every week we can look back and see what it is you've achieved. And you can tell me why it was scary, what made it scary, how you felt while you were doing it and then, look at where you are now. How fantastic are you!'

Adviser

In order to challenge, without disengaging the young person, Advisers had to work alongside them. They would **balance support and encouragement with direction and gentle discipline**. Advisers wanted to ensure that young people knew exactly what they were getting into, that they had a realistic view of their goal. This was achieved through ensuring the young person was informed (often by asking them to do their own research on a particular job or course), by identifying or creating opportunities, by regularly reviewing achievements post-activity and adapting the goals as the AA went on.

'They think about the money you can earn as a plumber, but before you have to train, you need maths and English and those kind of things, to make them aware. I'm not here to discourage. I'll encourage the people if you want to be a plumber, then I'll do everything I can to help you be a plumber.'

Adviser

This combination of support, encouragement, guidance and direction underpinned by a strong trusting relationship was largely successful and Advisers were highly valued by the young people they worked with.

Helen did not have a clear focus at the start of the AA. She had taken a BTEC Diploma course after school although pulled out of the Advanced Diploma as she was anxious she would not cope. Her AA took the form of a training course four days a week and as a result of this she had started an E2E course with the same provider and was also looking for work.

'She [my Adviser] was very supportive of me. She'd say "If there's anything else you want to do, just mention it" and she'll go and look for it. I still go to Connexions even though I'm not on the AA; I still go to see her and she's still helping me out a lot. Tomorrow she's actually said that she'll come out with me and she'll help me look for a job.'

3.2.3 Enabling a step by step approach

The programmes were not conceived at the outset and followed to the end point, rather they **evolved**, responding to the young person's needs, the degree to which they engaged with each activity and how the activities shaped their goals.

Some young people had urgent, fundamental needs arising from their personal circumstances, including housing and issues with anger or drug use. It was essential that these issues were addressed first in order to allow the young person to engage properly with the training and employment aspects of the AA.

'A young person can't be expected to progress onto education or training if they haven't got their basic needs met, which could be social, emotional, socio-economics, anything like this, problems with the gender, anything like that. So it's important to look at the personal development stuff before you put them into something like education or employment. So that's what we work on first, the biggest barriers, trying to overcome them and then look at the vocational progression later on.'

Adviser

For most young people we interviewed, their problems were less severe but were nonetheless important barriers to overcome. Advisers worked with young people to build their confidence or develop social interaction skills. They also introduced them gently to new situations and new environments to ensure that the young people felt safe and supported. One young person initially travelled everywhere with his mother. The Adviser worked to wean him towards more independence by phoning him at several points on a solo bus journey to check that he was all right. This was extreme but a common theme.

'We always plan in a practice run of anything they are going to do ... I'll get them onto journeys planner and show them how to plan a journey so that in future when they have got an interview they have got the skills to be able to work out how to get there, making sure they have got enough time to get there and factoring it all in.'

Adviser

3.3 Different types of small steps

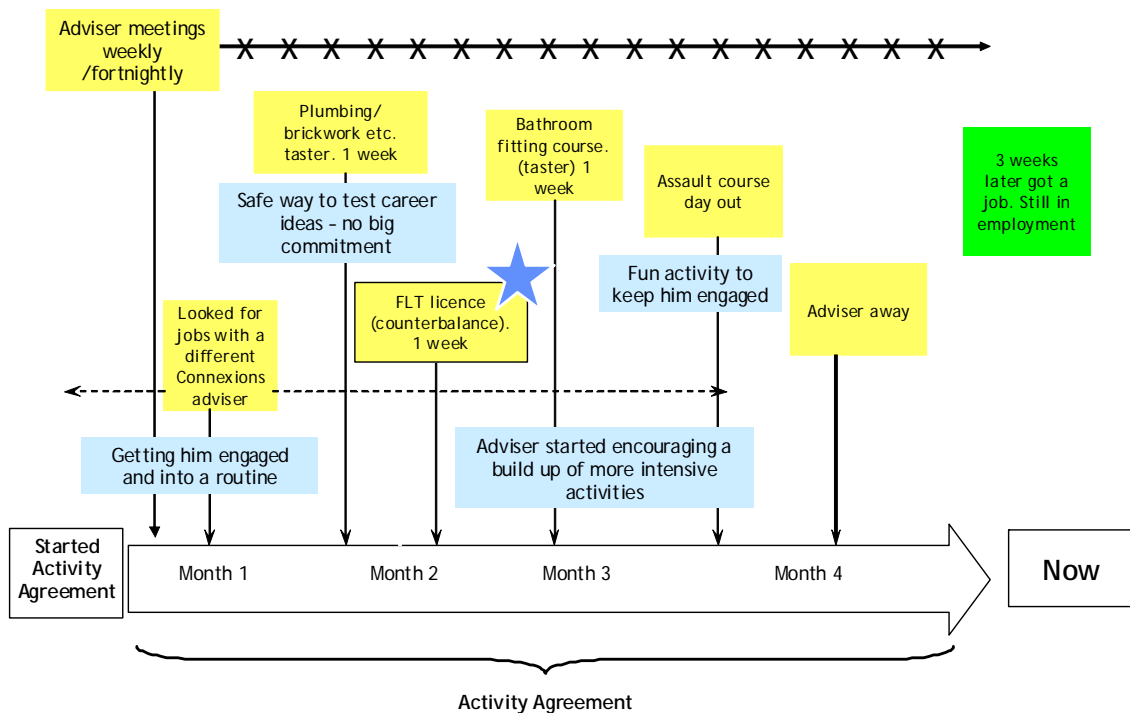
Advisers tended to think that most young people needed small steps of some sort even if this was not evident in their activity programmes or from their interviews. These types of 'small steps' clustered around the following:

- **Building up trust/taking the pressure off.** This was particularly important at the start of the AA and among young people who had significant issues around trusting adults perhaps because of difficult experiences at home or school. Some of these young people were working with youth offending teams (YOTs) and Advisers wanted the AA to be kept separate from this. The AA initially consisted of meetings only and activities were built up slowly over time. A lot of support work was often required for young people to return to any form of learning, even in the alternative settings provided by the AA.

'One [activity] was to just to get him engaged and in a routine of getting up in a morning. A lot of the young people you work with don't get up until about 1pm. Plus just working his way to see if that's what he wants.'

Adviser

Activity map for Manoj



Source: IES

- **Accessing support for wider barriers.** This was critical for young people who had significant barriers, particularly in the areas of health and well-being - such as substance misuse, mental health problems or learning difficulties. Sometimes progression for these young people meant being referred into more specialised support services.
- **A gentle nudge in the direction of their goal.** These young people had a realistic and achievable goal although they also had some anxieties about how to go about achieving it. Intensive support and the opportunity to do personal development activities that helped to build confidence for young people to attempt to achieve their main goal were involved. These activities might include meeting new people, working in teams.

'Now I had a lad start last week who is very bright, he's been applying for things for a long time and he hasn't been able to find anything. Now, he's a really articulate lad, really positive, really wanting to move forward and for him, we've done an assessment and the only thing that's come up is a little bit of self-confidence, and I think that's a bit because he's had so many knock backs.'

Adviser

- **Broadening the focus.** This type of small step was needed with those whose focus was very narrow and would often be achieved as a result of the brokering process. Intensive support could help young people understand the benefits of personal development activities that would also help them to achieve their work or learning goal.
- **Back-up plans to the main goal.** Young people who needed this type of small step had a relatively clear idea of what they wanted although had considered only one route to achieving it. The back-up plan might be a college application alongside job and training applications.

- **Trying out before making a full commitment.** For a considerable group of the Adviser-recommended cases, a main part of being in a position to progress had been the opportunity to try something before making a commitment. This opportunity could take the form of course tasters or work experience. Advisers identified the benefits of these types of activities in informing decisions about whether the longer term goal was the right one or not.

Alesha joined the AA wanting to work but was also considering learning. As part of her AA she had wanted to gain work experience and had this opportunity in one of the subjects she was considering taking a course in. She and her Adviser felt this had been important as it helped her to decide it was not the goal she wanted to pursue in the longer term.

'I kept looking for work placements and then my mum said "There's a job going in the hairdresser's for a Saturday person". I went down and she said "Yeah, we'll train you". I done that for three months plus seeing my Adviser, but after that three months my back was killing me so I thought, "No, it's not me, hairdressing", so I left and kept looking.'

Adviser: *'With the work experience that was something she definitely wanted to do in both fields [of interest] so that made it clear about whether hairdressing is the right thing for her ... because she realised that she didn't like it. So ... it just eliminates young people wasting their time.'*

- **Breaking down goals into achievable steps.** Advisers used this technique very deliberately although they were not always explicit with the young people that this was what they were doing. By focusing on immediate and achievable goals, the young people worked towards an outcome without being overawed by something too daunting. This approach worked equally for personal issues as it did for training and employment goals.

Gill had difficulties in her home environment. Her mother was a borderline alcoholic and she was often left in charge of her younger siblings despite her mother being present in the house. Gill struggled with this situation - the relationship with her mother was at breaking point.

'[Working with the Adviser] helped me to understand how to deal with that without losing my temper. I felt better about dealing with my mum.'

Adviser: *'So the small steps then came into place, we had a discussion about trying to talk with her mum more, just general chit chat with her mum, just making conversation because they weren't talking at all. So even from saying 'Good morning' or 'Hello' or 'How you doing' or making her a cup of tea, or anything like that. And then after a couple of weeks review it, if it improved, great, so then maybe we'd look at maybe tackling the anger situation.'*

Gradually, the young people would accumulate a series of successes that the Advisers could build upon with more intensive and stretching activities.

'This lad basically was kicked out of one school, kicked out of another, kicked out of another, and basically ended up not doing much. And I think he turned up thinking that you know maybe there's a chance that I'll get kicked out of this at some point, that's all he's been used to. So first of all it's important not to set him up to fail. So in terms of small steps I booked him in for one activity, and that was to see me. So all he had to do was come in, have a chat with me and from that obviously we have a discussion, we create an action plan. But that was his first target.'

Adviser

Thus the sequencing and the intensity of the activities was an important part of getting AA provision right. Ensuring fundamental needs were met, ensuring the demands of the AA were not too onerous and therefore off-putting, yet helping the young people build up their experience and demonstrate that they could apply themselves to work and/or training was at the heart of a successful AA.

Andrew was the main carer for his parent. He also had concerns about how a full-time income might affect his mother's benefits and was not sure whether he would be able to hold down full-time work. His AA involved intensive support from his Adviser, a series of course and placement tasters, and a basic skills course. Following the AA he was hoping to go to college.

'I got to pick everything I really wanted to do. Anything I was interested in there was something there.'

Adviser: 'They are doing a scheme at the moment where if you work full time as a volunteer you can get £60 a week and because [the young person] has never had to do anything full time, and as much as he wants to do gardening he has always done it in the same place where he knows people, so I was thinking if he came to the induction he might be able to make a link with the volunteer worker there and start maybe doing one day a week and so he could still earn his activity agreement money but not be at risk of feeling under pressure by having to do full time.'

3.4 Progression between activities

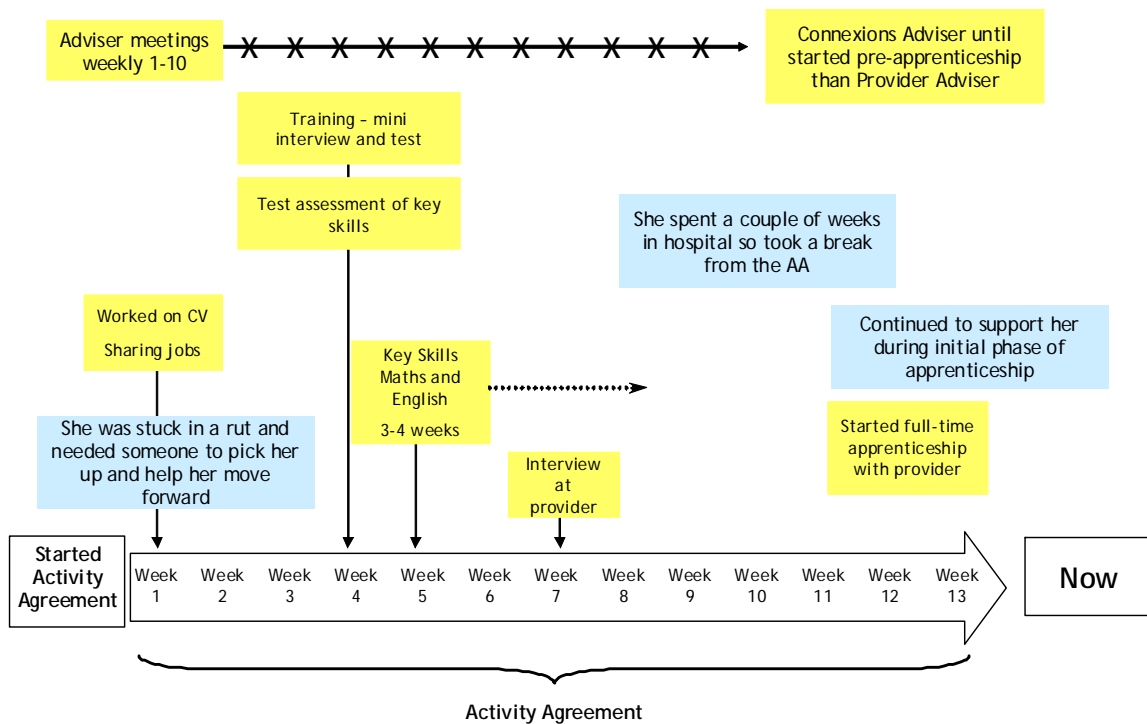
The progression between activities, in terms of skills or movement towards a final outcome, was often clear when reviewing the activity maps. Taster sessions, for example, a college open day or a visit to a construction site, were a popular way of introducing young people to an employment or training option. They were a valuable way for Advisers to test out the young person's interest before signing them up for a full course, which could be expensive. Many young people had taster sessions and moved on to other things or explored that area in more depth in subsequent activities.

'Maybe provide a taster of the classes and courses you can do for the AA, let them try a session and then come out and talk about it. It's important that they know they can come out if they don't like it. It's good to present them with a choice.'

Adviser

In both scenarios they moved forwards, closer to a final outcome, by having **greater clarity about what might suit them** as a destination from their AA and beyond.

Activity map for Madeleine



Source: IES

Another common progression was in building **skills**, in particular working to improve or consolidate young people's maths, language or communication skills to support job applications or to improve their interview technique. Basic skills could also be a pre-requisite for other qualifications that the young person wanted to pursue, so establishing a minimum level of achievement was often an early part of the AA.

However, progression, usually in the form of small increments, was most clearly evident in the young people's **personal development**.

'The link between [Activity] and [training outcome] is the personal development. So we wanted to get [Helen] to build up the routine, that was the main thing because she wasn't used to doing things on a regular basis, she didn't have any particular routine ... we wanted to look at her basic skills [and employability skills] as well because we didn't want to put her in a college programme where she didn't feel like she could get on as well as the other young people.'

Adviser

The ability to socialise with others and, to an even greater extent, the young people's confidence grew steadily throughout the AA and enabled them to progress. Success bred confidence, meeting others bred confidence and the new found confidence, in turn, made young people bolder and more able to try new activities and go to new places: a highly virtuous circle.

Adrian wanted to find work in a warehouse although had not had much success before joining the AA. His activities included a forklift course as well as support with his CV and distributing this to local companies. As a result of the AA he felt more confident about his career goal.

'I'm a lot more confident in myself now I'm a lot more pleased now than I was, because I have got everything, I'm on track now.'

Adviser: *'He had done quite a lot in 9-10 weeks, he had done quite a huge amount of things on a regular basis and the buzz he had when he passed because he had not achieved anything at school and it gave him tremendous support for his confidence.'*

Advisers were careful not to put young people too far outside their comfort zone but to gradually push the boundaries.

Callum did not have a particular career in mind when he entered the AA but thought he would like to be working. He had substance misuse problems although was not aware how this was affecting his life. He also lacked confidence outside his normal peer group. He thought the AA would be something to do. Having choice and control over activities was important to him. As part of his AA, he attended a range of college tasters in music to enable him to find out more about the courses available and also started working with a drugs counsellor. His Adviser had accompanied him to the tasters to give him that extra bit of confidence. He had started a music course after the AA and was looking for work alongside this.

'I've always had problems meeting new people and I'm very nervous. So to take me there for one day, with my Adviser rather than just throwing me in at the deep end, was better. So I could have a look around and meet people and things like that so it was much better for me.'

Reviewing achievements and experiences was an important part of ensuring, and **demonstrating progression** to the young person. The review process also enabled Advisers to help young people recognise the wider skill development that had evolved through seemingly fun activities that, as far as young people were concerned, did not contribute directly to their core goal.

'What we try and do all the way through this, we try and work on transferable skills. So at every point we are tricking them into learning about eye contact, communication skills, appropriateness around other people, interpersonal skills, non-verbal communication and different strategies for dealing with stress.'

Adviser

Young people also wanted to know they were making progress and, in many interviews, were proud to describe how they had achieved things they might have considered beyond them without the AA. Highlighting progression between activities with the young person was therefore very important and Advisers worked hard to show young people just how far they had come and what they needed to do to get to the next stage.

'I think they need to know what they're going to achieve at the end of it. It's quite important as well to make them understand how they're going to achieve it because I think sometimes they look at certain provision - it could even be basic skills - and it would scare them off because of previous experience, whether that be in school or you know LDD assessments, things like that. So it's important to always make sure that the young person knows where they're going, who they're going with, what they're going to achieve or what the aims and objectives are of the sessions. So it's all got to be quite meticulously planned out.'

Adviser

4 The Relationship between Progression and Outcomes

This section reviews progression pathways to identify whether these revolved around a key 'turning point' or were part of a more continual, incremental process. It then looks at which types of progression were needed for young people in different circumstances and with different end goals. Finally, it explores the perceived benefits of the AA (from the perspectives of both young people and their Advisers), and outcomes achieved as a result of the progress they made.

4.1 Progression as a turning point or continual process?

4.1.1 For most, it is the combination of weekly support and the activities that enables progression

Most young people felt progression to their goal (or towards it) had resulted from the **combination of individual support and activities**. Their starting point and type of AA journey did not really affect this perception. Young people tended to see the AA in holistic terms surrounding their support needs, the development of confidence and starting to do something on a regular basis or starting to set goals for their future. This in itself indicates the distance they travelled as part of their AA, and the kind of impact working with their Adviser had on their own understanding of their needs, particularly in terms of learning and work.

Deshi was interested in becoming a mechanic immediately after finishing school. While he recognised he would need qualifications he did not want to spend a lot of time in full-time education. The AA helped him complete a number of activities that would help him reach his goal including developing a portfolio of the work he was doing on cars at home to show to employers, and First Aid training. He also completed fun activities related to his interests. At the end of the AA he had an apprenticeship in a garage. Despite having a clear work focus he recognised the value of the fun activities and felt that the AA was a much better option for him than college.

'They say you're going to learn, but you're going to have fun as well; you're going to be in a workplace where you learn, but we're going to give you activities to go to, but during that time we're going to look for your college. So, in that sense it was like, I'd go to college, but I'd get a fun thing out of it as well. So, it helps you out a lot.'

Adviser: 'He was really eager to do lots of things, especially like short courses that would give him a certificate and increase, I guess, his employability. So, yes, he was willing to do the First Aid and the Health and Safety. So when I suggested it he was absolutely fine with it.'

From the Advisers' perspective as well, a combination of support and activities helped to achieve progression during the AA, although their experience suggested that the combinations related more closely to young people's focus and how realistic this was. Generally it was felt that *'having the activity or training available and your relationship with the young person as well'* enabled young people to move forward. Advisers also felt that being able to access a range of activities was important rather than simply those with a vocational focus (such as relevant learning or work experience).

'I think all the activities are as important ... obviously the vocational development but a young person can't be expected to progress if they haven't got their basic needs met which could be social, emotional, socio-economics... so it's important to look at the personal development stuff.'

Adviser

'I think it's a few things: if they're really set on a goal then it might be one big thing, but otherwise I think it's more just building up the small things, maybe a bit of work experience ... maybe some training, just trying different things and seeing where they lead.'

Adviser

Young people with a realistic work or learning goal would often need a combination of activities and support to help them to develop the confidence to take things one step further.

Madeleine had a specific career in mind when she joined the AA. She had started what she thought was a relevant college course following school but some way into had been advised it would not help her achieve her goal. She had not been offered any IAG or support to transfer to an alternative course. During the AA she decided that while she was still interested in this career she was not ready to commit to it fully. Instead, after the AA (which included a Prince's Trust course, CV development and job search and personal development activities) she started a Pathfinder course in literacy and numeracy to provide the underpinning skills she would need in the future.

Adviser: 'I think it was more a combination – if she'd just gone on the Prince's Trust without us discussing college then I don't know if she would have applied by herself or even chosen the correct course ... I think it's every step involved [in the AA] that got her ready for college. I think if we'd just applied for college and she didn't do the Prince's Trust she might have dropped out ... because she was worried that other people would be older than her. It's like building her confidence and sticking to something this time.'

The amount of time spent NEET was also a factor for Advisers in how the support and activities combined to develop and promote progression. They felt that young people who had spent a longer time NEET often would spend longer on the AA but that significant benefits arose from this.

'It would be a combination particularly with the longer term NEET young people. The whole process of having a purpose again and there's a structure to their week and they're expected to do stuff. That helps bridge a gap ... I value the stuff about engagement, that's not tied [to a vocational aim]. Stuff that's just about getting out and being around other people in different groups ... it's really valuable.'

Adviser

'If they're on the programme for quite a long time, they benefit from all the things they do. Some might not like some of the activities and some they do. It's like a slow drip which generally leads to better all round capacity to move on.'

Adviser

4.1.2 For a few young people there is one key factor or turning point

A small group of the young people and their Advisers identified that one particular thing had helped them to progress. Most in this group had a couple of ideas for their future goal although needed help to make a definitive choice. Consequently, their activity maps tended to be 'scattergun' and based on trying things out. Through this process of experimentation, one specific activity - or the action planning with their Adviser in between - provided the turning point for their decision.

When Oscar joined the AA he wanted to pursue a course in either sports or construction and needed help to reach a decision. As part of his activities he attended tasters and short courses relevant to both routes. As a result of these, he was confident in making a choice.

'Just going there [to the taster] and finding out, meeting the fellas, after that I decided to try it. It was good to try it out first to find out whether I liked it - I knew I wanted to go to college but doing [the taster] helped decide me on sport.'

For those with high barriers, the key factor is the support

For young people with significant barriers, the most important factor in their progression towards their goal was simply having the one-to-one, sustained support. This was often because their personal circumstances were very difficult and they needed help to resolve their situation prior to thinking about their future goals. 'Several weeks to get started' activity maps tended to sum up their AA experience.

Macy was thinking about going to college when she joined the AA although was unsure what subject to pursue. While she was offered a range of activities she had not taken up many – it was the support from her Adviser that most helped. Following the AA she had started work and had a provisional college place to start in September.

'I think having someone to talk to. She didn't judge me with whatever I told her, she would just advise me It was nice not having someone tell me what to do all the time and just giving me good advice, and whether I take it or not it's my choice, but I did take it.'

Adviser: *'The work I did with her [was most important] and was always dominated by her personal circumstances. She was estranged from her family and had moved in with her boyfriend's family but that broke down. She needed to live independently and needed money. But because [she] always had contact with me, it made her feel supported. I feel that opened a door for her ... and enabled her to be in the driving seat for things she needed.'*

4.2 Ways of moving young people forward

Advisers could not stress enough the importance of offering young people information about the different activities available and the ways in which they would help them. Giving information and exploring the benefits of activities formed an essential part of action planning for all young people, no matter what their focus. That said, some young person needed strong persuasion to pursue activities they saw as peripheral to their main goal whereas others would sign up to anything and wanted little prior information. The issue of how far the goal was 'owned' by the young person also featured here.

'You have to tell them all the positives and negatives, where they're heading and what the outcome is. A lot don't really know what they want to do, they'll say "Careers told me to do this" but the young person has no interest and what they do is engage in training activity and lose interest That's why we'll go through the ins and outs, tell them realistically also having taster sessions - that gives them more insight.'

Adviser

'Some very much know what they want to do and won't open their views to other things or options and some will just have a go at anything ... sometimes you will get an opinion of someone and then you will offer them something and they say "yes" and sometimes I ... think that shocked me because I didn't think they would take it up. Other times they are very prescriptive.'

Adviser

However, it was often the case that, when asked, young people did not necessarily recall that there had been this type of input: it was the 'doing' of the activities, rather than negotiating them, that stuck in their minds.

4.2.1 A gentle nudge in the right direction can lead to leaps and bounds

For many of the Adviser-recommended cases, a gentle nudge in the right direction was all that was needed to start moving towards a positive outcome. For those who wanted to work, the next steps were job searches and applications supported by vocational activities; for those keen to enter learning, the focus was course applications and forming plans for the period between the AA and the course starting. Most young people also engaged in development activities.

The activity maps for this group of young person tended to be either incremental pathways where activities built up through core and peripheral activities to the eventual goal, or scattergun, where young people experimented to find the objective for their goal (eg subject of course) and then started moving directly towards it.

'Some young people come on what are 100 per cent on the ball and in charge and know what they want and know what they want you to do for them to get there, and will either go into work in week five or week 15. They have their own clear idea of what progression means. When they use that word, they say I want a job in a month and we are going to do it this way ... [For those who want to go to college] in that last [four to five week] period we look at if we can get you set up to go to college in six months' time, because that's when it would start, maybe you can look into doing a course from now till then.'

Adviser

When asked about whether they had a clear idea of where activities were leading, young people had mixed opinions. Those with a clear and realistic goal seemed to understand from an early stage that they would be building towards it through a series of vocational and development activities.

Kumar who had got the apprenticeship at the travel agency said he had always had a clear idea about what he would achieve as a result of AA activities.

'I did to be honest, because they ask about you and tell you things you can do and what you want to get out at the end of it all, and the job, CV, what you would get by the end. [My Adviser] goes "you've got the capability to do quite a bit... you might as well go for that job, at the travel agent". At the end of the day it's worth giving it a go It's a start for you because after school it's hard to get a job straightaway.'

Adviser: *'He was pretty focused but I still think it's important to speak it out and register what they're doing. So it comes down to six or seven things over a period of 11 or 12 weeks, which shows you did commit yourself. I can't say that's the norm for all of them.'*

With others, the information given at the outset of activities was less explicit in terms of what the Adviser hoped they would achieve. This approach was often useful since it encouraged young people to approach activities with an open mind, and experiment around their main goal to ensure it was the right choice.

Reese had joined the AA with the idea of getting work although after school had started a catering course. She had left this when her course equipment had been stolen and was not keen to return to learning as a result. The AA had been an opportunity to explore different ideas and she decided upon finance work after being recommended a money management course by the Adviser. Following the AA she gained an apprenticeship in business administration.

'She played it down a bit. If she had said something like money management to me or marketing and advertising I would have been like, "No, I'm not going there, I just want some fun". But it did actually turn out to be a lot of fun. I met loads of people. It was good. I didn't really have a clue what was going to come of it. She said that I would gain some skills but I didn't expect any of it. [I just thought] it was something to get me out of the house, that's what they said to me [when I signed up], just a few little courses ... to help you on your way.'

Adviser: 'She wasn't hard to work with. We'd discuss opportunities and I'd give her the information she'd need. Some need more coaxing. She did a range of things, some about development, others more focused on what she needed. We got the outcome she wanted through a lot of the stuff we did on a one-to-one basis. So the weekly review and applying and going for a range of opportunities.'

4.2.2 Some barely need any steps to progress

There were a few among the Adviser recommended cases who the Advisers felt would have achieved a progression without the assistance of the AA. This group tended to be easily motivated and needed only the minimum of brokerage to get underway. The Advisers felt that the AA contributed by helping these young people to progress a little sooner, through activities aimed at building a routine, and intensive support which motivated them to enter learning or work. However, this may underplay the Advisers' role, as well as that of the activities. To be eligible for the AA, young people must have been NEET for 20 weeks¹, therefore they would have spent four to five months on their own already by that time, without managing to progress. It may be that the AA was the carrot they needed to become engaged and it became the motivating force that spurred them on.

¹ New flexibilities have been introduced in the extension of the Activity Agreement (from April 2008) eg earlier intervention with vulnerable groups, however our sample was drawn before these were introduced.

Madeleine had started an apprenticeship following the AA. When she had joined she knew she wanted to work although did not have a particular career in mind. She joined the AA for the opportunity to try different things before committing to one particular goal. Her AA comprised CV development, key skills provision and an induction with her apprenticeship training provider. *'She was sending off for interviews and stuff and I'd never done that before, and emailing and stuff, like emailing managers or whatever. It was basically stuff like that because I'd never done anything like that before. So she was just helping me with stuff like that really. It benefitted me because it helped me lead on to other things, so it was good.'*

Adviser: *'It's progressive, because she is getting up every morning now and she is going to work most days and getting to do an NVQ. She probably could have done it without [the AA]; I think it was just that she needed a push, that was all, someone to motivate her.'*

4.2.3 Some need help to break their goals into achievable steps

Other young people needed to break things down into achievable steps and information to understand how these steps would build towards their end goal. There was greater evidence of this in the sample from the provision study (which was undertaken among young people in the middle of their AA rather than among those who had completed it), although some featured in the Adviser-recommended cases.

Making the right decision

For some, the steps were based on making the right decisions about a course or career path and therefore information was important, as was time to establish the appropriate short and longer term goals. Once these were established, activities could be built up to help young people progress.

'[A step by step approach was] extremely important. I needed to give her the information so she could make an informed choice ... what the course entailed in terms of knowledge and understanding, how she would get there, what qualifications she would get and what she could do with it in the short and long term. At first she wanted an apprenticeship but then her financial circumstances changed and she was more interested in going to college.'

Adviser

Planning to relieve anxieties

Others needed a more closely planned approach, a regularly updated route map to their goal. This was often because they lacked confidence in new situations and knowing the 'plan' or route helped to alleviate anxiety.

Helen had started full-time learning following the AA and was also looking for work. She said that she sometimes needed a bit of support to try new things and go to new places and got this as part of her AA. She also worked with a life coach as well to help with her anxieties. Following the AA she had started an E2E course.

'Because it's not just got me doing things, but it has also helped me in other ways, like I gained more friendships through college, and it's helped me to gain confidence as well, so it has helped in so many ways. She's [the Adviser] told me she's seen a huge difference in me since I started, and to be honest, I can see the change as well.'

Adviser: *'I think without the set plan that we'd done at the beginning, I don't think [Helen] would have been able [to engage with activities] ... she's meticulous anyway and likes to plan ahead, know what she's going to do, who she's going to meet. This course, well some of her anxiety was meeting new people but because we were able to do an action plan every week to look at the weeks ahead that helps overcome that anxiety.'*

Alternative route-ways and back-up plans

A final group needed to consider back-up plans to their main goal which, although realistic, might be hard to achieve. This group needed encouragement to consider alternative routes and information about how these different routes would help them move forward toward their goal.

Harry joined the AA with an idea that he would like an apprenticeship in construction although had had little success in finding this and so wanted support and help. As part of his AA he did a range of certificated courses and his Adviser explained how this would help him find a job while still looking for his main goal.

'Obviously I want to try and get an apprenticeship and that but if I say it doesn't come across, say I can't get one in the future and that then [having gained the certificates] I think that'd mean I'll have jobs, with pub [security] work or something.'

Adviser: *'So he came out with three City & Guilds certificates: a certificate in conflict management, a certificate in roles and responsibilities... So he's qualified to work as a security guard. He has the physical qualifications and transferable skills. And anywhere he goes he's able to say he has all of those individual skills.'*

4.2.4 Others need small steps to build motivation and remove barriers

For others, the small steps were about motivation and confidence to reach their end goal and removing barriers that were stopping them from achieving it. These young people had the idea that they would like to go to college (or get a job with training), but they were at a loss as to how to go about this. In addition, there were factors in their wider lives that needed to be resolved before they were in a position to progress. These cases often resulted in scattergun AA maps that had little vocational content but instead focused on development needs and motivational support.

Gill and Kerry entered the AA together. Both had care responsibilities at home and an aim to enter learning although some anxieties about how to apply and what college would be like. Their Adviser recognised the positive influence they had on each other and was happy for them to attend the same activities as each other. These focused on a 'scattergun' of development and personal development activities. At the point of the interview, both had progressed into a travel and tourism college course.

Kerry: *'I feel all right now. I used to be right down and "Can't be bothered, I'll do it tomorrow". Now it's just get up and go!'*

Adviser: *'The big thing for me is that they realised themselves that they have potential, they realise that they can go on and take part in further education and they realise for themselves that's where they wanted to be. Because although we do try to encourage young people to take part in things and work towards goals, it's the young people themselves that have got to do it.'*

4.2.5 The most vulnerable need to take things very slowly

Those with the greatest barriers in their personal circumstances or their health and well-being, were the most likely to need to take the AA very slowly. 'Several weeks to get started' maps closely associated with this group and, within the sample for this study, it was least likely that they would move into a positive outcome as a result of the AA, although their 'distance travelled' was often significant.

The difficulty for Advisers when working with this group was the extent to which the young people concerned could take on board the information they were being given. In these instances, a 'softly, softly' approach was taken and young people were encouraged to give something a go and then feed back about it – before making the choice to try a longer-term related activity.

'I think we can give that [information] but it is just their comprehension and how they take on the information ... you need to be out there doing it rather than giving a leaflet or showing them something on the Internet. It is how you get that information across ... sometimes I say just to go once and if they don't like it that's fine but at least they will have given it a go.'

Adviser

What was striking was Advisers' recognition that the AA would not be able to help all young people in this group achieve EET outcomes. However, they felt the AA helped build confidence, improve young people's self-esteem and understanding of their own capacity, and put them in contact with support services that would help them beyond the AA journey.

'For other young people I can see at week 12, or even week one, after these 20 weeks you are not going to be ready for a job, or to go to college. It's just clear as pie that there is a lot of other stuff that needs to be looked at. Some who commit to coming just aren't ready for that kind of progression - it can be about getting the young person just in a different stance, to actually begin to do some work or make some life changes.'

Adviser

'We do have young people come through who we can't help to move on. We can be so positive with them when they're here, taking part, but they go home, mum and dad haven't been working, grandma hasn't worked in her life, and everyone's sat in the living room smoking, and factors like that can have a huge influence What we do is to try to encourage them to think about themselves ... and get some self-fulfilment.'

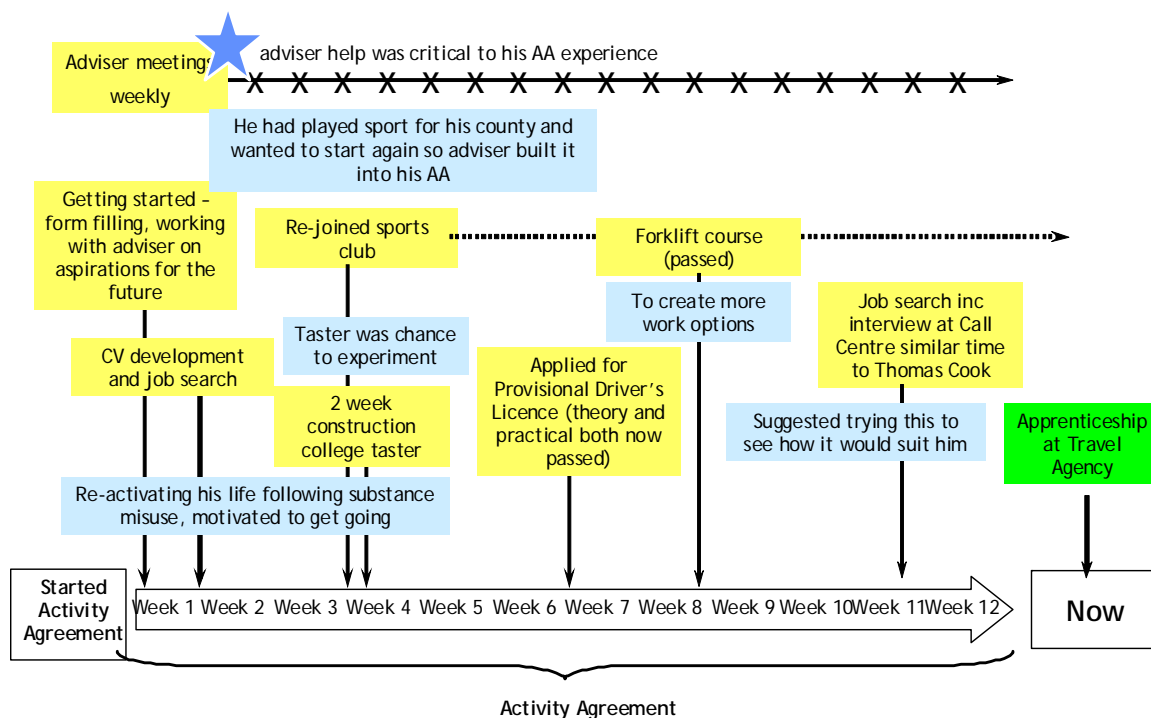
Adviser

4.2.6 Not all young people follow linear pathways

Progression was not always linear, as some young people progressed by trying things out and then opting for a different route. Discussion with the Adviser could move young people in a different direction. The process of exploring different options helped many young people to progress, albeit in a different direction to that which they originally envisaged. Examples of young people changing direction with positive outcomes cropped up frequently.

The small steps approach can obscure the progression among such 'scattergun' activity maps and at first sight they may not appear to have a great deal of coherence. The sequence of activities appears unstructured and/or ad hoc. In these cases, progression was not obvious from week to week and young people often saw the activities as a set of discrete, disjointed, but nevertheless valuable experiences. Often only on reflection was it possible to see progression and connections but this was rarely obvious, and may not have even been of interest, to the young person.

Activity map for Kumar



Source: IES

Although not an issue mentioned explicitly by young people, Advisers were aware that not all turning points took the young person forward. Some turning points were actually set-backs of some sort - although they revealed wider support needs that needed to be addressed before progression could be achieved.

'You do see them having turning points but then you can sometimes see them have other turning points that go backwards. It depends on what is going on in their lives ... at home or in their life in general ... something might just happen that makes them take three steps back and you have to do all that work again to make them move forward. What is good ... is that we have the ability ... we can support them in the way that they need - it is just identifying what sort of work and support they need.'

Adviser

4.3 Difficulties during the AA journey

Advisers felt it was rare that young people experienced difficulties with their AA that led to early leaving from the programme as a whole. It was more the case that the **problems young people had when they started the AA affected their journeys** and if particularly difficult, could lead to early leaving.

The relationship between the Adviser and the young person was crucial to sustaining engagement.

'[Wanting to leave the AA is] Not common. The majority ... that leave before the end have gone into a positive outcome The others ... have difficulties engaging in the first place and they're perhaps not ready to engage with anything at that moment. The one main characteristic [that associates with early leaving] is a quite turbulent home life and other factors like very low self-confidence.'

Adviser

'I think it happens only occasionally ... and it's down to the skills of the Advisers who are working with young people to make sure they do stay engaged and want to take part.'

Adviser

It was more common that **young people left particular activities** before they were meant to, or did not attend agreed activities, however Advisers put considerable emphasis on finding out the nature of the problem in case wider issues were at play.

'[Early leaving of activities is] quite common but we try to look at the reasons why - is it the provider, is it the environment, are there young people they're not getting on with, is it a travelling problem?'

Adviser

Given the emphasis on experimentation as part of the AA, to some extent Advisers expected some degree of drop-out from activities as young people rejected some of the choices available to them.

'You get some who want to do something but they are not so sure when they go to the course ... they say it's not for me I let them try a few things before they decide. In that way you don't usually see them have any problems.'

Adviser

It was sometimes the case that it took a little time, and extra support, to get young people over their initial difficulties. For instance, in some circumstances, Advisers worked with parents to provide the extra motivation needed for AA journeys to keep on track.

'The biggest problem was remembering appointments or getting up early but, once identified, I worked with his mum to ensure he would attend. It did get better, the first four or five weeks of the central training course, he was a bit juddery but then he started doing really well ... It's just because they're not used to being in a routine.'

Adviser

Where the difficulties were greater, it tended to be with clients from vulnerable groups with significant barriers to progress. This included young carers, those with drug or alcohol misuse problems, learning difficulties or those at risk of criminal behaviour.

'Young people who are caring for relatives or family members ... they haven't been able to finish things because of their duties there, just that they deal with quite complicated situations of the family life and other agencies being involved.'

Adviser

Advisers felt that, in general terms, hard outcomes were less likely to be achieved by this group, however distance travelled and soft outcomes were key in such cases.

'I have had a client who had very severe problems with cocaine and had been on the AA and was applying for jobs but not attending interviews if he got them. If I met him between Thursday and Tuesday I just couldn't get any sense out of him. I had to do a lot of work around drugs and how they affect you and he is now attending [drugs charity] three times a week. He was moved forward because he is attending [drugs charity], he is still NEET but I still see it as a positive outcome.'

Adviser

4.4 Benefits from AA participation

Young people enjoyed their experiences and described the benefits they derived from them. These were very often in terms of personal development but also in enhancing their future career prospects more directly. Advisers described great increases in young people's confidence and ability to interact with others, employers, tutors, family and friends. Young people recognised an increase in their confidence but also highly valued the more tangible outcomes of qualifications or accreditation for their activities.

4.4.1 Personal benefits and 'distance travelled'

Personal benefits manifested particularly in greater confidence and better ability to mix and socialise with others. This latter aspect related back to increased confidence but also to the opportunity the AA had given them to meet new people, sometimes outside their familiar home territory, with interests they shared. The value of the activities, and also support with enabling items such as bus passes, was in engendering real change in behaviour and prospects for learning and employment.

'When you aren't doing anything, you are just seeing the same people. You don't really want to go out of your own area, and with Connexions I met different people When you are with the same people, it just gets boring, and you go and meet other people and just have a laugh.'

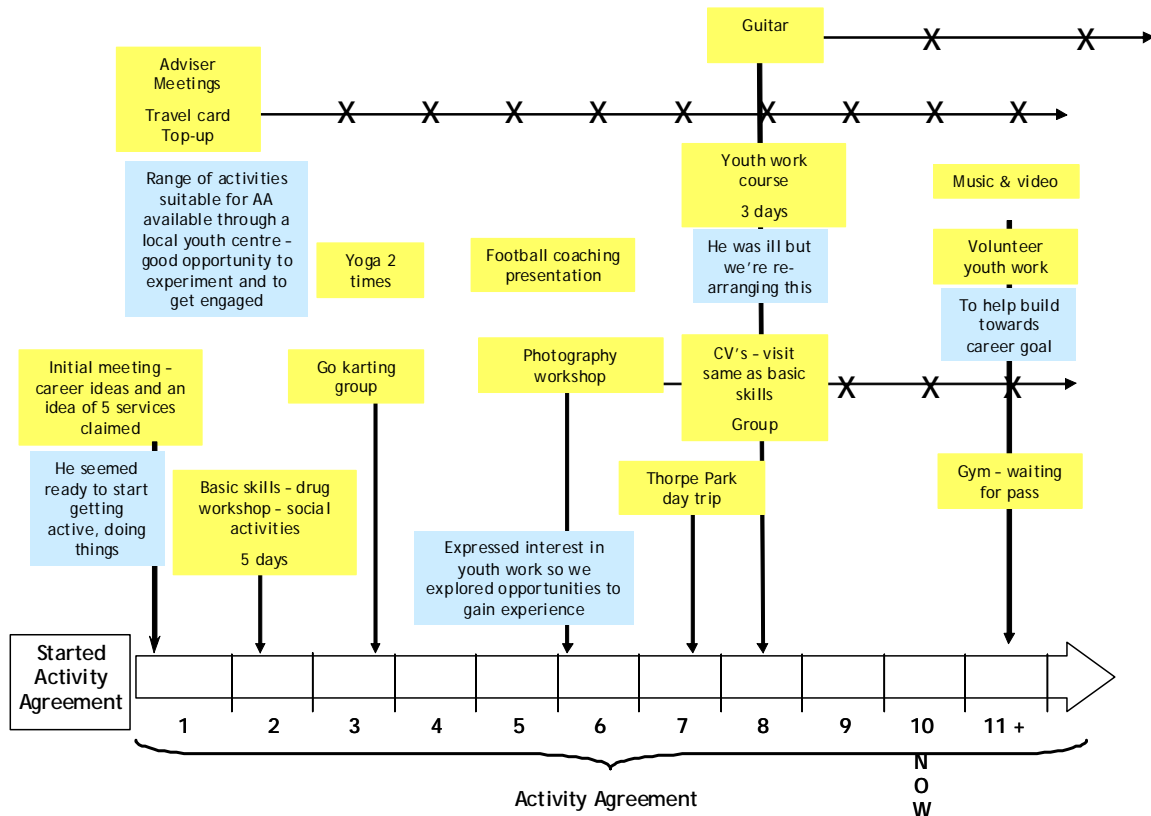
Richard

Advisers also stressed the importance of young people having severed links with previous groups of friends who were having a negative influence on their habits and behaviours. The AA had motivated many young people and opened up new opportunities for them, even when the immediate impact was not obvious.

'He had a lot of free time on his hands and wasn't really doing a lot with it, so now it's also helping him with organisation and learning different skills and you know he may end up being a football coach, he may end up being a photographer, or none of them, but at least he's had a go.'

Adviser

Activity map for Finn



Source: IES

Some young people had addressed very specific personal issues through their AA, including anger management or giving up smoking. In this way, young people were being galvanised to make life changes that reached well beyond work and training.

'When she came in doing the work experience at Connexions she was very popular with the staff. They all really like her. They're not aware that she has any anger issues at all because she hasn't displayed any anger. She really responded to the praise and positive feedback.'

Adviser

However, the most striking change, according to young people and Advisers, was in increasing confidence. For some this was a by-product of the activities, attached to the process rather than the particular activity, for others it was the main focus and main outcome. In the great majority of interviews with both Advisers and young people the issue of confidence was a strong feature. There was a range of facets to the confidence young people gained, whether it surrounded mixing with new people, just doing something to move on (such as handing out their CV to employers) or getting the chance to develop workplace skills, such as confidence to answer the telephone.

'A lot of young people haven't worked in a group. Plus, they're all right with their mates [but] they're not used to working with other people. Working with other people they need confidence.'

Adviser

'I got more confidence because I would never have answered phones and then you have to do it all day and in the end it was just like you were answering it and you weren't bothered. But at the beginning I was scared but near the end it just didn't bother me.'

Madeleine

4.4.2 Key outcomes for young people

In addition to the personal benefits, young people greatly valued more tangible outcomes. Progressing to employment, training, or both, via apprenticeships was an ideal outcome for most young people, even if they did not have a specific idea of what they wanted to do initially, and many credited positive destinations to their AA activities or to the Adviser who had supported them. Whilst personal development was valued, the ultimate goal for many was getting a job, and accessing training and gaining qualifications were very clear steps on the way to that goal.

Those working towards apprenticeships or employment without doing training first, gained skills in searching for jobs or interview techniques. They gained a better knowledge of the job market, which allowed them to formalise or refine their career plans and improved their ability to shape their futures. They were also given opportunities to try things out and develop employability skills through work experience or voluntary work.

'The fact that he was given an interview boosted his confidence a lot. I think that when I suggest jobs in the future he is more likely to want to apply to them because he knows that it got him somewhere. I think the woman who did the pre-screening interview gave him a lot of confidence.'

Adviser

Many of those who moved into learning or training had overcome reservations about learning gained through a poor experience in school. They regarded the AA as a more 'adult' environment, particularly in how they were treated by Advisers and tutors in college, with more personal attention, more work-related and relevant subject matter and more practical ways of learning. Some training programmes also helped them overcome an unsuccessful school career by giving them their first formal qualification.

'Yeah just get a certificate and that's basically it, certificates and that. So I'll be able to just go into a place and I'll show them my certificate and they'll know that I know about it, I know what I'm going to be doing and all that and they'll sign me up for the job.'

Jack

The accreditation for the learning was crucial in ensuring that the young person truly felt that they had gained something from a training programme. For courses such as the fork-lift truck licence, the qualification was essential in demonstrating to future employers what they had learned. But shorter courses such as First Aid or fire safety were said to be equally valuable.

'The First Aid will show I'm responsible - and the work placement will show I know about helping other people ... with the First Aid, I had the Emergency First Aid course from school but this is one better than that because it relates to work.'

Nathan

Where certification was not available, the young people attached less value to the courses because they felt they would not be able to use the experience.

'The only thing was that there wasn't sort of any accreditation attached to it. It was just something that she could put onto her CV and uses those skills but there was no accreditation attached to it. I think if she had, like, some kind of qualification from it then she would have felt that she had achieved more.'

Adviser

Some AA participants had not progressed into what would be formally recorded as a positive destination, however, the gains they made through the AA were valuable and Advisers and young people could identify specific benefits¹. In these cases, personal circumstances were often a barrier which prevented take up of a course on completion of the AA. One Adviser described the benefits for a young person who had taken casual work at the end of the AA; despite the outcome not being ideal, the Adviser held out great hope for the future.

Brad has ADHD and joined the AA with the idea that he wanted to work in Bradford Airport – although he had no particular career aim in mind. During his AA he met a girlfriend and this had distracted him somewhat from his activities. Due to this his AA had been terminated. However, he had participated in some personal development activities, received support around health and well-being, and was planning to apply for college.

'You can get stuff out of it, you get shown how to do different things, like looking for jobs and stuff, like confidence building I start this new college on Monday.'

Adviser: *'I suppose we are still looking for a very positive outcome for Brad and I think he has learned all sorts of lessons on the way really. I think he has learned a lot about relationships, both with his own peers, his relationship with his mum and step dad at home. I hope he has learned some things about relationships from me and he's making choices and some of them are right choices and some of them are perhaps not so right but he may feel that they are at this moment. He has taken advice very well really and as I say, I hope we are still looking towards a positive outcome whether that's in employment or whether it's in some sort of further education.'*

Others felt that the AA had helped to clarify what type of work or training they were interested in, by allowing them to try out and eliminate other options.

'It was always out of the two, beauty and hairdressing, or IT. But now I know that IT is going to be the one and not hairdressing. So it did help in a way because it made my mind up.'

Alesha

¹ With most cases drawn from the provision study, young people were only part way through their AA and therefore it was not possible to ascertain an end point. Amongst the Adviser-recommended cases there were some young people who had needed small steps and who had not achieved an EET destination.

4.5 Perceived impacts of the AA

Young people and their Advisers were invited to speculate on how much difference the AA had made, by saying where they might be if they had not taken up the programme.

Responses fell into three broad categories:

- **'Still on the sofa' or 'stuck in a rut'**. Most young people felt that the AA had been of great benefit and that without it they would have continued on the same path. This was generally expressed in terms of sitting about at home, watching daytime TV, bored and lacking the confidence, skills or ambition to change anything.

'I mean if I hadn't done it I'd probably just be on the dole and just sitting around doing nothing whereas now I'm a lot more active than I was before I started it. So I think that's probably the biggest thing, actually, just the motivation because I just had none of it before. Now I'm a bit more active and things like that so, yeah, I think that helped the most.'

Callum

Advisers tended to take a longer term perspective and believed that the young people would now be further entrenched in their situation and less able to progress. One Adviser wondered whether a particular young person who had a weekend job while she was on the AA might simply have built that up into more hours, making it more difficult to take a cut in income to start a college course or a less well-paid apprenticeship. Yet the AA had helped her with family problems and enabled her to stay in the family home. There were other scenarios painted by Advisers and young people alike.

'I think I would have just let everything get on top of me, but it was just nice to be able to go out and get away from everything and just focus on one thing.'

Macy

- **'I'd be doing this anyway.'** A small number of young people thought the AA had made little or no difference and that they would have made the same progress regardless. This was the case even if they admitted that they had learned or gained from the activities or had the chance to do something they could never have afforded without the AA, such as training for a forklift truck licence.

Advisers rarely concurred with this point of view and, even if they agreed that the destination might have been the same, felt that the benefits of the AA meant that the young people concerned were much better equipped to deal with their future.

'I think he would be doing exactly what he was doing before, perhaps trying various things but flitting from one thing to another, and I think the AA has enabled him to focus on what he could do and how he could actually do it with that support, with that personal one-to-one help.'

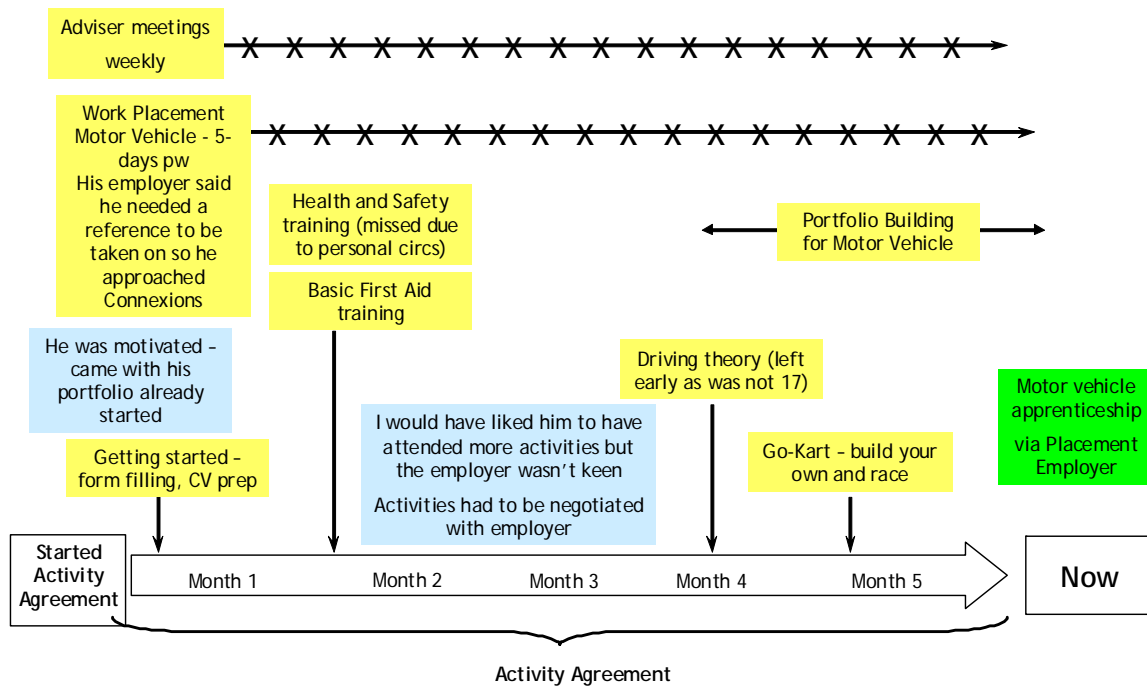
Adviser

There were cases that suggested some young people are ready to progress when they joined the AA although these were rare. In Deshi's case, Connexions Advisers had discussed with the young person whether an activity or learning agreement would suit his circumstances best. He opted for the AA although, given the substantive nature of his work placement, and his employer's reliance on him from an early stage, his AA experience was somewhat constrained. However, the AA had provided support and ensured that he was enabled to take a small step to move into learning.

'I would never have thought of going to college, but because of the Activity Agreement I'm in college now.'

Chris

Activity map for Deshi



Source: IES

'To come in and do stuff that he wanted to do and he was learning about the different options and to be put forward for different training that's available. I'm sure he would have found that anyway but I think this just makes it a bit easier if somebody's there and can support you and let you know about the different options.'

Adviser

- **'A life of crime?'** Many Advisers feared felt that some of the young people were at risk of taking a downward trajectory without the AA. This trajectory would take them beyond the 'stuck in a rut' scenario and into crime or homelessness. This was linked to the circumstances of the individual and highlighted a fairly pessimistic view of the young people's future.

'He'd be locked up. He was seriously heading that way. He was living in a high unemployment area, high drug problems, crime rate. Not engaged in activities, he didn't have nothing to go into. He would mess around with his mates, lead to boredom. [The AA] helped him quite a bit.'

Adviser

4.6 What is seen to be distinctive about the AA?

For Advisers, the distinctive features of the AA were around the opportunities to individualise programmes which enabled a range of different needs to be met. These included (in order of priority):

- the intensive, regular support (enabled by a small case load in relative terms)
'[What's different] is our time because we have small case loads you know you can spend that time. I can meet a client and spend two or three hours with them supporting them and also being able to pay for the services which they wouldn't be able to get elsewhere. I think that's a really positive thing.'

Adviser

- the range and choice of activities, allowing programmes to be tailored to individual needs and interests

'With the AA it's really, really one-to-one support. Young people can go off to other services and get some information but a lot of times they are sent off to go and do things on their own. They don't have the drive ... the confidence The AA is so individually tailored that it is designed to support the individual and their needs.'

Adviser

- funding to cover travel costs, purchase equipment or broker tailored and bespoke provision including specialist services such as counselling and mentors

'Two things stick out in my mind: one is the funding ... and the courses we have access to really is quite new and stands out from loads of other stuff ... [young people] can do anything under the sky if it ties to their goals and will help them to get to where they want to get to The other thing is the quality of the workers and the time they get with us ... that's not to say that there are not great workers in other fields ... it's just that when that is combined with quite an exciting array of let's get you busy doing what you want and doing quality courses [this sets the AA apart].'

Adviser

To a slightly lesser degree, the incentive payment was also felt to be important. In the Advisers' view, the AA provided a holistic approach to engaging with and developing young people.

In general, young people were equally as enthusiastic. The ways in which the AA proved to be a distinctive experience for them included being treated as an adult, and having choices and an individualised experience. Some said that the level of support had not been previously available or that the support from school to help with college applications ended as soon as they had left. Some recognised the AA presented a rare opportunity to develop skills and gain help to progress which should be taken keen advantage of.

'It helps you how to be. It helps you how to be in a job and it helps you know how to get one. You can't just go "Bam, I can do this!", you need to work on it and get up your confidence. It helps you with a lot of these things. The people there want you to get a job, like the guy who helped me, I'd buy him a drink if I saw him now. I didn't think they would go out of their way for you, I thought they would tell you what to do more.'

Will

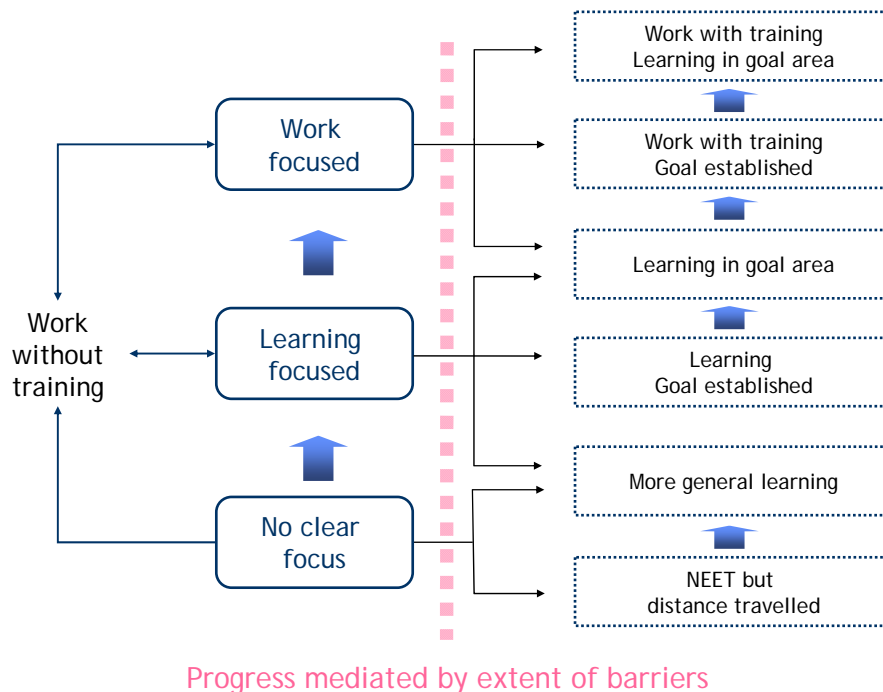
'They said you've got so much money so I thought I would just cane it. I think if people come on the AA they should use it, they shouldn't just come on it and not do anything. Some people might do it for the £20 and the social life but I think you should use all the courses you can so that you can get somewhere - it's what you make of it.'

Graham

4.7 The outcomes of AA participants

While end points can only be reported for the group of young people who had finished the AA by the time of their interview for this research - or by the time of the interview with their Adviser - some patterns can be seen to emerge. Figure 4.4 illustrates the different endpoints achieved by those in the research sample. It should be noted that the Adviser-recommended sample forms the basis for this analysis, therefore it was purposively selected and composed mainly of young people who had actually reached an EET outcome.

Figure 4.4: Outline model of outcomes by focus at outset of the AA



Source: IES

The boxes at the centre of the model show the three main starting points for young people embarking on the AA. The destinations on the right of the diagram can be thought of as final or interim (ie leading to other things). This shows how destinations can be common to different groups of young people, for example both learning-focused and work-focused young people progressed into learning within their desired field.

The block arrows show that many young people's focus changed over time. This natural career development moves from no clear focus, through learning and into employment. Young people starting their AA without a focus often developed clearer ideas and became more learning-focused, although some progressed to more general learning first (eg literacy and numeracy), and perhaps in the future will work their way into higher-level learning and ultimately into employment.

The left hand side shows how all young people can be drawn into jobs without training for varying periods of time. The lure of a wage more substantial to the AA incentive has the potential to knock young people, particularly those without a clear focus, away from the more desirable destinations (in policy terms, although not necessarily in the eyes of young people) on the right hand side of the diagram. However, provided they were still given opportunities and encouragement to develop and work towards learning or employment goals, this group could still progress to destinations leading towards employment with training.

5 Conclusions

This final section returns to the theory and considers it in light of the research findings. We also explore the policy implications arising from the study.

5.1 Refining the theory

Theory 18 (the ‘small steps’ theory): If the young person can be motivated to take a series of ‘small steps’ they will gradually move closer to their goal. In the AA, activities should be designed to build on one another - progression for most young people will be incremental and therefore the weekly nature of the AA process can facilitate this by breaking it down into ‘small steps’.

The previous sections have illustrated the ways in which young people are motivated and supported to engage with activities that help them progress towards their goal. The analysis has also shown that some young people need very small steps over a long period of time while others can progress in leaps and bounds after just a gentle nudge to get started.

However, the findings also suggest that there are some conditions that need to be applied to theory for it to reflect the realities of experience. These are discussed below.

- While progress can be incremental it is not necessarily linear. The AA has to be capable of adaptation as young people develop their goal ideas and address barriers - which may only become apparent some way in to the AA.
- The setting of activities is important and enables young people to experiment outside their usual peer group. This allows them to be less inhibited about trying something new or different, particularly activities that might seem foolish at first (such as juggling) but that develop skills and confidence through alternative approaches. The trust they build with their Adviser means that they will try these activities; the review process clarifies the benefits of getting involved.
- Small steps can help young people move forward although some travel backwards while on the AA. A setback however is rarely negative, rather it indicates where more effort or guidance is required or indeed if specialist support is needed (eg substance misuse counselling). As a result of ‘two steps forward, three steps back’ type turning points, young people learn more about themselves and their life-styles and this can lead to positive changes in behaviours which develops improved capacity to progress.
- While not explored by this study, the demonstrable progression theory became apparent in analysis and appears to operate in parallel to the small steps. This theory proposes that if the agreed activities lead to progression that can be assessed and demonstrated; this in turn will help the young person to sustain motivation and engagement. The weekly meeting with Advisers, where young people are supported, encouraged and have the positive messages about their development reinforced, helped to develop a virtuous circle of engagement in activities which in turn led to further development towards their goal.

5.2 Confidence is at the core of progression

In Section 2 of this paper, we proposed a model that drew on the DCSF activity framework, and presented different types of activities as having an equal influence on progression. While the analysis shows that this model contains the components of progression, it does not explicitly recognise the importance of developing varying facets of confidence. It was rare to find maps without one or more elements of confidence-building and it was common for young people and Advisers to report that improved confidence had flowed from the range of activities that had been undertaken. In almost all cases, developing confidence had been integral to progression although along the way this confidence had to be built and re-built across many different scenarios.

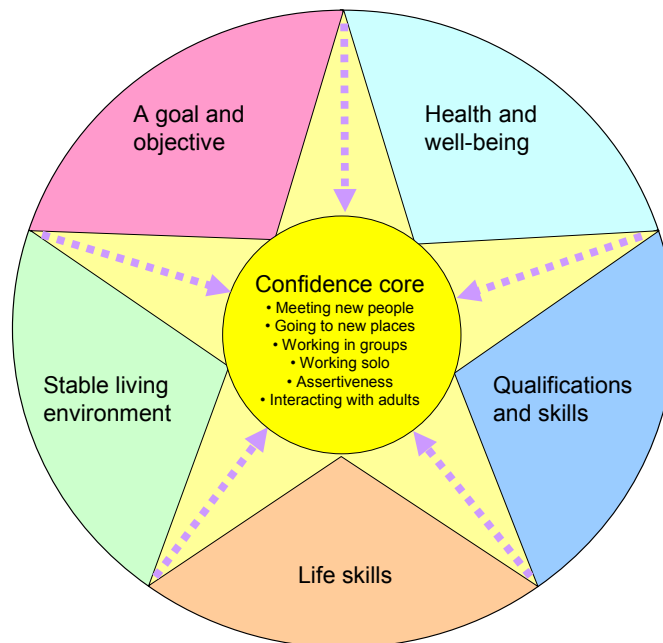
The progression model is reconsidered in the light of these findings in Figure 5.1. In this new version, confidence is at the core of progression and can be broken down into different components:

'Some [young people] are extremely confident with one older adult, but if they are in a group of two or three adults they freak out. So if they have a panel interview, they fall apart, or if they go into a group they are terrified or it can be the other way around and if they go into a one-to-one they are not as confident. There are lots of different equations of insecurities that I think [young people] have when it comes to goals.'

Adviser

Also indicated by the model is how the range of activities can lead to increased confidence – not simply those developed with confidence-building as an aim. Further to this, each young person has a different range of strengths and needs within these components when they start the AA, which are not particularly governed by their initial focus. This is why the one-to-one relationship with the Adviser, and the Adviser's brokerage role, is important to facilitating progression: it establishes not only what the young person needs but what they already have, and through this programmes can be appropriately individualised. This process continues throughout the activities phase of the AA: plans are refined and changed as different needs and wants start to become apparent.

Figure 5.1: Confidence at the core progression mode



Source: IES 2009

5.3 Some implications for policy

- The key implication for policy from this study is that one size most certainly does not fit all, and the flexibility of the AA is hugely important to the progression and outcomes achieved by young people.
- However, the majority of young people do require activities that help them to build their confidence and support to be able to work towards and/or achieve their goal. The ways in which this confidence develops varies case by case and it is unlikely to be delivered through a prescriptive, pre-set programme of activities.
- The most vulnerable young people require very small steps, often over a longer period of time than the 20 weeks allowed by the AA.
- For those with more significant barriers related to their health/well-being or home life, progression is mediated by having to deal with, or work around, these issues and culminates in 'soft' outcomes such as increased confidence and capacity-building. These young people needed longer than 20 weeks to attain an EET outcome.

Bibliography

CRG Research Ltd (2006), *Positive Activities for Young People: National Evaluation*, Final Report to DfES, DCMS, Home Office, Youth Justice Board and the Big Lottery Fund

Dewson S, Eccles J, Tackey N D, Jackson A (2001), *Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled*, produced for DfEE. Available at: www.esf.gov.uk/_docs/distance1.pdf

Golden S, Spielhofer T, Sims D, O'Donnell L (2004), *Supporting the Hardest-to-Reach Young People: The Contribution of the Neighbourhood Support Fund*, Research Brief RB535, DfES

Johnson C, Newton B, Usher T and Hillage J (2008), *Evaluation of the Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots Programme Theory, Working Paper 1: Incentivising Participation in Activity Agreements*, Research Report RW028, DCSF

Newton B, Fearn H, Johnson C (2009), *Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots: Programme Theory Evaluation, Working Paper 3: Provision in the Activity Agreements*, DCSF

Pawson R, Greenhalgh T, Harvey G, Walshe K (2004), *Realist Synthesis: An Introduction*, Research Methods Paper 2, ESRC

The Every Child Matters support website includes coverage of how quick wins “*help build momentum and commitment to the change process because stakeholders can see that the process has an impact on their work and on outcomes for young people. As quick wins are often implemented before the root causes of problems are uncovered during the Deepen stage, they can require adjustment in the long term.*”

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/targetedyouthsupport/discover/

Appendix 1: Topic Guides

Focused Study 5: Topic Guide, Participants Revised Version

The main aim of this study is to find out about the young person's experience in terms of progression on the Activity Agreement (AA) and how far a series of small steps helped them to reach their goal and positive outcome. **The main focus of the interview is the Activity Agreement and what the young person thinks about it (specifically whether it helped them build ideas about what they wanted to do), NOT the young person him/herself.** However, there are some early questions about the young person's background, household circumstances, attitudes etc. in order to get the interview moving and to provide important contextual information.

The section timings are guidelines only and should be viewed as a maximum rather than an average. Interviews might last up to an hour using this Guide depending on the number of activities the young person did and how long they were on the AA.

A. Introduction (5 mins)

This section is to set the young person at ease and give them some background about the research. Please reassure them about confidentiality and ask permission to record the interview.

- Introduce yourself and IES - emphasise we are an independent research organisation, so we are not related to Connexions or the government.
- Tell them about the research project: it is about young people involved in AA, their experiences of the activities, and whether these helped them to build towards a positive outcome following the AA.
- Emphasise that everything they say in the interview is confidential and will be reported anonymously - which means it will not be linked to them by name.
- Explain that as part of the research we will be comparing the opinions of young people and Advisers about the AA. We will discuss this thoroughly *after* the interview as we want them to be clear about the nature of the research before asking their permission to speak to their own Adviser. Let them know now that nothing they say in the interview will be shared with the Adviser.
- They can refuse to answer a question if they'd rather not do so and they can stop the interview at any time.
- Do they have any questions to raise now? They can also ask questions at the end of the interview, if they want.
- Ask permission to record the interview.

B. About the young person (5-10 mins)

The aim of this section is to get some background information about the young person, including a little about their education and employment background, and current circumstances. This should set the scene and provide context for the rest of the interview, as well as making the interviewee feel more at ease.

1. Current circumstances

- Confirm whether they did an Activity Agreement or not? (We will ask more about this later.) *Probe for how long they were doing it and how recently they left.*
- What are they doing now - working, studying, training, or something else?

2. Previous experience of education

- How long ago did they leave school? What age were they? What did they think of school?
- Did they get any qualifications at school? Explore subjects/grades in broad terms. *Probe: were they happy with these?*
- What did they plan/hope to do when they left school? *Probe for any ideas they had about types of work, education and/or training.*
- What did they do after they left school? *Probe: work, courses, NEET periods.*
- How did they find the time between full-time education (school and/ FE courses post-16) and the AA? *Probe enjoyable, difficult/challenging – why?*

C. The Activity Agreement (15-20 mins)

In this section we focus on the young people's experience of the AA, and the activities they got involved in. We will explore the options available, whether they were things the young person was interested in and what, in general, they thought they might get out of them.

1. Entry to the AA

- What was it that first got them interested in doing the AA?
- What did they hope to get out of it? *Probe for whether they thought that the AA would help them move nearer to getting work, education and/or training, or a clearer idea of what they wanted to do in future.* How did they think it would help them achieve this?
- What sorts of activities were available to them? *Probe: type of activities.* Was this what they expected / wanted?
- At the beginning, did these activities seem appealing? *Why/Why not? If yes, in what way? Probe extent to which they thought it might help them to progress.*

2. Developing the Activity Map

In this section we will use the 'timeline' to cover the period when they were on the AA. We will talk them through week by week exploring the activities they did, how long these lasted, and noting Adviser meetings. This activity map will be a comprehensive picture of their activities. All activities should be listed here but if something is forgotten it can be added later. Confirm the approximate length of time they spent on the programme and add to the timeline. We will add in critical incidences/turning points where activities/brokerage led to a clearer or changed focus for their future in Section D.

If prompts are required to develop the map suggest the following (*these also provide an indication of how to group activities*)

- CV development and job search
- confidence-building courses or workshops
- fun activities or days out, outward bound, team building
- budgeting skills and money management, health and well-being courses
- certificated courses such as First Aid, Health and Safety, food hygiene
- creative projects like film or music production
- courses / training to develop work-related skills eg forklift truck driving
- course tasters or work placements.
- **ASK:** Some people sign up to activities and then change their minds about doing them – did that happen to them at all? *If yes, probe:* What was it that they considered? Why did they change their mind?

All the questions in the following section will be asked for each activity in turn (remember to ask these questions for any 'forgotten' activities). Researcher should group activities where maps are highly populated to avoid the interview becoming too repetitive. Some questions are not appropriate to some activities (eg did they get anything for completing a 'fun day out') and can be missed out. Questions in bold format are most important to this section.

3. Discussing the Activity Map

- **How did they decide to do this activity? *Probe: What was the process they went through (eg on list/menu/other means)? Who suggested the activity?***
- Did they receive anything for completing this activity? *Probe: eg a certificate.*
- **Did this activity relate to something else they did during the AA or wanted to do after it?**
- ***If relates to another activity, how did it relate to the other activity? Probe: pre-requisite, underpinning learning/knowledge etc.***
- **How did they think this particular activity would help them to progress? Probe: pre-requisite, underpinning learning/knowledge, skill development etc.**
- What did they think of the activity? *Probe: how enjoyable, how worthwhile.*

- What were the benefits/drawbacks of doing the activity? *Probe: 'Soft' outcomes, such as trying new things, skills development, new friends, confidence/self-esteem*
- If they could go back in time to when they started the AA, would they choose this activity again? Why / why not?

D. Reflection on Activities and Progression (15-20 minutes)

This section will focus on their overall perspective and experiences of the AA. It will explore their opinions on the choices available, examples of anything they felt was missing, and how they will use the AA to progress.

1. Reflection on how ideas of progression developed

- Was there one particular thing (activity, help from Adviser) that helped them during the AA or was it more the combination of the activities and help from the Adviser?
- *If one thing*, mark with sticker on map. *Probe: Stickered activity / thing, explore why this was important to them.*
- *If a combination*: How (in what way) did all these things combine to help them? *If young person has difficulties expressing this, ask them to explain how they got to their EET outcome in terms of the support / activities through the AA.*

2. Reflection on the activities

- When starting the activities did they have a clear idea of what they would achieve as a result? How did they know what they might achieve?
- How important was the regular contact with an Adviser? What did they get out of it? *Probe: Links to progression eg a clearer / changed focus, building a path through the activities and / or to positive EET outcome(s) after the AA.*
- Did they leave any activities earlier than initially agreed? Why? *Explore how far their reason relates to their ideas for progression in and after (was the activity aimed at helping them form an opinion?).* What were the next steps?
- Did they consider leaving the AA at any point? *If yes, what kept them going?*
- What is different about the AA compared to other things they have experienced eg schooling/learning, training, other programmes for young people?

3. Progression and outcomes

- When they left the AA, what did they plan to do? *Probe: Explore links between their plans and the AA and / or how / the extent to which AA influenced or changed their future ideas.*

- What did they do after the AA?
- Did that lead on from the AA or is it something totally different? *Establish chronology if more than one thing.*
- *If one thing:* What do they think of it? *Probe:* Enjoyment, satisfaction, do they see it leading anywhere (building towards a career)?
- *If more than one thing:* Why did they make a change / changes? *For current / most recent EET destinations, probe:* Enjoyment, satisfaction, do they see the current/most recent leading anywhere (building towards a career)?
- What has been their overall experience of the AA? *Probe: How worthwhile, satisfactory - why / why not?*
- Looking back, what do they think they got out of the AA? *Explore how far the AA helped them to progress / achieve their EET outcome following the AA?*
- Ask them to imagine they had *not* got involved in the AA - what do they think they would be doing now?
- If they could improve anything about the AA what would it be? *Probe: The choices/activities, the path through activities, help from the Adviser to build through activities to a positive outcome.*

4. Wider reflections

Introduce the next series of questions as follows:

The Activity Agreement is only open to young people aged 16 to 18 who have left school and who have not been doing any college courses, training or work for a few months.

- Would they recommend the AA to other young people in this situation? *Why / why not?*
- Ask them to think of the kind of person they would recommend the AA to (or the kind of person who signs up to the AA). Now ask them to think of that person at the start of the AA and then again after they have finished it. Use the before and after picture with the young person to discuss 'before and after' thoughts on each of the following:
 - how this person spends their time
 - what, if anything, this person wants for their future (work, training etc.)
 - how this person feels about themselves (confidence, self-esteem etc.)
 - what this person has (skills, qualifications, certificates).

Closing the interview (5 mins)

Thank them for their time. Ask if they have anything else to add.

Explain that we want to interview their specific AA Adviser and what that interview will involve (show them the timeline and explain that it is just that part of the interview that we want to discuss with the Adviser). Make clear that none of their answers about Connexions or the Adviser will be passed on to the Adviser and that this is voluntary.

If they agree they **must sign the consent form and give the name of their Adviser.**

Focused Study 5: Topic Guide, AA Advisers

The main aim of this study is to find out about young people's experience in terms of progression on the Activity Agreement (AA); particularly how far a series of small steps can help them to reach their goal and positive outcome. The approach uses young person-centred case studies. The Adviser interview will explore views of how provision was selected and brokered, how small steps were built in to help with progression, as well as more detailed information about negotiating with young person X to create an AA programme that would help achieve an EET outcome. Section timings are guidelines only and should be viewed as maximum rather than an average.

A. Introduction (5 mins)

This section is to give the Adviser some background about the research. Be sure to reassure them about confidentiality and to ask permission for the interview to be recorded. Young person X's consent form will be shared with the Adviser during this introduction.

- Introduce yourself and IES - emphasise we are an independent research organisation commissioned to evaluate the Activity and Learning Agreements.
- Tell them about the research: it is about young people involved in AA, their experiences of the activities, and whether these helped them to build towards a positive outcome following the AA. A key focus is outcomes and progression.
- Emphasise that the interview is confidential and will be reported anonymously. Young people are also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity in the report.
- Explain that as part of the research we have gathered information about the range of activities young person X was involved in and it is this that will form a key part of the interview. We will not discuss anything confidential young person X told us about.
- Offer the Adviser the opportunity to ask any questions they might have; also mention that we can take questions throughout the interview or at the end.
- Confirm that they have responsibility for brokering and negotiating young people X's provision for the AA. *Provide copy of young person X's consent form.*
- Ask permission to record the interview.

B. Background about the Adviser (5 minutes)

This aim of this section is to get some background information about the Adviser. The research team will also gather information about the AA within the area from the process element of the evaluation.

- How long have they been involved in the AA?
- Does the Adviser cover specific geographic areas or work across the pilot?

- What are their particular responsibilities within the Activity Agreement? *Probe: Recruitment of young people; engaging/supporting young people for the AA; negotiating activities; brokering activities; one-to-one review meetings with young people.*
- What size caseload are they typically managing for the AA?

C. Young person X's activities (20 minutes)

In this section we focus on the Adviser's perspective on the experience of the young person X. If the Adviser's case load includes two of the case study young people then the activity map for each will be considered in turn, if time allows. If their case load includes more than two participants, we will interview them a second time but cover only the map element.

Introduce this section as follows: The next part of the interview focuses on the provision and activities that were put in place for young person X. We are interested in the extent to which activities formed a series of small steps to help build towards progression for young person X (eg opportunity to experiment, build alternatives into plans/back-up plans, if one activity underpinned another etc.). We are not expecting Advisers to tell us anything confidential about young people. If it is possible to say in outline why any type of provision was proposed it would be useful. For instance, the Adviser might say that an activity was proposed to help with young person X's confidence or self-esteem although we do not need to know the reasons why young person X needed an activity to help with this.

1. Reviewing the activity map for young person X

The interviewer will email the Adviser the PowerPoint diagram of young person X's activity map in advance of the interview. The redrawn map will ensure that the young person's recollection of activities is clearly shown and that no sensitive information is disclosed to the Adviser. We expect interviewers to guide the Adviser through the map and prioritise provision for deeper examination eg it would not be appropriate to ask the full list for each review session; and longer-term provision may provide a richer source of information than a one-off session. To some extent, decisions will also be based on the interviewer's knowledge of the young person's response to each activity.

- Show the Adviser the activity map for young person X and talk them through the things the young person mentioned they had done.
- Check with the Adviser that the list and timing of activities is broadly correct.
- Add in any activities that the Adviser thinks have been missed out.

2. Discussing young person X's Activity Map

For each activity noted for young person X:

- How was this activity decided upon? *Probe: What was the process they went through?*
- Did this activity relate to something else young person X did during the AA or wanted to do after it?
- *If it relates to another activity:* How did it relate to the other activity?

- How did the Adviser think this particular activity would help young person X to progress? *Probe: Pre-requisite, underpinning learning/knowledge, skill development etc.*
- Were they able to schedule/commission this activity at the point they felt was most appropriate for young person X? *Probe: If not, was there an impact from this on young person's progression?*
- What did they think about the value of the activity to young person X? *Probe: How worthwhile, did it relate to a future career path or other activities on the AA?*
- With hindsight, would they have recommended this activity to young person X? Why / why not?

D. Experience and Reflections on Activities (15-20 mins)

This section will focus on Advisers' overall perspective on the AA activities using Young Person X as a typical or atypical example of AA participants. It will explore their opinions on how ideas for progression developed, how the activities worked to deliver progression and outcomes. If the Adviser has provided information for two young people, the experience of both can be used as examples in this section.

1. Reflection on how ideas of progression developed

- Was there one particular thing (eg activity, help from Adviser) that helped young person X to progress during the AA or was it more the combination of the activities and help from the Adviser?
- *If one thing, mark with sticker on map. Probe stickered activity/thing, Explore why this was important to them*
- *If a combination: How (in what way) did all these things combine to help them?*
- **How common is this** - for which groups of young people?

2. Reflection on the activities

- How important was it to offer young person X information about the potential outcomes of the different provision? What sort of information did they need? **How common is this** - and for which groups of young people? Why?
- *How relevant were the activities to establishing a progression path for young person X? In what way? **How common is this** - and for which groups of young people? Why?*
- Did young person X experience any problems with their activities? How were these resolved? **How common is this** - and for whom?
- How important were the regular review meetings with young person X? Why? **How about to other groups within the AA** (what groups and why)?
- Did young person X leave any activities earlier than initially agreed? Why? What were the consequences/next steps? **To what extent does this apply more widely? Is it more problematic for some groups of young people than others?** If so, who?

- Did young person X want to leave the AA at any point? *If yes*, how did the Adviser keep them engaged? **How common is this** - and for which groups of young people? Why?
- What is different about the AA compared to other NEET engagement programmes they know about? Is there anything distinctive about the AA in terms of how it builds towards positive outcomes for young people?

3. Outcomes and progression

- What were the key outcomes for young person X resulting from the AA? What did they gain most from the AA? How did this help them to progress after the AA?
- Ask the Adviser to imagine that young person X had not got involved in the AA - what do they think they would be doing now?

4. Wider reflections

This section is to gather more general reflections about the AA and is not specific to any of the young people who have been discussed earlier in the interview. Clarify with the Adviser that the emphasis is on the AA generally rather than the specific experience of young person X.

Introduce the next series of questions as follows:

The Activity Agreement is only open to young people aged 16 to 18 who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). Knowing what you do about young people in this situation ...

Ask them to think about the different types of young people they have encountered on the AA (draw on examples the Adviser has given about types of young people in the preceding sections). Ask them if one particular group requires a 'small step' approach more than others? If so, for this group ask Otherwise, ask the Adviser to select one type/group of young person and ask them to think about this young person at the start, and then the end of the AA.

- What are the characteristics of a typical young people in this group?
- What would a typical young person in this group want for their future?
- How would a typical young person in this group feel about themselves?
- What type of steps would be needed to help a typical young person from this group achieve a positive outcome?

Closing the interview

Thank them for their time. Ask if they have anything else to add.

Appendix 2: Consent Forms

Initial research consent form

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) is carrying out some research into the activities available to young people through the Activity Agreement. This will involve a short interview with an IES researcher.

- The interview will last about **30-45 minutes**.
- It would take place at your home, or another venue of your choice if you prefer this (eg a local café).
- You will receive a **£20 High Street voucher** as a thank you for taking part, after the interview. This can be used in various stores including HMV, Zavvi, Boots, JJB Sports, New Look, River Island, and the Carphone Warehouse.
- The interview is **confidential**.
- The interview will cover your experiences of learning and work, and your experience of activities on the AA.

If you would like more information or have any queries please contact Becci Newton or Claire Johnson who are both researchers at IES:

Becci Newton: 01273 873692 (direct) **Claire Johnson: 01273 877607 (direct)**
becci.newton@employment-studies.co.uk claire.johnson@employment-studies.co.uk

If you are willing to take part, please complete your contact details below and return this form to your Adviser. Alternatively, your Adviser may complete this on your behalf.

Name:

Address:

.....
.....

Home tel. number:

Mobile number:

Thank you very much for your help. A researcher from IES will telephone you shortly to book an appointment.

Adviser research consent form

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) is carrying out some research into the Activity Agreements available to young people and has interviewed you about this.

As part of this research IES would like to get opinions from both the young people and their Connexions Advisers about the activities they completed and how those activities were organised.

IES is asking for your permission to contact your Connexions Adviser in order to discuss with them the activity map that we drew up in your interview. This will be the ONLY part of your interview that we will discuss with your Adviser. We will NOT discuss any comments you made about Connexions, your Adviser, or the activities as this type of information is confidential.

We will only contact your Adviser if you are completely happy with the idea. If you have any question please ask the IES researcher.

Name:

Signature:

Would you be willing for us to contact your Connexions Adviser for an interview?

Yes, I don't mind you contacting my Adviser for an interview

No, I don't want you to contact my Adviser for an interview

If you have given your consent, please complete the contact details of your Adviser below.

Name of Adviser:

Connexions Office:

Ref: DCSF-RR098

ISBN: 978 1 84775 419 6

© Institute for Employment Studies 2009

www.dcsf.gov.uk/research

Published by the Department for
Children, Schools and Families