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# IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CARE TO LEARN: A SURVEY OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY CO-ORDINATORS

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# Implementation and Effectiveness of Care to Learn: A Survey of Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators

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# 1 Introduction

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Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators (TPCs) were asked to answer seven questions about the implementation and effectiveness of Care to Learn in their locality for the 2004/05 year. This document summarises the responses of 77 TPCs, or another relevant respondent (eg Connexions, Sure Start).

TPCs were asked:

- how well their area was performing in terms of take up of Care to Learn relative to the national take up rate of 11.77 per cent.
- to identify any barriers to take up of Care to Learn in their locality and proposed action.
- about the coverage and effectiveness of local partnership and collaboration on Care to Learn and how the initiative was co-ordinated.
- how involved learning providers were.
- the referral systems in place to ensure that young people receive the support and advice they need.
- whether there was any training in place, or being developed, to support childcare providers working with young parents.
- what actions were being taken to address issues raised through the Care to Learn take up visits from the (then) DfES Childcare Support Managers.

The 77 responses were divided into two groups:

- 38 reported better than average performance in take up of Care to Learn
- 39 reported less than average (or just average performance).

A few respondents did report difficulties with their data, for example, conflicts between their records and those of Manchester City Council (MCC) – these were being addressed.

## 2 Care to Learn - A Survey of Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators

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There was not a clear geographical divide between the better and less well performing areas, although most London Boroughs (for which responses were received) were in the better performing group. Furthermore, as will be discussed later, it was not clear that the poorer performing areas were less well co-ordinated or had a smaller range of agencies involved in supporting and promoting Care to Learn.

It would be interesting to relate performance in terms of the proportion of young parents funded through Care to Learn with various characteristics of different areas – eg extent of deprivation, overall levels of teenage births – this has not been done for this report.

The questions asked of TPCs were very open. While some, eg about barriers, the involvement of learning providers and training for childcare providers were fairly specific, others were much more general. It has not always been straightforward to combine responses into a coherent whole. In some cases it has been necessary to draw out a number of themes.

This does raise the issue of how questions should be structured to collect feedback in future from TPCs, at the same time paying regard to not placing an undue burden on these people who already have heavy workloads. For the coming year, more specific questions might be needed, eg to try and look what makes some areas more successful than others in engaging teenage parents, and to explore the extent to which more young parents can be brought back to learning.

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## 2 Barriers to Take Up

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The main barriers to take up reported fall into six groups: childcare; age and attitudes; flexibility of learning; the application process; the availability of information; and co-ordination issues. Each of these is discussed in more detail below. There was little noticeable difference between the responses from areas of high and lower take up. However, those in areas of lower take up were slightly more likely to mention co-ordination issues and that most young parents were not interested in learning.

Although the question asked about proposed actions to deal with any identified barriers, these were often not reported. Where any actions were reported, these were usually around involving and communicating with a wider range of agencies and making sure that essential actors, for example the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), learning providers, Early Years and childcare providers were closely engaged.

There was some confusion about the eligibility of those with employed status on modern apprenticeships. This should have been sorted out with the inclusion of a clearer statement on the Care to Learn website and other promotional material. For example, the website now clearly states that to receive Care to Learn trainees on work-based learning must have 'non-employed' status. Those with employed status are not eligible but can access other sources of support (eg tax credits).

### **Childcare related issues**

These were most commonly reported as barriers to take up and several themes emerge.

#### **Funding**

The cost of childcare was reported to be a problem, largely in London but also in a few other areas. Outside London it was commonly reported that the cost of childcare was a problem for those wanting to study full-time. Others experiencing difficulties lived in rural areas where travel times are extended, travel is expensive and the additional childcare needed to allow for travel time all contribute to weekly costs exceeding the maxima. This was reported at a time when there was an annual amount

young parents could apply for, however such difficulties can still apply since the introduction of a weekly maxima.

Particular problems around the cost of childcare were reported in London. For example, one TPC reported that childcare cost £200 a week. Connexions PAs were helping young parents to juggle registered childcare with family support. Additional funding had been sought from a range of charities and trusts. ESF funding had been available but was no longer. The cost of childcare in London often meant that care was only accessed to cover time spent in classes, there was no spare money to cover private study. Furthermore, travel can also be expensive, especially when transport links to appropriate learning are indirect or long.

There were some reports of difficulty obtaining funding for childcare over the summer. This could be a deterrent for continuing learning as young parents were reluctant to take their children out of the nursery over the summer – it was unsettling when they went back in September. Furthermore, some did not have a guaranteed place and had to use different provision in the next academic year.

#### **Availability of places**

There were a few reports of a general shortage of childcare places, however most gaps were in particular types of provision. These included:

- good quality, teen friendly childcare
- general lack of places in college nurseries, which was a type of childcare often favoured by young parents
- lack of full-time nursery places near a college (again favoured by young parents)
- shortage of places for those aged under 2 years, especially babies. This was reported in both college nurseries and provision more generally
- insufficient childcare outside normal working hours
- lack of flexible childcare, especially when needed for very part-time courses or for a few hours at a time.

In the majority of cases, effort was being put into looking at how these issues could be resolved.

#### **Preference for informal care**

A general theme emerged from not all but a number of responses that teenage parents were reluctant to use formal childcare, they did not want to leave their child with a stranger. In a number of areas there is a cultural tradition of not leaving a young child with anyone outside the immediate family and this was a difficult barrier to overcome.

While some effort had been put into encouraging family members to register and train as childminders so that they could utilise Care to Learn funding, this was not proving very successful. For example, in one area it was reported that this was due to eligibility to benefits being affected if a family member in receipt of benefits received Care to Learn funding.

### **Past experiences**

There were some reports of childcare providers being reluctant to offer places under Care to Learn due to delays in payment in the past. There was also some misunderstanding and distrust around Care to Learn, which was being addressed through the provision of more information and training to providers.

### **Age and attitudes**

This covers a group of issues relating to the upper age limit and attitudes towards learning amongst young parents.

It was frequently reported that many young parents do not consider undertaking further learning until their child is older. The majority of conceptions are after the age of 16 – young mothers want to spend some time being a mother and, in a number of cases, sorting out more immediate housing, financial and personal difficulties before they can think about returning to learning. For example, TPCs commented:

*‘Young parents often have complex social and economic issues to deal with and returning to learning and employment is usually low down on their list of day-to-day priorities.’*

*‘Young people who have been poor attendees due to social problems or bullying are far less likely to want to return to formal education.’*

Other young parents are concerned about how they will be viewed if they leave their child with a stranger. It was reported that some young parents say that they feel they will be seen as poor mothers if they leave their children rather than caring for them themselves. Some are worried that a child will build up a stronger relationship with a childminder than with themselves. This can contribute to them wanting to delay returning to learning. One TPC reported that 80 per cent of young mothers attending local support groups had no intention of returning to learning – they wanted to be a full-time mum.

There were various suggestions that the age limit should be extended up to as high as 23.

Attitudes to learning amongst young parents vary. While some, as evidenced by the take up of Care to Learn, are keen to return to learning or, with some persuasion and support will do so, a lack of interest in learning is more difficult to address amongst others. This was discussed by a number of TPCs.

Some lack confidence and self-esteem, for example:

*'Many of our young parents lack confidence and self-esteem. Therefore the prospect of attending an FE college is often not an option, unless they have a good support system from their family.'*

Young parents who have under-achieved at school and have very little confidence in their academic ability, find it difficult to engage in formal learning situations.

More deep seated in some areas is a culture of intergenerational worklessness and an acceptance of teenage parenthood. For example, one TPC commented:

*'There is a real challenge for the partnership to find routes to overcome both the deeply engrained culture where women have patterns of early motherhood, and paid worklessness and to overcome teen parents lack of self esteem and aspirations.'*

### **Learning related issues**

The lack of flexible learning provision and short courses was also reported as a barrier to engaging young parents in Care to Learn. Although, as discussed later, a significant number of TPCs did report that there were sufficient or many such opportunities in their area.

Some examples of the problems are illustrated below:

*'All NVQ2 learning is full time and some college courses. Young mums cannot cope with this. Some E2E programmes are rigid and not flexible – eg full time so that day is far too long for a young mother to cope with and be without her child.'*

*'There is a lack of flexible learning for young parents, particularly in courses such as hairdressing and beauty therapy.'*

*'E2E courses are setting higher entry levels for applicants and thus making it less accessible to some young parents.'*

*'There is a need for short courses that are certificated to promote achievement – taster courses.'*

*'Some college courses change day and time every term which can prove to be a problem when trying to arrange childcare'*

*'Enrolment in September/October can be a barrier to those whose pregnancy does not fit with this timetable.'*

*'A lot of young parents prefer short or part-time courses. They need to engage in courses that slowly encourage them back into learning.'*

It was commented by a few that it could be difficult to apply for Care to Learn funding for short courses due to the volume of paperwork relative to the length of the course and that the application took too long. (However, it should be remembered that there were delays in the processing of applications early in the 2004/05 year which have not re-occurred in 2005/06.)

A few TPCs raised issues around the signing of the application form. Some colleges were not prepared to sign a form until a young parent actually started their course. This meant they could not sort their childcare out in advance, in particular through obtaining the deposit to secure a place, and places had been lost as a result.

### **Application process**

Some issues continue to be raised about the application process and how these can deter some young parents from applying.

Completing the form and obtaining the sign off by childcare and learning providers was reported to be off putting. Those linked to a support network do not usually have a problem; it is those that are not linked in who have problems. Young parents are not always organised about applying for a course and leave this until the last minute, which means they are often unable to secure appropriate childcare. Support structures were in place and being expanded to try and address these issues.

The time taken for an application to be processed was also reported as a problem and that, as a result, childcare places had been lost. This should not be an issue for 2005/06 as applications have been processed within a week.

### **Information**

Publicity around Care to Learn has generally been good at both national and local levels. The evaluation and visits by the Childcare Support Managers have all found this. However, it seems some gaps still remain. Where they could TPCs, and other key actors in local areas, were acting to address these.

A general issue raised, no means by all, but by a significant minority was that it was not always possible to obtain the general information leaflet about Care to Learn, especially at peak times. Obtaining bulk deliveries of these leaflets was also reported to be difficult.

There were a few criticisms of the information available on Care to Learn, although these were not widespread. For example, clearer communication on changes was asked for.

Many of the problems around information were specific to particular areas. In a number it was felt that more awareness was needed amongst teenage fathers; awareness amongst some professional groups remained low and needed improving.

A few examples can be given illustrating particular misunderstandings about Care to Learn:

- In one area it was reported that there was a concern that school aged parents who are using Care to Learn may not be able to access payment if they have been on the

scheme for two years and that this could affect their ability to continue with further education.

- In another it was reported that support workers would like to access Care to Learn to cover crèche costs for their support groups but that they did not want to do this by identifying the young mothers and asking them to apply. They felt that this might affect their ability to claim the full Care to Learn amount if they then went on to college.
- Informal learning opportunities being accessed in some young parent groups were not using Care to Learn funding – there were issues around the paperwork involved for such a short period (a five week course at two hours a week) and young parents wanting a crèche on site.
- In one area concern was expressed that providers are not supporting young parents in accessing Care to Learn for informal education and training such as volunteering and peer mentoring because they are confused about how the funding could be used.

However, in another area it was reported that since it was made clear that Care to Learn was available for informal learning as well as formal courses, take up had increased dramatically.

### **Local co-ordination issues**

This was reported to be an issue but in a relatively small number of cases.

Issues included:

- No strategic participation on the partnership board from the LSC or FE.
- No tracking system in place for parents above school leaving age; problems identifying teenage parents.
- Co-ordinator on long-term sick leave.
- Lack of co-ordination between local agencies.
- Gaps in partnership/co-ordination work with LSC and Early Years.



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## 3 How Care to Learn is Co-ordinated

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This section considers responses to the question on how Care to Learn is co-ordinated and the coverage and effectiveness of local partnership and collaboration. Responses varied in their depth and breadth, but key themes are brought out in this section.

Nearly all the TPC reports showed considerable evidence of a wide range of local agencies working together around Care to Learn, and a wider range of representation being included over time. What is clear is that active multi-agency working is crucial to the success of Care to Learn. It is also clear that, in most areas, a lot of effort has been put into co-ordinating Care to Learn, and in mobilising resources around this structure.

In the majority of areas, Care to Learn is now a standing agenda item on the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board (TPPB) or a related high level group. In a number of areas a sub-group has been set up or an individual co-ordinator put in place. However, this is not always the case – and this occurs in both high and less well performing areas. In some areas sub-groups are looking at specific issues relating to the take up of Care to Learn and accessing young parents.

Although a few areas with a low proportion of young parents on Care to Learn had poorer co-ordination and were less likely to include reporting to higher level groups (eg the TPPB), this was often not the case. Other factors were also playing a role (including local cultures and attitudes to learning and parenthood). Some of these poorer performing areas had recently (often as a result of feedback especially from the Childcare Support Managers) put greater co-ordination and reporting in place. At the time TPCs were writing their reports, these measures had had little time to take their full effect.

One comment made was that those areas with lower rates of teenage pregnancy overall have fewer resources, eg there is no Reintegration Officer or Sure Start Plus. It is perhaps understandable that where there are small numbers of teenage parents, especially in the under 16 age group, resources are unlikely to be devoted to specialist workers. However, this does not mean that teenage parents are any easier to access.

Indeed due to the isolated nature of teenage parenthood in such areas, it may be even more difficult to identify and keep track of young parents.

Some TPCs commented on the cultural difficulties of persuading teenage parents to participate in learning – especially during the first few years after the birth of a child. There will be some young parents in this group in all areas. However, there are no data that enable us to explore the extent to which this is an issue across and within different areas.

In a few areas, key posts (eg TPC, Reintegration Officer) being vacant have hampered partnership working. However, this seems to have happened in areas of high as well as lower take up of Care to Learn.

### **Who co-ordinates Care to Learn?**

Not all areas have one specific person responsible for Care to Learn. Where there is a co-ordinator the job of the person does vary. The following list illustrates the range of people who co-ordinate Care to Learn in local areas:

- Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator
- Other workers in the local Teenage Pregnancy Unit (TPU)
- Sure Start Plus eg Strategic Co-ordinator, Programme Manager
- Teenage Pregnancy Connexions PA
- Reintegration Officer
- Member of relevant department in local authority
- Childcare Information Services (although in one area it was reported that the CIS was contacted and said they could not take on a co-ordinating role due to resource implications)
- Early Years Services
- Specially funded posts.

Sometimes co-ordination was shared between individuals in more than one of these posts (eg TPC and Connexions PA; TPC and Reintegration Officer).

In some areas there was no specific individual co-ordinating Care to Learn, but co-ordination was the responsibility of particular agencies (either individually or in combination). For example, Connexions, Children's Services, or one of the organisations mentioned in the next section.

### **Which high-level boards/groups are involved?**

A number of TPCs reported that Care to Learn is now a standard agenda item for meetings of the TPPB.

The local group leading on Care to Learn varied although these were usually within the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. The groups mentioned included:

- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Steering Group
- Teenage Pregnancy Implementation Board
- Support for Teenage Parents Task Group
- Better Support Sub-Group
- Young Parents Sub-Group
- Education and Reintegration for Young Parents group
- Childcare Sub-Group
- Partnership Childcare forum
- Economic Well-Being group
- Teenage Pregnancy Operational group.

There was some mention of local action plans. However, as there was no specific question on this it is difficult to draw conclusions on how common these were. It does seem though that in most areas lessons are being learnt about the operation of Care to Learn and/or potential barriers and issues around take up are being identified. Future activities were being planned to address these.

### **Which agencies are involved?**

What is notable about many of the responses is the wide range of agencies involved in Care to Learn, particularly at an operational level. This has expanded greatly since Care to Learn was first introduced.

Action groups have been set up in some areas, with representatives of agencies most immediately involved with young parents. In other areas, although there is no such group, the key workers regularly communicate and co-ordinate between themselves. This is not the case in all areas, because in some there is either no group identified to encourage inter-agency involvement and co-ordination or there is little communication.

The exact list of agencies involved in operationalising Care to Learn in each area does vary, for example, relating to the organisation of support in an area. However, these agencies include:

- Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator
- Midwifery
- Health Visitors
- Connexions
- Reintegration Officers
- Educational Welfare Officers/Services
- Early Years and Childcare Services
- Childcare Centres
- Childcare Information Service
- childcare providers including childminders
- National Childminding Association
- YWCA and youth groups
- National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
- Health Promotion
- housing organisations
- Social Services
- Children and Young People Services
- Leaving Care Team
- voluntary organisations
- representatives of local projects working with young parents (mothers and fathers)
- Sure Start and Sure Start Plus
- Pupil Referral Units
- Job Centre Plus
- learning providers
- local regeneration groups and local economic strategies – eg Neighbourhood renewal projects.

Not all these were directly involved in the strategic groups overseeing Care to Learn or the more day to day action groups. Those core to running Care to Learn on a more day to day basis were most likely to be TPCs, Connexions, Sure Start Plus, if in a Sure

Start Plus area, Reintegration Officers, local authorities Children/Youth Services, some representation of Early Years/Childcare Services, and increasingly representatives from health services.

Others were however being involved, eg on particular projects, through wider consultation and through those more directly involved liaising and working with them.

Where good links had not been developed with childcare or health services, the desirability of doing this was sometimes commented on.

It does look as if links with learning providers are still relatively weak in a number of areas and in particular, schools were rarely mentioned as being involved. In some reports publicity about Care to Learn being sent to schools was commented on.

### **Spread of information**

Again, although this was not specifically asked about, in a number of reports, TPCs commented on specific initiatives to better inform various actors, eg childcare services and providers, learning providers, those involved in health services.

A point that does emerge is the need for local publicity to be fairly continuous and to regularly reinforce the message about Care to Learn being available.

### **Working groups established**

In some areas working groups or sub-groups had been established to look at particular aspects of support or provision for young parents. Again, these were spread between well and less well performing areas in terms of engagement with Care to Learn. They do however illustrate how particular challenges are being identified in different areas and attempts made to address these. As TPCs (or whoever is taking a similar role) are getting past the initial process of spreading information and getting agencies on board, some are starting to look at 'deeper' issues. For example, around participation in learning and take up of Care to Learn, in particular looking at childcare needs and childcare as a barrier, tracking young people and how to address low motivation to learn and cultural barriers. The extent to which this is happening (at least as evidenced in the reports being summarised here) should not be over emphasised. However, it is an issue that perhaps requires further investigation, especially if the more challenging Care to Learn targets in coming years are to be achieved.

Some example include:

- One area had looked in some detail at local childcare needs and resources, including undertaking a consultation exercise with young people on childcare. Key actions included providing training for childminders on working with teenage parents and the production of a local leaflet explaining childcare options and

funding sources (Further Education Learner Support Funds as well as Care to Learn).

- In another a working party was being set up to look at recommendations made by a childcare needs assessment of the types of childcare required by teenage parents.
- A Connexions Partnership was about to monitor participation to establish whether lack of childcare is a real barrier to teenage parents engaging in learning.
- Connecting young mothers and improving self-esteem – there was a long term plan in one locality to develop a pathway of support for mothers. The details of this were to be established following a review and mapping of support currently in place.
- In another it was planned to introduce a working group developing a professional pathway which will include Care to Learn. This will be introduced to all those who work with teenagers and teenage parents – to ensure all are referred to appropriate agencies at appropriate times.
- An area had looked at training childcare providers to work with young parents and was moving on to explore take up of Care to Learn (this area had particularly low take up, and very low levels of interest in learning were reported).

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## 4 Referral Systems in Place

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This section considers the referral systems in place to ensure young parents receive the support and advice they need to access learning and Care to Learn. The question asked particularly for information on the link between midwifery/health and Connexions/Reintegration Officers. The information provided showed how much work has and is being put into ensuring referral systems are in place. As with the overall co-ordination of Care to Learn, no one model is evident amongst these systems and a range of approaches seem to work. Furthermore, the nature of referral systems does not really help in distinguishing between low and better performing areas in terms of take up.

A number of themes do emerge from the data and these are outlined below.

In many areas, Care to Learn has contributed to much greater communication and co-ordination between the range of agencies working with young parents. There are now in many areas, but not all, clear or evolving referral paths. Most commonly midwifery services and health visitors are providing information (and increasingly with the use of a referral form) on teenage parents. This information is most often passed to Connexions, Reintegration Officers, Sure Start (Plus) Advisers, ie the agency most likely to be supporting young parents in an area and encouraging or supporting their involvement in learning.

In a few areas referral forms have been developed and given to the range of agencies that might come into contact with young parents (eg voluntary organisations) to try and ensure that all are known about and contacted as appropriate. Leaflets have also been introduced so that young parents can refer themselves, eg to Connexions, Sure Start. These are being given to anyone who might deal with a young parent and left in 'teen friendly' places (eg youth centres, doctor's surgeries).

The importance of sharing of information between agencies is emphasised, to ensure that some young parents do not 'fall through the net' and that the range of support needs they might have are addressed. In some areas this is done informally, through regular contact and meetings as necessary between the key actors involved. In others, this occurs more formally, eg weekly meetings between the main support agencies,

usually alongside more informal contact as necessary. There is no clear pattern of one form of information and co-ordination sharing being more successful than others. This seems to depend on eg the individuals involved, the extent to which agencies are able to work together, the number of young parents in an area, etc. What is important is that information sharing occurs. Supporting young parents through Care to Learn is only one issue addressed in this information sharing.

In a number of areas databases have been set up to track teenage parents and, increasingly, the different information held by eg health services and Connexions are being linked. This does not mean that all young parents are 'forced' to accept support, but rather that it can be made clear that support is available if needed.



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## 5 Involvement of Learning and Childcare Providers

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### Learning providers

The previous section did suggest that learning providers are not yet so well engaged with Care to Learn. A specific question asked about the involvement of learning providers.

The picture is patchy, and again does not seem to be related to whether an area was performing well in terms of the proportion of young parents in Care to Learn. Indeed, if anything those areas doing well in terms of engagement were slightly more likely to report issues around the level of learning provider engagement.

An overall message is that more needs to be done in terms of engaging learning providers and promoting flexible provision. On the other hand there are some concrete actions being taken by local co-ordinators to publicise Care to Learn further, to engage learning providers more fully and to promote provision that better meets the specific needs of young parents. A number of these actions were recent and/or on-going, it may take a while before they concretely impact on the take up of learning and Care to Learn amongst young people.

A focus on the NEET group more generally has been relevant to addressing the needs of teenage parents.

### Gaps in involvement

The extent to which local colleges were involved did vary considerably. Some were very well linked into Care to Learn providing student support, assistance with childcare, etc. Others were less so. However, there does seem to have been a significant improvement in the level of college involvement. In areas where they remain less well engaged, plans were often in place to address this. In a few, learning providers were not being specifically targeted for involvement, but publicity about Care to Learn was being disseminated to them.

The importance of having a named person or at least clear support structures in colleges was emphasised, so that young parents know where to go for help whether with their application or other issues.

The involvement with schools was less commonly mentioned and is less well developed. In a few areas, very good involvement by individual schools was reported. In others it was more a case of making sure that schools were kept aware of Care to Learn. In many ways it is not surprising that schools are less engaged on a regular basis with Care to Learn – most will only rarely deal with teenage pregnancy. What is important is that schools with higher levels of teenage pregnancy are engaged, while others are kept informed about the availability of funding for childcare and the wider support available.

The extent of involvement of other learning providers was varied. In a number of areas there is an established group of providers who work with young parents and this does seem to be expanding. However, involving other providers more generally was not always easy – especially if teenage parents were not a particular target group.

### **Flexible learning provision**

One barrier to engaging young parents in learning was reported to be the lack of flexible learning provision, and this is supported by evaluation findings and central information on Care to Learn. Yet, a majority of TPCs reported that there was much flexible, informal learning in their area and a number of examples of new initiatives were provided. Many of these were not in schools or colleges, but were run by other agencies.

Some examples of flexibility in colleges and schools were reported. For example:

- In one area amended timetables were being offered or providers were being flexible about the number of sessions a young person had to attend.
- Another college was offering some form of certification or accreditation so a young person could build up credits that enabled them to gain a recognised qualification over time.
- In one college taster sessions were run for all young people (not just young parents) across many areas including ICT and public services, to help them make better informed course and career choices.
- Some courses have been designed to allow a young person to try out a variety of subjects – access to them is flexible and they can be delivered in different learning tiers to help build a young person's confidence. Job search skills, CV writing and interview techniques are also available.
- There seem to be a growing number of colleges providing some form of 'return to learning' courses whereby young parents can attend short courses such as first aid,

parenting, cookery, entry to employment, sometimes achieving a range of qualifications from this. This often helped them return to study on a more formal course. For example, one college was offering a ten week short course to help young parents return to education, this involved attendance once a week followed by personal tuition if requested.

- In one area individual education packages have been put together tailored to the particular needs of young parents, so that they could attend part-time courses across a range of learning providers (including 6<sup>th</sup> forms). Part-time attendance was possible with home study and childcare arranged to cover this.
- In another area ESF funding was obtained to provide six taster courses a year, so that young parents could take a smaller step towards accessing further education. These have proved popular and interestingly the tasters attract young parents into further education but often in a completely different subject. For example, two who did a nail art taster enrolled in NVQ2 childcare and have done very well.

Young parent groups are an important source of flexible learning opportunities. For example, short or drop in courses are provided on subjects such as cooking, the importance of play, health and safety, parenting.

In a number of areas, short courses are provided through a range of partner agencies:

- Connexions PAs organising informal learning provision such as short courses.
- Connexions offering in-house accredited training for young people in a more informal setting than available at a college.
- Youth Service working in partnership with the Teenage Pregnancy team to offer alternative provision to formal education.
- The YWCA, Sure Start and Sure Start Plus were also mentioned as providers of informal, flexible learning opportunities, including taster courses to improve confidence and encourage young parents to return to learning.

### **Actions being taken to improve learning provision for young parents**

A number of reports mentioned specific actions that were being developed to improve the flexibility of learning and provide more learning opportunities relevant to the specific needs of young parents.

Some examples include:

- Working with training providers to ensure a named link and to develop a wider range of courses to meet the diverse needs of young mothers in the area.
- Working with Sure Start Children's Centres to provide flexible learning for teenage mothers in all new centres.

- An initial discussion with the Open College Network (OCN) to develop a course for young parents.
- Part of the action plan in one area was to audit the support and sex and relationship education (SRE) needs of young parents in colleges and sixth forms – this will provide information on whether there is adequate support for young parents through student services.
- In another area work was planned to map provision and support for young parents with the colleges.
- One TPC reported a project researching the barriers to learning for young parents and that a local task group had been set up to implement the recommendations. Actions will include working with partner agencies to address the findings and improve learning opportunities for young parents.
- Another area was looking at providing a tiered approach through learning and educational/personal development routes for all under 20s with structured support from agencies and Care to Learn.

There is evidence that more information-sharing on the types of flexible learning provision within regions and the impact of these types of provision in terms of engaging young parents, is being developed to share as 'good practice' between areas.

## Training for childcare providers

A specific question was asked about whether training was in place, or being developed, to support childcare providers working with young parents. There was a considerable amount of activity taking place in involving childcare providers further in Care to Learn. This was aiming to help them be better prepared in providing a service relevant to young parents, and increasing their confidence in working with this group of parents.

In the vast majority of areas training was either already in place or being planned for childcare providers. Only four respondents reported no specific training, although two of these commented on the general availability of training for childcare workers. Three said they did not know.

Amongst the rest, the majority reported that there was some form of training in place. Varying levels of detail were provided about the training available. In a few cases where some detail was given it seems that the training could be more accurately described as providing information and sharing experiences.

Training was more fully developed for childminders for whom the training is primarily intended. In over half the areas with some training provision this was for childminders, although in a few of these training was being extended to other childcare providers.

There was some feeling that other types of childcare provider more generally had greater access to training. One TPC commented that nursery staff at the FE college were very used to working with young people who are juggling life with college and other demands.

The nature of training varied considerably in its length and formality. Due to the varying detail given it is difficult to provide an overall picture, except to say that there were variations. In a few areas mentoring was available. The training was also being provided by a range of different agencies/people. Although Early Years partnerships usually took the main role in delivering training, Connexions PAs, Reintegration Officers and others working more directly with teenage parents might also be involved.

In one area a pilot scheme was being set up in the Children's Centre. School-age parents attend the centre for 'maternity leave period' and this arrangement continues once the mother returns to mainstream school. Staff aim to link young parents to community services and activities. There was no training as such, but staff were developing skills and an understanding of the needs of young parents.

Take up of training was reported to be low in a few areas. For example, one TPC attributed this to the low number of teenage parents using childcare in that area. In another area, advisers liaise with childcare providers offering to attend training/staff meetings to discuss Care to Learn and ways of working with young parents. Take up was low and more promotion needed, but this was difficult due to workloads.

In the remaining areas some form of training input was either actively being developed or it was planned to do this in the near future. Again, this was more often for childminders than for childcare providers more generally.

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## 6 Visits by Childcare Support Managers

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Over the time period TPCs were reporting on, two Childcare Support Managers from the LSC conducted a programme of visits to local areas. The majority but not all areas had received a visit and many had built this into a multi-agency meeting. These visits were nearly always favourably received.

This is one area of the responses which does seem to distinguish the less well from the above average performing areas in terms of take up of Care to Learn. The lists of actions following a visit reported by the less well performing areas were, on the whole, much more extensive than those of the better performing areas. This should not be over-emphasised, but does suggest that perhaps the less well performing areas were beginning to catch up in terms of co-ordination, etc but that this was not yet fully reflected in take up. An additional explanation is that at least some of these less well performing areas were facing much more deep seated barriers (eg motivational, cultural) in engaging young parents in learning, compared to the better performing areas. A combination of factors is the most likely explanation.

The actions taken as a result of meetings were varied and extensive. They fell into the following categories:

- Identification of clearer lines of responsibility, one or joint lead co-ordinators and increased co-ordination of Care to Learn generally.
- Including Care to Learn as a regular agenda item on key high level groups/boards working with teenage parents.
- The development of an action plan.
- Involvement of a wider range of agencies.
- Wider and more publicity.
- A more rigorous and wider-ranging referral process.
- Better tracking of young people, more monitoring.

- Addressing childcare issues, eg gaps in supply, training of providers.
- Focusing on greater involvement of learning providers.
- Local research and mapping projects eg to explore young parents attitudes, gaps in provision, etc
- Providing case studies of good practice.

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## 7 The LSC Response

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The Care to Learn team in the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the IES evaluators have found the information provided by Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators extremely valuable. We are grateful to all those who gave up some time to complete the report.

These reports raise some issues that need to be addressed in the delivery of Care to Learn. This section outlines actions that have either already been taken or are planned by the LSC in response to the reports.

There is some evidence that in certain circumstances the funding is inadequate. Since August 2005, the maximum available has been expressed as a weekly, rather than an annual, amount. This is generally welcomed particularly as other schemes, eg childcare tax credits for those in work are based on a weekly figure.

In section two (barriers to take up), it was reported that there is mistrust and misunderstanding amongst some childcare providers, often due to administrative delays in the past. Action has been taken to increase the size of the administration team at MCC and to provide extra helplines. There have been no delays during the peak application period in 2005/06.

Some TPCs felt that the application procedure was over burdensome. The LSC has continued to develop the application procedure, and the form for 2005/06 is considered a marked improvement on its predecessor. The introduction of an on-line application facility in October 2005 means that the application procedure has been further streamlined. The LSC will continue to strive to minimise bureaucracy.

In the past some colleges have been reluctant to sign application forms until term dates are finalised. This has caused problems because deposits were not being paid and childcare places had been lost. The message that provisional dates should be provided seems to be working, and experience over the past year suggests that this is no longer a major problem.



Some criticism has been made that the cut off for eligibility on Care to Learn is 18, and that this is out of line with the rest of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. From September 2006, young parents aged 19 or under – at the point at which their learning starts – will be eligible for Care to Learn funding.

It was reported that some support workers were unaware that Care to Learn can be used to support flexible learning such as tasters and other learning activities that are very short term and/or do not lead to formal qualifications. This is covered in the leaflet and other publicity, However, the LSC will be making this clearer in the 2006 version of the national leaflet. A quarterly newsletter has also been introduced to keep everyone up to date with the latest news and issues around Care to Learn.

The LSC are continuing their programme of visits to local areas to encourage participation and spread good practice. They are also producing a good practice guide to cover many of the issues raised in this report.