

Young Apprenticeships: Equal Opportunities

B Newton, L Miller, R Page, K Akroyd, S Tuohy



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Young Apprenticeships Equal Opportunities

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Executive Summary

Context and aims of this study

In September 2004 the DfES established a programme of Young Apprenticeships (YAs). The aim of the DfES in developing the YA programme is to allow 14 to 16 year olds (at Key Stage 4) to combine the practical application of skills and knowledge in a vocational context with studying for qualifications that relate to particular occupational sectors. More broadly, introducing a new vocational route for this age group had underpinning links to the drive to address occupational segregation through encouraging young people to consider non-traditional options. The 14 to 19 age range is regarded as a particularly important phase in learning and has therefore become the focus for government initiatives aimed at widening the variety of learning options available.

During the public consultation on the *14-19 Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* green paper, the EOC expressed concerns that greater and earlier vocationalism might lead to more, rather than less, gender-stereotyped curriculum choices. Their concerns stemmed primarily from the fact that, in the ten years that had passed since their introduction¹, apprenticeships had failed to increase the numbers of young women entering training in jobs normally undertaken mainly by men, such as engineering and construction (and likewise, had failed to increase the numbers of young men in areas such as childcare). This led the DfES to evaluate how equal opportunities concerns were being addressed within its innovative new provision, the Young Apprenticeships. A parallel aim of the work was to capture good practice so that learning may be transferred into other qualification routes (eg the development of the Special Diplomas), and the systems through which young people make their option choices for year 10.

By September 2005 there were around 80 partnerships in existence. These were in business administration, engineering, art and design/performing arts, health and

¹ ten years as at the time of the EOC's written submission to the consultation

social care, motor vehicle, hospitality, sports management leadership and coaching, and textiles. These subjects are delivered through partnerships who have bid for cohorts in response to DfES specification. Within their proposals for funding for the second cohort of young apprenticeship schemes, partnerships were asked to specify how they would address the equal opportunities agenda.

Methodology

The study was undertaken in two phases: the first phase consisted of telephone interviews with the nine Sector Skills Councils involved in the delivery of the YA subjects, and a further interview with the representative of the TUC who sits on the YA National Advisory Group. In addition, a sample of 20 second cohort partnership leads were contacted for their views, as well as their recruitment data. In parallel with this, a review of YA publicity materials was undertaken by the research team.

The second phase of the research involved case studies of five partnerships to identify good practice and points in the process where further work might be required. An additional strand of work involved three smaller case studies in an area of emergent good practice in encouraging wider choices: taster events.

Key findings

Information is central to challenging (or beginning to challenge) stereotypes of occupations, sectors and vocational qualifications. Ensuring that young people have access to information that *accurately* reflects sector workplaces and the occupations therein can help to shift out-of-date images and concepts. The emergent themes, conclusions and recommendations are reported from a perspective of where action needs to be taken. Following this, we set out some considerations for good practice.

Publicity materials nationally and locally

While young people themselves did not refer to the publicity materials produced by DfES, we did receive positive comments about them from SSCs, partnerships and in some cases, parents. Our own review of the range of national and local materials found these to be of high standard and generally working well together to provide information from a number of perspectives. However, there were opportunities to develop these, particularly in the images used, so that they challenge people's perceptions and stereotypes of the occupational sectors, as well as ensure that a fully inclusive feel is communicated.

In some cases, the images that were used portrayed an impression that the Sector Skills Councils themselves felt was an outmoded stereotype, for example, the 'blue overall' image demonstrating the engineering and automotive sectors. Regarding the issues of inclusion and diversity, our recommendation are that images used in such

publications should aim to show diverse groups of young people. These considerations apply equally to materials produced for the occupational sectors. In addition, we suggest the inclusion of more detailed sector-based information, which the case study research has shown to be highly important to young people. Evidence elsewhere¹ suggests that the information about sectors and occupations should include information about rates of pay so that young women in particular can gain clear information about the implications of the career choices they make.

At the local level, partnerships also need to be aware of how images can communicate out-of-date concepts of occupations. Local materials are essential. They provide detailed information for pupils, and their parents or guardians, about the delivery model and qualifications that will be achieved. They also inform about practicalities such as travel arrangements, and health and safety within employer placements and at provider premises. However there remains a need to be cognisant of occupational stereotypes and to select images that do not serve to further entrench these.

Targets and monitoring - guidance from national stakeholders

We found that very few partnerships set their own EO targets and, where these were established, they related to training uptake in the broad offer of the provider. We suggest there is a need for greater national guidance about expectations for equality of opportunity as this would help ensure that providers prioritise the issue. Although SSCs had provided information on the diversity targets that were planned within the sectors, partnerships largely reported that they had received no information on targeting for diversity from either the SSCs or LLSCs. Advising partnerships to set targets that borrow from other qualification routes or SSC aims (eg the one per cent per annum target to increase women's participation in engineering over the next five years) may be a practical solution. Setting targets that aim to build on current achievements (as in the example) may also trigger appropriate positive action for atypical entrants in the application of the YA entry criteria, and at minimum sustain the extent of diversity that has currently been achieved.

Regarding the information that partnerships collect, there were also variations: the minimum requirements for data collection are often driven by national organisations, or the local offices of national bodies (eg use of the Equality and Diversity Impact Measures set by local LSCs); with more detailed monitoring being dependent on the local context specific to the partnership and the remit of the lead partner organisation. In two of the partnerships there were clear messages that they felt their own monitoring to be superior to what was required of them. These partnerships felt there was a need amongst the national stakeholders to capture qualitative/supplementary information about the processes and actions taken during recruitment.

¹ for instance, a BMRB survey of 1,000 adults, undertaken in April 2004 on behalf of the EOC; and the report of the Women in Work Commission, (Prosser, 2006)

Operation of the entry criteria at partnership level - national guidance

We found little application of discretion in terms of the way in which the academic criteria were being applied. Although the DfES guidance allows for the criteria to be waived 'in exceptional cases' this appeared to have happened rarely and there is a strong belief that the criteria are required to ensure recruited pupils will cope with this often demanding programme. From a diversity perspective however, there were several reports of how, following the application of the criteria, atypical entrants had been excluded from consideration. We suggest that the DfES should consider whether any stronger guidance is needed to ensure that schools and providers realise that partnerships may waive one or more of the selection criteria, where there is a special case to be made for a young person. For example, this might be appropriate if someone is particularly well-motivated or has extensive experience in an area but is achieving at a level slightly under that required for the YAs.

Ensuring young people receive the information they need - action at partnership level

There appears to be a need for more comprehensive information to be delivered in awareness-raising activities. Some pupils said that they would have liked more information about the topics they would be studying. Others commented that what they really wanted was more detailed information about the subject of the YA rather than the processes involved (eg about the process of application or details regarding their attendance at the college). While late funding notification or entry into the YA partnerships in some cases had limited the extent of information the pupils had received, as YAs move towards embedding information-giving within their standard yearly practice, this will be an important area for action.

Working with schools on selection - action at partnership level

Schools have a strong influence on how awareness of the YA opportunity is raised. Generally two models existed: that of broad spectrum awareness raising (ie to the whole of year 9) or some degree of pre-selection based on previously established preferences or choices of the young people, or based on schools' views about who might gain most from the YA. While these latter approaches may have some benefits in ensuring pupils who apply to the YA are both interested in the subject and motivated, they do however limit the ability of the lead to promote non-stereotypical choices in the YA. However, it should also be noted that some partnerships felt that the broad spectrum approach was problematic too, in that it did not help to identify whether pupils had the motivation required to undertake a YA.

The selection of schools to participate within partnerships can have very direct impacts on the diversity of the cohorts achieved. In two instances, partnerships had taken strategic decisions to involve schools with significant ethnic populations or to encourage the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. While in some

occupational areas, the inclusion of schools may be determined by the pre-entry qualifications required for the YA, in others there is greater flexibility to consider this approach.

Supporting (atypical) young apprentices - action at partnership level

Our findings also suggest that there is a need to ensure that young people have sufficient opportunity to give feedback about their experiences, and that providers need to find better ways to identify the support required by the young apprentices. Indirect approaches, such as observation, may give a false impression, especially if young people are aware that they are being observed in the work setting and are keen to give a good impression. It is clear, too, that general questioning is often not an effective way of eliciting information from young people.

For this reason, while the provision of partnership co-ordinators was generally thought to be supportive for the young apprentices, and they themselves confirmed this in many cases, the extent to which they are seen as helpful depends on the way in which they work with the young people. Asking general questions about how well a placement is going, tends not to elicit useful information. Taking a structured approach, however, in either one-to-one or group meetings to obtain feedback is likely to ensure a co-ordinator gains a greater awareness of the young apprentice's support needs. A further suggestion is that co-ordinators or teachers give young people a list of potential types of support that could be made available (such as provision of a mentor, telephone support contact number, increased visit frequency, one-to-one meetings with the co-ordinator etc.) and ask them to indicate which, if any, they would like to have made available.

The evidence suggests in particular that, for young women entering male-dominated sectors, critical mass is important as this effectively serves to build a self-supporting group. Where critical mass has not been reached within the YA cohort, ie where there is just one female, or one person from an ethnic minority, then providing access to post-16 learners (eg apprentices) with similar backgrounds, in both college and workplace (if possible) may be helpful.

Although there is evidence from young people to suggest that atypical entrants do require, to some degree, additional support, some of the partners did not perceive this need. Where support is sufficiently individualised and structured support may be sufficient; however, if assumptions are being made about how the young people appear to be doing, there is a strong likelihood that their support needs may be overlooked. As well as improving the means by which feedback is sought from the young apprentices, it would appear that there is a training need amongst some staff in the partnerships to increase their awareness of the fact that treating everybody in the same way is not necessarily the way to promote equal opportunities.

Support during placements - action at partnership level

Ensuring a well-structured, well planned placement is important to how well supported young people feel during their YA experience. It is necessary to ensure first that there is a clear role for young people to fulfil and tasks for them to undertake, and second that there is someone they can approach if they are unsure about something.

Introducing other atypical workers to them and providing some formal access to these is likely to be beneficial, even if they are drawn from work disciplines other than those covered by the YA. There may be a case for sending pairs of atypical entrants on placement as a support mechanism.

Good practice considerations

The provision of taster sessions was believed to help encourage wider choices. Tasters varied a great deal in their structure and intent, but were seen as useful for several reasons: ensuring the motivation of young people; giving young people knowledge of a broader range of subjects; and helping to break down stereotyped concepts. Examples were found of tasters that addressed gender barriers, and some that addressed the needs of stakeholders in young people's choices, such as parents. There was a willingness amongst providers to organise tasters to meet different requirements, provided that resources allowed this.

Parents/guardians play an important role in supporting young people's choices (and it is a DfES requirement that each young person has parental support). They can also exert strong influence, in some cases leading to the withdrawal of young people from vocational courses. The findings suggest further work to update parents about sector workplaces and different qualifications may be required if greater diversity is to be achieved.

It is also the case that many young people will not experience guidance from any other adults at this age, and the research showed that a number would have liked some external review of their aptitudes.

Where guidance was available, most young people reported they had received this from their teachers. However, many of the professional staff in these sectors were critical of the (out-of-date) information held by other professionals, such as those in guidance and teaching. Good practice would be to offer some staff development, such as the taster provided under the 'Building Better People' programme, that aims to inform professionals about employment opportunities.

There was a consensus that young people needed to hear about sectors from employers and the YAs have certainly allowed young people a good insight into the sectors. Involving employers (not only for the YA but in wider awareness raising

activities) is likely to bring benefits for young people by encouraging wider choices, particularly if atypical role models can be involved.

One final point that bears repeating is the finding that better systems are needed to allow young people to feedback their experiences. Reports were received that young people had not received the information they required from tasters or from awareness raising events about the courses or the placements. Without some method to directly ask them about their needs, young people may not volunteer them this information, in spite of how supportive the structures appear. Providers would find such information useful to them in informing future planning and action and improving retention, and so it would make sense to ensure they have the systems in place to gather this information.

1 Introduction

In September 2004 the DfES established a programme of Young Apprenticeships (YAs). The aim of the DfES in developing the YA programme is to allow 14 to 16 year olds (at Key Stage 4) to combine the practical application of skills and knowledge in a vocational context with studying for qualifications that relate to particular occupational sectors. Young people would typically spend years 10 and 11 on the programme. At the end of the programme, the young person is expected to gain a level 2 vocational qualification comprised of units of occupational competence identified as appropriate for the YA programme by the relevant Sector Skills Council.

In the initial phase a first cohort of around a thousand 14 year olds was admitted to YA programmes across five occupational sectors: business administration, engineering, design and performing arts, health and social care, and motor vehicle. In the following year, 2005, the DfES commenced a second phase of YA projects, with offers of places on YA programmes being extended to an additional 2,000 young people. At the same time, a further three occupational sectors (hospitality, sports management leadership and coaching, and textiles) were added in which YA programmes were available.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for funding and approving the delivery arrangements for the YA programme. YA programmes are delivered via partnerships which can involve training providers, schools, FE colleges, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and Local Authorities (LAs). Local LSC offices, Education-Business Partnerships and Connexions offices also may be involved in YA partnerships. Local employers complete the partnership by providing work placements for the young people.

Training provision for young people on YA programmes usually takes place at training provider premises, FE colleges or employer premises and sometimes (less often) at the schools themselves. Each partnership has a designated lead partner with whom the local LSC contracts. During the two years of the YA programme, the apprenticeships typically have been designed on the assumption that young people will spend an average of two days per week out of the school in the vocational

learning setting. This time allowance includes time spent by the young person in the work experience/work based setting as well as time in the programme of study that leads towards the level 2 learning outcome.

By September 2005 there were around 80 partnerships in existence. These were in business administration, engineering, art and design/performing arts, health and social care, motor vehicle, hospitality, sports management leadership and coaching, and textiles. The vision was for the creation of a small scale, high quality route at Key Stage 4 that offers able and well-motivated pupils the option to pursue general or industry-specific vocational programmes outside school, in partnership with employers and involving extended periods of work experience. The route also offers the chance to progress into Apprenticeships post-16, while also keeping other progression routes at age 16 open.

1.1 The increasing choice agenda

The YA programme is the latest development to come out of wider government policies to increase both choice and quality of provision for young people aged between 14 and 19. The 14 to 19 age range is regarded as a particularly important phase in learning and has therefore become the focus for government initiatives aimed at widening the variety of learning options available. We next outline some of the other initiatives that form the background to the development of the YA programme.

1.1.1 Extending opportunities for 14-19 year olds

The government first announced its intention to increase the options available for young people between the ages of 14 and 19 in the green paper, *'14-19 Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards'* (DfES, 2002), with the government's plans being subsequently announced in the white paper, *'14-19 opportunity and excellence'*, (DfES, 2003).

'14-19 opportunity and excellence' recognised the need both to improve vocational options and raise the status of vocational provision. *'Curriculum 2000: innovations, opportunity and change'*, published by the LSDA in 2002, further reinforced this message. The LSDA report noted the need to:

- increase parity of esteem for vocational qualifications
- enhance and broaden GCE 'A' level programmes by introducing vocational elements
- increase the range of subjects offered to learners, especially in schools
- raise the profile of key skills

- increase the uptake of information and communication technology (ICT), languages and mathematics
- provide a cross-institutional focus for inter-departmental collaboration and change, including cultural change
- increase the emphasis on the role of ongoing guidance.

Taken together, the white paper and the LSDA report acknowledged that simply providing an increased range of options would not, on its own, be sufficient to ensure that young people considered all the potential choices. Any alternative qualifications would need to have parity of esteem and, in addition, would need some degree of organisational change and increasing partnership, if the new awards were to be successfully delivered.

Increased flexibility programme

An early step towards improving access to a broader range of options, and particularly vocational qualifications, was the introduction of the increased flexibility programme (IFP) for 14 to 16 year olds in 2002. This programme has created enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds by promoting collaboration between FE colleges, schools, training providers and employers and the creation of eight new GCSEs in vocational subjects. Through the programme, pupils receive opportunities to study off the school site, qualifications delivered by FE colleges or training providers and they develop knowledge and understanding in a work context eg through employer placements. Approximately 300 partnerships have been formed nationally, largely between colleges and schools. Evidence suggests that over 2,000 schools have become involved (with at least one partnership in each local LSC region) and that over 90,000 pupils are benefiting from the IFP options.

The IFPs were set-up to: raise the attainment in national qualifications of participating pupils; increase their skills and knowledge; improve social learning and development; and increase retention in learning after age 16. Outcome targets have been set (over and above their predicted GCSEs) and these include: at least one-third of the young people involved in the IFP gaining at least one GCSE in a vocational subject at level 2; and one-third of pupils gaining at least one NVQ level 1. A final target is for three-quarters of young people involved in the IFP to progress into further learning beyond the age of 16.

The IFP initiative brought together schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to offer a broader range of provision to young people than could be provided by those institutions working alone. This includes access to vocational options that might otherwise not be available to young people staying on in education. The partnership

model trialled by the IFPs has effectively become the basis for the subsequent delivery of the YA programmes.

GCSEs in vocational subjects

The eight new qualifications created under the IFP were the GCSEs in vocational subjects also introduced in 2002. These included: Applied Art and Design; Applied Business; Applied ICT; Applied Science; Engineering; Health and Social Care; Leisure and Tourism; and Manufacturing. These are 'double awards', ie equivalent to two standard GCSEs and are designed to explore vocational learning through investigation and research of the 'world of work'. The aims of the VGCSEs are to introduce learners to a broad sector of industry and business; encourage understanding of that sector, and the key concepts and theories prevalent in it; and develop capability in some of the skills used within it. Schools and colleges have also been encouraged to plan the curriculum to incorporate work placements and other practical activities such as employer visits.

The YA route

It can be seen then that the YA route developed as the logical extension of the Modern Apprenticeship (now Apprenticeship) programme together with initiatives such as the IFP that were being tested under the 'Increasing Choice' agenda and the development of vocational options within GCSEs. The joint aim of such developments is to provide access for more young people to a high quality vocational training route and allow the UK to develop a skilled workforce capable of competing with those of its international competitors. The YA route itself aims to bring a sharper work/vocational focus than the IFP and VGCSEs through its extended work placement and this is perhaps the most distinctive of its features.

However, evidence suggests that previous initiatives, including the IFP, have had little impact to date on subject segregation by gender. We provide a brief overview of this issue in Section 1.2 below.

1.2 Equality of opportunity and the increasing choice agenda

Gender segregation remains pervasive throughout most occupational sectors in the UK. An implicit aim of the moves to improve vocational options and increase choice was to encourage young people to consider non-traditional options. However, during the public consultation on the '14-19 *Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*' green paper, the EOC expressed concerns that greater and earlier vocationalism might lead to more, rather than fewer, sex-stereotyped curriculum choices. Their concerns stemmed primarily from the fact that, in the ten years that had passed since their

introduction,³ apprenticeships had failed to increase the numbers of young women entering training in jobs normally undertaken mainly by men, such as engineering and construction (and likewise, had failed to increase the numbers of young men in areas such as childcare).

In her reply to the EOC's concerns, the then Secretary of State said:

'All new initiatives emanating from the Department aim to mainstream equal opportunities and to challenge stereotyping. The programme of vocational learning...will significantly expand the opportunities for girls and boys to undertake non-stereotypical vocational courses and work placements. We will be urging participating schools and colleges to promote such courses in a gender-free manner and actively to encourage take-up that is non-traditional. The associated monitoring and evaluation arrangements will provide valuable feedback on the extent to which this has happened and we intend to use the findings to influence future policy development.'

Despite the best intentions of the DfES and the assurances of the Minister, evaluations of related vocational routes such as the vocational 'A' levels, Modern Apprenticeships and the Pathfinder projects have shown that these programmes had limited impact on equal opportunities and diversity. The findings are more positive in relation to the IFP and particularly around the experiences of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds or with special educational needs. We provide a summary of the emerging themes from two of these routes in the next sections: the Modern Apprenticeships and the IFP.

1.2.1 Modern Apprenticeships

An assessment of the extent to which the Modern Apprenticeship programme had helped decrease gender segregation, undertaken as part of the EOC's General Formal Investigation into occupational gender segregation, revealed that apprenticeship intakes reflected the patterns of segregation found in the adult workforce (Miller *et al.*, 2004). Following the Cassells' review of apprenticeships, which called for action to address gender segregation in apprenticeships (Cassells, 2003), a subsequent assessment of actions taken by the LSC and education and training providers to address gender stereotyping and segregation in Modern Apprenticeships found that only a minority of institutions were taking any actions (Miller 2005).

1.2.2 Increased flexibility programme

In their review of the IFP, OFSTED (2005)⁴ reported that 'IFPs have done little to increase the range of choices made by girls and boys in vocational fields ... In the

³ ten years as at the time of the EOC's written submission to the consultation

⁴ OFSTED (2005), *Increased flexibility programme at key stage 4*, ref HMI 2361, downloaded from www.ofsted.gov.uk, February 2006

lessons observed, two-thirds of all girls were following just three subjects: hair and beauty, health and social care, and leisure and tourism. In motor vehicle, engineering, welding and construction courses, 19 out of 20 pupils were boys.’ However, beyond gender, the IFPs are showing evidence of supporting pupils with special educational needs, the participation of this group is 13 per cent higher than in other key stage 4 routes; in addition the participation of pupils in receipt of free school meals is five per cent higher than nationally (NFER, 2005⁵).

1.3 The young apprenticeship routes

All young apprenticeships have a similar structure but differ in the qualifications offered, to reflect the various occupational sectors. At the time of the evaluation, there were eight YA programmes in place and a further eight in development.

Young Apprenticeships are designed to offer Level 2 NVQ qualification outcomes, identified by the SSC as appropriate for delivery to this younger group of individuals. In addition, young people on these programmes typically continue their studies for all of the core curriculum and for some other optional GCSE subjects at school.

As we have already noted, there is no ‘typical’ training route through the programmes. For the majority of young people on YA programmes their training will take place on training provider premises, in FE colleges or on employer premises, and sometimes (less often) at the schools themselves. The apprenticeships were designed to two days per week (or equivalent) release from school onto the scheme, to include 50 days work experience.

1.3.1 Equality of opportunity in young apprenticeships

In part influenced by the outcomes of the General Formal Investigation (GFI) conducted by the EOC into occupational segregation, the DfES, working with the EOC and the LSC, identified a need for further action to encourage more diverse cohorts within the YA programme. From the outset of the programme, an aim was to ensure that the YA programme would challenge stereotypes and open up a wider range of learning, training and work opportunities for young people. To this end, YA partnerships were encouraged to actively promote equality of opportunity and to support and enable young people to make wider choices and to access opportunities across all frameworks irrespective of their gender, race or disability. By year two, the invitation to submit proposals set requirements that partnerships should develop strategies to target groups that are disadvantaged, counter gender stereotyping and target ethnic minorities, SEN and pupils with disabilities.

⁵ Golden S, O'Donnell L, Benton T, Rudd P (2005), *Evaluation of Increased Flexibility for 14 to 16 year olds Programme: Outcomes for the First Cohort*, DfES/ NFER

In the submissions made to the DfES for cohort 2 delivery there were a variety of responses to the DfES's request for clear statements of equal opportunities: at one end of the spectrum, some cases failed to include any statement at all while in others, a one-size-fits-all type of paragraph was inserted in the application. Others, however, had carefully considered what actions they might take, specific to YAs in the relevant sectors, which might help encourage young people to consider routes for which they may not have been traditional entrants.

However, partnerships also needed to respond to other priorities, such as specifying how they would manage health and safety issues, travel and access, employer engagement and placement quality and in turn the DfES also needed to consider the proposal as a whole when evaluating the proposals. Following roll-out of the second year of the programme, the DfES decided to assess the extent to which equal opportunities were being addressed in practice and how far equality of opportunity was being considered, given the many other priorities the partnerships needed to address.

In September 2005 the DfES commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to undertake an evaluation of how equal opportunities issues were being addressed in the second tranche of Young Apprentice partnerships. This report is the culmination of that evaluation.

1.4 Aims of the research

The main aim of this research is to review the current arrangements within the Young Apprenticeship programme to encourage wider (and particularly non-traditional) choices, such as how awareness raising is undertaken and the impacts of this. A further aim is to identify and capture good practice in selection and support processes within the partnerships. In particular, the research:

- assesses the extent to which partnerships have delivered on their proposals/strategies to promote equality
- assesses the impact on the cohort selected
- highlights strategies and practices that have been effective in countering gender stereotypical choices and promoting equality of access for all candidates
- identifies the roles of key partners in delivering best practice
- identifies good equality practice for apprentices on non-traditional YA programmes more widely *eg* support mechanisms
- provides the basis for considering the feasibility of developing a blueprint for selection processes and equality delivery for 14 to 16 year olds on vocational programmes.

1.5 Structure of this report

In the next chapter we provide details of the methodological approach for this study. Chapter 3 explores the views of the Sector Skills Councils involved in the YAs, and those of the TUC. We first provide a pen-portrait of diversity in each sector and, following this, we consider the messages emerging from these discussions. In Chapter 4, we provide a review of the publicity materials providing by DfES, SSCs and partnerships.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of equality and diversity concerns within the partnerships. This is followed in the ensuing chapters by a more detailed examination of the outcomes of our analysis. We discuss targets and monitoring in Chapter 6 and awareness raising and recruitment in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8 we explore the kinds of support offered to, and required by, young apprentices and atypical entrants throughout their experience on the programme.

Chapter 9 draws together information about the processes and practices that help to encourage wider choices; and in Chapter 10 we discuss in more detail the provision of subject tasters. In Chapter 11 we conclude our analysis and provide some considerations for good practice.

2 Methodology

The project initially consisted of four components, the first three of which were undertaken in parallel:

- telephone interviews with a sample (20 of the 80) of YA partnerships to gather information about the focus on equality and diversity, and recruitment data
- telephone interviews with representatives of national stakeholder bodies
- review of national and local materials developed and used to promote the young apprenticeships (reported in Chapter 5)
- in-depth case studies with partnerships exhibiting evidence of having recruited a diverse pupil group (generally one issue such as ethnicity) and/or introducing an innovative approach in recruitment with demonstrable diversity outcomes.

Following the initial telephone interview phase of research, a fifth component was added to explore an aspect of emergent best practice: the provision of subject taster sessions.

2.1.1 Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of the partnerships who had proposed and were delivering cohort 2 YAs. The sample, representing one-quarter of the delivery partnerships, was selected by the DfES and aimed to produce: a range of emphases on equal opportunities and diversity within the cohort 2 proposal; a mix of cohort 2 only, and cohort 1 and 2 partnerships; subject; and geographic coverage. Table 2.1 lists the partnerships selected for this phase of the research.

These interviews explored the profile of the current cohort(s); recruitment processes and any difficulties experienced; and issues associated with occupational segregation and supporting wider diversity. In addition, statistical data were collected about the profile of entrants within these partnerships to inform the selection of case study sites.

Table 2.1: Partnerships DfES selected for the telephone interviews

Partnerships	Subject(s)
Age Concern Training NW	Business administration
AVE Partnership	Health and social care
Bedfordshire YA Partnership	Business administration
Central Wiltshire Partnership	Automotive; business administration
City College Norwich	Performing arts
Croydon 14-19 Partnership	Hospitality and catering
Evesham and Malvern Hills College	Engineering
Leeds Further Forward	Automotive; business administration
Manchester Occupational Learning Partnership	Automotive; business administration; health and social care
Merton College	Automotive; health and social care
Paragon ITE Training Group	Automotive
Performance Through People	Business administration
Peterborough Regional College	Engineering
ProCo.NW Ltd	Automotive; business administration
STEPS into Health and Social Care	Health and social care
Surrey YA Partnership	Engineering
TDR Training Ltd	Engineering
Warwickshire College	Health and social care ⁶
West Cumbria 14-16 Increased Flexibility Partnership	Engineering; business administration; performing arts
Willenhall School Sports College	engineering

Source: IES/DfES, 2005

In parallel to the telephone interviews with a sample of partnership leads, national stakeholders were contacted for their views. These included all relevant Sector Skills Councils (listed below), and a representative of the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

- SEMTA – science, engineering and manufacturing
- CfA – business administration
- Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS) – design and performing arts
- Skills for Health *and* Skills for Care – health and social care
- Automotive Skills – motor vehicle/automotive
- People1st – hospitality and service
- Skillsfast – textiles
- Skills Active – Sports management leadership and coaching

⁶ A parallel motor industry YA is offered within the Warwickshire and Coventry region, for which the health and social care lead provided recruitment data.

During these interviews, we explored issues relating to occupational segregation within their sectors, and issues specific to the delivery of the YAs. In the following sections we typically refer to the sectoral interviewees as ‘the SSCs’ or ‘SSC representatives’.

2.1.2 Case study research

The information from the telephone interviews was used to identify five partnerships for the subsequent good practice case studies. The five considerations influencing the selection were:

- gender performance within the subject framework (taking into account applications as well as enrolment data). A key priority was to select case studies that captured best practice recruitment:
 - where there are strong gender traditions in the workforce – and where it would also be assumed that the challenges were greater for recruiting atypical YAs – automotive and engineering (predominantly male), and health and social care (predominantly female)
 - where there is a more gender balanced sector workforce tradition – business administration, performing arts, or hospitality and catering
- recruitment of an ethnically diverse cohort in context, and particularly where the recruitment of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than would be expected in the catchment population
- recruitment of pupils with SENs. The early phase of the research identified that this group had received less attention generally
- the apparent strength of focus on equal opportunities within interviews, taking into account any actions taken to recruit a diverse cohort.

Using this information, the DfES selected five partnerships following discussion with the research team: Bedfordshire and Luton; Croydon; STEPS Northumberland; TDR Newcastle; and Warwickshire.

In each case study, a range of stakeholders was interviewed and these comprised, in most cases: the partnership lead; staff involved in the delivery of the YA in schools, colleges and other institutions; staff involved in recruitment for the programme; employers; and in each case study site, four young people undertaking the programme.

In addition to these interviews, in TDR and Warwickshire focus groups were held with young people enrolled on the YAs. These sites were selected for focus groups as they offered the possibility to combine young people from different subjects; areas and cohorts.

2.1.3 The provision of subject tasters

The format for the investigation of subject tasters was a short case study involving face-to-face (and in some cases telephone interviews) with key professionals who could provide information about the different aspects of delivery, management and resourcing of tasters. Only a small number (around one-quarter of the sampled partnerships) had offered subject tasters, and final selections for the case studies were made on the basis of equal opportunities performance in conjunction with the provision of tasters. The case studies involved three to four members of staff in each of three areas selected on this basis: AVE Derbyshire; Norwich; and West Cumbria.

2.1.4 Reporting the data

Throughout this report, we adopt the following conventions in reporting data obtained during the various phases of the work:

- The round of telephone interviews with partnership leads provided a scoping of activity with regards to equal opportunities and the outcomes achieved by each partnership. While statistical data from this early work is attributed, the spirit of the enquiry was to find out how far proposals matched with activity. For this reason, we do not attribute comments from this part of the research.
- As noted earlier, comments from the interviews with SSCs are attributed to the relevant SSC.
- Information gained from the representative of the TUC is attributed as such.
- Where information on good practice from case study interviews with professionals is cited, these are identified in the report.
- The very small numbers of atypical young apprenticeships in the regions visited would render them particularly prone to identification, were either the location or the occupational sector to be given. For this reason, we have not provided descriptions of young people above the level of whether they are a traditional or non-traditional entrant to the sector.
- The quotes from the telephone interviews were checked with respondents during Autumn 2005 and were subsequently modified as necessary; thus all the statements made relate to that period.
- Similarly, the quotes from the case study interviews were checked with and modified by respondents during Spring 2005/06; again all statements relate to that period.
- The exploration of subject tasters was undertaken in parallel with the main case study research. Quotes were checked with and modified by respondents during Winter 2005/06 and accordingly, all statements relate to that period.

3 Sectoral Perspectives on Equal Opportunities and Young Apprenticeships

Key to the development of the YAs has been the role of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). While some have had greater involvement over time from involvement in the first cohort, and/or in the nature of their interactions with partnerships attributable to number of delivery partnerships in the sector, their role in helping to ensure the YAs are responsive to the needs of employers, and sector skill needs more generally are part of what makes the YAs different.

Each of the SSCs involved in the delivery subjects of the YAs was contacted to discuss workforce diversity in the sector generally and particularly in the context of the potential impacts of the YAs. In this chapter we explore their views of the YAs and the opportunities these represent to the different councils. We also explore the extent to which SSCs believe that young apprenticeships have the potential to influence young people's thinking about their career choices.

To give some context to the different debates in each of the sectors, we first provide an overview of workforce trends, training developments and equality and diversity issues in each sector, based on the discussions with SSC representatives.

We follow this with a thematic analysis of the SSC views about their views of the YAs, and how they might start delivering greater workforce diversity.

3.1 Diversity and the sectoral workforces

3.1.1 Automotive Skills, motor vehicle YAs

Women currently form around 22 per cent of the workforce but they are largely confined to administrative roles. They constitute 1.3 per cent of learners registered on Advanced Apprenticeships and 1.4 per cent on Apprenticeships. Automotive Skills' SSC contract with the SSDA is to increase the number of women working in the sector by one per cent over the next five years. There is no set target for increasing the

percentage of females in training, although there is recognition that enrolments from females are scarce.

The sector is largely perceived as attracting low achievers. The SSC representative believed that the YA presents an opportunity to promote the sector to a different calibre of young person, through its emphasis in the selection criteria on good achievers. Given the number of partnerships involved in the sector, Automotive Skills does not work 'locally' with any but organises a support network for the 17 partnership managers. A key aspect of this network is to promote innovative thinking and good practice.

However, Automotive Skills does not consider that the attraction of non-traditional entrants has been a key focus for most YA automotive partnerships, as the prime emphasis has been placed on other issues such as promoting this new route, and health and safety. Reviewing recruitment across the range of prior apprenticeships *ie*, post-16, the representative reported that, despite the best efforts of colleges and training providers, there has been little change in the profile of entrants to the sector. While the YAs allow a younger age group to gain an early experience of motor vehicle occupations, the SSC believed the power of these qualifications to change what is likely to be established thinking about careers may already be limited. Encouraging young women to engage with the sector, they believed, would be 'a steep hill to climb'.

3.1.2 Creative and Cultural Skills, design and performing arts YAs

Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS) launched in July 2005 and is not yet at a point of setting targets for sector recruitment. Its representative reported that, historically, the sector has lacked diversity: there are few people in the workforce with special educational needs (SENs) and physical disabilities, and people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented. The proportion of workers from ethnic minority backgrounds generally is low, and this is a particular concern in the cultural heritage industry. Overall, the CCS representative reported that, when compared to other sectors, there is a greater balance by gender, with a slight weighting towards men (approximately 55 per cent representation).

The traditional academic routes into the sector partly account for this lack of diversity. CCS believe that the YAs are an opportunity to challenge this by providing a new, vocational route into the sector.

One of the key problems for partnerships offering CCS-industry YAs is the lack of vocational progression routes, post-16. Until this can be addressed (CCS is planning an apprenticeship launch in 2008), there is little choice for interested young people other than to progress through 'A' levels, foundation study and into university. Despite the current lack of vocational progression routes, the SSC representative

believed that young apprenticeships would gain benefits beyond their peers following the full traditional route:

'They will go into this route armed with skills that non-YA entrants have not had the chance to develop.'

Because of this lack of any tradition of apprenticeships within the sector, the SSC representative believed that the young apprenticeships present an opportunity to begin to engage with employers to help start the process of their acceptance and interest in vocational routes.

3.1.3 Council for Administration (CfA), business and administration YAs

There are differences in the gender distribution seen in lower and higher level roles in the sector. Occupations drawing on qualifications at level 4 and above are 70 per cent weighted towards men. In occupations requiring qualifications equivalent to level three and below, women form around 70 per cent of the workforce. Over the next five years, CfA has set a target to achieve gender balance in both levels of occupation, although its initial focus is on level three and below. CfA has yet to review the representation of people from ethnic minority backgrounds or with disabilities/SENs. The sector has an ageing workforce: employers have tended to recruit older workers for their literacy and numeracy skills, lacking in younger entrants.

The SSC sees the YA scheme as contributing to the development of the agenda to increase the representation of men in level one to three occupations, as YAs form a link to post-16 vocational routes. They present a greater chance to influence thinking at an age where young people would appear to have fewer barriers to traditionally gender stereotyped roles: for example, the intake to qualifications such as Business Studies tends to be gender balanced. It is also an important opportunity to promote the range of opportunities in this sector to young people *eg* such as those in retail or finance. The growing professionalisation in the sector is also influencing the choices of young men. Developing an understanding of the skills required by the sector amongst young people will help address the lack of age diversity the sector the sector is currently experiencing.

3.1.4 Skills Active, sports management leadership and coaching YA

The sector is characterised by low-pay work, with unsociable hours and shift work linked to poor career pathways. Nonetheless the sector is attractive to young people. The Skills Active representative drew on data to suggest that 26 per cent of young people want to enter the sector; however, most aspire to be a sports person, player or athlete. If not successful in this, the majority do not consider other roles in the sector such as coaching or other supportive roles. There is no tradition of apprenticeships in the sector, thus there is a need to engage with employers to develop vocational routes

in. Traditionally there have not been any particular gender imbalances in the sector, and ethnic minority representation largely reflects the UK population.

Skills Active facilitates a good practice network across its YAs with Regional Development Managers leading on closer liaison.

3.1.5 SEMTA, engineering YAs

Currently women comprise just under one-fifth (19 per cent) of the sector's workforce, and where they are employed, this tends to be at level two and below. SEMTA has a target to increase women's participation by one per cent a year and monitors this on a quarterly basis.

The proportions of women, people with disabilities, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds is broadly the same in training as in the workforce (19 per cent women, 13 per cent with disabilities and four per cent EMB). Overall, women are thus highly under-represented, and the proportion of people from EMBs is two per cent lower than in the general working population.

However, within the Engineering YAs, female representation is between five and six per cent nationally. This proportion is higher than for other apprenticeship routes, where the current target is for four per cent participation. The sector has a large majority of white/British workers. Attracting ethnic minorities into some sub-sectors, such as heavy engineering, has been difficult given recruitment traditions. The proportion in the workforce of people with disabilities/SENs is low for similar reasons of tradition.

The SEMTA representative reported that employers view the YA as a mechanism both for future recruitment and progression into post-16 apprenticeships. They see benefits in the opportunity to start changing the image of the sector before young people make career choices.

Regional Managers have the close liaison with partnerships and feedback to the national SEMTA group. Involvement with equality and diversity tends to be around issuing guidance and sharing good practice. The focus is on sustaining the achievements of YAs with regard to gender.

3.1.6 People1st, hospitality services YAs

Although women are the dominant gender group, their weighting, at around 60-65 per cent of the workforce, is not as extreme as in other sectors. Part-time work is prevalent and, while the sector does attract young people *ie* those aged below 19, the majority of workers are aged over 35. There is a high turnover of workers and, linked to this, a lack of career pathways: young people tend to move out of the sector. In hospitality services specifically, around six per cent of workers are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Around 11 per cent of employers report hard-to-fill vacancies and attribute this more to lack of interest in the sector rather than, for instance, skills shortages. It is an accessible sector but also seen as not demanding of skills. The post-16 Hospitality and Tourism apprenticeship is a popular choice; however, completion rates are a concern. People1st is attempting to address this issue in order to enhance the progression prospects of young people.

The YAs offer an earlier chance to start working with young people and influencing career choices.

'I think employers are interested in reaching younger people and getting them to stay. And that's why many are involved in the YAs – it's a different approach for them.'

However, the representative raised a concern: whether the focus able learners⁷ may be problematic for employers who believe craft skills can be better developed with less academic young people.

3.1.7 SSCs involved in the health and social Care YAs

The YA in health and social care involves curriculum and work experience that overlaps the remit of two SSCs: Skills for Care and Skills for Health. These two bodies have worked together to provide support to partnerships.

Skills for Care

This is a female dominated sector, with female representation across occupations at 81 per cent.⁸ Men have greater representation at management and/or senior levels: senior staff in operational divisions are 42 per cent male, and residential care managers are 38 per cent male. Women dominate in roles which directly involve 'care', and notably form 95 per cent of domiciliary care staff and 96 per cent of home care workers.

The representative reported that the sector workforce is ethnically diverse, but within YAs the participation of ethnic minorities depends largely on the local population.

The YAs offer young people the chance to gain a realistic view of the sector so that they can make more informed choices. The SSC works closely with partnerships (on a daily basis) offering advice on recruitment, employer engagement and facilitating appropriate placements. It has also provided guidance to partnerships on strategies and positive actions to recruit young men into this YA sector. While each of the YA

⁷ The programme aims to engage pupils predicted to achieve five A*-C GCSEs. Entry criteria clearly define the level of academic achievement required for the YAs.

⁸ Skills Research and Intelligence Division (2005), *The State of the Social Care Workforce 2004*, Statistical Appendix, Skills for Care, downloaded 10 November 2005 from:
<http://www.topssengland.net/files/2%20SfC%202004%20SRI%20StatsApp%20v2.pdf>

partnerships has clear and open selection processes, the Skills for Care representative noted that the majority of applications are from young women.

Skills for Health

The health workforce is female dominated, with women currently constituting 78 per cent of the workforce. There is a strong tradition of women entering nursing roles. Unlike the care sector, there is a greater gender consistency in higher level roles, for instance, currently 65 per cent of consultants are male, but amongst the most recently qualified there is an equal gender mix. Equal opportunities principles are promoted at local level although the SSC is not currently setting diversity targets for the sector as a whole.

Skills for Health has an advisory role in the YAs, and works in close liaison with Skills for Care to provide 'joined-up' support to the YAs. The SSC provides the interface with employer perspectives eg capacity to deliver placements and aims to share good practice across partnerships.

3.1.8 Skillsfast, textiles YA

As a whole, the sector does not appear to have any particular gender biases, however, when representation at different occupational levels is reviewed, there is a tendency for women to dominate in operator roles (level three and below) and men in managerial roles (level four and above). The sector is involved in post-16 apprenticeships, however, these have tended to focus on technical- and science-based occupations. Gender representation on post-16 apprenticeships is weighted towards men, who form approximately 75 per cent of apprentices. While the SSC has currently not set gender-related targets, this is something it is considering for the future. It is working on three major EU projects (with other manufacturing SSCs) to encourage women to go into management (and through the glass ceiling).

Skillsfast is unique among the YA SSCs in that it currently is working with just one delivery partnership. This has enabled it to play a central role in the development of the textiles YA, and in particular the SSC has made significant contributions to the development of the curriculum and employer engagement and guidance.

3.2 SSCs and the potential of YAs to address workforce diversity

The SSCs and TUC welcomed the opportunity to work with this age group, viewing the initiative as potentially bringing a number of benefits. First, was the opportunity to raise the profile of the sector at a point when careers choices were not yet fixed. Most SSCs felt their sector had an image problem of some kind. For example, the automotive and engineering SSCs felt that stereotyped concepts of the heavy

industries do not take account of the state-of-the-art facilities that are more often the case. The SEMTA representative believed that the YA route may offer the best opportunity yet for young people to gain insight into the sector:

'Getting in at this early stage means you have a better chance of influencing career decisions ... Without YAs, the advice they get may not promote the sector or vocational routes so well.'

A number of the SSCs shared the view that the YAs also constitute an opportunity to start influencing employers' thinking about career pathways within their sector, or in some cases to start them thinking about the profile of entrants. In sectors with a lack of any apprenticeship tradition, SSCs see an opportunity to start to promote the idea of vocational pathways into work. Creative and Cultural Skills saw the YAs as an opportunity to lay the foundation of apprenticeship routes in this sector; similarly, Skills Active also saw this as a key issue:

'Employers can hold quite traditional views about entry into the sector, and many don't understand vocational qualifications. The YA is an opportunity to start changing the routes in and changing ideas about entering the sector.'

In other sectors it is the academic profile of the entrants that is the key change, with the YAs providing a cohort of motivated pupils of good ability in contrast to the typical profile of entrants that the sector currently attracted. One example here was Automotive Skills.

In contrast, People1st commented that there was a need to work with some employers to convince them that the standard of pupils enrolled on the YAs would be right for their situation. The representative noted that, from this point of view, the current cohort of YAs were good ambassadors:

'Through the YA programme, employers get high achieving young people, who are supported by their parents and who have high levels of enthusiasm. And that's important when trying to influence their thinking.'

Another facet to the benefits of the YA perceived by SSCs was that young people gained information from undertaking the programme that would help them in making their career choice. In this way, the YA was seen to provide an industry 'taster'. The SSCs firmly supported the idea of open progression routes and the opportunity to change direction, rather than being entirely committed to one single education or training route following a decision made at the age of 14. There was some consensus that if a young person decided not to enter a sector as a result of the YA, that still constituted a useful outcome both because their decision had been made on a more solid basis; and because their views of work in the sector may have broadened as a result of the YA:

'Also, even if they decide the occupation is not for them, it broadens their view of the sector – they can see that these organisations require accountants, sales and administrative staff –

so they can see all the elements of the sector through this experience – and may choose to stay in a different type of role.'

There is a firm belief that a two-pronged approach is required in changing the diversity of sector workforces. While it is important to work with employers to challenge stereotypes, and ensure equality of opportunity, there was a recognition that the aspirations of young people themselves have much potential to act as a force of change. SEMTA was very positive about the potential role of YAs to start changing sector diversity.

'The major thing is to get young people out to employers to see what the sector is really like – by changing their assumptions you are more likely to attract a more diverse group of entrants. Non-traditional entrants need to see what the work environment is like.'

More generally, the SSCs believed that the earlier opportunity to develop work-based and transferable skills gave young people a distinct labour market advantage over their non-YA peers. One SSC mentioned how this more mature approach showed in the young people's subsequent approach to management of their core curriculum subjects.

'You can see the difference in young people – the skills they are developing which are different from their school colleagues. These include things like problem-solving ability, communication skills, they come across as more mature and take a more mature approach to their work. These are valuable work-place skills – and very transferable.'

The majority of SSCs had taken on an advisory role with partnerships and had created networks to help share learning and good practice across partnerships and throughout vocational frameworks but played no active role in delivery. All had provided some input into identifying workforce and skills trends within their sector and all were keen to build knowledge of the types of practices that work when seeking to recruit a more diverse pool of entrants. However, the maturity of the SSC largely informed whether any good practice could be shared by SSCs with partnerships. In only a small number of cases, the SSC was the lead partner or recently had been, and this currently limited the extent to which they could directly influence good practice; however as or when the number of partnerships grow within these YA sectors, the nature of their relationship with the various bodies is likely to change into one in which they can begin to support the sharing of good practice.

3.3 Trades Union Congress

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has a representative on the national advisory committee for the YAs with a remit of monitoring and supporting the development of the YAs. It is keen to use this role to ensure both the quality of work placements offered under the YAs and to ensure within this, equality of opportunity. The TUC has a broad co-ordinating role on this issue, with each SSC being required to have

union representation. In this way the TUC has been able to promote the issue of equal opportunities within sector skills agreements.

The TUC firmly supported the DfES' move towards the inclusion of equal opportunities criteria in the second round of YA proposals. The TUC representative felt that this issue had been a low priority for the first cohort and positive actions were now required. While appreciating the efforts made by partnerships across England, the TUC did have some concerns about whether there is sufficient support and guidance for young people to help them make non-traditional choices. The representative felt that the opportunities presented by, for instance, taster sessions, needed to be built on, and questioned whether the use of tasters in isolation would be enough to overcome peer or parental pressure.

However the TUC representative also felt that the YA schemes are developing the knowledge base of how gender and racial diversity issues can be addressed and supported.

'If there are problems we need to dig into what is happening to understand the context and issues. Similarly, if some partnerships are more successful, we need to understand what it is they are doing that is making the difference.'

4 Materials Used to Promote the Young Apprenticeships

An essential first stage in challenging occupational segregation is to raise young people's awareness of a broader range of careers. One way of doing so is to provide young people, and their parents or guardians, with information about non-traditional occupations and sectors. With YAs, there is the additional issue of raising awareness and providing information about a completely new vocational route. Again, a particular issue with regard to the YAs is the extent to which any information is aimed at attracting non-traditional apprenticeship entrants.

In this chapter, we examine the attempts that have been made by partnerships and others to make young people aware of the opportunities in these sectors, and more generally, to promote engagement with apprenticeships for this new group of learners.

4.1 Materials produced by national organisations

In this first section we consider the materials that have been produced by national bodies such as the DfES and LSC, and any relevant ones produced by the Sector Skill Councils. For the materials produced jointly by DfES/LSC, we start by giving a description of the materials and their contents. This is followed by a section in which we assess the strengths and weaknesses of the various materials in the context of: the anticipated audience; the messages conveyed about young apprenticeships; and the messages conveyed about occupational stereotypes.

4.1.1 Department for Education and Skills with the Learning and Skills Council

The DfES has produced a series of information pamphlets and booklets. All share high production values: good quality paper with coloured images and the text generally follows a question and answer format. This makes them direct and accessible both in terms of content and their visual impact.

The materials provide *general* information regarding the content of the YA, eg about the qualifications that will be gained through the programme, since the model of YAs and qualifications varies in each partnership. However, this can have the effect of making information about, for instance, the value and equivalence of qualifications seem somewhat vague.

Because of this, the materials usually need to be supplemented by information from partnerships to ensure that both the general and specific questions from key stakeholders are answered. Below we describe and discuss each of the materials produced by the DfES for the YA programme.

Information for pupils

Designed for pupils enrolled on the YA, this A5 brochure gives answers to practical issues about the organisation of YAs, how the YA interacts with other year 10 choices and the equivalence of the kinds of qualification that will be studied. It offers information about the possibilities for work and study following the YA and where to go for advice and guidance. Photographs of young people on YAs support this content. Two case studies are provided: one of a young woman studying business administration, the other a young man on the motor industry YA.

On the inside cover of the brochure is a quote from Ivan Lewis, Minister for Skills and Vocational Education. While this 'sells' the development opportunities afforded by the programme, a quote from a young person about the experience, perhaps drawn from the case studies, might speak more directly to the target audience.

Information for parents and guardians

This offers information about the YAs, their operation and the practicalities of the route. It reassures parents that young people's health and safety is a priority and that they will be learning in safe environments. It also details the support and guidance arrangements within YAs. It describes the typical qualifications that will be achieved and their equivalence. The same case studies that are featured in the information for young people are used here also.

Similar to the information for young people, on the inside cover of the parents' brochure is a quote from Ivan Lewis, Minister for Skills and Vocational Education. This identifies that the YAs aim to target talented young people, which is likely to appeal to parents of young people who are enrolled on the route ie the target audience. The text tells parents that YAs offers their children 'a chance to experience learning in the environment which suits them best'. Again, direct parental experience may speak more to other parents than a ministerial quotation, although we recognise it may have been difficult to gain comments from parents in the early days of the scheme.

A guide for employers

This brochure starts by identifying the opportunity presented by the YA for the employer and their organisation ‘to become involved in shaping the workforce of the future’. It describes the YA, its operation and management and how it will benefit employers. Most of the information is presented in bullet point format to enable employers to quickly find the information they seek. There are sections on the employer’s responsibilities as part of the YA, the costs and the support they can expect. The case studies of young people are featured again. A quote from a participating employer is used in the inside cover, describing how the young apprentice has settled in and the enthusiasm of their other staff regarding taking on young apprentices.

The key aim of this brochure is to help partnerships engage with employers by ‘selling’ the apprenticeship route and identifying the kind of employer who should want to get involved *ie* those who are interested in developing their workforce and that of the sector more generally.

There is also detail about the collaborative nature of the delivery partnerships in which employers can take a strong role in developing the work-focused and other delivery aspects of the YAs.

Safeguarding pupils on Young Apprenticeships

This brochure is aimed at all partners involved in the different aspects of YA delivery to ensure health and safety responsibilities are fully identified and addressed. It offers specific guidance for each partner including employers; it details the expectations and guidelines from the LSC; and works through process issues such as Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks, monitoring and reporting attendance, illness and accidents. There is also specific advice about how partnerships can involve parents and young people in health and safety considerations. For the range of information supplied, sources of further information are given.

Consideration has been given to equal opportunities in the presentation of this brochure, similar to that in the other YA materials. This demonstrates that the DfES and LSC are concerned to ensure an emphasis is placed on these issues with staff and the wider stakeholders.

The images used include those developed specifically for the YA, and are combined with some drawn seemingly from wider sources such as other apprenticeship routes, that communicate more about the work-based nature of apprenticeships. These also provide a wider variety of images that promote ideas, for instance, of young women in hi-tech engineering.

Choices after Young Apprenticeships: Progression information for pupils

This booklet is aimed at current pupils on the YAs, and focuses on the opportunities available to them following completion. There is a clear explanation of the available educational routes eg work-based learning; full-time level three qualification and following these higher education choices including foundation and honours degrees. The point is made that the best choice is likely to be related to the sector young people wish to enter, and this makes the link to the information provided in the booklet by each of the sector skills councils involved in the YAs. The routes through education are also outlined in an accessible diagram, which emphasises that higher education is possible from any of them.

Each sector has provided information about the qualifications and entry criteria generally required for access to these progression routes. A strong link is made to the careers within the sector, particularly emphasising the range of occupations available and sub-sectors. The most accessible of these are those with different careers or sub-sectors presented as a list of bullet points, as these add emphasis on the page and the eye is drawn to them.

The combination of the sectors in one brochure helps to ensure young people have the opportunity to consider other sectors and see how the qualifications they have gained might help them to enter these.

4.1.2 Use of images

The materials produced by DfES and CfA (see below) use a common set of specially commissioned colour photographs of pupils who were enrolled on the first cohort of the YA. The use of photographs ensures a high quality feel to the brochures and direct communication of the YA opportunities to young people. However, while there has been some attempt to address stereotyping in the images, it has not been entirely successful. We present our analysis below.

Occupational and gender stereotyping

The most commonly used images focus on engineering, motor vehicle and business administration. In engineering (or automotive) the photographs feature young people wearing blue overalls and/or carrying tools such as spanners, while in business administration, the background environment shows computers and office furniture, with smartly dressed young people engaged in actions such as speaking on the telephone or carrying files.

Overall, the images of young people in blue overalls are used more frequently than the other images within the materials. This is a concern, as it may serve to confirm traditional views of apprenticeships, *ie* that they continue to be intended for traditional sectors, rather than challenge this concept now that their reach is much broader.

In any event, the extent to which such images present an accurate image of these sectors today is questionable. One of the partnerships offering motor vehicle engineering, for example, said:

'We have a "state of the art" facility which is unlike the "oily rag" image of engineering. It's useful to show atypical entrants this – to show it may not be as they assume.'

The images currently in use are more likely to reinforce traditional (and erroneous) stereotypes of these sectors than promote their modern day realities.

As we indicated in the first section, two case studies are used in a number of the materials: one of a young woman studying business administration, the other of a young man on the motor industry YA. These images do not challenge gender stereotypes for these jobs. While it would be inappropriate to have only photos of, for example, female motor vehicle apprentices and male health and social care apprentices, there are a range of potential roles within the existing young apprenticeships that could have been used to show both girls and boys undertaking traditional and non-traditional activities.

There may also be greater opportunity to depict young people undertaking workplace activities, rather than perhaps being shown without a visually strong context. The picture of the young woman in an office situation begins to describe the kinds of task in which she might be involved. Generally those of young people in the blue overalls do not offer the same degree of context: while some are of pupils holding tools, there is no description in the picture of their using them in practice. In any case, as we have indicated above, some of these sectors may well believe the images to give an out-of-date impression of the work.

What works?

From an equal opportunities perspective, the most successful of the images used is the photograph on the cover of the information for pupils. This could have provided a conceptual theme for the images throughout the materials. The image depicts two young people, one male, one female, with one in sharp focus and the other in soft focus.

In this particular image, it is the young woman who is prominent. Since both young people are wearing the blue overalls it may be assumed they are drawn from either the engineering or automotive sectors. The photograph is particularly appropriate in our view as it promotes gender equality and challenges occupational gender stereotyping. What makes the image particularly successful is that males are not excluded. Providing the dual focus (ie both genders) in the photographs has the action of making the image more inclusive.

Using this approach more widely within the visual imagery of the brochures would offer a range of possibilities for promoting the inclusion of different groups within

single images eg a mix of ethnicities as well as of genders. We would also suggest that in future publications young people could be shown working as part of team undertaking workplace or college activities to further promote a more general idea of diversity.

Clearly a role remains for single person images with less background context; however, we would suggest that these work best where they are complemented by relevant quotations from the young person about their experiences on the YA.

Overall, including action images (rather than portraits) helps to communicate the features of the workplace and work-based element of the YA and therefore offers the opportunity to challenge traditional stereotypes of these occupations. As we have noted, some are more successful than others, and the emphasis on young people in blue overalls for the two male-dominated sectors, while good in some respects, does little to challenge gender stereotypes.

4.2 Sector Skills Councils and information materials

The majority of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) contacted during this research had not produced any brochures or materials specific to the YAs. Beyond ensuring that partnerships were aware of the trends within the sector, there had not, during the current recruitment round, been a specific focus on issuing materials or guidance to challenge occupational stereotypes.

However, this should not be taken as indicating a lack of concern with the need for materials; rather, there was a sense that other issues, such as developing the infrastructure, required greater priority in the SSC's early dealings with partnerships. Over time, it was felt that this would change.

'It was quite a risky thing for educational establishments to get involved in in the first stages, but the YAs are becoming more established now and there is more scope to be proactive [on equal opportunities] ... There were too many organisations and infrastructure issues to resolve in setting up the first cohorts.'

Other sectors' decisions to not produce specific materials were linked to their challenging occupational segregation at a broader level. For instance, some SSCs had issued materials intended for all apprenticeship routes, not solely the YAs. In some cases, this was a pragmatic response to the large number of partnerships delivering YAs in the sector: specific local support was not a viable option.

'So, we have tended to focus guidance to be used on all apprenticeship routes rather than specifically for the YAs. Our role is to offer strategic equal opportunities guidance, but not specific local promotion.'

One sector saw potential to further develop the work started by the DfES in its campaign. The representative identified the importance of challenging gender

traditions within visual imagery and noted the achievement of the national materials in this respect.

'Our sector should broaden the marketing material to say there are many jobs in the sector...'

'...There is very powerful peer pressure amongst teenagers so the messages from the YAs themselves will be very helpful.'

4.2.1 Council for Administration (CfA)

CfA which supports the business and administration YAs, is one of the few SSCs to have produced specific YA materials. It has developed two single-page, folded A4 booklets aimed at young people and employers. These booklets use the same colour photographs as in the DfES/LSC materials, alternating photographs of the male and female business administration young apprentices on the cover and inside pages.

The booklets are much shorter in content than the DfES/LSC materials, however they do aim to encourage pupils and employers to understand the wider benefits of participation in the YA, such as the opportunity to gain real work experience, and develop vocational and transferable skills.

Although CfA did not claim that the primary aim of its materials was to challenge gender stereotyping, the use of the alternate male and female images in the brochures communicates the point. However, in respect of the brochures' role in challenging occupational segregation within the YAs more broadly, the representative felt that partnerships were already well aware of the issues and, more importantly addressing them.

'Partnerships are working to recruit a wider diversity of young person, however, they were doing this anyway, not because the CfA has become involved... There has always been a relatively balanced gender profile in business studies at this age. So the problem is not necessarily about how the opportunities are made available.'

4.3 Partnership provided materials

Very few of the YA partnerships with whom we spoke during the first round of interviews for this research had produced brochures or materials for the young apprenticeships, although when asked about this, most assumed the question referred to glossy brochures. When we explored further, we found that most had prepared introductory information sheets (about the content of the qualification and route) and many had held parent/pupil meetings (with a similar focus). Most partnerships supplemented their information with the national 'glossy' materials.

An example of the coverage of the information provided by partnerships is given in Box 1 below. In some partnerships it had been possible to embed YA recruitment

within the year 9 option selection procedures. Where this happened, information about the YA was inserted into existing documentation.

Box 1: Example of partnership provided information drawn from an engineering/automotive YA

The information booklet, a folded A4 sheet, printed double-sided, in black and white with three text pages, focuses on the content of the qualification that is delivered through the YA, its GCSE and points equivalence, and details of the awarding body. The overall tone is explanatory, reassuring and the content is well-conceived generally. It provides key information about the YA that both young people and their parents or guardians would appreciate, for instance: the timetable, location and expectations of conduct during the YA sessions.

There is detail about the NVQ assessment mode and an explanation of competency and how this is measured and demonstrated. Progression routes are detailed with apprenticeship options shown in a diagram. Beneath this, the other routes receive a bullet point each, in smaller print. This tends to indicate a stronger focus on apprenticeships, over the other progression routes.

The final section of the booklet explains the application process, advertises an information evening, and specifies the entry criteria. It also offers practical tips on preparing for the interview, such as making a good first impression and responding to questions with detailed answers.

Occupational and gender segregation

While there is nothing in the content to suggest that YAs in the subject are more appropriate for any particular group, the 'clip art' image on the cover-page is a cartoon of a male, white mechanic with a spanner and cog. This is unfortunate, since, as we have noted, the relevant SSCs, are campaigning to change such stereotypes of the available occupations as well as of the nature of the workforce. Using such an image is more likely to reinforce, rather than challenge, any stereotyped views of this occupation already held by young people.

The extent to which the national materials were being used varied, with one partnership reporting that they had arrived too late to be incorporated into the awareness-raising process. The partnership lead felt this was unfortunate since the national materials gave the best impression of the young apprenticeships and the production values exceeded the resources available to the partnership. This view, however, was not shared by all partnerships: another (delivering one of the subjects introduced in cohort 2) felt the materials had been too general and lacked focus on the specific needs of their sector.

The extent to which materials and images can or do actually influence young people's thinking was questioned by one partnership which was well-established and delivering a range of 14 to 19 qualifications, including a YA in a male-dominated sector.

'We produced and distributed leaflets which were about vocational training more generally. They have images of females and ethnic minorities but these don't really have an impact on

young people – Connexions and staff in schools are more important and you need to spend time with them ensuring they have the right ideas and attitudes.'

Clearly, individualised advice and guidance has the potential to have a personal impact beyond that available to a brochure; however there remains a case for ensuring that at every opportunity balanced impressions are presented of different sectors and occupations so that young people are not subtly influenced to think about their future careers in stereotyped, traditional ways.

4.3.1 Innovative materials

There are examples of innovative approaches in the production of YA materials and information for young people and their parents/guardians. Notably, two partnerships reported the use of video productions at information sessions, or as part of the interview process. These aimed to give a brief but practical and action-oriented overview of the sector and the YA; and aimed to appeal to young people in our media-savvy society.

'The video we produced shows interviews with various people, including men, who work in health and social care to help young people know what the work involves. It's just 10-15 minutes but it gives a real flavour of the programme.'

While, because of production/reproduction costs, the partnerships felt unable to provide copies for the research team (meaning we cannot comment on the content or imagery), there was a sense of pride in having 'taking a different approach': one of these partnership representatives reported that a copy had been given to DfES. This representative had also given a seminar paper about using the video in recruitment at a relevant national conference, demonstrating an interest in sharing 'what works' more widely. It is also noteworthy that one of these partnerships viewed challenging gender stereotyping as a key concern in their video presentation.

4.4 Conclusions and recommendations for publicity materials

In general, the materials are produced to a high standard, with attractive photographs. Unfortunately, though, at present the images used convey stereotypical messages about the nature of some of the occupations and the sorts of people who might be expected to undertake them. In particular, the photographs often convey an image of a sector that the SSC has been working to throw off.

A second issue, less directly related to issues of gender segregation is the nature of the information given. Most is generic (about young apprenticeships in general) and, while this information clearly is needed, many of the stakeholders to whom we spoke felt there was a need for more specific information relating to each of the sectors. While this may seem at first to be unrelated to issues of gender segregation of

occupations, if segregation is to be challenged an essential first step is for young people to have accurate information about the sorts of activities and skills involved in the various occupational areas. This is particularly important given that previous research conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission has noted that young people often are not encouraged to consider any non-traditional alternatives when contemplating their career decisions.

We therefore recommend that:

- future publications should feature a more diverse and less stereotyped range of images of the occupational sector and apprentices
- brochures specific to the various sectors should be developed. A lower cost alternative would be to develop a format for brochures into which sector-specific pages could be inserted.

Both of these activities should be undertaken in consultation with the relevant SSCs to ensure that the information and images incorporated are in keeping with the view of the sector the SSC is seeking to promote.

5 Equal Opportunities and the Delivery Partnerships

Our initial round of telephone interviews indicated that partnerships are balancing the needs of a number of agendas within their implementation of the YAs and so, broadly there appeared to be a relatively low emphasis on equal opportunities. Examples of the other issues involved with getting the YA working effectively included engaging the middle ground of pupils, promoting the sector, promoting vocational routes and, more particularly, promoting vocational routes to a higher calibre of pupil. While partnerships were aware of the drive by DfES to increase the extent of thinking about equal opportunities in the second cohort proposals, this had not led to a prioritising of the equal opportunities agenda. Typically, partnership leads would tell us that equal opportunities were ‘one of their priorities’ or say these issues were a concern but that other issues, such as ensuring a group of young people that meet the specified entry criteria, were of greater importance.

Generally, however, partnerships reported that they were working consistently to promote equality of opportunity across the range of programmes in which they were involved. The issues and barriers they faced in doing so varied with the different subject areas. For instance, in some sectors there is the issue of how to title the YA to make it more attractive to atypical entrants (for an example, see Box 2). In other sectors, the lack of any tangible experience in the subject, can make it more difficult to attract a diverse cohort.

Box 2: Attracting young men to business and administration

YA pupils were asked about their perceptions of business administration as a subject and whether it was seen as a boys’ or girls’ subject. They had no strong opinions about this, feeling that it is suitable for both boys and girls. However, a college tutor pointed out that post-16 business courses are overwhelmingly male, and therefore the make up of the YA cohort does appear to differ from the tradition [in this area].

The issue of nomenclature may be important when marketing a new course in this sector, with the words or phrases used influencing whether the subject appeals to males or females. Professionals

reported that boys are more likely to be attracted to business courses than girls. However, the word 'administration' tends not to attract boys, as they associate it with secretarial work.

In this case the partnership has named the YA programme, 'business administration' as this is thought to be more appealing to male entrants. Similarly, it may also be more attractive to ethnic minorities groups whose parents are concerned that they gain the skills for entry to higher level occupations (ie managerial not clerical type work).

'There is some difference with other subject areas. There is little direct experience of health and social care prior to pupils selecting it at key stage 4. They do get some experience of it before, such as general stuff about diet and health in PSE, however, it is only at GCSE where it becomes a clear qualification route. There is a strong uptake by girls at GCSE. It's a post-14 choice, however, there is little information to support making the choice.'

In addition, and as might be expected, any EO agenda within the YAs seems as much driven by the concerns of bodies such as the LSC, as by the requirements set out by the DfES in its specification for the YAs.

'It is a focus, we do have an "inclusion policy". We want to meet the needs of a broader group of students, this comes also from the LSC (our funders) and the LEA (our employer). However a lot of groups have a focus for a number of reasons. African-Caribbean boys are a focus because they tend to be low achievers and there is also a problem with white working class boys. Therefore as well as trying to promote non-stereotypical choices there are other issues of inclusion which also need to be tackled.'

'It's open to everyone. From the school's perspective we seek to look carefully at gender and ethnicity issues and ensure all opportunities are open to all. We do this through the curriculum, providing opportunities to try different courses, such as catering, from year 7. We also track how students are doing who go into atypical sectors, such as women into engineering, to check it's going ok.'

'The college does have an equal opportunities policy and uses posters with mixed groups, ethnically and gender wise, to promote vocational courses.'

Those with experience of learners with disabilities are more aware of the various sources of support that can encourage their inclusion more generally. This may, in itself, feed through into their decision-making for the YA.

'We have good communications with schools. We see children with a wide range of abilities, some have ten GCSEs through to those who have autism, ADHD, one is deaf and so we link in with the local authority sensory department.'

There was some evidence that partnerships were more successful in attracting atypical gender entrants on programmes other than the YAs, particularly in academic qualification routes or non-qualification work placement programmes.

'We have achieved an entry rate of 30 per cent by young women in our [work placements] so we have had some success in encouraging young people to make atypical choices. We have also been successful on recruitment from ethnic minority groups on this as well, so

that while the EMB population in this area is around two to three per cent, their representation on our [work placements] is up at 11 per cent.'

The interviews indicated that much of the good practice was, in fact, not being driven by any overt policy to increase the diversity of the YA group, but rather, by extension of the organisations' historical approach to recruiting learners. In the next section, we consider the extent to which partnerships had set any targets for the YA programme and how the schemes are being monitored.

In the following chapters we review how the partners are addressing equal opportunities by exploring some key themes and an example of particularly good practice that emerged during the research. These are:

- targets and monitoring (Chapter 7)
- raising awareness and recruitment (Chapter 8)
- support and delivery (Chapter 9)
- encouraging wider choices (Chapter 10)
- provision of tasters (Chapter 11)

In Chapter 11 we conclude by discussing the results of our analysis.

6 Targets and Monitoring

6.1 Targets

The initial telephone discussions with partnership leads indicated that target setting for diversity had not formed part of practice amongst the sample. When asked about whether they were operating under any targets, typically the lead would recall the maximum number of places they had been granted on their YA programme, or the targets for progression set by DfES/LSC.

'Our target was to recruit 20 young people to the engineering YA route, meeting the entry criteria... there were no targets for equal opportunities.'

'Following renegotiation [it was agreed that] we [would be] able to recruit 30 places to motor vehicle. This target was achieved with both groups....There were no targets on gender or ethnicity...'

'We had a target to recruit 30 YAs, 15 students drawn from each school, with the level of ability required by the DfES entry criteria. We also have the targets for progression set by the DfES.'

Equally, the SSCs had not prioritised the setting of targets in their advisory capacity with partnerships. A number attributed the lack of targets for atypical groups entering training in the sector to the early stage they had reached in the development of their SSDA sector skills agreements.

'The SSC only received its licence recently... at this early stage we are focusing more on the prolific thing of gathering data.'

'We have just started work on the sector skills agreement, lots of that information will be contained in that.'

The longer-established SSCs had tended to set targets for greater diversity in the workforce, rather than for specific numbers entering training and education. However, to some degree specification of targets remains driven by their SSDA agreement.

'We have targets in place to achieve a 50:50 split [gender balance] within the next five years both in the occupations at levels one to three and those at levels four to five.'

'The proportion of women employed in the sector across all jobs is currently 22 per cent. This is across all jobs, admin. upwards. The target for number of women employed in the sector next year, specified in their contract with the SSDA, is for 23 per cent women (ie a one per cent increase).'

Similarly to the partnership leads, the SSCs were well informed of the progression targets and saw the benefits (where apprenticeship/vocational routes are already established) for rising numbers coming into the sector because of the YA route. Most positively, in some sectors the YAs were seen to be achieving something different when compared to other vocational routes – despite the lack of targets. The SEMTA representative noted that the percentage of atypical entrants to engineering with the YAs was around two to three per cent higher than in training generally in the sector.

'Nationally there are around three per cent of women working in engineering occupations and mostly at levels 1 and 2. However on the YA programmes, their proportion is up to five to six per cent across the 29 partnerships – very nearly double the occupational trend. The proportion is also higher than other apprenticeship routes. So the YAs are doing something rather different and innovative in terms of attracting atypical entrants.'

However, Automotive Skills, which faces similar diversity problems to SEMTA, was less optimistic about the potential for change presented by the YAs given the experience of targeting on post-16 apprenticeship programmes.

'Whether the SSDA targets can be met is questionable. It is not always a holy marriage... The Apprenticeship targets are not being met, nothing has changed, providers have spent loads of money but nothing has happened (ie, numbers of girls has not changed).'

If partnerships had targets in place, these were self-configured and more likely to occur at subject level rather than for particular qualification routes. However the nature of the organisation from which the partnership lead is drawn may have a strong influence on this. In the example below, the organisation, TDR, was configured to support entry and progression through educational opportunities specifically for engineering. The response cited is in reply to a question about the extent to which equal opportunities and diversity is a concern for the partnership.

Box 3: Recruitment targets and the YAs

'It's one of the priorities. TDR has set itself targets to improve diversity of gender and ethnicity in engineering. It's not specific to the YA but covers all school programmes and apprenticeships.'

6.2 Monitoring

In some cases there appeared to be uncertainty amongst the partnerships regarding quite what they were monitoring and/or required to monitor. During the first round

interviews, all provided some basic information about applications, enrolments and current status. Beyond this, the requirements of national bodies such as the LSC and the Adult Learning Inspectorate drove the level of monitoring undertaken. One partnership mentioned that it was active in providing evidence to its SSC:

'In general we are required to monitor information on learners, yes, so this applies to YAs too. We look at numbers on each programme, and achievement by ethnic minority, gender etc. to ensure that there are no differentials. The LSC requires this, and the Adult Learning Inspectorate. The PICS database system links into the LSC. We have added the work based learners and young apprentices onto that system so any reports on the programme can be fed into this system.'

'We provide data to CFA based on gender, ethnicity and disabilities including special educational needs.'

'We do keep records, we keep the referral forms and note the action taken, and where [the students] go... We are also monitoring with the steering group, [using] a quality assurance toolkit the LSC sent us.'

Often, the extent of monitoring was dependent on the local context and the localised activity of partners and partnerships. In some cases, monitoring was seen as a key resource for continuous improvement.

'We have ethnic minority achievement groups. These look at young black achievers across our provision. Through this we are trying to find out which girls⁹ we are failing and where.'

'We use the EDIMS [Equality and Diversity Impact Measures from the LSC] but that is currently just for the post-16 Apprenticeships. We are currently looking to develop our management information system to handle this level of information across the range of programmes we offer to provide more joined-up monitoring and analysis of gender uptake, ethnic minorities... to help us understand the uptake and progression between YA or other programmes for this age group into post-16 Apprenticeships.'

One of the partnerships was particularly critical of the lack of any real interest in the issue of monitoring and the development of good practice.

6.3 Conclusions

There is evidence to suggest that giving greater national guidance to the partnerships on the expectations of the DfES for equality of opportunity would help prioritise this issue. The setting of targets for the numbers of pupils to be involved in the YAs, the numbers who will progress into apprenticeships from the YA, and for attainment and motivation has been effective in ensuring these issues are a very high priority for partnerships and SSCs. However, very few partnerships had set gender or diversity

⁹ note: this comment comes from a girls' institution

targets (and where these existed they tended to be focused on broad provision rather than the YA), although all were aware of sector gender patterns and many were seeking to address these. Part of this problem is likely to reflect a lack of detailed information from national bodies.

Box 4: Monitoring and the YAs

‘[This organisation] monitors applications, interviews and final selections, but it is not asked to do much beyond this by the LSC or anyone else. The LSC takes the data but does not request any kind of report which might discuss issues and outcomes and give qualitative information about how recruitment was managed and what was achieved. This organisation has been more proactive on these issues than the LSC. There has been little support from any national organisations about how to challenge gender segregation and encourage boys into the sector. How far does the lack of ‘real’ monitoring indicate the lack of interest?’

While SSCs are providing some focus on EOs, they are not issuing guidance as, it would seem, they tend not to have a clear picture of what targets would be appropriate either within workforces or within post-16 training and particularly within this age group. Just one of the SSCs involved in the YAs, SEMTA, had set targets for increasing the number of, in this case, women in training in the sector. This target was for a one per cent increase per year over the next five years.

During the first round of interviews for this research, we specifically questioned partnership leads about whether any diversity targets had been set locally by their LLSCs. However, we received no reports of this happening. It is the case, however, that LLSCs set targets for the uptake of training, and usually this includes some target regarding the diversity of the learner population, in institutions’ development plans. While the academic profile – and the age range – of the YAs may set them apart from other apprenticeship routes, LLSCs should consider whether there may be some benefit to setting targets to help inform institutions’ thinking about diversity in this group of learners. This may have additional benefits in feeding forward to help organisations achieve the targets for entry to post-16 apprenticeships, as it would to some extent join up agendas and make it more likely that atypical learners will progress through to post-16 apprenticeships.

The gathering of equality data throughout the recruitment process had not formed part of practice for many partnerships although all were able to supply details of applications, offers of places and enrolments. However, generally partnerships did not track the characteristics of those coming to, for instance, events to publicise the YAs. The extent of monitoring of diversity varied: the minimum undertaken was driven by requirements of national organisations (eg EDIMS in some of the local LSCs). More detailed monitoring was dependent on the local context and remit of the lead partner organisation. In two of the partnerships there were clear messages that they felt their own monitoring exceeded any requirements placed on them by the LSC or DfES.

Setting targets that indicate the sort of increase on the current baseline would lead to more systematic information gathering and action. There needs to be encouragement of partnerships to build on (or at least work to sustain) their successes but at minimum, to feel a real obligation to act on equal opportunities. It was notable that more than one partnership saw the diversity profile of their cohort (in terms of gender and/or race) as something that 'just happened' and over which they had little control. Without targets or effective monitoring of achievement against targets there is little to prompt organisations to review what is proving effective for their aims and what needs revision.

7 Raising Awareness and Recruitment Strategies

7.1 Awareness raising

While the lead organisation in general took the main responsibility for awareness raising regarding the YA scheme, schools often determined the format of their activities. Thus the kinds of events held about the YAs varied, from information at assemblies, presentations to year 9 regarding this additional option,¹⁰ or other school-based meetings for smaller groups of pupils. In addition to this, events for parents/guardians and pupils were also fairly common.

While many of these events appear to have been successful, leading to quite large groups of young people applying for the YA programme, some schools struggled. There were also indications that those young people selected to hear about the YA, may not have been selected in the spirit of the DfES set entry criteria.

'As with a lot of other GNVQs they are really seen as a vehicle for weaker pupils to attain GCSE level qualifications... The style of assessment will often suit this group better than examination formats. And these are the ones who will go on to become craft apprentices....'

Therefore, one issue for partnership leads was the fact that the extent to which they were able to raise awareness of the YA with young people was largely determined by individual schools. In most of the case study areas the lead was a college, training provider or other external organisation, and accounts of non-inclusion in school events were given in each of the case study areas. This may indicate one area where it is hard for partnership leads to have a real impact on diversity in the YAs.

'There are different structures operating in each school so what you can do in one school is not necessarily what you can do in another. You may be working with a work-based

¹⁰ These were often separate presentations as, for many of the partnerships, notification that their application to offer the YA programme had come too late for this information to be included in the standard presentations to year 9 pupils regarding their year 10 options.

learning co-ordinator in one school and the deputy head in another. The differences in their roles does affect what you can do – a deputy head may have more clout to make decisions about how to approach awareness-raising than the WBL staff.'

'We do try to encourage females through our marketing materials. We have a collage for public presentations that shows a wide spectrum of young people of both genders and an ethnic mix. If we are invited into schools we do encourage them to try to include females in the groups. We can only work with the referrals we are sent though.'

In some cases, schools would either raise the possibility of enrolling for the YA with the whole of year 9 (usually through discussion at assemblies, delivered by staff from the lead partner organisation) or through inclusion of information about the YA within the information given to pupils about to make their year 10 option choice. The alternative approach was to find out which pupils already had some enthusiasm for, or interest in, the subject and present the detailed information regarding the YA to this specific target group.

'[The training provider] approached us and said they had opportunities for level 2 students to come onto motor vehicle engineering. It was an excellent opportunity for us that they were looking for level 2 students. One of the criteria was that their SATS indicated that they would get three fives in maths, English and science, because the YA is equivalent to four grade A to Cs at GCSE. So in terms of the school data, we got hold of all the students who had been assessed as having achieved fives on teacher assessments for SATs and told them about the YA. I spoke to them, outlined the course to a mixed group of boys and girls who reached the criteria. Then if they had no enthusiasm for the subject, they could leave. Then with the smaller group that was left that was interested in the course I gave them the details of the course and the qualification.'

In addition, in some cases, there was further targeting of the YA to sub-sets of pupils within subjects, as was illustrated by the quotation earlier in this chapter that indicated that teachers themselves determined the sub-set of pupils to be offered the YA option, in that case, from amongst young people who had already chosen to undertake a GNVQ in the same, or similar, subject. While these latter approaches may have some benefits in ensuring pupils who apply to the YA are interested in the subject and motivated, they do limit the ability of the lead to promote non-stereotypical choices in the YA, and amongst this age group more generally:

'This year, we are hoping to do more to raise awareness of the YA during school assemblies and start the process before young people make their option choices. However much depends on the individual cultures within schools. You can only go in if you are invited. Some schools are happy to have the YA raised amongst its broad community whereas others identify students for whom they think it is relevant.'

The partnerships were doing their best to work with schools to offer information (and tasters in some cases) to young people, and many have developed effective strategies at this (see Box 5). Nonetheless there is evidence that further work is required. We received many reports from pupils, across the case study partnerships, who felt they

had received insufficient information. Often they commented that what they really wanted was more detailed information about the subject of the YA rather than the processes involved (eg about the process of application or details regarding their attendance at the college). The late entry of one school into the YA partnership had the impact that young people could not attend the information event so did not receive any information.

'I went to the open day, it wasn't very informative. They just said the four subjects we would be doing, told us to write it down, the times we would be there, when the breaks would be. And then they changed them [the arrangements].'

'I would like to have been told what the subjects were about. We only met one of the four tutors.'

'There was an open day but we missed it. Our school only got asked because another school dropped out.'

There appears to be a need to deliver more comprehensive information: some pupils said that they would have liked more information about the topics they would be studying. One particularly strong theme to emerge was that they appreciated being told more about the range of job options available within the industry:

'We were given leaflets and then we got to see the college, the pictures were of [the] college in the leaflet, and other information...we were shown how it could help us in the future, they gave us a leaflet showing all the different types of jobs that learning about catering and health and safety could lead onto.'

'I want to do social work – I'll get the opportunity to find out more about the job.'

'We learn about all the different types of job you would not have thought about to do with health and social care and the qualifications you need.'

In addition, young apprentices were concerned about how the scheme would affect their progression, and particularly whether universities would have heard about the YA qualification and understand its points equivalence:

'I want to go to college but I don't know the qualifications I will need...and I am worried about whether the university [ie, their admissions tutors] will have heard of the young apprenticeship. Will they know what the YA is, what it's supposed to be worth?'

Box 5: Warwickshire and Coventry Coordinator: Awareness raising and recruitment strategy

'We sent a letter to schools that had accompanying brochures (from the DfES that had a set of questions and answers that parents and pupils might want to know), then I visited the schools to meet and tell them what we were offering. Then details were sent out to the parents by the schools. Once they had identified who wanted to attend here we had a parents evening to meet the mums and dads and answer any questions. We met them face to face rather than relying on printed information. Just saying 'Come in, meet the tutors', having an informal atmosphere, helps. They were very keen to meet the tutors.'

I then visited schools to talk to individual learners. I designed a set of questions to be asked to all applicants, to ensure there was a fair selection process, with all applicants being asked the same set of questions. Then the young people were asked to come in for an evaluation day [*ie taster day*] during which they spent time in the workshop with the tutors, trying out simple activities and being assessed, and they sat tests of literacy and numeracy. At the end of the day the young people had to fill out an evaluation form that asked them if they were still interested, what had gone well about the day and what had not.

7.2 Recruitment and selection

Experience of recruitment varied considerably: some partnerships were over-subscribed and one mentioned formal feedback systems so that pupils had an opportunity to discuss and learn from their interview and the selection experience. For others, the application and screening processes led to the total number of applicants being equal to (or close to) the partnership's target number for recruitment. In those cases, it was rare that the selection process resulted in any applicants being rejected.

Some concern was expressed about the action of 'broad spectrum' awareness-raising strategies and the extent to which these led to the most motivated pupils applying to enter the YA. There was more generally a strong emphasis during the recruitment phase on gaining a clear picture of the individual's motivation before signing up.

'We think that some of the problems they are having currently, students not being as keen on the scheme, is a result of the recruitment process used last time. I think the [subject] YA scheme needs to be focused at students who really want to do it due to the extra burden it places on a student... only students who are really motivated should go onto the scheme.'

As we have noted previously, the DfES has set entry criteria for entry to the YA.¹¹ Since the criteria and guidance indicate that, save for exceptional cases, only pupils expecting to attain 14 points in their SATs scores for English, maths and IT should be considered for the scheme, schools have tended to lead on this aspect of selection, as it is the schools' teachers who are responsible for predicting the pupil's expected grades. While the DfES guidance does state that exceptions to these criteria may be allowed in some circumstances, in the majority of cases schools took the '14 points' criterion as absolute, and therefore excluded all pupils expected to achieve lower SATs scores than this.

This meant that, effectively, there was a stage of pre-selection before the issuing of an invitation to apply for the YA scheme. Depending on the number of pupils remaining

¹¹ The requirements are: key stage 2 SATS of at least level 4 in maths English and science (or higher); combined KS3 teacher assessment score of 14 or higher (that is a combination of 5, 5 and 4 in maths English and science); attendance and behaviour (at the level of the average or above for all of year 9 at school); and evidence of parental support. Exceptionally those meeting at least one of the first two criteria who are already motivated to progress in [subject] to work-based learning at 16 or to other vocational programmes, will be considered.

after this initial screening based on these criteria, and/or any other local practice, the schools would then put the pupils forward for the further selection process at partnership level (eg interview, test or practical activity). Achieving the entry requirements for the cohort is a key priority of most partnerships, and although we did encounter some more flexible attitudes and some frustration at schools' processes, this was in just a small number of partnerships. An example of a partnership taking positive action is shown in Box 6, however this was the only incidence we found.

'Schools start the recruitment process and do the initial screening for the entry requirements. There is an emphasis in recruitment on getting candidates of the right standard through to interviews.'

'You have to work with schools on the entry criteria and particularly to get the predictions of KS4 results – the information is not generally available until nearing the end of year 9. We work closely with the technology teachers to ensure they understand the aims of the YA – it is aimed at average and above kids – but probably not the rocket scientists. There are a lot of subjects and specialisms available [in technology] so it's important that teaching teams understand what it is we are looking for and what the YA is about... Our priorities are entry criteria including motivation, followed by diversity.'

'The school selection process filters out students who should be considered. The schools shouldn't self-select first. It should be open to all and the college could choose from there. This would give everyone a chance. Also, recruitment strategies should focus on observing students in taster sessions to see if they are suitable. This should focus on team work, which is an important aspect of the YA.'

However, two messages emerge from this part of the research. If the YA scheme is to be made more widely available and to truly become an option for all young people, then some consideration will need to be given to how to ensure the scheme is promoted to pupils in those schools that currently do not allow access to the partnerships.

Secondly, there needs to be stronger guidance to ensure that schools realise that, where there is a special case to be made for a young person who is, for example, particularly well-motivated or has extensive experience in an area, that partnerships are allowed in such circumstances to waive some of the selection criteria.

This last point, flexibility in the application of the entry criteria, was particularly important to the inclusion of pupils with SENs, and this may partly explain their minimal presence in the YAs. While, as we have noted, the guidance does allow partnerships to 'exceptionally' recruit on the basis of aptitude rather than attainment, at present this message is sometimes missed. As we have indicated, the entry criteria are widely viewed as allowing access to the scheme only to those who attain 14 or 15 points in their SATs, with no leeway to apply discretion. This can serve to exclude those with SENs. The use of discretion appeared to be localised, but effective.

Box 6: STEPS, Northumberland, Health and Social Care YAs

‘We have a positive action policy for boys, if a boy demonstrates strong commitment, but is scraping the academic criteria, we would accept him on the programme. This year all of boys who applied were taken on...’

‘It’s important that this scheme is promoted as being open to all and also that the DfES criteria are viewed as a “firm guideline not a straightjacket”. If a pupil has not quite made the required SAT score we [the partnership] will look at their circumstances and motivation before deciding yes or no. We have made some exceptions because we want the course to be as inclusive as possible to anyone who is interested in it. For example two YAs didn’t achieve the SATs score, although they were close, as they had barriers to learning, mild dyslexia.’

‘The big issue is the special schools and including them... Special schools are not hard to reach but hard to prepare for. And the requirement for attainment of level 2, this limits us... but we could take [these three YAs] as they were well-supported by their schools.’

In some cases, despite no positive action being taken by a school or partnership, interest was generated amongst some potential atypical applicants (in this case, girls being attracted to one of the male-dominated subjects); however, the partnership believed that these young people could not be offered places because they did not meet the academic entry criteria. In other partnerships, there had been greater initial success in attracting atypical individuals. However, following notification of success, or at course commencement, these atypical entrants had dropped out.

‘In cohort 2, two girls [atypical entrants] applied and were accepted onto the programme. However one pulled out by the end of term and the other really at the outset of the course. Maybe it was the fear factor... They have stayed in [subject] but opted for different qualifications.’

Most partnership leads believed they had recruited numbers of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds equivalent to their proportion in the local population. However, in one or two cases there had been some strategic school selection that helped to ensure an ethnic mix.

‘This cohort worked well in terms of equal opportunities. This was partly because we worked with LEA to choose schools that had a diverse ethnic mix.’

7.3 Recruitment data in the 20 YAs sampled for this research

Table 7.1 shows the profile of applicants, enrolments and those still involved in the YA when the first round of interviews was undertaken (October and November 2005), to offer some context to what was achieved during this second round of recruitment for the YAs. We have provided actual numbers rather than percentages, which would not be useful given the relatively small numbers involved in YAs. It should also be

emphasised that these data should not be considered representative of the YA second cohort as a whole, since only a sub-set of cohort 2 partnerships was involved in this research.

The extent to which partnerships were able to report the profile of pupils moving through selection processes varied and here we report the most commonly available data. We suggest that the value of capturing such data is evident from the table and demonstrates in some partnerships that achievements have been made in encouraging pupils to consider non-traditional sectors – even if those pupils were not in the end enrolled on (and in some cases retained by) the programme.

The presence of any atypical entrants in strongly gender-stereotyped sectors appears to be an achievement: of the partnerships sampled, just six girls had been recruited to automotive YAs (from a total of 120 YAs in this sector). In engineering six girls had been recruited (although one subsequently withdrew) of a total – in this case – of 157 YAs. In health and social care, there are five boys from a group of 80 YAs which appears to represent a slightly stronger uptake by atypical entrants than in the male dominated sectors. However within these patterns, there are partnerships which appear to have achieved greater uptake by atypical entrants such as Warwickshire for automotive, where eight girls entered the application process and four were enrolled and have continued learning on the YAs.

Even in routes that are less gender-stereotyped, there is considerable variation in uptake by young men and young women. For instance, in business administration, a number of partnerships have achieved gender balanced cohorts (eg Bedfordshire and Luton partnership) while others have struggled to involve young men (eg Age Concern Training).

Uptake by ethnic minority pupils varied. However, the local population (not just that of particular schools) largely accounts for this. There were instances of partnerships reporting above population ratio recruitment of ethnic minority pupils although this may be linked to the strategic targeting of schools for participation which had high numbers of ethnic minority pupils (eg Bedfordshire and Luton Partnership), and to some extent, partnerships suggested this could be attributed to the occupational area (eg business and administration is attractive to young Asian people and their parents since there is a strong culture of enterprise within this population).

There is no base for comparison for the hospitality and catering YA although the profile of pupils here is suggestive of the difficulties of engaging young women. Similarly, only two performing arts YAs were involved in the research however one of these appears to have had greater success in overcoming the barriers for entry by young men.

Of the 560 YA enrolments in this subset of second cohort YAs, just 13 were reported as having learning or physical disabilities. As we have discussed, partnerships tended to believe that the entry criteria were likely to exclude these pupils.

Table 7.1: Recruitment in the sampled YAs – Actual pupil numbers

	Applications				Enrolments				Still learning			
	F	M	W	NW	F	M	W	NW	F	M	W	NW
Automotive												
Evesham and Malvern	1	24	25			24	24		1	22	23	
Leeds Further Forward		9	9			9	9			7	7	
Merton College	—	—	—	—		10	6	4		8	5	3
Paragon ITE Fareham	—	—	—	—	2	17	—	—	2	17	—	—
ProCo Wigan Partnership	1	41	40	2		14	14			14	14	
Warwickshire	8	26	—	—	4	26	30		4	25	29	
Wiltshire **		14	14			14	14			13	13	
Business and Administration												
Age Concern Training *****	28	6	33	1	25	4	29		23	4	27	
Bedfordshire and Luton Partnership	13	12	—	—	13	12	12	13	13	12	—	—
Leeds Further Forward	13	8	19	2	13	8	19	2	13	8	19	2
Manchester Occupational Learning Partnership	—	—	—	—	8	5	10	3	8	5	10	3
Performance Through People ****	—	—	—	—	15	15	12	18	15	15	12	18
ProCo Wigan Partnership	30	5	34	1	8	2	10		8	2	10	
West Cumbria	6	3	9		6	3	9		6	3	9	
Wiltshire	6	1	7		6	1	7		6	1	7	
Engineering												
Manchester Occupational Learning Partnership	—	—	—	—	2	10	11	1	2	9	10	1
Peterborough Partnership		40			1	28	26	3	1	28	26	3
Surrey Partnership	1	26	—	—	1	25	26			24	24	
TDR	3	91	94		*	58	58			58	58	
West Cumbria	1	22	23		1	11	12		1	11	12	
Willenhall	3	28	28	3		20	18	2		20	18	2
Health and social care												
AVE Partnership - Aldecar	34	4	38		15		15		15		15	
AVE Partnership - Long Eaton *****	17	4	21		13	2	15		13	2		
STEPS	58	2	60		28	2	30		25	2	27	
Warwickshire	24	1	—	—	24	1	24	1	22	1		
Hospitality and catering												
Croydon 14-19 Partnership***	4	15	7	12	3	12	6	9	3	12	6	9

	Applications				Enrolments				Still learning			
	F	M	W	NW	F	M	W	NW	F	M	W	NW
Performing Arts												
City College Norwich Partnership	22	12	32	2	20	10	29	1	18	10	27	1
West Cumbria	8	1	9		8	1	9		8	1	9	

— data not supplied/available * places offered to 2 young women not taken up

** 4 SEN pupils enrolled *** Croydon has recruited and retained 3 pupils with SENs on the programme

**** approximate data ***** 2 SENs and 3 disabilities ***** 1 SEN enrolled

Source: IES November, 2005

7.4 Conclusions

Schools have a strong influence in how awareness of the YA opportunity is raised. Generally two models existed: that of broad spectrum awareness raising (ie to the whole of year 9) or some degree of pre-selection based on already established choices or views about who might gain most from the YA. While this latter approach may have some benefits in ensuring pupils who apply to the YA are interested in the subject and motivated, they do limit the ability of the lead to promote non-stereotypical choices in the YA. However, we should also note that some partnerships felt that the broad spectrum approach was problematic too, in that it did not help to identify whether pupils had the motivation required to undertake a YA.

There appears to be a need to deliver more comprehensive information in awareness raising. Some pupils said that they would have liked more information about the topics they would be studying. Others commented that what they really wanted was more detailed information about the subject of the YA rather than the processes involved (eg about the process of application or details regarding their attendance at the college). Late funding notification or entry into the YA partnerships limited the extent of information the pupils received in some cases. As YA partnerships start to consolidate their practice, this is an important area for action.

Adherence to the DfES-set entry criteria has been a high priority for partnerships and, while exceptions to the criteria are allowed, many partnerships had not made use of this. There were a number of reports of how, following the application of the criteria, atypical entrants had been excluded from consideration. It is apparent that there needs to be stronger guidance to ensure that schools in particular realise that partnerships may waive one or more of the selection criteria, where there is a special case to be made for a young person. For example, this might be appropriate if someone is particularly well-motivated or has extensive experience in an area. This is particularly the case for pupils with special educational needs who many partners considered would (or more accurately could) not be eligible for the YAs.

There were some cases in which positive action had been taken in the application of entry criteria. In the few cases where this had happened, atypical entrants had been

recruited who were close to, but did not achieve, the academic criteria, but showed strong commitment to the sector and their studies. In these cases the young people, who, in some partnerships would have been excluded from the YA process, were making good progress.

The work indicates that there is a need for much clearer guidance on exemptions from criteria to be produced by DfES. Particular attention needs to be paid to the wording, so that the guidance gives a more positive message, as it appears to be use of the phrase 'in exceptional circumstances' that has led providers to believe that exemption is allowed in only very extreme cases.

8 Support and Delivery

8.1 Supporting atypical YAs at school and in training

Ensuring that young people are supported throughout their YA experience is a concern for most of the partnerships, however, opinions of the extent to which atypical pupils need additional or different types of support varied. A number of partnerships discussed how they provided individualised support mechanisms to all pupils. This, they felt, addressed the needs of atypical YAs. However, others did not consider there were any additional needs:

'There is a need to monitor and observe their experience and watch for any signs of their needing help. However as an organisation we are concerned that they [young men] are not picked out from their female peers and made to feel different. This could be more damaging than helpful. But at the moment there hasn't been evidence of additional support needs.'

'We have one-to-one tutorial support, the course tutor, plus the person who organises the work placements who spends time with the YAs, and if they are having trouble they will go and talk to their tutor on their behalf.'

'Yes, probably in general, YA students do [need additional support], to help them balance school and college etc. Regarding the girls on the YA scheme at present, though, I wouldn't say that they need support. The girls are atypical as that sector tends to be dominated by white males... I don't know that they need additional support to help with this though.'

YA co-ordinators most often took the lead in providing support. Where the partnership is led by a college, then the young people's contact with their YA co-ordinator tends to coincide with their YA college delivery day. In one college, tutors who were involved purely in delivering training could refer pupils to the available generic support services provided by the college as well as being able to speak to their co-ordinator about any difficulties:

'There are low numbers of young women coming through to [this subject]... but the college has support services and facilities. We can signpost these at the lectures they have here. And their YA co-ordinators are always available. But other than that we [as a delivery partner] don't have particular support.'

In most cases the co-ordinator support was felt to be working well, with coordinators confident of their relationship with the young people and their understanding of their needs and young people reporting that they felt supported by the delivery model. A good practice example of an integrated approach to the support of (atypical) pupils is shown in Box 7. Similar systems were seen in the case studies elsewhere, and embedding an integrated review system was not uncommon.

'A member of staff goes out every 12 weeks to see them at the employer's, and conducts a review with the learner. Equal opportunities are raised at the review and health and safety, as well as learner progress. All the young people are issued with a card that gives them the telephone numbers for contacts and the support officers are available to them all the time. The young people also come in here every week for training and a review of progress, and if there were any issues they would come and see me.'

Partnerships at a broader level were aware of the pressure of the combination of the core and YA curriculum, combined with the work experience level. There had been difficulties in some areas with scheduling and most YAs were required to take responsibility for their core curriculum.

'There is also quite a responsibility for catching up on other school work – and you have to approach teachers to make sure you don't miss out. Some offer after-school sessions anyway which helped because it provided the opportunity to catch up but others are less sympathetic. One young apprentice had missed a subject demonstration [due to attending the YA] but the teacher still asked them to do it the following week in front of the rest of the class...'

Box 7: Support in the TDR YA engineering

TDR has an established equality and diversity policy and is involved in out-reach to encourage female entrants into engineering and the YA. The TDR schools teams (YA co-ordinators) work with schools throughout the duration of the YA programme eg awareness-raising activities, recruitment and selection, and during YA delivery. They also work with schools more generally to promote engineering. Each of the schools teams has been configured to consist of a male and female co-ordinator, one drawn from industry; the other from a relevant teaching background. Discussing her support needs, a female young apprentice said of the coordinator with whom she most identified 'He just helps, if we've got problems we go and talk to him and he works it out... He's always been helpful about things like jobs or just general advice. He comes into the college quite often.'

In addition to the co-ordinator support, at the outset of the programme, YAs attend an induction which encompasses a half-day on equality and diversity in the context of the workplace and in education. The session uses a video and work-pack produced by the LSC entitled 'Working Together'. This resource is not specific to engineering but covers a range of issues relating to the workplace such as power relationships, racism, dyslexia/SENs, behaviour standards. The approach is to explore the scenarios presented in the video through discussion and trying to see the situations from both points of view, which allows TDR to raise the issue of their expectations of the young apprentices' behaviour. An example of the impact of the equality and diversity training

was given by one of the employers offering placements. One of the young women had challenged another worker's use of language about migrant workers during an open meeting.

College delivery partners varied their methods to ensure atypical YAs had opportunities to work both in gender matched and mixed groupings, identifying benefits of mixed gender groups during sessions. 'It's positive to mix genders during the work - to get something positive out of the gender mix - something interactive. They will be working in teams of men in their placement.'

For the duration of their YA, TDR has established a six-weekly pupil review process to ensure that timely support and guidance is available to all pupils. 'Part of the purpose is to help overcome any barriers students are experiencing - its very individualised.' The college, employer and school provide input to the review, and the findings are discussed with each YA individually and also sent home to parents/guardians.

While a lot of good practice was seen in the partnerships interviews and case studies, there is still a need to collect feedback systematically from young people to ensure their needs are being met. Indirect approaches may not capture the experiences as young people perceive them, as we illustrate below. The first quotation is taken from an interview with a YA co-ordinator, the second from an interview with one of the group of atypical pupils the co-ordinator is discussing:

'I was quite worried about this and so I went to check on the girls at the college who went on the YA scheme as they were the only girls. They seemed very happy and didn't want any extra support.'

'Two other girls from [my] school are there. The class at college is mainly boys. Most of the stuff we're taught is aimed at the boys, we [the girls] are left out...it's more for boys. All the teaching is based around the boys, what they should wear, how they should present themselves. They don't show the girls stuff.'

Some professionals also commented on the nature of any 'support' the YAs were receiving:

'There are co-ordinators in each school, they look after the interests of the pupils, but our feedback from the young apprentices is that they only get asked "how are you doing?". I have just completed our own end of term review, I ask them about any barriers, any likes or dislikes they have.'

Taken together, these reports from young people and professionals indicate that partnerships should perhaps in future attempt to explore young people's experiences in a more structured manner.

8.2 Support during work placements

The work placements are a crucial part of the YAs. They provide the opportunity to gain real experience of the demands of work and apply the skills developed at college. In some areas there had been difficulties with employer engagement and this is an aspect of the programme that can greatly impact on young people's experience. For

non-traditional entrants, their early experiences with an employer can be daunting and it may be the case that partnerships need to have a greater focus on this early part of the experience.

'I think the work placement is the hardest place because you're surrounded by blokes all the time. When I did my work experience there were no women on the shop floor; it was just me. It's alright and you get used to it after the first few days. But if you put one of these lads in a room full of lasses they're bound to feel uncomfortable. If you put a lass in a lad's environment they're obviously going to think, "oh she's a girl, and she can't do it to our standards". That was basically what I got when I joined it. You feel bad about it. But once you get started I suppose they just change their mind about it and you just get on with it.'

There is a clear need to work with employers to ensure that they are aware of how the workplace might seem to atypical entrants – and more broadly, this age group with very little experience of working environments. There were examples of employers who had a greater awareness of support needs. However; it tended to be the case that they understood all young people would require support and most of the needs of atypical entrants would be wrapped up in such support.

'...we do it more subtly. We ensured she was placed in a section with a team of men we knew would be supportive of her – we did think about the staff who would guide her early experiences. We also matched her with a (male) mentor who we knew would treat her equally. But other than that she has the same degree of support as any other apprentice in the company. They all get a mentor as well as access to line managers and HR. I think the less fuss the better, after all, she is meant to be equal.'

Some, but not all, of the partnerships have thought about, and addressed, the need to provide workplace support, either through co-ordinators or WBL staff, or through more direct mechanisms within the employing organisation, such as buddies and mentors. However, the diversity of those workplaces greatly affects the ability of employers and partnerships to provide, for instance, gender-matched mentors.

'We do try to match young apprentices with male workplace mentors or buddies but our ability to do that largely depends on the employer's workforce.'

Again, some, but not all, of the partnerships were aware of the difficulties that could arise and how the placement situation could become problematic.

'The work placements will vary from company to company. Large organisations that are used to apprentices and trainees, this [support] may be part of the work placement. Others in large companies may get a bit swamped. You can't generalise.'

It was thus unsurprising that some of the YAs spoke of difficulties they had experienced on their placements:

'Sometimes on placements it can be difficult because you can be given too much responsibility before you are really ready. Sometimes the staff are busy and they tell you

really quickly what they want you to do and if you haven't understood it can be difficult to get them to go over it again – even to ask them again.'

'The work experience wasn't good. This was because when we first went there the man didn't know we were supposed to be there so we were hanging around for ages waiting to be told what to do. We were just working with men. The toilets are horrible and so are the changing rooms, where we had to change was dirty. It's ok working with all men and if someone has a day off and they have to get someone else in it's quite often a women. Most of the waitresses are women but we don't really see them, but there was one we used to have lunch with.'

More generally, in good practice organisations, employers were aware that part of their responsibilities in supporting young people, was providing an appropriate work experience. This brings benefits for both parties.

'Young people can find placements are boring because employers have not put enough thought and planning into how their time will be spent. Sometimes employers' expectations are beyond what a young person is capable of – they can forget that these are only 14/15 year olds so they can't do the same things as older apprentices. You have to tailor the experience so that young people can get something out of it as well.'

However, in addition to such examples of good practice there were some examples where little attention was being paid to the support needed by young people in the work setting, or the needs of any atypical groups:

'[We are not providing any extra support] as such, other than our own experience of making sure they understand what they are up against in terms of how people in the trade behave, and they will not be treated any differently and we cannot influence how people in the trade behave...'

8.3 Strategies to support atypical entrants

Professional staff tended to agree that developing a 'critical mass' of atypical pupils is an important stage in addressing segregation. Once a critical mass has been reached, this effectively provides peer support amongst the young people themselves. However, a recognition of this issue did not necessarily lead to strategic action within partnerships to create such self-supporting groups in some way:

'If it was a single female I think they would need additional support but this group of three form a self-supporting group, plus one of them is very outgoing... if there was only one then I imagine the female staff at [the training provider] would probably introduce a mentoring system. I would encourage dialogue and visits and also would have meetings with that student.'

There was evidence that the young people did appreciate having peers within their workgroups at college and, in some cases, the placement. Even where non-traditional entrants felt comfortable with their subject choice, they would still prefer greater peer

support. This may be particularly the case when, for instance, young women enter male-dominated environments.

'[It would be better if there were] ...more lasses on the course. It's all right working with the lads and everything because I am part of the team, but you wish you had someone else there to know how you're feeling. There are some things you can't do because you're a girl. Like lifting heavy things, and sometimes your ability, because you haven't got it in your head to do it. You can feel a bit down.'

'Well, the first thing I noticed was that they've got all men here. And I just thought, great [ironic tone]... it would be good having seen women around.'

However, this was seen as less of an issue where young men were following non-traditional routes in some areas of the country. There was less perceived need for 'buddy' or mentor support, although it was suggested that this might be affected by the economic changes (leading to the greater existence of workforce role models) that has happened in recent years.

'In terms of what young people see in the workplace, the position may be slightly skewed here. The decline of heavy industries has meant that men have retrained for jobs. It may be that in [this region] there are more men in non-traditional roles [health care] because of economic circumstances. So there may be stronger role models and anyway, occupations in the health sector are less gender stereotyped than say, motor vehicle.'

That is not to say, however, that some gender-atypical entrants had not gained from working with opposite-sex peers in some cases. Such findings can only support attempts at more diverse recruitment:

'Before I came here I didn't really used to talk to them [boys] or anything and now we're like really close, really good friends.... With some of the lads we were dead unpopular before we came here and now we're just the most popular people.'

However, sectors do vary greatly in the extent to which they are gender (and ethnically) segregated, and it remains possible that positive action may still be required in some sectors in order to start building a 'critical mass'.

There was evidence also from the range of professionals interviewed during the research that providing opportunities for buddying and mentoring are recognised by many (although again, not all) as an important form of support for atypical entrants (and the YAs more broadly). There is some consideration being given to pairing up young people for their placements or pairing them with slightly older learners (eg post-16 apprentices) in the same organisation. However, the diversity of the employer workforce is the key determinant of whether partnerships can effectively implement such strategies.

'There are advantages to having peers around [who are] following much the same route – it can provide support at the work placement. Peer support can also help with the catching up on other classes as a peer may have attended something you have not been able to.'

'We are thinking about putting in place a mentoring or buddying system [in college], with post-16s in the subject area mentoring or buddying a pre-16.'

'I had a cadet nurse (MA) as a buddy at one of my placements – I found it helpful because she was a similar age to me and I felt it was easier to go to her and ask questions than approach the staff sometimes...'

In some areas the needs of pupils from ethnic backgrounds were considered. In this case, however, the extent to which action was possible was also determined by the sector workforce. In one of the areas in which ethnicity had been targeted as an EO issue for the partnership one of the staff members involved, thought that practice in the employing organisation was sufficiently good that there would not be any particular need for additional support.

'It might be an issue that additional support is needed for students from ethnic minorities as some of the employers' workforces are "rather white". However the employers are excellent so it's not really a problem at this stage.'

It is perhaps unsurprising that, in partnerships in which pupils with special educational needs were participating in the YA scheme, closer attention had been paid at the outset to some of the support arrangements. With this group in particular, it is important to try to minimise, from the start, some of the difficulties they might experience with attending placements.

'The pupil with SENs receives additional help and support to enable him to access the YA scheme. This includes additional help in the arrangements for the work placement so that lengthy travel would not be involved... The pupil also receives help "with organising things"; however this help was provided by his school for his studies generally – not something additional arranged especially for the YA.'

Professionals and employers seem aware however that there are limitations to the extent to which the existing workforce can be used as buddies, or role models, particularly when they themselves are a non-traditional entrant.

'We would like to make greater use of work place role models, I think it could be helpful, but you have to be careful not to exploit those atypical young people [post-16] who have entered the sector although it does need to be young people, as role models from a similar age group are likely to have more impact.'

There exists however a small group of professionals who remain convinced that the needs of atypical entrants do not require any additional consideration and that suggesting employers put strategies in place would be potentially damaging to the experience of these entrants.

'No. They should all be treated exactly the same. If you told the employers "they need extra support" it would probably put them off. There were some raised eyebrows when I said they would be having girls.'

This last comment suggests that, although there is already a lot of good practice emerging, in some partnerships there still remains more that could be done in terms of training and awareness-raising for some of the staff involved in development and delivery of the YA schemes.

8.4 Conclusions

Our findings suggest that there is a need to ensure that young people have sufficient opportunity to give feedback about their experiences and help to identify any support needs. Indirect approaches, such as observation, may in fact give a false impression, especially if the young person is aware that they are being observed in the work setting and are keen to give a good impression. It is clear, too, that general questioning can also be an ineffective way of eliciting information from young people.

For this reason, while the provision of partnership co-ordinators was generally thought to be supportive for the YAs, the extent to which they are seen as helpful depends on the way in which they work with the young people. Taking a structured approach in one-to-one or group meetings to obtain feedback is likely to ensure they gain a greater awareness of their support needs. A further possibility is that, rather than just asking a general question regarding how well the placement is going, co-ordinators or teachers give the young people a list of potential types of support that could be made available (such as provision of a mentor, telephone support contact number, increased visit frequency, one-to-one meetings with the co-ordinator etc.) and ask them to indicate which, if any, they would like to have made available.

Ensuring a well-structured, well planned placement is important to how well supported young people feel during their YA experience. There is a need to ensure that there is a clear role and tasks for them to fulfil as well as someone who they can approach if they are unsure about something. Introducing other atypical workers to them and providing some formal access to these is likely to be beneficial, even if they are drawn from other work disciplines than the YA. There may be a case for sending pairs of atypical entrants on placement as a support mechanism.

The evidence suggests in particular that for young women entering male-dominated sectors, critical mass is important as it builds a self-supporting group. Where critical mass has not been reached within the YA cohort, ie where there is just one female, or one YA from an ethnic minority, then providing access to post-16 learners (eg apprentices) with similar backgrounds, in both the college and the workplace (if possible) may be helpful.

Although there is evidence from young people to suggest that atypical entrants do, to some degree, require additional support, some of the partners did not perceive this need. Where support is sufficiently individualised and structured further support may be unnecessary. However, if assumptions are being made about how the young people appear to be doing, there is a strong likelihood that their support needs may

be overlooked. As well as improving the means by which feedback is sought from the young apprentices, it would appear that there is a training need amongst some staff in the partnerships to increase their awareness of the fact that treating everybody in the same way is not necessarily the way to promote equal opportunities.

9 Encouraging Wider Choices

This chapter draws together good practice examples from our discussions with the range of stakeholders involved and some of the ideas that emerged to challenge stereotyped choices.

9.1 Raising awareness

Reflecting on their experiences of awareness raising, there was some consensus amongst partnership leads that the best approach to awareness raising was to embed YA recruitment within year 9 option selection processes. Earlier access to young people was generally felt to encourage them to consider the range of options available to them. There were strong indications that leads saw a significant part of their role as being to encourage a broader diversity of pupils into their subject and noted their broader outreach activities.

‘With our major programmes we have re-designed all our stands and are making a real push to attract females. There is a range of strategies. Plus the local paper did a big feature on a female motor vehicle trainee. So we use case studies. We hit the issue on a number of fronts but it is quite difficult to attract females.’

‘It’s [promotion of non-stereotypical choices] embedded in all our recruitment material across the college, we would always want to encourage atypical learners across the board. We are thinking about doing a young designers twilight club, get people in who are interested in design generally but we could give them the idea of, for example, going into motor vehicle bodywork design, as a way to get past their preconceptions....the LEA are encouraging us because they want to meet their targets for getting atypical learners in.’

Partnerships, and the individual schools, colleges and training organisations of which they were comprised, were also providing mechanisms for pupils to gain hands-on experience in different subjects, and this is one area of rapidly developing good practice. Findings from our main research into this issue are reported in Chapter 11 but those relating specifically to the YA case studies are reported in Section 9.1.1 below.

It is perhaps salient to add a cautionary point here from a local LSC about expectations of returns from these and other diversity strategies. It may be the case that partnerships who are implementing such strategies will have to wait to see the impact of their work over the longer term.

'[The partnership lead] has put lots of effort in over time to get young women onto the engineering YA. Indeed the rewards are not so great for the amount of effort put in.'

9.1.1 Subject tasters

Numerous examples of taster sessions and experiences were mentioned during our case study visits and momentum is growing to expand the provision of these kinds of activities to help young people fully understand the nature of subjects. Attention is now being paid to finding ways of ensuring that pupils have of the opportunity to gain a realistic picture of different sectors and the range of occupations potentially available. The drive to provide this type of information and experience often is highly localised, although in one case, there was a strong regional drive partly encouraged by the regional implementation of the IFP.

'This year, one of the schools held a year 9 industry day and invited the [partnership lead] in to present about engineering and provide industry mentors. There were in-school activities such as building a crash barrier, wind tunnel – lots of practical activities.'

'We offer taster days for both types of qualification (YAs and E2E). YAs come in for a day. Everyone who applied was invited. Most of the post-16 E2Es get an opportunity also. We used to recruit on the basis of, if they turned up, they were "in", but not anymore – this [the taster day] does sort out who is dedicated. You can let them have a go, have a look at their performance. But it is useful as it gives them a proper idea of what to expect.'

'I show them how to do rudimentary things eg jack up a car and take off the wheel, other simple things. Also there is a small number of multiple choice questions, to assess whether they have any prior knowledge of vehicles, but mostly geared towards health and safety and to allow us to look at the way in which they approach MCQs, whether they are being logical or just guessing.'

Box 8: Tasters in Sunderland

'There is £1.3m sub-regional partnership spend on taster activities, as we identified the need to work at this level as part of our 14 to 19 response. There is confidence in the academic provision available and they [young people] know about that side of thing. The progression routes there are well-trodden and obvious.

'Vocational routes need development and subject tasters have an important role in this. In Sunderland the entitlement (through Connexions) is that every young people between 14 and 15 can do three vocational taster subjects. They don't have to take up all three tasters so if they find one they like they can do another taster in it. It's a best practice model [ie tasters] - for a

young person you can assess whether you like it, gauge your aptitudes, and for professionals wrap up in that model feedback and information and guidance.'

LLSC

In some cases, usually where there is some compulsory element within the choice options available to the year 10 pupils (eg a compulsory technology subject), schools have introduced a longitudinal model in which pupils 'rotate' through the range of technologies as part of their year 9 curricula. This has the advantage of ensuring that pupils gain some insight into the subject prior to making their choice of options. In some subject areas this can be particularly important as there may be little experience before year 10.

'In year 9 all the students will rotate around the technology choices – so before they make their KS4 choices. They experience food, electronics, resistant materials, design, textiles so they do get quite a good idea of what each is about. Engineering is the least popular once you get to the KS4 choices...'

A small number of partnerships were interested in using the taster as a means of assessment during the recruitment process. This would involve observation of pupils undertaking practical activities to provide some assessment of whether the mode of learning and subject area seemed a good match to their personal approaches.

'The selection panel will include the lead partner, the college, and several school staff. After students have put themselves forward for the YA option, they can take part in taster sessions, which the college will lead on. Members of the selection panel will observe potential students in the taster sessions to get a sense of their motivation and attitude towards the YA option and the subject in general. Tasters are seen as important so that potential students know what is involved and are less likely to drop out. Tasters will be followed by an interview and a test.'

'[The provision of taster days] goes across all programmes in the prospectus and these may in some cases double up as an interview day or assessment day... They come in for the day, all the schools send them in on one day across all five sites. The student selects the subject they want, they get a bit of background, activities, and we talk to them about our expectations of them, perhaps give them an interview at the same time if possible. Potentially young apprentices would come in, in future we plan to have an information evening for apprentices and their parents ahead of the day.'

Tasters are viewed as helpful in identifying the most dedicated learners amongst the pool of applicants. While this may not have been an issue for many partnerships in these early years of the YA (given that their attention was primarily focused on recruiting sufficient numbers) it may be an issue that providers may wish to consider in future years, as numbers of applicants grow.

More broadly, tasters may have a role in ensuring that young people are fully aware of the full range of subjects that are available to them and in breaking down stereotypical views about those subjects. Indeed we found examples of tasters (or

planning for tasters) configured to address gender barriers, some to address the needs of the wider stakeholders in young people's choices (notably parents) and a willingness amongst providers to configure tasters in whatever format was required. However, the outcomes of doing this varied, and perhaps indicate the need for work at a number of levels to encourage young people to consider non-traditional choices.

'We are currently working on a female session for school pupils. We have done female-only tasters in the past – they seemed to enjoy it but we only had one female applying to the apprenticeship. It was a two to three day programme at college and they had female staff to work with the group as a role model and mentor. It's slowly but surely getting there... It can depend a lot on the views of parents and to some degree the structure of the community.'

'I am considering saying to the schools, when we offer them places on taster days, if you want to bring eg ten girls [traditional entrants], then you must bring one or two boys. I don't know if we could do this, but I am thinking about it. Also we will target certain schools with ethnic minorities.'

'The way we do them [the taster days] tends to be based on the requirements coming from the school. So we deliver [a session to] an all female group [atypical entrants] if that's what they want. We can also do it for teachers so that they can get to know what it's about. But it needs funding.'

'We did taster days for the past two years. We have tried to work with one all-girl school and did set up a taster day for that school but they did not come. We've constructed a day, and we speak to PAs in the schools who market it for us. The taster days are held during half term, on Saturdays and at Easter, to make it easy for them to attend, they come in, in groups of eight to ten, some are very well-attended. We say "Come and have a go". The parents come in too. They spend a day having a go at a bit of plumbing, construction....if anyone needs help with transport we organise that. The emphasis is hands on.'

'We do "dads and lads" days in the catering department. These take place on Saturdays in October. These are advertised through the schools. They normally get a good take-up. This is aimed at kids from seven and eight up to kids aged 14 or 15. The aim is to give the college a profile and get the students interested in the courses, areas of study.'

During our visits, we also encountered tasters that aimed to address the information needs of staff and professionals. In one of the YA case study sites, a college mentioned holding industry days for staff – and there was certainly a feeling amongst partners that improving the knowledge of staff would improve the quality of advice they can give to young people (see sections below).

Since conducting the case studies we have found a further instance of tasters being offered for teaching and advice and guidance professionals. The event is designed and offered by a college that is currently not involved in the YAs. This event is entitled

'Inside the Real World of Plumbing'¹² and has been organised under the 'Building Better People' programme and led by Connexions in the area, to provide professionals with an opportunity to find out how this industry is working locally to increase the skills required in the local economy. Specifically, the aims of the event include:

- gaining an insight into the diverse range of work involved in this sector [plumbing]
- seeing what manufacturers, suppliers and employers are doing to address skill shortages
- hearing from young people who are taking Modern Apprenticeship programmes
- developing links with local experts who are keen to get involved with schools.

There are, however, some points of concern about any further embedding of taster sessions. While there appears to be considerable interest in providing information this way, there are also some limitations in what partners can deliver. There are two main issues: funding, and gaining evidence of any impact of these actions. It is noteworthy that some partnerships are attempting to monitor the impact of these interventions.

'Yes have done some. It's mostly a case of financing them – we would deliver if there was funding available. It tends to be that you get money for special projects... The LSC will provide BRIDGE funding for outreach to encourage young people to consider engineering occupations so it will ask providers what they can offer... Because it is a large facility we do need resources to provide taster sessions to ensure full supervision and a good breadth of experience for young people.'

'There is a lack of a clear structure – it's not clear where such investment leads (ie. how far providing short tasters does encourage young women into engineering choices) but we would love to do more of it.'

'We use the information [about applications to taster days] to see if there is any impact on equal opportunities. We look to see what areas of [the county] they are coming from, also whether they then make an application for E2E or work based learning programme.'

During the YA case study visits, we were able to speak directly to young people about their experiences of tasters. Depending on their school, college or partnership, only a sub-set of young apprentices had experienced a taster. Even so, young people had some criticisms of the process and what was possible from these short intensive experiences, and these concerns may need to be addressed in future implementations. An emerging theme from our analysis is that there is a need for staff and professionals to find out what it is that young people would like to gain from these types of initiative, rather than making assumptions on their behalf.

'From year 7 till the end of year, we've got industrial day where loads of companies come in.... They send you to different rooms for different subjects, but you can't choose where

¹² The authors are grateful to Debbie Murphy of Coventry College for bringing this to our attention.

you want to go, so you're still not winning either way. Last year, I went nowhere I wanted to be. I didn't want to do business and they sent us to all business rooms.'

'They kind of got the gist of showing you things, but they haven't put you in the right places. I still think year 11 should get their own individual talks with people. Because by now we should be close to making up our minds about what we want to do when we leave, but I've honestly got no idea what I want to do.'

'I think tasters would be a good thing at 14 but the problem is that you can't really tell in that short a time.'

Young apprentice

We have begun to identify the key people involved in supporting young people in their option choices, and more specifically in their decision to enter the YAs. In the next section we consider the different perspectives of a range of stakeholders within partnerships about who is important and why.

9.1.2 Who influences young people's choices?

Parents' and guardians' involvement in choices

Parental involvement was seen as a key factor, and there was an awareness of the need to engage with parents beyond gaining their written support for YA candidates. Many partnerships consider that involving parents at an early stage for the YA helps to build support for young people to take up YAs (and other vocational qualifications) and make atypical subject choices.

'We have had kids who were really keen to take the BTEC or the AVC but parents have put them onto say, maths GCSE. We do our best to support the kids and encourage them to tell their parents what they really want – to tell staff as well so that they can support those choices in discussions with the parents. And there are some who are academically really bright but still want the hands on approach of the BTEC and it's important they get that chance.'

'Vocational options need to be promoted to parents and schools. At the moment I think they are viewed as the "last chance for anything" and that they are perceived as being for people who "can't do anything else". Students need to be aware that there are lots of options.'

The majority of parents were less concerned about a child's choice being non-stereotypical choices than about the possibility that their child might be put at risk by the scheme, or might restrict their future subject of career choice options. However, in such cases, usually when partnership representatives met parents they could reassure them by explaining the format of the YA, the fact that other routes were not necessarily closed off by taking the YA, and about the health and safety of pupils.

'We heard about it through the school, [the lead partner] came and gave a talk and the kids went for an interview. It was great and it was interesting It was well done with plenty of

time for us to ask questions, there was a question and answer session... there was information about health and safety in factory environments, how they assess risk, that sort of thing.'

'We went to the parents' evening... it was really useful. They told us about the YA and the college and employer placement. There were discussion groups so you all got to ask questions and it helped to hear about the answers to the questions other parents raised. We talked about what [our daughter] wanted to do and the kind of commitment that the course needs. We also talked about what she would be getting out of it... the qualifications and the work experience.'

Nonetheless, despite such positive reactions, we did encounter one parent of a non-traditional entrant who, while now supporting her daughter's choice, was (still) not convinced that the automotive sector was a good career choice.

'We let her reach her own decisions. To be honest I was against her choosing motor mechanics because it is a tough world out there and being a girl meant she would have to be exceptional to get anywhere.'

This is perhaps an indication of the extent to which parents need information about different careers and sectors. The messages we received during the fieldwork regarding young women's chances in engineering or automotive were that they 'would be snapped up' and are often viewed as being amongst the highest achievers.

'The girls nearly always end up winning prizes – they have greater ambition and can communicate that.'

Professional guidance

An issue identified by a range of people within the partnerships is that there is little in the way of structured career guidance for this age group. The majority of professional guidance 'kicks-in' at the end of year 11, when decisions about progression from KS4 qualifications are being made. The experience can vary between schools in a locality (and partnership) and it is the case that young people themselves identify a need for more professional guidance.

'I honestly haven't got a clue what I want to do. In school we haven't had hardly anything about careers.'

'At other different schools they've had load of things, they've had people coming from Connexions and helping them apply for colleges and everything, and we've had nothing like that... I think our school should do things like that. I think they're trying to do it themselves, but I think they should get people in.'

'I don't think it matters where the talks come from, but we just need talks, basically, we just really need career talks because I don't think the school has done a very good job at the moment. I mean, fair enough they have tried to help, I'm not saying they haven't... it's just that... I think there's more that can be done that's not being done.'

This issue was also raised by a YA co-ordinator who had received feedback from the young apprentices with whom she worked:

'Quite a few said that they would have liked some external view on their skills and aptitudes to help them make their GCSE choices as these start to build towards final career choices, you know we had kids saying that "teachers should direct more" and "it would be good if they said you would be good at this because of this or that".'

We also found an excellent example of how one school was trying to increase and improve the guidance young people receive.

Box 9: Ernesford Grange School

'We have a careers convention and are one of the few schools that invite the colleges in and have a wide range of activities that [the pupils] can participate in, plus we provide a synopsis of what each speaker will be talking about. What we try to do through Connexions is make a link with [a Group Training provider] and Connexions will take a group out so they can have a look at a workplace. In year 9 we have an equal opportunities morning, we make a conscious effort to bring in, for example, a female police chief, a male nurse, female engineer, and do a sort of 'What's My Line' with them, the pupils have to ask them questions and work out what their job is.'

As well as these examples of good practice, concerns were raised during the research by staff and professionals regarding the issue of guidance, and in particular the impact of the changing agenda of services such as Connexions. Indeed a Connexions adviser reported:

'There is an issue with careers advice in general. Connexions no longer provide this. Schools are supposed to do so. Connexions' focus is on NEETs [those not in employment, education or training] and the disadvantaged.'

The staff group to whom this age group most often turn for advice and guidance is their teachers. Despite comments from the young people themselves that suggested that they felt the guidance they had received was useful, other professionals were concerned about the quality of the information provided by teachers. A number of interviewees identified a need to develop teachers' knowledge of the occupational areas so that they were more aware of the diversity of careers in the different sectors.

'One problem we sometimes have is that teachers won't suggest subjects to their students if they don't think it's applicable, for example, one boys' school wouldn't even suggest [the subject] to their pupils because it's just [the subject] and they didn't think anyone would be interested.'

'Teachers in the schools do provide good advice about traditional career routes but they can be snobbish about apprenticeships. [The partnership lead] is helping through its programmes to change their perceptions – to make them understand the sector is more professional than they think.'

Of greater concern was the belief that other factors might underpin the kind of advice young people received from their schools.

'There can be a conflict of financial resources in terms of the funding each individual pupil will attract – schools are out to keep the students who they think will do best at sixth form so they don't tend to refer them to the vocational provision that is out there. So that can determine the kind of advice that young people receive.'

Alongside the role of professional guidance, there is the opportunity for employers to get involved to help give young people a realistic view of the sector and challenge their pre-conceptions. We move onto this issue next.

Information from employers

Partnerships saw an important role for employers in providing information about jobs and the industry to the young people. Indeed, in partnerships where employer engagement was working well, teams had included employers in several aspects of awareness raising, and in a small number of cases, recruitment.

'I've been to their presentations, and one of the questions I've always asked the students is, is this what you thought engineering was before you came here. And sometimes they say "No, it's totally different", and I think that's possibly why there aren't any females, because their concept of engineering is hard graft. So it's wrong, because they just do not know, and if they came round and did work experience, it would open their mind.'

'I know that was missing when I left school, the actual guidance on various types of jobs and the ins and outs of them and what they entail. We got very, very little information and so you made a decision based on not a great deal of thought. That's why I'm keen to be involved.'

However, partnerships reported difficulties in gaining the active engagement of employers in activities to encourage young people to make more diverse choices. In one case, there was an acknowledgement of the lack of any previous history in the area of employers and schools working together, and so there was a lack of knowledge about how to make progress and manage the engagement of, and subsequent working relationship with, employers.

'We have tried very hard to get men (or women for that matter) who work in clinical roles to be guest speakers in schools. We would particularly like men because very few boys choose health and social care, so male clinical staff would provide good role models. But, it's very difficult to get speakers to come.'

'It would be too resource intensive for a school or college. [The lead partner] engages with the employer and has a wealth of experience in this. They provide the help that all the stakeholders need to move forward with delivery. Having the initiative is good, however you need the drive to take it forward.'

However, while employers may recognise the need for pupils to receive accurate industry information, they may not recognise that they themselves could provide this. In addition, those willing to get involved may have no history of working with this age group (or indeed with schools) and so they may need guidance about how best to approach their role in this regard.

'Getting information out to schools is an absolute imperative so that children hear about [the subject] not from a careers officer but from someone who works more closely to industry. Careers officers are not specialist enough, they don't have the awareness of the diversity of occupations within [the subject].'

A key equal opportunities action, mentioned by large numbers of partnerships, is the inclusion of role models within awareness raising activities and in the workplace. This is the final topic in this section.

Role models, buddies and mentors in and from the workplace

There is recognition amongst partnerships that greater inclusion of atypical role models in awareness-raising activities and during work placements is important in challenging stereotyped choices. There were many good practice examples in place around the case study partnerships. However, the extent to which mentors or role models can be used by a partnership depends largely on the diversity of the local sector workforce and particularly the companies with which the partnerships are engaged. There may also be concerns, as noted previously, about the extent to which atypical entrants begin to feel stigmatised by the level of interest from external organisations such as schools and colleges.

'As far as gender segregation goes, in my honest opinion, engineering needs earlier work to get young people progressing through. It's too late to leave it until they have left school. We need more role models – more successful female engineers going into schools. How often do girls get to meet female engineers?'

'Greater use of role models would be helpful... It does need to be young people as role models because they are likely to have more impact. But you have to be careful not to exploit those atypical young people who have entered the sector eg post-16.'

An important last point on role models is made by one of the atypical young apprentices, speaking about their own career choice. This had been strongly guided by the presence of role models within the workplace. Another young apprentice noted the lack of any role models elsewhere.

'I want to go into the Royal Engineer's. There are quite a lot of women that do that. It will be easier if there are going to be other women there as well, so you'll feel better about yourself.'

Another key action was to provide buddies or mentors in the workplace. While similar issues exist as for the provision of role models, ie you cannot provide an

atypical mentor if none is currently employed, there were felt to be advantages to providing a consistent support figure, even if they could not be from the same sex or ethnic background:

'I think it would have been worse if it had been individuals, on your own... all my other friends from school they had to go [on placement] by themselves ..., but we [the atypical YAs] were put into a group, so I think that helped because we knew everyone.'

9.2 Partnership perspectives on the actions required to encourage wider choices

In a very small number of cases, and at a broader level than the YAs, some different approaches to widening choices had been tried. These involved theatre-style presentations, so were to some extent, 'info-tainment'. In one case, the partnership lead organisation had paid for a company of actors to bring an established play to schools in the area. In another area, resources had been found to commission and develop a play. A key aim of both interventions was to challenge gender stereotypes and show atypical employees within a workplace in a segregated sector.

'We paid for the play to visit some schools in the area. It was effective and provided a different way to work with young people... but it was hugely expensive which has prevented us from doing it again. It involved two men and one women acting out [employment] roles. Our evaluation suggested that it did have some impact on young people's perception of [the sector] for instance, it challenged their concepts of [it being] low-skilled work.'

Again at the broader level, there was criticism of the lack of resources available to fund innovative actions to address widening choices and the lack of any guidance or advice coming from national organisations.

'We would be keen to do more work in the area [encouraging atypical choices] however there is a lack of funding and resources for this kind of activity. There is also a dearth of information. If there was someone who could give a formula about how to do it, we would operate it. However there is a lack of any guidance either from LSC or SSCs. Nor is any funding being provided that would enable on-the-ground organisations to experiment to find new ways of approaching this issue.'

9.3 Conclusions

There was evidence that partnerships felt they could have greater impact on the choices young people make if they can gain broad spectrum access when they initially raise awareness of the YA opportunity. This was particularly the case where partnership leads saw their role as being to raise awareness of the sector and improve knowledge about it. However, there were some cautionary comments regarding how long it may take to see the results of such activities. It is therefore important not to

expect to gain very rapid results when trying to embed any activities. Measurement of impact may need to be carried out over the longer term.

A mechanism for helping to encourage wider choices was the provision of taster sessions. These varied a great deal in their structure and intent, however they were seen as useful for ensuring the motivation of young people as well as giving the young people knowledge of a broader range of subjects while breaking down stereotyped concepts. Indeed we found examples of tasters (or planning for tasters) to address gender barriers, and some to address the needs of the wider stakeholders in young people's choices (notably parents). There was also a willingness amongst providers to configure tasters in whatever format was required, provided that funding allowed this.

Parents/guardians play an important role in supporting young people's choices (and it is a DfES requirement that each YA has parental support). They can also exert a strong influence, in some cases leading to the withdrawal of young people from vocational courses. Some of the findings suggest that more work to update parents about sector workplaces and different qualifications is required if greater diversity is to be achieved. It is also the case that many young people will not experience guidance from any other adults at this age, and our research showed that a number would have liked some external review of their aptitudes. Where guidance was available, most young people reported they had received this from their teachers. However, it was also the case that many of the professional staff were critical of the (out-of-date) information held by other professionals.

There was a consensus that young people needed to hear about sectors from employers and the YAs have certainly allowed young people to gain a good insight into the sectors. Involving employers (not only for the YA but in wider awareness raising activities) is likely to bring benefits for young people by encouraging wider choices, particularly if atypical role models can be involved. What should not be overlooked is the fact that employers too will gain from involvement in such activities, as young people are likely to be keen to apply to them as an employer of choice in the future.

10 Year 9 Tasters

This chapter presents the findings of research into the planning, organising, resourcing and managing of taster sessions in vocational options for year 9 pupils. The data has been gathered from three case-studies and is supported by some data relating to tasters which emerged from the five case-studies conducted for the main section of this project. The aim of this part of the study was to see how taster sessions were integrated in the curriculum, and to explore their delivery and management and the extent to which they help to promote non-stereotypical choices in terms of gender, ethnicity and other diversity factors.

The chapter describes the aims of the tasters, their content and funding and how pupils are selected to attend them. The importance of timing and of parental involvement are then highlighted. The impact that tasters have on diversity is then discussed alongside the outcomes perceived to result from taster sessions.

10.1 Aims

Taster sessions were offered for a range of reasons. In some instances there had been a 'trigger' which led to the need to provide pupils with information about vocational options and hence development of the tasters. These trigger events included, in one instance, the introduction of a core vocational option in years 10 and 11, and in others the introduction of a YA programme for a selection of pupils.

The aims of the taster sessions were reported to be wide-ranging and included helping pupils to make informed decisions about their options, to reduce drop-out rates and to highlight alternatives to classroom-based learning. In all cases a primary aim of the taster sessions was to enable pupils to experience or 'taste' the new subjects that were available to them as part of their year 9 options so they could make informed choices. Generally, pupils have studied and have first-hand experience of many of the more traditional subjects which are offered as part of their year 9 options. They therefore have an understanding of the nature of the course, their levels of achievement in the subject and the available progression routes into further and higher education and through the workplace. In contrast to this, pupils were reported

to have very little understanding of the progression routes that vocational courses can offer and explaining these was seen to be an important element of the taster sessions.

Making pupils more informed about the courses they elect to take is also aimed at reducing drop-outs and swapping between courses at the start of the autumn term. An additional aim was for pupils to try different ways of learning outside of the classroom environment, many of which are different to the methods of learning that pupils have been used to and to which they may find they are better suited.

Where tasters were undertaken with providers external to the school then an aim was for pupils to familiarise themselves with the setting, expectations and the tutors. In these cases, increasing the number of pupil enrolments with the provider was a secondary aim, and in some of the case studies we found contract agreements detailing expectations of the number of pupils who would enrol on a college course as a result of taster sessions.

In some instances, tasters were provided to help tutors assess pupils' aptitude and enthusiasm for the subject in order to help give them advice, guidance and feedback about their suitability for the vocational subject area. For example, in one taster session for performing arts, pupils had to perform in front of an audience in a situation similar to that of an audition and then received feedback about their success in doing this.

10.2 Models of provision

Two models of taster provision have emerged from the case studies. One is centred on an external training provider, usually a college or a training provider, which hosts the taster sessions for pupils from a range of local secondary schools. The other model is school-based taster provision, which is made possible where the school has the facilities and resources for vocational options.

College-based model

The location of the provision affects the costs associated with funding the tasters and therefore the number of pupils who are able to benefit from them. Where provision is college based there can be costs associated with transport, and in addition in some instances the training provider also charges a fee for each pupil who attends a taster. Sometimes these costs placed limitations on the number of pupils who could attend the tasters and therefore selection criteria were put in place. In other instances the tasters were limited to those pupils who were eligible and interested in undertaking a vocational option. When taster provision was off site and attended by only a small number of pupils, then pupils sometimes had to miss school lessons in order to attend. This model was used where a limited number of pupils were expected to undertake vocational options in years 10 and 11 and this was by far the most common method of taster provision.

School-based model

One case-study was undertaken in a school where it is compulsory for all pupils to undertake a vocational option in years 10 and 11 and hence the school has a wide range of facilities to support vocational learning. These facilities were used for the taster sessions and this lowered the costs for the school. In addition, the normal timetable was suspended to allow *all* pupils to try out a range of vocational subjects.

10.3 Content

The taster sessions were typically designed to reflect the types of activities a pupil might expect to undertake if they selected a vocational option in that subject. For example, in 'motor vehicle' pupils might take part in changing a car tyre, in 'food and catering' a dish might be prepared, and in 'performing arts' pupils might perform in front of an audience. Organisers of the taster sessions were, however, careful to be realistic in the types of tasks pupils were asked to undertake, and, where written work was also part of the programme of assessment, this was made clear to pupils and was also part of the taster.

10.4 Funding

In most instances the schools, colleges or training providers funded the taster session themselves. Some organisations had received specific funding for the purpose of developing vocational taster work. In some instances this had come via their local LSC, but both the IFP and Young Apprenticeship funding had also been used to help fund tasters, and, in one case, European Social Funding had been awarded for this purpose.

The relative expense of the tasters depended on the extent to which the school could offer provision on site, or whether or not they had to pay for it to be provided at the local college. Where provision was off site then transport costs could be an additional funding issue, although some providers had decided to absorb this cost as well.

Funding for tasters seems to have been on an ad-hoc basis with, where possible, providers supplementing the school budget with money from one-off sources and initiatives. One college representative interviewed for the main case-studies presented in this report said that their college would be in a position to offer taster sessions, providing sufficient funding was available to cover the costs of teaching and supervision; however, schools in the local area were reported not to have this funding. Although in some areas colleges charged schools for participating in the taster session, others colleges and providers covered the expenses associated with the tasters. This was sometimes from the marketing budget and the expectation was that many of the pupils participating in the tasters would return to the college or training organisation in future to take courses and qualifications for which they would be funded.

10.5 Selection

The funding available and where the taster provision is held influence whether or not places for taster sessions are limited, and therefore whether decisions have to be made about which pupils can receive a taster opportunity. In one case, where pupils undertook a compulsory vocational option, there was no selection for participation in the tasters, although there was an intensive selection process to ensure pupils were of the right level of ability to undertake the resulting chosen vocational option. This model allows the full range of pupils to try all options and makes no judgement about who is best suited to particular learning options.

In one case it was reported that pupils participating in vocational courses at the local college in years 10 and 11 were typically of lower academic ability. The school had judged that these pupils were the most appropriate group to participate, since this group would gain the most from working outside of the classroom environment. Therefore a sample of the most poorly performing individuals had been selected for the tasters on the basis of their SAT results.

Where the tasters were run to enable pupils to experience the subjects offered in the YA programme, only pupils who met the selection criteria were able to take part in the taster sessions.

10.6 Involving parents

The involvement and support of parents was seen as critical to the success not just of the taster process, but also later of pupils' achievement and retention in their vocational options. A variety of methods of communication and involvement were undertaken to gain the support and trust of parents. In some cases parents could take part in the taster sessions with their children, in others they were involved in the process at open days, or via options evenings. One provider ran 'Dads and Lads' days on Saturdays offering tasters in catering for children aged between eight and 15. The aim was to try to encourage pupils to study catering, to see what the college environment was like and had to offer and to increase the college's profile.

Involving parents was seen to be crucial because many parents were reported to have stereotyped or set views of what they expected their children to be learning, of the vocational courses themselves, or ideas of what their children might do in the future for work. For example, one school found some parents of more able pupils resisted their children's involvement in vocational options. Here they had one-to-one meetings with these parents to discuss vocational progression routes and the potential benefits to their child of undertaking a vocational qualification.

10.7 Timing

There was some diversity within the time scale during which the tasters were offered in the three in-depth case-studies. The earliest tasters took place in February before the half term, another set took place in March, and the latest example was a series of tasters which took place in May. For the aims of tasters to be reached their ability to help inform pupils' selection decisions is critical. The provision arranged for February and March was felt to enable pupils to do this effectively, while the taster sessions in May were felt to be too far into the year 9 options process to have much impact on pupils' decisions.

10.8 Promoting diversity

Within the case studies there were some examples of providers trying to encourage girls into atypical areas of industry. One provider offered tasters for girls – '*Girls into Construction and Engineering*'. A separate taster session in this subject area was decided upon because, although girls were reported to be enthusiastic about traditionally male subjects at the taster stage, this enthusiasm had not translated into enrolments in previous years.

The teachers running the tasters had noticed that, in traditionally male subject areas, girls tended to work in different ways from boys. They reported that girls largely seemed to work in concentrated silence and together, whereas the boys were more rowdy and in large numbers they created an air of a building site, which, it was felt, could be intimidating. The girls-only tasters particularly focus on progression through the industry and the types of courses and areas that could lead on from a vocational option in construction, eg quantity surveying.

However, the provider did not offer boys-only tasters for female-stereotyped areas as they had not had the same difficulties with the number of boys enrolling on courses such as health and social care. They believed this was largely because some former pupils had entered atypical areas and then gone on to be successful in the relevant sectors. This, they felt, helped to break down and challenge stereotypes. For example, one male pupil who had completed a health and social care course at the provider had gone on to be a paramedic and was well known amongst the current pupils.

Another provider used role models within some of the taster provision, such as female engineers and male nurses, in order to show young people real examples of opportunities and progression in routes they may not have considered. There were reported to be isolated examples of success and headway was being made in some areas. However, many of the schools reported that the choices the pupils made, both for the tasters in cases where they had to select these, and then for their vocational options, remained largely stereotypical.

Therefore, when pupils have to pre-select options for their tasters rather than trying out all the options available, the process may serve to reinforce more gender-stereotyped choices if girls do not select to try traditionally male subject choices, and vice versa. Being required to try a subject may help alter perceptions which may otherwise remain unchallenged if pupils select their own preferences for tasters.

One provider was examining how to encourage a more diverse range of pupils to undertake work in traditionally female areas. Last year the male applicants to typically female vocational subject areas had low academic ability. The more able boys who wanted to go into areas such as health were recommended by the school to continue on the more traditional route of science subjects and 'A' levels through to degree. As a result this provider felt it was important to demonstrate that vocational pathways could also lead to higher education in order to ensure pupils realised they were not sub-standard.

'[Ensure they know they are not being] "fobbed off with a Mickey Mouse course that they are not going to get anything out of – they are getting high level qualifications to sit alongside their GCSEs"'.

10.9 Outcomes

A number of outcomes and positive impacts were reported as a result of pupils taking part in taster sessions. These included an insight into courses and progression, increased pupil motivation, better stay-on rates post-16, and good levels of retention in vocational options. This would suggest that generally the initial aims of the tasters have been met successfully.

Where pupils went on to select a vocational option in years 10 and 11 then retention on these options was reported to be nearly 100 per cent. This was believed to be because pupils had benefited from a meaningful taster experience which reflected the realities of the course and therefore they knew what they were opting for before they signed up.

After the tasters, staff within the schools reported they had noticed a knock-on effect in other subject areas for some pupils who became happier at school. Pupils were felt to benefit from seeing different styles of learning, to which they may be more suited. This was reported to have had positive impacts on pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning in general and pupils had increased their effort and application in other subject areas. For example, pupils who said they could not do maths, found via the taster sessions that they were able to apply their number or problem-solving skills to practical problems in vocational situations. From this, pupils gained confidence and when they went back into maths or other subjects then there was some transfer across to their performance in these subjects. Pupils could then see the relevance of doing subjects like maths through the vocational options and courses. In one school staff had noticed a better retention on timetable overall with fewer pupils disengaged or truanting.

The tasters are also thought to have helped increase the stay-on rate at post-16 among a group of pupils that traditionally did not participate in education after this age, as many pupils participating in tasters and then vocational courses were reported to continue on to vocational courses at college.

Box 10: Tasters in Derby

A school in Derby is the lead school in the partnership of five secondary schools. There are also training providers, a further education college and two specialist secondary schools in the partnership. The 'cluster' is designed to support each other - either by offering tasters or helping each other to develop provision.

At the lead school every pupil undertakes a vocational course in years 10 and 11. The tasters offered in year 9 relate to the vocational areas of the curriculum they offer. There is a greater input into the options process to explain to pupils what these courses and subjects are about, the sort of things pupils would be expected to do and what would be expected in terms of levels of achievement.

The tasters are compulsory for all year 9 pupils and the regular timetable is suspended while pupils take part in the taster work. This year the taster experience will consist of a carousel where all pupils take part in tasters for eight subject areas, with a two-hour session in each subject area. A ninth subject area, beauty therapy, is to be offered at the local college, which is part of the partnership, later in the year. There is a week of assemblies leading up the taster session to prepare pupils for the sessions, so that they will know what to expect, the purpose of the tasters and what it is hoped they will gain from them.

For the taster sessions the school brings in one person, a painter and decorator, but all the other courses are now run by people who are part of the school staff. For example, travel and tourism is taught by geography teachers, and performing arts is delivered by music, drama and dance staff.

This year the school ran a '*Girls into Construction and Engineering*' taster because in both these subject areas girls are under-represented. The girls-only taster focused on progression through the industry and the types of courses the areas that could lead onto, eg quantity surveying.

Within two to three weeks of the taster sessions the pupils make their initial option choices. However, there is a longer process after that with more assemblies, an options evening, and form tutor involvement when options can be re-selected or refined.

The deputy and assistant head, alongside the vocational course tutors, manage and organise the taster sessions. The head teacher oversees the process and heads the partnership with the other schools in the area. A large amount of time and effort is needed to plan and manage the tasters.

The Learning and Skills Council have funded some of the school's taster work to help with the set-up costs, for example developing a construction and an electrical facility. The taster and the vocational courses themselves are expensive to run and the school has operated the rest of it through the school budget. Funding associated with the YAs helps fund the tasters in the area of health and social care. They are a specialist vocational school and have £90,000 a year for four years and this also helps towards the costs.

Case-Study: Tasters in Cumbria

A college in Cumbria leads a partnership of twelve secondary schools, and provides taster sessions in vocational courses for their year 9 pupils. The tasters include art and design, hairdressing, beauty therapy, motor vehicle, and construction. The college also offers tasters for subject areas offered by other training providers by inviting them into the college to work with pupils. This enables pupils to sample and gain information about the range of options available to them in the local area.

The tasters provide the basis for pupils likely to take vocational GCSEs, NVQ1 and YAs to choose their options. Each school sends a different number of pupils to the college taster days, but usually between 30 and 50, depending on the size of the school. Schools select pupils for the tasters based on academic ability and the results of a selection test. They choose pupils who are likely to get D-G grade GCSEs as they feel these pupils are most likely to benefit from undertaking vocational GCSEs and NVQ level 1 courses and that it will not negatively affect their position in the league tables of the percentage of pupils gaining at least five GCSEs grade A*-C. However, if other pupils request to take part in the tasters then they are allowed.

In recent years tests have been implemented which pupils undertake before the tasters. The college found there was a need to have more detailed information about the young people joining its vocational programmes in order to enable better and quicker configuration of support. The tests help to identify any literacy, numeracy or other support needs before pupils join their vocational route. The initial assessment has been 'seed' funded by the local Learning and Skills Council under the Pathfinder scheme to enable it to be incorporated this year. In future, the college will resource it.

There is a taster booklet for pupils which explains the options in depth, the qualifications that will be awarded and the typical 'routes of progression'. It also details contacts at the college, should pupils want to discuss the tasters or vocational areas in more depth.

The college offers each school blocks of time for their participation in the taster event (normally two half days across two weeks). Taster sessions are run on the college site, by college lecturers and last for one hour. Pupils miss timetabled lessons in order to take part in the sessions.

Each school has a co-ordinator who attends the tasters and they are responsible for the young people while at college. It is useful to have the teachers involved as this provides consistency for young people (should they have any concerns/issues, there is a familiar face); similarly, if there are any behavioural issues in the college environment, teachers are better equipped to deal with this since they are familiar with the young people.

The tasters are run in May and then the pupils choose their options in June, to start courses the following September. It was felt that the tasters may help to meet their aims better if they were run earlier in the academic year so that the tasters can help pupils with their decisions before the year 9 option process.

While out on tasters, pupils miss out on the content of their everyday lessons and this can create tensions. Therefore it was reported to be vital to communicate to the pupils that they must make up for any work that they miss and to get the support of teachers before the start of the process.

In one school, teachers reported to the staff member responsible for organising the tasters if pupils participating in the tasters had failed to catch up with work missed during taster sessions.

In one school the tasters were initially 100 per cent funded by the school. Now there is some funding via the increased flexibility programme, but this is a small amount. The schools have signed a contract with the college and have targets around the number of pupils who will undertake a vocational GCSE, and the number that will undertake a YA.

Case-Study: YA Tasters in Norwich

The partnership, led by a college and involving a number of local secondary schools, began delivery of a YA programme last year, with the introduction of YA in performing arts. This is the first year the partnership has run the taster events, and hence this case-study illustrates the initial set-up stages of planning, resourcing and managing taster sessions, early implementation issues and design principles.

The partnership has developed taster sessions to help to make pupils more aware of the opportunities and options that are open to them, including progression and work demands, and to help assist with selection for the YA programme. At present, these events are in an advanced stage of planning (to take place in March 2006) for three occupational areas: performing arts, construction and health and social care, and the tasters are solely for those pupils who have expressed an interest in undertaking a YA. An express purpose of the taster sessions is to challenge gender-stereotypes in the subject areas.

The taster sessions are being designed to try to accurately simulate what the course would be like in order to avoid giving pupils false perceptions. At the end of the sessions the application process will be explained. Pupils will miss lessons for one day in March to attend to taster event. Parental permission will be sought for pupils to make their own way to the college, and if that is not forthcoming or if there are a large number of pupils then the schools will consider arranging a coach, although this will have cost implications.

The tasters for each YA area will be run on the same day, however, it has not yet been confirmed whether they will run in sequence, giving pupils a more in-depth experience, or parallel to each other, allowing pupils to experience just one of the three options.

A sample of employers who are likely to provide placements for the YAs will also attend the taster sessions so they can input into the taster and explain what the work-based side of the process will be like. Employers have been engaged with the programme via word of mouth from pupils and parents and via the college's brokerage team, which has a good employer network.

Pupils are not selected for the tasters; rather the YAs are marketed to all pupils. However, there are ability criteria for the YAs and pupils must meet these to be able to take part in the tasters.

College and school liaison has been fairly informal so far, but there are plans to increase the number of YAs that are available and hence the number of tasters will also expand. This may

mean that relationships have to become more formalised in order to effectively manage the process.

The funding for the taster session has so far been accommodated within funding for existing provision at the college. However, as taster provision expands, then it is anticipated that a more formal approach to resourcing will be needed.

11 Conclusions and Recommendations

Information is central to challenging (or beginning to challenge) stereotypes of occupations, sectors and vocational qualifications. Ensuring that young people have access to information that *accurately* reflects sector workplaces and the occupations therein can help to shift out-of-date images and concepts. In the first section of this final chapter, we summarise the emergent themes from the perspective of where to take action. In Table 11.1 we provide a short summary of these findings along with the identification of who might be responsible for the action. Following this, we set out some considerations for good practice.

Publicity materials nationally and locally

While young people themselves did not refer to the publicity materials produced by DfES, we did receive positive comments about them from SSCs, partnerships and, in some cases, parents. Our own review of the range of national and local materials made available found these to be of a high standard and generally working well together to provide information from a number of perspectives. However, there were opportunities to develop these, particularly in the images used, so that they challenge people's perceptions and stereotypes of the occupational sectors, as well as ensure that a fully inclusive feel is communicated.

The pictures that were projected, in some cases, portrayed an image that the sector skills councils themselves felt was an outmoded stereotype, for example, the 'blue overall' depiction of the engineering and automotive sectors. Regarding the issues of inclusion and diversity, our recommendation is that images used in such publications should aim to show diverse groups of young people. These considerations apply equally to materials produced for the occupational sectors. In addition, we suggest the inclusion of more detailed sector-based information, which the case study research has shown to be highly important to young people. Evidence elsewhere¹³ suggests

¹³ For instance, a BMRB survey of 1,000 adults, undertaken in April 2004 on behalf of the EOC; and the report of the Women in Work Commission, (Prosser, 2006).

that the information about sectors and occupations should include details on rates of pay so that young women in particular can gain a clear understanding of the implications of the career choices they make.

At the local level, partnerships also need to be aware of how images can communicate out-of-date concepts of occupations. Local materials are essential to provide the detailed information for pupils, and their parents or guardians about the delivery model and qualifications that will be achieved. They also inform about practicalities such as travel arrangements, and health and safety within employer placements and at provider premises. However, there remains a need to be cognisant of occupational stereotypes and to select images that do not serve to further entrench these.

Targets and monitoring - guidance from national stakeholders

We found that very few partnerships set their own EO targets and, where these were established, they related to training uptake in the broad offer of the provider. We suggest there is a need for greater national guidance about expectations for equality of opportunity as this would help ensure that providers prioritise the issue. Although some SSCs had provided information on the diversity targets within the sectors, partnerships largely reported that they had received no information on targeting for diversity from the SSCs or LLSCs. Advising partnerships to set targets that borrow from other qualification routes or SSC aims (eg the one per cent per annum target to increase women's participation in engineering over the next five years) may be a practical solution. Setting targets that aim to build on current achievements (as in the example) may also trigger appropriate positive action for atypical entrants in the application of the YA entry criteria and, at minimum, sustain the extent of diversity that has currently been achieved.

There were also variations in the information that partnerships collect: the minimum requirements for data collection are often driven by national organisations, or the local offices of national bodies (eg use of the Equality and Diversity Impact Measures set by local LSCs). More detailed monitoring is dependent on the local context specific to the partnership and the remit of the lead partner organisation. In two of the partnerships there were clear messages that they felt their own monitoring was superior to that which was required of them. These partnerships felt there was a need amongst the national stakeholders to capture qualitative/supplementary information about the processes and actions taken during recruitment. National guidance is required that sets minimum standards for monitoring and identifies the different kinds of information to be captured.

Operation of the entry criteria at partnership level - national guidance

We found little application of discretion in terms of the way in which the academic criteria were being applied. Although the DfES guidance allows for the criteria to be waived 'in exceptional cases' this appeared to have happened rarely and there is a

strong belief that the criteria are required to ensure recruited pupils will cope with this often demanding programme. From a diversity perspective however, there were several reports of how, following the application of the criteria, atypical entrants had been excluded from consideration. We suggest that the DfES should consider whether any stronger guidance is needed to ensure that schools and providers realise that partnerships may waive one or more of the selection criteria, where there is a special case to be made for a young person. For example, this might be appropriate if someone is particularly well-motivated or has extensive experience in an area but is achieving at a level slightly under that required for the YAs.

Ensuring young people receive the information they need during selection processes - action at partnership level

There appears to be a need for more comprehensive information to be delivered in awareness-raising activities. Some pupils said that they would have liked more information about the topics they would be studying. Others commented that what they really wanted was more detailed information about the subject of the YA rather than the processes involved (eg about the process of application or details regarding their attendance at the college). Late funding notification or entry into the YA partnerships had, in some cases, limited the extent of information the pupils had received. As YAs move towards embedding information-giving within their standard yearly practice, this will be an important area for action.

Working with schools on selection - action at partnership level

Schools have a strong influence on how awareness of the YA opportunity is raised. Generally, two models existed: that of broad spectrum awareness raising (ie to the whole of year 9) or some degree of pre-selection based on previously established preferences or choices of the young people, or based on schools' views about who might gain most from the YA. While these latter approaches may have some benefits in ensuring pupils who apply to the YA are interested in the subject and motivated, they do limit the ability of the lead to promote non-stereotypical choices in the YA. However, it should also be noted that some partnerships felt that the broad spectrum approach was problematic too, in that it did not help to identify whether pupils had the motivation required to undertake a YA.

More broadly, the selection of schools to participate within partnerships can have very direct impacts on the diversity of the cohorts achieved. In two instances, partnerships had taken strategic decisions to involve schools with significant ethnic populations or to encourage the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. While in some occupational areas, the inclusion of schools may be determined by the pre-entry qualifications required for the YA, in others there is greater flexibility to consider this approach.

Supporting (atypical) young apprentices - action at partnership level

Our findings also suggest that there is a need to ensure that young people have sufficient opportunity to give feedback about their experiences, and that providers need to find better ways to identify the support required by the YAs. Indirect approaches, such as observation, may give a false impression, especially if young people are aware that they are being observed in the work setting and are keen to give a good impression. It is clear, too, that general questioning is often not an effective way of eliciting information from young people.

For this reason, while the provision of partnership co-ordinators was generally thought to be supportive for the YAs, and the young apprentices themselves confirmed this in many cases, the extent to which they are seen as helpful depends on the way in which they work with the young people. Asking general questions about how well a placement is going, tends not to elicit useful information. However, taking a structured approach in order to obtain feedback, either in one-to-one or in group meetings is likely to ensure a co-ordinator gains a greater awareness of the young person's support needs. A further suggestion is that co-ordinators or teachers give young people a list of potential types of support that could be made available (such as provision of a mentor, telephone support contact number, increased visit frequency, one-to-one meetings with the co-ordinator etc.) and ask them to indicate which, if any, they would like to have made available.

The evidence suggests, in particular, that, for young women entering male-dominated sectors, critical mass is important, as this effectively serves to build a self-supporting group. Where critical mass has not been reached within the YA cohort, ie where there is just one female, or one YA from an ethnic minority, then providing access to post-16 learners (eg apprentices) with similar backgrounds, both in the college and in the workplace (if possible) may be helpful.

Although there is evidence from young people to suggest that atypical entrants do, to some degree, require additional support, some of the partners did not perceive this need. Where support is sufficiently individualised and structured additional support may not be needed. However, if assumptions are being made about how the young people appear to be doing, there is a strong likelihood that their support needs may be overlooked. As well as improving the means by which feedback is sought from the YAs, it would appear that there is a need for training amongst some staff in the partnerships in order to increase their awareness of the fact that treating everybody in the same way is not necessarily the way to promote equal opportunities.

Support during placements - action at partnership level

Ensuring a well-structured, well planned placement is important to how well supported young people feel during their YA experience. There is a need to ensure

that there is a clear role to fulfil and tasks to undertake, as well as that there is someone for young people to approach if they are unsure about something.

Introducing other atypical workers to them and providing some formal access to these is likely to be beneficial, even if they are drawn from work disciplines other than those covered by the YA. There may be a case for sending pairs of atypical entrants on placement as a support mechanism.

Table 11.1: Summary of recommendations and where action is required

	DfES/LSC	SSCs	Partnerships
Written information			
Care to be taken in the selection of images to ensure these do not portray out-moded stereotypes of sectors	✓		✓
Use images of diverse groups to promote inclusion and diversity (gender, ethnicity etc.)	✓	✓	
Include information about rates of pay in written information about sectors		✓	
Targets and monitoring			
Encourage partnerships to set targets, using - as a baseline - diversity targets from other qualifications/the sector; or current local (or national) YA-sector profiles.	✓	✓	✓
Revise national guidance to set out minimum quantitative monitoring requirements and good practice such as capturing qualitative statements about processes	✓		
Selection and recruitment			
Guidance to re-iterate to partnerships that in exceptional cases discretion may be applied in the entry criteria	✓		
Embed comprehensive information-giving during recruitment eg delivery model, subject, qualification and entry processes			✓
Work with schools on pupil selection to ensure that processes do not unnecessarily limit the choices available			✓
Support and delivery			
Embed multiple mechanisms to capture pupil feedback. Consider use of approaches such as structured questioning and a menu of support options from which (atypical) pupils select			✓
For atypical entrants, critical mass is important. Where this is not achieved in YA recruitment, offer opportunity for atypical YAs to meet atypical entrants to other qualifications			✓
Atypical entrants often require additional support. Partnerships (and national stakeholders) to provide equal opportunities awareness training to co-ordinators etc.	(✓)	(✓)	✓
Look to provide support from atypical workers (even if drawn from other disciplines) during placements			✓

11.1 Good practice considerations

A mechanism for helping to encourage wider choices was the provision of taster sessions. These varied a great deal in their structure and intent, however they were seen as useful for ensuring the motivation of young people as well as giving them knowledge of a broader range of subjects while breaking down stereotyped concepts. Indeed we found examples of tasters (or planning for tasters) to address gender barriers, and some to address the needs of the wider stakeholders in young people's choices (notably parents). There was also a willingness amongst providers to configure tasters in whatever format was required, provided that funding allowed this.

There was evidence that partnerships felt they could have greater impact on the choices young people make if they can gain broad spectrum access when they initially raise awareness of the YA opportunity. This was particularly the case where partnership leads saw their role as raising awareness of the sector and improving knowledge about it. However, there were some cautionary comments regarding how long it may take to see the results of such activities. It is therefore important not to expect to gain very rapid results when trying to embed any EO activities. Assessment of impact may need to be viewed over the longer term.

Parents/guardians play an important role in supporting young people's choices (and it is a DfES requirement that each young person has parental support). They can also exert a strong influence, in some cases leading to the withdrawal of young people from vocational courses. The findings suggest further work to update parents about sector workplaces and different qualifications may be required if greater diversity is to be achieved.

It is also the case that many young people do not receive guidance from any other adults at this age, and our research showed that a number would have liked some external review of their aptitudes. Where guidance was available, most young people reported they had received this from their teachers. However, many of the professional staff in these sectors were critical of the (out-of-date) information held by other professionals, such as those in guidance and teaching. Good practice would be to offer some staff development such as the 'Inside the Real World of Plumbing' day organised by one of the Midlands colleges.

There was a consensus that young people needed to hear about sectors from employers and the YAs have certainly allowed young people to gain a good insight into the sectors. Involving employers (not only for the YA but in wider awareness raising activities) is likely to bring benefits for young people by encouraging wider choices, particularly if atypical role models can be involved.

What should not be overlooked is the fact that employers too will gain from involvement in such activities, as young people are likely to be keen to apply to them as an employer of choice in the future.

A final point is to re-iterate our finding about the need for systems to ensure that young people feedback about their experiences to help inform future planning and action. There were reports of young people feeling that had not received the information they required from tasters, awareness raising events and about their courses or their placements. Without some method to directly ask them about their needs, young people may not volunteer this information, in spite of how supportive the structures appear.