

Learning Provision for Young Parents: A survey of learning providers

Sally Dench

PART OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION OF CARE TO LEARN



Leading learning and skills



REPORT 440

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Learning Provision for Young Parents

A survey of learning providers

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Executive Summary

As part of the national evaluation of Care to Learn, a telephone survey of learning providers was conducted relating to the 2005/06 academic year. Interviews were conducted in 950 learning providers: 249 FE colleges, 90 sixth form colleges, 101 schools without sixth forms, 207 schools with sixth forms, 103 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and 200 Work-Based Learning (WBL) providers.

The survey was conducted to explore the extent to which learning providers are involved with teenage parents and Care to Learn, and the extent to which they are addressing the specific needs of young parents. Data were collected on the number of young parents, their childcare and involvement with Care to Learn, and how support needs were identified and addressed. The data seem to suggest a relatively high level of flexibility and provision for young parents, including within institutions that rarely engage with this group.

Young fathers are eligible for Care to Learn funding as long as they have the main caring responsibility for their child. This survey therefore asked learning providers about young parents generically. However, it is likely that most of the data relate to young mothers as they nearly always have responsibility for their child. In practice, very few young fathers apply for Care to Learn – in 2004/05, five young fathers received the funding; in 2005/06, 12; and 20 in the 06/07 academic year.

Young parents in learning

The sample included learning providers that regularly had young parents studying and others that rarely, if ever, had any dealings with young parents. FE colleges were most likely to regularly have young parents studying with them and to have them in larger numbers. Schools, with or without sixth forms, and sixth form colleges were least likely to have experience of working with young parents.

Although FE colleges were most likely to have some young parents studying with them, these respondents were least likely to be able to report how many. There are a number of possible explanations: the large size of these institutions means that young

parents have a relatively low profile, the information was simply not collected, or the information was not readily to hand.

Funding of childcare

Care to Learn is an important source of funding for childcare. However, a range of other sources is used, including grandparents, Learner Support Funds, European Social Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, funding from various local and national charities. It was also reported that some young parents used their Education Maintenance Allowance, or paid for their own childcare. These are often used in conjunction with each other – for example, Care to Learn funding might be used on some days and grandparents on others.

Three-quarters of FE colleges either provide childcare on-site or have arrangements with other local providers. Just over half of FE colleges were reported to have childcare on-site for all pre-school children, and 17 per cent just for children over two years old. The majority of other learning providers did not have childcare on-site.

Provision of support and advice

Virtually all respondents reported providing some form of information, advice and guidance to young parents regardless of the regularity with which they had young parents learning with them.

Specialist staff were the main providers of support and advice to young parents across all institutions. The extent to which teaching staff also provide such support and advice varies; however, they still play a major role.

There were some variations in the extent to which young parents are singled out as a specific group for support. FE and sixth form colleges now often have well-developed support structures aiming to address the needs of all students. However, around one-third were providing support specifically for young parents. PRUs were most likely to provide support specifically for young parents, which is not surprising as these are set up for groups of young people with particular problems or support needs.

Institutions vary in the extent to which they provide support to all teenage parents or only react to those who ask. FE colleges were most likely to provide support to anyone who asks, while the majority of PRUs provided support to all on an on-going basis.

Those that had some young parents applying for Care to Learn were providing quite wide-ranging support with this – in particular, informing young parents about the funding, providing them with an application form and helping with the completion of this. Hardly any providers were reported to be offering no support at all, and in those that were, respondents usually reported that young parents were able to access external support to meet any needs they had.

Very few learning providers were reported to be doing nothing in relation to encouraging young parents to stay in learning. In particular, it was reported that they encouraged a young person who became pregnant to continue with their course, and talked to them about their options. Providers were frequently working with other local agencies in doing this. Between 80 and 90 per cent of each type of provider, with the exception of FE colleges (just under 70 per cent), reported trying to make courses more flexible for young parents returning to education. Although the majority of FE colleges do report such flexibility, it is this sector which seems to be lagging behind slightly, when compared with others.

This high level of encouragement does seem to be rather at odds with some other evidence. There are a number of possible explanations for this. A number of learning institutions are large organisations; while some flexibility for, and encouragement to, teenage parents may be offered, this might not happen across all departments. In recent years much effort has been made in many local areas to increase support and provision for teenage parents and encourage them to remain in, or return to, learning. These figures perhaps reflect this effort: for example, learning providers, through working with external organisations, provide a range of support and flexibility. There may also be a gap in perception and understanding between different groups. For example, a learning provider might think they are being flexible in providing some marginal adjustments for young parents, while young parents and those working closely with them still experience the provision as inflexible or inappropriate.

The progress of young parents was monitored in virtually all learning providers – often as part of the monitoring of all learners. However, in one-tenth to one-third of providers the progress of young parents was monitored separately.

Similarly, nearly all providers reported that action would be taken if young parents were identified as struggling or in danger of dropping out. They would generally be given more support, or various alternative options would be explored.

Many respondents had no experience of young parents dropping out of a course. However, those that did, perceived the main reasons as being that young parents found balancing studying with parental responsibilities too much, or that they had financial problems. A lack of support from their family was mentioned, particularly by schools and PRUs.

The majority of learning providers were working with external organisations to support young parents. Connexions played a key role; however, providers were also working with a wide range of other organisations.

Flexible learning provision

Most learning providers were providing some flexible provision for young parents. FE colleges, WBL providers and PRUs were generally offering the greatest range of flexible provision. This included allowing young parents to start a course after it had

started, customising short courses to meet the needs of young parents, outreach activities, 'return to learn' courses, and unaccredited and modular provision.

There did, however, seem to be little scope for further expansion of such flexible provision across a larger number of learning providers.

Care to Learn and childcare

The sources of information about Care to Learn were quite varied, and those utilised did differ between learning providers. Schools, whether with or without a sixth form, were far less likely to be utilising various sources of information, and they were most likely to find out about the programme through local contacts. These institutions were less likely to have young parents using Care to Learn, with childcare by grandparents being popular. It seems likely that staff in these institutions were less well informed about Care to Learn.

The national leaflet was most commonly mentioned overall, but local contacts and publicity were an extremely important source of information. This emphasises the importance of continuing and on-going local publicity around Care to Learn.

Respondents in institutions most likely to be involved with teenage parents, and those that have dealings with Care to Learn were more likely to feel confident about their level of knowledge.

Regardless of the extent to which respondents felt that they were well informed or not about Care to Learn, they were asked what further information they would like, or what aspects of the programme they were unsure about. A proportion of respondents simply said that they did not really know about Care to Learn or that they didn't need any further information. The rest reported areas they would like more information on. No single aspect emerges as particularly needed. Respondents just generally wanted more information on Care to Learn. A few specific issues were mentioned, for example, more updating on changes, information on travel expenses and eligibility issues.

The overall message is that information needs to be both broad-based (or general) in nature, and specific, providing precise details about the programme. It also needs to be available through a range of sources and on-going (in other words, a one-off or infrequent publicity campaign will not be enough).

1 Introduction

As part of the national evaluation of Care to Learn, a survey of learning providers was conducted relating to the 2005/06 academic year. Interviews were conducted in 950 learning providers: 249 FE colleges, 90 sixth form colleges, 101 schools without sixth forms, 207 schools with sixth forms, 103 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and 200 Work-Based Learning (WBL) providers.

The survey was conducted to explore the extent to which learning providers are involved with teenage parents and Care to Learn, and the extent to which they are addressing the specific needs of young parents. Data were collected on the number of young parents, their childcare and involvement with Care to Learn, and on how support needs were identified and addressed. The data seem to suggest a relatively high level of flexibility and provision for young parents, including within institutions that rarely engage with this group.

A random sample across all the different types of learning provider, and covering a range of types of geographical location, was selected. Interviews were conducted by telephone. The interviewer explained the purpose of the survey and checked that the person they were speaking to was the most appropriate respondent within the organisation. If the person said they were, an interview was either conducted at that time, or an appointment was made for a more convenient time. If the person did not feel that they were the most appropriate respondent, another name was obtained and the contacting process was repeated.

The job titles of respondents were very varied, including those working in student support services, senior staff in learning providers, those involved with promoting inclusion and attendance. In some cases, a Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) was interviewed. The majority of respondents had among their responsibilities that of providing support to young parents who were studying at the institution. They also had a range of other responsibilities. In colleges, respondents were more likely to be specialist support staff. However, in schools and PRUs they were more likely to combine these support functions with teaching.

This survey looked at the 2005/06 academic year, and therefore focused on parents under the age of 19, or who had started a course before their 19th birthday (Care to Learn funding was extended to cover 19 year olds in August 2006). However, although this age definition was emphasised during the interview, it is likely that some respondents were also thinking about 19 year olds when answering the questions. Indeed, especially in the larger institutions, where there are more young parents studying, although certain people might be identified as young parents, respondents might not always have been exactly sure of their ages.

Young fathers are eligible for Care to Learn funding as long as they have the main caring responsibility for their child. This survey therefore asked learning providers about young parents generically. However, it is likely that most of the data relate to young mothers as they nearly always have responsibility for their child. In practice very few young fathers apply for Care to Learn – in 2004/05, five young fathers received the funding; in 2005/06, 12; and 20 in the 2006/07 academic year.

There are no national data on the extent to which learning providers have experience of dealing with young parents. However, it is known that some institutions will regularly have at least some young parents on their roll, and in some cases relatively large numbers. Others will deal with one or two young parents on an ad hoc basis. The completed sample does include learning providers with a range of levels of involvement with teenage parents, defined by regularity of involvement and the number of young parents studying or training there. It also includes some that were reported rarely, if ever, to have some young parents on their roll.

The learning providers varied in size in terms of their overall student numbers, with PRUs being by far the smallest. The median size (by number of pupils) of PRUs was 32. WBL providers were the second smallest, with an average of 150 trainees. Schools without sixth forms had a median number of 870 pupils. Schools with sixth forms and sixth form colleges had an average of 1,200 and 1,380 pupils. FE colleges were by far the largest, with an average of 8,000 students. The majority of respondents were able to report the number of pupils/students. Only seven respondents in PRUs could not report this: one in a sixth form college, three in schools with a sixth form and three in schools without a sixth form. However, nine per cent (23) of college respondents and 11 per cent (23) of WBL providers could not provide these data.

The rest of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 reports the extent to which this sample of learning providers were engaged with young parents and their involvement with Care to Learn.
- Chapter 3 looks at the support provided to young parents.
- Chapter 4 addresses some issues around the flexibility of learning provision.
- Chapter 5 looks at childcare and the availability of information on Care to Learn.
- Finally, Chapter 6 draws some conclusions.

2 Young Parents in Learning

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the number of young parents studying or training with this sample of learning providers. A range of questions was asked as, based on past experience, it seemed likely that a proportion would not have this information (for example, Dench and Evans, 2002¹). Information on whether students/trainees have parental responsibilities is more likely to be kept now than in the past. For example, with a focus on vulnerable groups and the specific needs of teenage parents, and an emphasis on widening participation in learning, systems are more likely to be in place so that take-up by various vulnerable groups can be monitored.

As might be expected, this sample of learning providers did vary in the extent to which they had any experience of dealing with young parents; the survey does not just include those who regularly deal with this group, or who deal with relatively large numbers of them.

This chapter looks at the number of young parents studying/training with these learning providers, and the extent to which respondents were able to provide this information. It goes on to look briefly at the type of course these young parents were doing, and how their childcare was funded. As well as looking at the use of Care to Learn to fund childcare, the survey tried to collect information about those young parents who were not accessing this funding and how they funded their childcare. Respondents were often not able to report the number of young parents not accessing Care to Learn. This is not really surprising, given that respondents could often not say how many young parents in total were learning with them. However, what these data *do* show is something about the extent to which alternatives to Care to Learn and combinations of childcare funding were being utilised.

¹ Dench S, Evans C (2002), *Childcare, 16 to 19 Year Old Parents and Further Education*, Department for Education and Skills.

2.2 Young parents studying with these learning providers

By no means all the learning providers in the study had young parents regularly studying or training with them (Table 2.1). The patterns of involvement across learning providers shown in this table do seem logical. The survey includes learning providers that rarely, if ever, have dealings with young parents, although such providers are probably under represented in the sample. There are no national data to compare this with. It is known that the majority of schools rarely have any young parents and this is reflected in the data. By definition, given that the number of teenage parents increases with age, those institutions providing courses for older teenagers are more likely to have some contact with young parents – this again is reflected in the table. Some PRUs have been set up specifically to address just the needs of teenage parents, while others address the needs of other groups of young people that some young parents are likely to fall into (such as persistent non-attenders, young people with behavioural problems). Not every area has a PRU specifically for young parents, and we know from qualitative work conducted with young parents not in learning¹ that a number had been in some sort of more general PRU. Again, WBL providers offering basic courses, including Entry to Employment (E2E), would be expected to include teenage parents. These data do not claim to provide a representative picture of the extent to which learning providers have experience of catering for teenage parents, but rather, they give a context to the survey findings presented in this report.

Table 2.1: Extent to which they ever had young parents studying/training (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Regularly have more than five young parents studying/training	65	16	0	2	28	23
Regularly have up to five young parents studying/training	15	23	4	4	14	23
Have one or two young parents studying/training occasionally	9	41	55	49	38	38
Rarely, if ever, have any young parents studying/training	5	18	42	44	20	13
Don't know	6	2	0	1	0	3
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

¹ Dench S, Bellis A, Tuohy S (2007), *Young Mothers Not in Learning. A qualitative study of barriers and attitudes*, IES Report 439.

Further questions were asked about the number of young parents currently studying with a provider. Table 2.2 reports the number studying in the 2005/06 academic year. The patterns are broadly similar to those in Table 2.1, although just looking at Table 2.1 would suggest higher levels of involvement than in Table 2.2. In some areas, for example those with higher levels of teenage pregnancy, schools will often have some young parents. However, in the majority of cases, schools, in particular, will only have ad hoc dealings with young parents. What is particularly different about the two tables are the data relating to FE colleges. While these are most likely to report regularly dealing with teenage parents in Table 2.1, respondents nearly always did not know how many young parents were studying there. FE colleges, and a few WBL providers, were the only ones dealing with a large number of young parents in that academic year. For example, eight WBL providers reported having between 20 and 50 young parents and one had 100; 15 FE colleges reported between 20 and 50 young parents, two between 70 and 100, one 150, one 200 and one 250. One PRU reported having 65 young parents. Some PRUs cater just for teenage mothers who cannot, for a range of reasons, remain in a mainstream school. This is usually because the young women themselves are reluctant to remain in, or return to, school. Indeed, many have a history of poor attendance prior to pregnancy, and placing them in a PRU is the only means of ensuring they attend on becoming a mother (this issue is explored further in the report on the flexibility of learning¹). Other PRUs cater more generally for all young people with poor attendance, and might rarely come into contact with teenage mothers.

These data show that the majority of learning providers therefore only have to address the needs of a small number of young parents, often among the needs of many other students with varying, but equally demanding, requirements.

Table 2.2: Number of young parents currently studying (2005/06) (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
None	5	26	57	52	36	29
1 or 2	6	30	34	38	27	21
3-5	6	18	5	5	10	12
More than 5	16	7	2	10	27	20
Don't know	67	19	2	2	0	18
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

¹ Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

Those who were unable to say how many young parents were studying/training with them were asked the main reason for this (Table 2.3). Firstly, it is notable that respondents in hardly any schools, and none of the PRUs, did not know the number of young parents. This is not surprising; PRUs are very small units where everyone knows everyone. Schools deal with young people of statutory school age and should therefore know. They are also likely to have stricter registration and attendance procedures in place than, for example, FE colleges dealing mainly with older young people. The main reason for not being able to report the number of young parents was that respondents did not have this information to hand. Responses to this question were unprompted and therefore it is possible that this could mean they did not collect the information. However, in a telephone survey of this nature, it is always the case that some respondents are unable to access factual data of this kind quickly. Respondents in FE colleges were most likely to report that this information was not collected. The third row of Table 2.3 – ‘only hear about young parents if they are struggling’ – is interesting, illustrating that collecting information on this group is not always a matter of course, but that attempts are made to pick up those struggling. However, this row only represents a relatively small number of respondents and should not be over-emphasised.

Table 2.3: Reasons for not knowing the number of young parents studying (column per cent - note these are based on small numbers, and percentages are presented to be illustrative)

	FE college	Sixth form college	WBL
Don't collect this information	26	12	3
Don't have this information to hand	40	47	57
Only hear about young parents if they are struggling	19	12	8
Not part of my job	10	29	22
No single person has responsibility for young parents	1	0	8
Other	4	0	3
<i>N</i> =	167	17	37

Note: Only two schools without sixth forms did not know how many young parents were studying with them - one respondent did not have the information to hand and one said it was not part of their job. Only four schools with sixth forms were unable to report the number - three respondents did not have this information to hand, and one said it was not part of their job.

Source: IES survey, 2006

The extent to which young parents were studying full time and on mainstream courses varied to some degree between providers (Tables 2.4 and 2.5 respectively). These data are only available for providers that had some young parents studying with them and knew how many; therefore, they only provide a partial picture. Between 55 and 60 per cent of respondents in FE and sixth form colleges and schools with a sixth form reported that all young parents studying with them were doing so

full time. Although almost a quarter of respondents in FE colleges didn't know, the majority of these (two-thirds of this quarter) thought that the majority were studying full time. Very few were thought to be studying part time. This does seem to overstate the proportion of young parents who study full time, as it is known from qualitative interviews that many do study part time. This might reflect the level of detailed knowledge of respondents about teenage mothers studying in an institution. For example, many respondents will only have had contact with a sub-group of these young women who study with them, and may be reflecting their partial knowledge. Another explanation is the definition of a full-time and part-time course. For example, a full-time course often does not require five days a week and all-day attendance. Young parents may be studying full time on their course, but only attending the learning provider part time.

Other young parents were on courses involving various hours. PRUs and schools without sixth forms were the only providers where relatively large proportions of young parents were not studying full time (around one-third). PRUs do provide a flexible alternative to school for young parents; while maintaining strict attendance requirements, they often offer a shorter day.

Table 2.4: Proportion studying full and part time (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
All studying part time	1	4	34	14	39	8
Mix of full-time and part-time study	20	38	15	29	18	18
All studying full time	56	58	49	55	41	74
Don't know	23	0	2	2	2	0
<i>N</i> =	70	50	41	96	66	107

Note: Based on providers that had some young parents studying with them and where the respondent was able to report how many.

Source: IES survey, 2006

An important part of attracting young parents back to learning, or retaining them in learning, is that there is some form of flexible provision. This might be in terms, for example, of courses that help those who have missed out at school and need to improve their basic skills, or that improve their confidence through offering a route back into learning that shows them they can achieve. Respondents were asked about the extent to which young parents were in mainstream courses (Table 2.5).

Mainstream courses are those leading to qualifications in a range of vocational and academic subjects and are generally open to all with the relevant prior qualifications. The survey asked about young parents studying on these, compared with those on 'return to learn' type courses that provide, for example, basic skills, and work with motivations, etc. These latter do, however, often also lead to qualifications, for example, in basic skills or Youth Achievement Awards.

Table 2.5: Proportion studying on mainstream courses (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit
None studying on mainstream courses	0	0	5	15	8
Mix of mainstream and other courses	15	42	31	11	13
All studying on mainstream courses	71	58	59	73	79
Don't know	14	0	5	1	0
<i>N</i> =	70	50	41	96	66

Note: Based on providers that had some young parents studying with them and where the respondent was able to report how many.

Source: IES survey, 2006

WBL providers were asked a different question. Sixty-six per cent reported having young parents on E2E courses and 52 per cent on apprenticeships (again, these responses are based on those that had young parents studying with them and where respondents were able to report the number).

2.3 Funding of childcare

Care to Learn is an important source of funding for childcare; however, a range of other sources is also used. It should be remembered that these data rely on the knowledge of respondents in learning providers, not all of whom had regular dealings with Care to Learn.

Several points emerge (Table 2.6). Care to Learn funding appears to be little utilised in some learning providers – especially schools and those dealing with the younger teenage parents. Grandparents are important providers of childcare. From the percentages below it can be seen that there is considerable overlap; grandparents are providing childcare alongside other sources of funding. However, in a number of cases, grandparents seem to be providing all the childcare, again especially for the younger parents. The figures for schools without a sixth form and PRUs strongly suggest this – both only deal with young people of statutory school age. Qualitative work conducted in the course of other parts of the evaluation reinforces this point. It was reported by a range of respondents that the younger young parents most commonly prefer to use their own mother for childcare, most of whom would not be in receipt of Care to Learn (unless a registered childminder).

Other financial support was mentioned most often by FE colleges, and when these respondents were asked what this was, the most common responses were Learner Support Funds (LSF), college hardship and similar funds. Other sources, mentioned across the range of learning providers but by only a few in each case, included:

European Social Fund (ESF), Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), funding from various local and national charities, Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), social services and Sure Start.

Those reporting that young parents paid for the childcare themselves were nearly all FE or sixth form colleges, or WBL providers. These would include young parents who were old enough to work, and it is possible that working partners were paying.

Table 2.6: Proportion of learning providers reporting that young parents studying with them used each source of childcare (cell percentages, ie 89 per cent of respondents in FE colleges reported that there were young parents studying with them who accessed Care to Learn)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Care to Learn	89	82	26	31	55	56
Grandparents	67	55	77	49	62	57
Other financial support	76	33	9	14	11	18
Pay for own childcare	23	9	2	1	0	17
<i>N</i> =	237	67	43	100	66	144

Note: This table excludes all learning providers that had no young parents studying with them during the 2005/06 academic year.

Source: IES survey, 2006

Where Care to Learn funding was not being accessed, respondents were asked the reasons for this. No single clear reason emerges; a range was mentioned, and each by only a few respondents. A total of 29 respondents reported not knowing about the funding, and 58 reported that the funding wasn't needed as family/friends cared for the child. Other reasons were rather ad hoc, including a few reporting that the child stayed with their mother while she studied, other sources of funding being available, the child being in foster care. Only a very few responses suggested difficulties with Care to Learn: for example, two respondents reported, mistakenly, that the young parent was too young to apply, another that they found it difficult to apply and another that the young person could not be bothered to fill in the form.

Among learning providers that had any experience of young parents applying for Care to Learn, the majority of young parents were reported to have received all the funding they had applied for. The numbers become small when looking at how those not receiving all the funding coped with their additional childcare costs. The most common response from learning providers was that families provided care. A number of FE colleges had drawn on their own funding, in particular LSF, to support these young parents, as had a few other providers. It was reported that some young parents had dropped out and that a few had spread their studies over a longer period. A few others had funded themselves.

Table 2.7: Whether childcare is provided by learning providers (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
No	26	76	86	85	67	79
No - but have arrangements with local providers	4	4	8	8	10	7
Yes - but only for those aged over 2 years	17	3	3	1	1	2
Yes - for all pre-school children	52	16	3	5	20	12
Other	<1	1	0	<1	2	1
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

A final question on childcare asked whether each learning provider had its own childcare provision (Table 2.7). FE colleges and PRUs were most likely to have provision on-site. This is not surprising. FE colleges cater for students of all ages and many of these, in addition to teenage parents, will require childcare. Making provision on-site and subsidising a nursery, for example, is one way they can utilise their LSF childcare allocation. A number of PRUs cater only for young parents, and the provision of childcare on-site is an important part of their overall service. Many young parents are reluctant to leave their child with others, and having provision at their place of learning can help to reassure them. While it may seem surprising that any schools have childcare provision, these will not be providing specifically for young parents, but will have a nursery on-site as part of their general provision.

3 Provision of Support and Advice

3.1 Introduction

Evidence from a range of other sources, including other parts of this evaluation and visits by the Care to Learn Childcare Support Manager¹, highlights the importance of providing support and advice to young parents to help them enter and remain in learning. This support and advice often needs to be wide ranging, not just relating to selecting and coping with a course, but also in relation to other aspects of their lives. Some young parents, in particular those who were previously motivated to learn and who have strong family support and other networks, may require little additional support and advice. However, others have extensive needs and often require intensive help. These issues are explored in more depth in other parts of the evaluation.² However, the survey data reported here did explore the ways in which learning providers support young parents, and the structures they have in place to do this.

This chapter looks at how support is structured, how support needs are identified, the support given to young parents when applying for Care to Learn, and issues around preventing drop-out. It also reports on the range of other organisations that learning providers work with to help young parents return to, or remain in, learning.

¹ The LSC employs a Childcare Support Manager within the Care to Learn team. She visits the teams who work with teenage parents (particularly mothers) at a local level, including promoting and supporting young parents on Care to Learn. These visits may be initiated by someone in a local area or by the LSC (eg in an area where take-up is low). Each visit is written up, outlining the structures for supporting young parents in an area and issues around the delivery of Care to Learn; this note also recommends future actions to expand take-up. The visit reports are sent to those in the local area and also shared within the Care to Learn team and the programme evaluators.

² Dench S, Bellis A, Tuohy S (2007), *Young Mothers Not in Learning. A qualitative study of barriers and attitudes*, IES Report 439; Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

These data give a generally positive view of the extent and nature of support provided by learning providers to young parents. This does seem to be slightly at odds with some of the other sources of evidence referred to in the first paragraph of this section. These suggest that there is still much to be done in encouraging providers to engage with and support young parents more fully.

There is a range of possible reasons for this. A survey such as this can only draw on the knowledge and experience of one person representing what is sometimes a large organisation with a range of people acting in different ways. While one part of an organisation may be supportive, another may not. The findings will only relate to the young parents these learning provider respondents know about, and in some large institutions, especially in those catering for those aged over 16, young parents may not always be identified or identify themselves. Perceptions as to what are appropriate levels of support may also vary between learning institutions and those on the receiving end.

In Chapter 2 it was shown that these learning providers had varying levels of experience in dealing with the needs of young parents. While some regularly had a number of young parents studying or training with them, others rarely, if ever, had any. Others did not really know. Those with more and greater experience of dealing with young parents were generally more likely to report the higher levels of support. However, relatively high numbers of those not regularly addressing the needs of young parents also reported being able to provide support.

3.2 General provision of support

Virtually all of this sample of learning providers was reported as being able to provide support to young parents in some form or other. Almost all respondents reported providing some form of information, advice and guidance, regardless of the regularity with which they had young parents learning with them. Indeed, only five FE colleges, one school with a sixth form and two WBL providers said that they did not offer some form of support. These rarely had young parents studying with them. Table 3.1 shows the ways in which the provision of information, advice and guidance is provided to young parents. It provides a picture of two aspects of support. The top rows (above the line) show the extent to which support is provided by specialist staff. These might be PAs, part of the Learner Support function, counsellors, etc. These staff are not normally involved in teaching a subject, but have pastoral and related functions. In a few types of learning provider, eg PRUs, there is likely to be more overlap between these functions. A few respondents reported drawing on external agencies, such as Connexions, social workers, and youth services, to support young parents. The lower part of the table shows the extent to which support is provided specifically for young parents, or as part of more general support available to all.

Table 3.1: How information, advice and guidance is provided to young parents (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
By specialist staff	91	94	91	90	94	61
By teaching staff	58	90	79	82	90	55
Specifically for young parents	35	37	69	65	91	41
Support for young parents part of general support available	80	88	71	70	81	62
N =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

The majority of providers had specialist staff to provide support (Table 3.1) – over 90 per cent – apart from WBL providers, where just under one-third reported having specialist staff. Teaching staff were also involved, especially in schools, sixth forms and PRUs. Schools and sixth forms will have tutor and head-of-year systems in place so that pupils have a member of staff who is responsible for supporting them as necessary. Qualitative interviews conducted as part of the overall evaluation,¹ as well as anecdotal evidence, suggest that the situation in colleges can vary, with some staff being very involved in providing broader support, and others focusing largely on teaching their subject.

The lower part of Table 3.1 also shows some variations in the extent to which young parents are singled out as a specific group for support. FE and sixth form colleges now often have well-developed support structures aimed at addressing the needs of all students, and this seems to be reflected in the table. However, around one-third were providing support specifically for young parents. PRUs were most likely to provide support specifically for young parents, which is not surprising as these are set up for groups of young people with particular problems or support needs.

These data provide a picture of high levels of support being available, which is perhaps slightly at odds with other sources of evidence. For example, other parts of this evaluation have found that the extent and nature of support provided to young parents in colleges is rather patchy.² Table 3.1 suggests that support is available, but says nothing about the form it comes in, its general suitability to young parents or the extent to which it is utilised.

¹ Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

² See for example, Dench S (2006), *Implementation and Effectiveness of Care to Learn: A Survey of Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators*, DfES/Care to Learn; Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

Table 3.2 shows how support needs are identified in each of the different types of learning provision. Respondents were asked which statement best described the situation in their establishment. These data go some way in helping to explain why the high availability of support suggested in Table 3.1 seems to exaggerate what happens in practice. There is a significant element of support being provided to anyone who asks, especially in FE colleges, but also in around one-quarter of schools and sixth forms. This means that those who do not know who to ask, or who do not, in some way, come to the attention of staff, are less likely to be having any support needs addressed. Around one-quarter of schools reported monitoring progress and offering support as required, which means that needs should emerge. However, some young people do manage to avoid the attention of the authorities. Indeed, in interviews conducted for the qualitative study on learning provision for young parents, it was reported that some young people manage to slip through all services and not attend school.¹ It only becomes noticed that they are not attending when they become pregnant and have contact with, for example, a teenage midwife who passes their details to the local teenage-pregnancy team.

PRUs and WBL providers were most likely to be providing support to all, or monitoring progress and offering help/advice as needed. As already mentioned, PRUs are specifically set up to deal with young people experiencing particular difficulties, and by definition deal with small groups and provide intensive support. WBL providers may also be dealing with more vulnerable young people, and hence support is an integral part of the package.

Table 3.2: How support needs are identified (column per cent - asked of those who reported providing some support)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Support is provided to all on an on-going basis	35	31	46	53	80	70
Support is provided to anyone who asks	56	27	23	22	7	10
Monitor progress and offer support if necessary	6	16	26	22	12	21
Depends - can be any of the above	<1	26	5	3	0	0
<i>N</i> =	240	90	100	205	103	194

Source: IES survey, 2006

¹ Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

3.3 Support when applying for Care to Learn

This sample of learning providers had what appears to be fairly high levels of involvement with Care to Learn, given the extent to which they have dealings with young parents (reported in Table 2.1). Looking at the last row in Table 3.3, only one-tenth of FE colleges and nearly one-fifth of sixth form colleges reported having no experience of anyone applying for Care to Learn. Around three-quarters of schools (with or without a sixth form) had no experience of the programme, half of PRUs and a third of WBL providers.

Table 3.3: Support provided to young parents when applying for Care to Learn (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Told them about availability of funding	79	80	14	20	41	56
Provided with application form	81	75	10	17	38	57
Helped complete application form	83	73	13	18	39	55
Helped find suitable childcare	60	43	9	12	31	37
Helped identify a suitable course	63	66	11	12	39	30
Offered additional funding (eg from LSF)	64	67	2	4	11	18
No support provided	4	0	2	0	0	2
Haven't had anyone apply for funding	11	17	76	73	56	34
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

Those that had some young parents applying for Care to Learn were providing quite wide-ranging support – in particular informing young parents about the funding, providing application forms, and helping with the completion of these. Hardly any were reported to be providing no support at all (only four per cent of FE colleges, two per cent of schools without sixth forms and two per cent of WBL providers). The most common reason for not providing support was that the young parents were given help through an external organisation. Two respondents reported that families helped, and two that the young parents did not seem to need any support.

3.4 Encouraging young parents to stay in learning

Table 3.4 shows very high levels of activity being provided to help young parents remain in learning. Very few learning providers were reported to be doing nothing. In particular, it was reported that they encouraged a young person who became pregnant to continue their course, and talked to them about their options. Providers were often

working with other local agencies in doing this. Given that schools are dealing with young people who legally have to be in education, it is perhaps surprising that not all of them were reported to be encouraging pregnant teenagers to remain in education. FE colleges were slightly less likely to report working with these young people to help them continue in education. Nevertheless, over 80 per cent were doing so.

The proportion of providers reported to have some form of outreach activity also seems high. Organisations responding to this survey were perhaps more likely to be sympathetic to young parents although, as shown in the previous chapter, not all had young parents studying with them.

Between 80 and 90 per cent of each type of provider, with the exception of FE colleges (just under 70 per cent), reported trying to make courses more flexible for young parents returning to education. Although the majority of FE colleges do report such flexibility, it is this sector which seems to be lagging slightly when compared with others.

Table 3.4: Activities aimed at encouraging young parents to remain in or return to learning (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
If a young person becomes pregnant we encourage them to continue their course	86	91	93	98	98	96
If a young person becomes pregnant we talk to them about options for staying in education	87	100	96	98	99	95
We work with other local agencies/ organisations to ensure that young parents can find suitable learning provision	84	94	95	96	91	86
We provide outreach activities to help young parents return to learning	54	31	63	54	64	48
We publicise our courses and the support available in places used by young parents	67	49	22	19	25	71
We will try to make courses more flexible for young parents returning to education	68	88	85	80	88	82
Nothing	6	0	3	1	1	4
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

This high level of encouragement does seem to be rather at odds with some of the data collected by a qualitative study¹ and what is generally reported. There are a number of possible explanations for this. A number of learning institutions are large organisations; while some flexibility for, and encouragement to, teenage parents may be offered, this might not happen across all departments. In recent years, much effort has been made in many local areas to increase support and provision for teenage parents and encourage them to remain in, or return to, learning. These figures perhaps reflect this effort: for example, learning providers through working jointly with external organisations can provide a range of support and flexibility. There may also be a gap in perception and understanding between different groups. For example, a learning provider might think they are being flexible in providing some marginal adjustments for young parents, while young parents and those working closely with them still experience the provision as inflexible or inappropriate.

3.5 Monitoring the progress of young parents

The majority of providers were monitoring the progress of young parents (Table 3.6). The last row of Table 3.5 shows that FE colleges and WBL providers were the most likely to report not monitoring the progress of young parents – however, only nine and seven per cent respectively were in this category. Young parents were not usually being singled out for separate monitoring – it was more usual for them to be monitored as part of a more general process applied to all students, especially in FE and sixth form colleges. However, between one-quarter and one-third of respondents in schools and PRUs did report that progress of young parents was monitored separately to that of all pupils.

Table 3.5: Monitoring the progress of young parents while learning (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Progress of young parents is monitored as part of the monitoring of all learners	82	90	72	65	70	88
Progress of young parents is monitored separately	11	10	23	33	30	3
No monitoring of young parents	7	0	5	1	0	9
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

¹ Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

Respondents were read a list of possible monitoring activities, and their responses are given in Table 3.6. In addition, a range of other activities was mentioned, unprompted, each by very small numbers of respondents. For example: childcare issues, parenting ability, general health, behaviour, emotional well-being, contact with other agencies, support from parents. There was only one unprompted activity mentioned by a larger proportion of respondents, and that was the monitoring of attendance (by 30 per cent of FE colleges and 13, 11, five and four per cent of sixth form colleges, schools without a sixth form, schools with a sixth form and PRUs respectively). This is something which is increasingly tightly monitored by many learning providers. Schools have to ensure that those up to the statutory leaving age are present. The advent of EMAs has led to attendance monitoring of those eligible, as regular attendance is one condition of its receipt. This has had a knock-on effect, leading to greater attendance-monitoring of students in general. Some colleges have adopted the same or similar criteria as they impose for EMA for those in receipt of LSF.

Table 3.6: Which aspects of the progress of young parents are monitored (cell per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Their ability to cope with the work	65	97	90	96	96	74
Their ability to cope with student/trainee life generally	59	92	88	95	95	75
The likelihood of dropping out	57	91	90	90	89	75
External difficulties that might impact on their ability to study	54	92	84	81	96	72
Any financial difficulties	68	94	61	69	79	72
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

Again, the table reflects relatively high levels of involvement with teenage parents. Another theme beginning to emerge is that although the majority of FE colleges are monitoring a range of aspects of progress, they do seem to lag behind other types of learning provider in this respect. Seven per cent were not monitoring the progress of young parents at all, and amongst those that were, lower proportions reported each type of monitoring listed in Table 3.6. They were more likely than other learning providers to report monitoring attendance. This was, however, an unprompted response, which is why respondents were not consistently asked about this.

3.6 Identifying and dealing with drop-out

A range of actions were taken if a young parent was identified as struggling or likely to drop-out (Table 3.7). In addition to those listed in the table, a range of other actions was mentioned, but each by only a few respondents: for example, contacting parents/family, encouraging interaction with other students who were young parents, and offering home tuition/visits.

Trying to offer more support in general, looking at individual needs and involving external agencies were most commonly mentioned, and there is no clear pattern by type of learning provider. What is clear from the table is that respondents adopted a range of approaches, and hardly any reported that nothing happened. Looking at options for returning later was mentioned by very few respondents. It is possible that this was left to professionals working with young parents outside their learning provider, but this is something that providers should also be addressing.

Table 3.7: Actions taken if a young parent identified as struggling or in danger of dropping out (cell per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Try to generally provide more support	64	59	65	73	67	53
Look at individual reasons for leaving and try to address these	43	70	41	56	59	56
Refer them to a specialist/external adviser	54	31	66	57	69	55
If financial difficulties, try to advise/help with this	27	26	10	19	19	7
Look at other options, eg fewer hours	13	28	28	33	37	15
Suggest more suitable courses/help them change course	12	13	21	21	21	10
Look at options for returning later	5	7	8	13	13	9
Visits/reviews meetings with tutors/guidance workers etc.	8	9	3	1	3	8
Nothing	4	0	1	1	0	2
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

Some differences between different types of learning provider emerge towards the bottom of the table. For example, FE and sixth form colleges are more likely to report helping with financial difficulties, compared with other providers. This could be because they are more likely to be dealing with older young parents, who may be

living independently from their family. These institutions also have financial support to administer and do allocate funds to students in need.

Looking at other options and helping young parents to change course were more common in schools and PRUs than in FE colleges. The expanding range of alternatives to a straightforward GCSE/academic timetable, including the alternative curriculum, is perhaps offering more scope for these institutions to offer more varied activities. Furthermore, as they are dealing with young parents who should legally be in education, there is perhaps more onus on them to explore alternatives.

WBL providers, sixth form and FE colleges were most likely to report teenage parents having dropped out during the academic year (Table 3.8). Nevertheless, five per cent of schools without sixth forms and 15 per cent of PRUs reported some drop-out. These types of institution would be working with young parents below the statutory school leaving age. It cannot be said from the survey whether such drop-out was due to lack of support or is rather a reflection of the difficulties in keeping some young parents engaged in education. It is probably a combination. However, over recent years more support and alternatives have been introduced in many areas to try and retain young parents in education. PRUs have contact with the most disengaged young people, usually as a last resort when schools cannot cater for them or when their specific needs cannot be addressed through attending a mainstream school – hence a higher level of drop-outs might be expected, despite efforts being put into addressing this.

Table 3.8: Proportion of each type of learning provider having some young parents drop-out (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Had young parents drop-out	38	30	5	8	15	27
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

The higher level of drop-out from FE and sixth form colleges and WBL providers will reflect a range of issues. These young parents are no longer required by law to be having an education. A lack of support will be part of the cause. However, some young parents will, like all young people, start a course and find it is not for them. This is in addition to the added complexities of combining studying with parental responsibilities.

Where there had been any drop-out this usually involved only one or two young parents, although it was reported that ten had dropped out of one FE college and out of one WBL provider. FE colleges and WBL providers were also more likely to say that they did not know how many had dropped out.

All respondents were asked about their perceptions of why young parents drop out of a course (Table 3.9). The most common reason reported was that young parents find

balancing study and having parental responsibilities too much. Between 14 and 34 per cent of respondents reported having no experience of young parents dropping out and hence were unable to comment on their reasons for doing so. Some of these had little experience of young parents, while others had little drop-out. Around one-third of those in sixth form colleges reported having little experience. Part of the explanation of this is likely to be that many young parents in these institutions were on an academic track and more highly motivated than those in some other providers.

There were some differences by type of provider. Schools with sixth forms and PRUs were more likely than others to comment on the lack of family support. PRUs address the needs of the most disaffected young parents (and it is often the case that many were disaffected before becoming pregnant). Lack of parental support can be an issue for this group, and this is emerging from the qualitative studies being conducted as part of the evaluation.¹

A significant minority of learning provider respondents mentioned issues around childcare as a reason for young parents dropping out of their course. However, it was not so much funding issues that were causing problems as childcare breaking down or being unsatisfactory in some way.

Table 3.9: Perceptions of reasons for young parents dropping out of a course (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Don't have a history of young parents dropping out/no experience of this/don't know	14	34	27	19	18	25
Find balancing study and being a parent too much	66	49	56	62	57	36
Financial problems	28	19	5	12	6	27
Childcare unsatisfactory or breaks down	7	9	11	14	8	7
Not enough funding to cover all their childcare needs	3	0	6	6	6	2
Lack of support from family	8	7	12	24	22	5
DK	10	6	5	2	2	
N =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

¹ Dench S, Bellis A, Tuohy A (2007), *Young Mothers Not in Learning. A qualitative study of barriers and attitudes*, IES Report 439; Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

Respondents were not read out a list of possible responses to the question on reasons for drop-out, but interviewers did code as far as possible to a list of pre-coded responses. Two reasons for drop-out that it was thought might come up were peer pressures/negative attitudes of other students/trainees and the negative or inflexible attitudes of staff. These did not emerge amongst the responses. Pregnancy or illness during pregnancy was mentioned as a reason for drop-out by 11 per cent of WBL providers; however, only five other providers mentioned this.

A few other reasons were mentioned, but each by only a few respondents. These included problems with housing, young parents generally being low attainers and lacking motivation, isolation, looking after their child being a bigger priority, problems with their own health, peer pressure from other young parents, illness of the child and relationship issues.

In the majority of learning providers there was reported to be some follow-up if a young person drops out. FE colleges were most likely to not provide any follow-up (just over one-tenth), and nearly one-fifth of respondents reported not knowing. What is clear from Table 3.10 is that although around one-half of most types of learning provider – three-quarters of WBL providers – provided follow-up themselves, there was a relatively high level of working with other organisations. The next section looks at which local organisations learning providers work with to help young parents remain in, or return to, learning.

Table 3.10: Whether any follow-up if a young parent drops out (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Yes - by school/college/WBL staff	51	49	47	57	52	77
Yes - by other organisations	21	40	42	32	43	14
No	12	2	3	2	2	3
Don't know	17	9	9	10	3	6
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

3.7 Other organisations worked with

Virtually all the learning providers participating in this survey were reported to be working with some other local organisations to support teenage parents remaining in, or returning to, learning. This was not just about preventing drop-out, but also about attracting young parents into learning and supporting them while they were there.

A number of points emerge from Table 3.11. A wide range of organisations are involved with learning providers in supporting young parents. The Connexions service plays a key role. Over half the schools (with or without a sixth form) and PRUs

reported working with health services. Increasingly, health visitors and midwives are becoming involved in directing young parents towards learning, or at least ensuring that all the appropriate services (including Connexions and learning providers) are informed so that these young parents do not 'fall out of the system'.

It is perhaps not surprising that schools and PRUs are most likely to have contact with Educational Welfare Services and Reintegration Officers, as all deal with the needs of young parents who are of statutory school age. Furthermore, PRUs are addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and disengaged young people, and are likely to be involved with a range of services.

FE and sixth form colleges, also schools with sixth forms, were much less likely to work with other learning providers. PRUs and WBL providers, also schools without sixth forms were more likely to work with other learning providers. On one level this is not surprising, for example, PRUs will nearly always have some involvement with the school a young parent should be attending. Indeed, the young parent might return to school for some lessons.

Only a few other types of organisation were mentioned that are not included in the table, each by a few respondents at most. These included counselling services, the Citizens Advice Bureau, the police, youth offending teams and Jobcentre Plus.

Table 3.11: Other organisations worked with in supporting young parents

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Other local schools/ colleges/training providers	20	19	48	28	61	66
Connexions	83	94	87	86	87	95
Sure Start/Sure Start Plus	29	9	17	9	34	40
Educational Welfare Services/Reintegration Officer	23	4	60	64	75	26
Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator	24	12	40	32	52	26
Local voluntary agencies	16	11	16	23	21	45
Local projects for young parents, disadvantaged young people	32	29	44	38	46	37
Early Years/others providing childcare or information on childcare	23	3	14	9	22	28
Local LSC	17	4	14	12	14	56
Health services	21	13	54	54	55	29
Social Services	2	8	10	11	11	1
None	6	1	1	0	0	3
<i>N</i> =	<i>249</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>200</i>

Source: IES survey, 2006

4 Flexible Learning Provision

4.1 Introduction

A lack of flexible learning provision has been identified as a key barrier to engaging more young parents in learning in many areas.¹ The previous chapter did touch on this issue in that some of the support reported to be given to young parents was in the form of more flexibility, for example, around attendance and timetables. This chapter looks further at the extent to which learning providers are offering flexible provision for young parents, and at the scope for this to be extended.

Flexible provision can take a number of forms, but basically seems to sub-divide into two broad groups: allowing flexibility in terms of attendance, deadlines, etc., and providing specific courses that are attractive to young parents and that meet their needs. Both are explored here. However, it is important to point out that learning providers only provide part of the picture. A number of courses, especially for those most disengaged from learning, but also others, are provided by a range of voluntary organisations.² While some of these will be WBL providers, not all fall into this category.

4.2 Current provision

During the interview a range of flexible options was read out to all respondents. This was drawn from an 'aide memoire' that was written for providers soon after Care to Learn was first introduced (and is currently being revised). They were first asked whether each was available in, or run by, their institution. Those that did not have

¹ For example, in Dench S (2006), *Implementation and Effectiveness of Care to Learn. A survey of teenage pregnancy co-ordinators*, Learning and Skills Council.

² Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

each one were asked how likely it was that this type of provision would be introduced over the next few years.

Looking first at current provision, Table 4.1 suggests a relatively high level of flexible provision, which does seem at odds with other information (eg the visit reports from the Childcare Support Manager referred to in Chapter 3, and the review of Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator reports mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). There are a number of possible explanations for this. Although this sample does include a number of providers that have little if any contact with teenage parents, those who agreed to be interviewed are likely to be amongst those who were more sympathetic towards young parents, or who in theory thought such provision should be made. Furthermore, such flexibility might be available for some courses only, and not throughout a particular type of learning provision. For example, current qualitative work suggests that in FE colleges, only some departments are prepared to offer flexibility to young parents (health and social care, beauty therapy, and childcare being the most common).¹

Table 4.1: Provision of customised courses and flexible learning opportunities - proportion of each type of learning provider currently making each available

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Young parents can start a course once it has started	83	73	78	77	93	90
Customised short courses to meet the needs of young parents	61	14	41	40	74	50
Courses in community locations (eg outreach projects, community halls, etc.)	75	31	61	43	57	40
'Return to learn', basic skills and other courses that might attract young parents back into learning	91	47	48	39	62	74
Courses that do not lead to formal qualifications	74	30	58	44	73	62
'Roll on, roll off' courses that build up to a full qualification over time	73	32	37	35	53	91
None of these	7	13	9	11	2	3
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

¹ Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

Table 4.1 shows that most learning providers were providing at least one form of flexibility listed. FE colleges, WBL providers and PRUs were generally providing the greatest range of flexible provision. These do often have more scope to do so. For example, they are not following the more traditional curriculum of schools and colleges focusing on GCSEs and 'A' levels.

Almost one-third (31 per cent) of WBL providers reported offering other forms of flexible learning opportunities. These were wide ranging in nature. Most commonly, flexible or shorter days were offered (16 respondents), 12 were prepared to modify courses to suit individual needs, nine offered new courses of interest to young parents (eg childcare, parenting skills) and seven offered home or distance learning. Other types of flexibility, each mentioned by one or two respondents, included extended-length courses to accommodate time off before and after birth, support with personal issues, one-to-one support and taster days.

4.3 Scope for expansion

Those institutions not providing each type of flexible provision were asked about the likelihood of it being introduced in the future. Table 4.2 generally shows that either respondents did not know or that there seems to be little potential for the further introduction of these types of provision (it should be noted that in some cases the base on which percentages are calculated is very small).

The proportion of 'don't knows' may be due to respondents not being in a position personally to comment; it is not possible to tell from this survey. Although the numbers involved are relatively small, PRUs were most likely to report expanding flexible provision for young parents.

Table 4.2: Likelihood of customised courses and flexible learning opportunities being introduced - proportion of each type of learning provider not currently making each option available saying they might (column per cent within each section of the table)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Young parents can start a course once it has started						
Very likely	0	0	5	4	*	5
Fairly likely	4	4	0	11	*	15
Not at all likely	24	67	50	47	*	20
Don't know	72	29	46	38	*	60
N =	46	24	22	47	7	20

Customised short courses to meet the needs of young parents

Very likely	6	0	7	3	7	3
Fairly likely	9	7	13	18	7	21
Not at all likely	16	55	50	44	63	24
Don't know	69	39	30	35	22	53
<i>N</i> =	97	77	60	125	27	101

Courses in community locations (eg outreach projects, community halls, etc.)

Very likely	2	0	3	3	7	2
Fairly likely	3	5	15	14	15	22
Not at all likely	26	60	63	50	34	26
Don't know	69	36	18	33	24	50
<i>N</i> =	62	62	39	118	41	121

'Return to learn', basic skills and other courses that might attract young parents back into learning

Very likely	0	0	4	3	15	2
Fairly likely	9	4	21	21	13	21
Not at all likely	13	60	49	44	51	25
Don't know	78	35	26	32	21	53
<i>N</i> =	23	48	53	126	39	53

Courses that do not lead to formal qualifications

Very likely	3	2	2	2	11	1
Fairly likely	0	3	17	17	21	17
Not at all likely	41	62	55	53	50	29
Don't know	56	33	26	29	18	53
<i>N</i> =	66	63	42	115	28	76

'Roll on, roll off' courses that build up to a full qualification over time

Very likely	3	1	0	2	10	5
Fairly likely	6	3	22	19	33	26
Not at all likely	21	57	42	40	40	11
Don't know	71	38	36	39	17	58
<i>N</i> =	68	61	64	135	48	19

* = *N* too small.

Source: IES survey, 2006

4.4 The aide memoire

Soon after Care to Learn was introduced, an 'aide memoire' was developed to help inform learning providers about the types of flexible provision that young parents might need. This has recently been updated and is available from the Care to Learn website. However, what is interesting from this survey is that hardly any learning providers had seen this aide memoire, and even fewer had made use of it. The new version will need to be given wider publicity and circulation to ensure that it comes to the notice of as many providers as possible.

5 Care to Learn and Childcare

5.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have reported data on the number of young parents using Care to Learn in this sample of learning providers, and the extent of support given during the application process.

This chapter looks at the sources of information used to find out about Care to Learn, how well respondents felt they understood Care to Learn and the adequacy of the funding.

5.2 Sources of information on Care to Learn

The sources of information about Care to Learn were quite varied and those utilised did differ between learning providers (Table 5.1). Schools, whether with or without a sixth form, were far less likely to be utilising various sources of information, and they were most likely to find out about the programme through local contacts. These institutions were less likely to have young parents using Care to Learn; childcare through grandparents being popular. It seems likely that staff in these institutions were less well informed about Care to Learn. Later in this chapter it is shown that respondents in these did feel they were particularly ill-informed.

The national leaflet was most commonly mentioned overall, but local contacts and publicity were an extremely important source of information. This emphasises the importance of continuing and on-going local publicity around Care to Learn.

Other sources of information were mentioned by a few. For example, respondents had obtained information on Care to Learn from colleagues, other organisations (eg Connexions), from young parents, Jobcentre Plus and through attending training courses.

Table 5.1: Sources of information used to find out about Care to Learn

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
National leaflet	70	67	12	14	63	34
Care to Learn website	60	53	8	8	25	27
Attended national information meetings	15	11	1	1	14	5
Phoned helpline	43	34	1	5	20	6
Through local contacts	23	40	22	17	35	15
Local information meetings	19	21	6	3	23	10
General local publicity	24	21	2	4	15	6
None	14	21	69	73	42	22
<i>N</i> =	249	90	101	207	103	200

Source: IES survey, 2006

Those that had used each of the sources of information listed were asked how useful they had found it on a scale of one to five, where one was not at all useful and five was very useful. Rather than present a series of tables reporting the scale for each, the mean has been calculated. The nearer the mean score is to five, the more positive respondents were about a particular source of information. As Table 5.2 shows, all sources of information were valued by those who had used them; all mean scores were around four. Some of these providers were using a range of sources and found that each was useful. This suggests they were obtaining different information from different sources, or that they were using each for a different purpose. It is therefore important that the range of publicity about Care to Learn continues.

Table 5.2: How useful was each source of information on Care to Learn (mean scores for those using each)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
National leaflet	4.3	4.2	3.8	4.1	4.0	3.8
Care to Learn website	4.3	4.1	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.9
National information meetings	4.3	4.3	—	—	4.0	4.1
Helpline	4.1	4.4	—	4.0	3.9	4.2
Local contacts	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.0
Local information meetings	4.2	4.0	4.3	—	4.2	4.0
General local publicity	3.8	3.6	—	—	3.9	3.7

Note: cells are left blank where fewer than five responses.

Source: IES survey, 2006

5.3 Overall understanding of Care to Learn

Respondents were asked how well they felt they understood Care to Learn (top part of Table 5.3). We were not testing whether respondents' knowledge of Care to Learn was correct, and it is known that there are a few misconceptions. Some of these are emerging through the qualitative interviews conducted as part of the evaluation.¹ Those respondents in institutions most likely to be involved with teenage parents and have dealings with Care to Learn were more likely to feel confident about their level of knowledge.

Table 5.3: How well respondents felt they understood Care to Learn (column per cent)

	FE college	Sixth form college	School without sixth form	School with sixth form	Pupil referral unit	WBL
Very well	41	42	10	20	38	13
Fairly well	52	49	48	55	43	43
Not very well	6	7	26	18	18	20
Not at all well	3	1	16	7	0	24
Don't really know about Care to Learn	5	11	39	25	20	–
Don't need any further information	59	58	35	35	57	42

Source: IES survey, 2006

Regardless of the extent to which respondents felt that they were well informed or not about Care to Learn, they were asked what further information they would like, or what aspects of the programme they were unsure about. The bottom two rows of Table 5.3 report two aspects of their replies – a proportion of respondents simply said that they did not really know about Care to Learn or that they didn't need any further information. The rest reported areas they would like more information on. No one particular gap in information emerges. Respondents just generally wanted more information on Care to Learn. A few specific issues were mentioned: for example, more updating on changes, information on travel expenses and eligibility issues. In schools (with or without sixth forms), which were generally less likely to have utilised Care to Learn, it was reported by 40 per cent of the former and 28 per cent of the latter that if they needed further information they would visit the website to find out. The overall message is that information needs to be both broad-based (or general) in nature, and specific, providing precise details about the programme. It also needs to be available through a range of sources and on-going (in other words, a one-off or infrequent publicity campaign will not be enough).

¹ Dench S, Bellis A, Tuohy S (2007), *Young Mothers Not in Learning. A qualitative study of barriers and attitudes*, IES Report 439; Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

6 Conclusions

This survey of learning providers provides a positive picture of provision for young parents while in learning. The survey included providers who regularly have a number of young parents studying with them and others that rarely have contact with these young people. The picture of positive provision holds across learning providers, whether or not they regularly deal with young parents. This seems to be at odds with some other data (eg reports by Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators, the visits made to local areas by the LSC Childcare Support Manager and other parts of the evaluation). The lack of flexible learning provision is reported to be a barrier to retaining young parents in learning.

There are a number of possible explanations for this apparent inconsistency. A survey of this kind provides an 'average' picture across learning institutions. The learning providers varied in size but many were large. It is possible that while one department or function within an institution provides considerable flexibility for young parents, other parts are less flexible or understanding of their needs. This emerged in the qualitative work exploring flexible learning provision.¹ For example, some teachers or tutors may be more understanding of the needs of young parents than others. Those working in support services may provide the necessary support to those who come to their attention. Young parents who do not come to their attention may not experience such flexible and understanding support or provision. Furthermore, we cannot report from these data the extent to which any flexibility in provision is really meeting the needs of young parents, or a majority of young parents. While staff in a learning provider may think they are being flexible, young parents themselves, or those working more intensively with young parents, may not perceive this to be the case. Learning providers have a range of targets that they have to meet, including completion rates and learning outcomes. Those catering for young people eligible for EMAs, set attendance and other targets to ensure that those receiving the funding are

¹ Dench S, Bellis A (2007), *Learning for Young Mothers. A qualitative study of flexible provision*, IES Report 441.

performing appropriately. Flexibility for young parents might be provided within this, but only to a limited extent so that broader targets can be met.

The picture within FE colleges is slightly less positive compared to other types of learning provider. However, there does still seem to be quite a high degree of flexibility within these institutions. FE colleges are nearly always large institutions, and addressing the needs of all students can be difficult.

While Care to Learn is an important source of childcare funding for young parents, respondents in learning institutions do report that a range of sources are utilised. It is likely that larger numbers of young parents are in learning than illustrated by the Care to Learn management information. Grandparents are an important source of childcare especially for the youngest parents. It seems that, especially in schools and PRUs, there are a number of young parents who only use grandparents for childcare. These data also show how some young parents utilise a range of different funding and other sources to cover the childcare they need while studying. In some cases this will be because Care to Learn does not cover the level of expenditure needed. However, in other cases this will be because a young person likes to utilise a range of sources of care – for example, combining grandparents and formal care on different days.

Learning institutions are rarely addressing the needs of young parents on their own. They work with a range of other local organisations to provide the range of support needed. Connexions is a key organisation and over 80 per cent of all learning providers reported working with this service. Health services are very important for schools and PRUs. Midwives and health visitors are much more involved in providing information on learning opportunities to young parents than in the past, and they are also working with a range of other support services.

Those in learning providers utilise a range of different sources of information about Care to Learn. Both national and local contacts are important. This emphasises the need for continuing a range of publicity materials, both at national and local level. Respondents in providers that had some experience of Care to Learn were, by definition, most likely to report that they understood the programme and did not need any further information. However, there remains a range of learning providers where the programme is not fully understood and where further information is required. When asked what further information they would like, no specific gap emerges. It is not surprising, given that a number had little experience of Care to Learn, that the main request was just for 'more information generally'. A few reported specific information needs, but these were each only mentioned by a few. Although there are still some misunderstandings about Care to Learn, it seems that there is no one gap in information that those involved in learning providers would like filled.