

# Evaluation of the KickStart programme

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# 1. Background

## This evaluation

The University of Wolverhampton's School of Education was commissioned by the Black Country Training Group (BCTG) to undertake an evaluation of the Black Country Pre Entry to Employment Programme – KickStart. The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the project from the perspectives of both training providers and learners and to establish to what extent the programme's targets have been met to date.

Visits were made to all seven training providers in June 2007 in order to gather relevant information to conduct the evaluation effectively. This took the form of a series of interviews with staff and learners at each centre, in addition to collecting hard data for analysis.

## Background to KickStart

The KickStart programme commenced on 1 November 2005 and is funded until March 2008, co-funded by the Black Country Learning and Skills Council and the European Social Fund. The programme is coordinated by the Black Country Training Group and delivered by the following seven Black Country training providers: Age Concern Training; Electric Palace; Nacro Oldbury; Nova Training; Rathbone Training; St Thomas' Community Network; and Trinity Training Services. KickStart provides a unique opportunity in the Black Country to meet the needs of learners aged 16-19 who are not in education, employment or training as well as those with a resistance to learning - individuals described as the 'hardest to help'.

The programme is designed to support those learners with multiple barriers to learning who are not yet ready to cope with mainstream training. Key basic skills are taught in order to raise literacy and numeracy levels, while intensive support in small group settings aims to overcome barriers to learning and to develop personal, social and work-related skills. When the learner is ready, he or she can then progress into other areas of training, education or employment. In particular many KickStart learners move on to the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme.

Each young person on the KickStart programme receives a weekly allowance of £30. In addition, towards the end of the programme learners are offered a week or more of work experience at a local employer, wherever possible in an employment area of interest to each individual young person. KickStart learners are also given the opportunity to participate in activity training, where a learner has the chance to go on a trip to somewhere like The Safari Park, The Pioneer Centre or The Think Tank. Activity Training not only gives the learners a chance to try something they have never done before, but also continues to develop their team building and communication skills.

## Aims of KickStart

KickStart came into being in order to help and support those individuals who are experiencing multiple barriers to learning. The overall aims are to help improve basic skill levels in order to progress on to training and employment, whilst helping to combat the learners' more personal and social issues.

Within each training centre, the learning focus/aims vary to some extent, in order to meet the learning needs of specific individuals and groups. Listed below are some of the key aims identified by training providers interviewed:

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- To engage with young people who need support / signposting, 'filling the void' after school
- To achieve some success for those young people who have had none previously
- To meet the needs of 'hard to reach' young people
- To provide young people with a positive learning and social environment
- To prepare young people for employment, addressing issues of concern, removing barriers to learning and increasing employability
- To get NEET learners into education, to help raise their basic skills and to improve skills for employment
- To help create some stability in the lives of vulnerable young people
- To improve key skills and offer work tasters
- To provide pastoral as well as educational support to prepare learners for engagement with future training/employment

## 2. Methodology

For this evaluation, visits were made to all seven training providers, in order to conduct one to one interviews with both staff and learners about their experience and perceptions of the KickStart programme. Each interviewee was given a short information sheet to read, explaining what the survey was about and how the collected data would be used. All interviewees signed a consent form, confirming that they had read and understood the information sheet and were happy with the process. Participants were informed that any quotations used in the report would not be attributed to specific individuals.

A total of 38 interviews took place, comprising of 18 staff, 13 male learners and 7 female learners. The schedules of questions which formed the basis of these interviews are attached in the appendices to this report. The chart below gives a breakdown of interviews carried out in each centre.

Training Provider	Staff interviewed	Male learners interviewed	Time on programme	Female learners interviewed	Time on programme	Total interviewed
Age Concern Training	2	1	8 wks	2	5 wks 3 wks	5
Electric Palace	3	0		2	8wks 8wks	5
Nacro Oldbury	2	1	6 wks	1	8 wks	4
Nova Training	3	3	7 wks 9 wks 7 wks	0		6
Rathbone Training	2	2	26 wks 17 wks	0		4
St Thomas' Community Network	3	4	26 wks 5 wks 30 wks 13 wks	1	12 wks	8
Trinity Training Services	3	3	2 wks 17 wks 8 wks	0		6
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>7</b>		<b>38</b>

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At each provider at least one senior manager and one training advisor or KickStart co-ordinator was interviewed. This provided both an overview of the implementation of the programme (including recruitment, initial assessment, meeting criteria, success rates etc), and an insight into the day-to-day, logistical running of the programme (including challenges, opportunities, limitations and barriers). The majority of learners interviewed were currently on the KickStart programme, representing a range weeks completed. A small number of learners were interviewed who had completed the KickStart programme and had progressed on to the E2E programme. These interviews provided a useful retrospective insight into how KickStart had helped them to prepare for further training and employment opportunities.

A number of documents were used both as sources of background information and as reference points for records and statistical information gathered to date. Documents consulted included:

- About KickStart – KickStart Your E2E (BCTG website)
- Black Country Training Group’s Schedule 1 – Service Specification
- Needs of the NEET Group and Provision Needed
- NEET Health Check, January 2007
- KickStart your E2E – Update February 2007 (KickStart Programme Coordinator)

Interview notes were typed up. Common themes were identified against a number of key questions (see sections 5 and 6 below). Also, any opinions which were particularly strongly expressed by an individual interviewee were noted against these questions. The conclusions are drawn from these analysed interviews and in relation to the aims and performance data detailed in the documents listed above.

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### 3. Context and performance to date

#### 3.1 The local NEET population

Two documents were provided to give some statistical context and background to the NEET group:

- 'Needs of the NEET Group and Provision Needed' (Jan 2007, Black Country Connexions)
- 'NEET Health Check' (January 2007, Black Country Connexions)

The first report identifies 4 separate groups within the NEET cohort:

1. Young people willing and competent to enter work or training, but looking in occupational areas in which there are few or no opportunities.
2. Young people willing and competent to enter work or training, but who need more support to do so.
3. Young people not yet ready to make vocational choices or who need some help to develop confidence, employability and basic skills.
4. Young people with severe or multiple barriers to progression to work or training.

These four categories are a useful means to begin to identify and describe the needs of the NEET group. However they also highlight some of the difficulties inherent in such an attempt, as there are inevitably overlaps between the groups, particularly groups 2 and 3. Young people's position with regard to training and employment, their barriers to such and their needs are not easy to describe succinctly. This report will nonetheless try to build on some of the models already developed and draw some general conclusions about how best to support this diverse population.

Other key conclusions from the 'needs report' include:

- The KickStart (and Steps to Work) pre-E2E programmes are described as having had *'...some success with reasonably positive progression rates. However, the average length of stay of around 8 weeks needs to be longer to make an impact.'*
- The lower than forecast rate of intake is put down potentially to the 'low' rate of training allowance at £30. The report also states that provision would benefit from greater flexibility around intake and from a loosening of the link between funding and achievement, to better meet the needs of a 'wider group of NEETS'.
- KickStart meets the needs of a number of learners who have not attained the level required by E2E (especially under the new requirements). However, it also states that KickStart does not cater for the 'most vulnerable.' Specialist provision for young people with multiple barriers to engagement is suggested, starting in the identified 'NEET hotspots' within the region.
- KickStart is not meeting the needs of NEET individuals with substance misuse problems because these young people are typically not good at programmes with morning starts.

The report estimates that at October 2006 there were the following numbers of young people in the four categories, by location:

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	Dudley	Sandwell	Walsall	Wolverhampton	Total
1. Competent to work/train but shortage of available placement	140	150	85	90	465
2. Competent to enter work/training with more support	235	335	255	330	1155
3. Not yet ready to make vocational choices or need to develop employability and basic skills	100	142	110	145	497
4. Severe or multiple barriers to progression	130	215	130	165	640
Total	605	842	580	730	2757

The KickStart programme currently works with young people who fall mainly in category 3. A minority of KickStart clients sit in category 4 and a smaller number still in category 2.

The NEET Health Check produced in January 2007 gives the following headline statistics:

	Adjusted % of population in NEET group				
	Dudley	Sandwell	Walsall	Wolverhampton	Overall
Q3 05/06	8.3	10.6	10.8	11.3	10.1
Q4 05/06	8.5	10.4	10.0	11.9	10.1
Q1 06/07	6.5	16.1	10.4	11.7	10.4
Q2 06/07	7.2	17.4	10.3	12.1	11.0
Q3 06/07	6.5	15.8	9.1	11.1	9.0

The 'adjusted % in the NEET group' dropped over the 12 month period shown in all the authority areas except Sandwell.

The NEET health check at January 2007 made the following key points:

- The proportion of young people whose current situation was unknown showed the usual seasonal decrease on the previous quarter and a reduction compared to the same quarter in the previous year.
- The proportion of 16-18 year olds participating in learning had increased on the same quarter as the previous year. All areas achieved an increase except Sandwell, though this exception was due to different recording methods.
- There was a decrease in the proportion of teenage mothers in education, employment and training compared to the previous quarter and previous year in Walsall. In the other three areas there were small increases.
- For young people with LDD, there were small decreases in the proportion in the NEET and EET groups, a result of an increase in 'not knowns'.

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- The proportion of care leavers in the NEET group showed a small increase in all areas except Wolverhampton during the 12 month period, having shown a small decrease in the previous 3 quarters.
- The proportion of young people engaging in substance misuse in the NEET group had decreased from June 2006 to December 2006.
- With regard to ethnicity, participation in EET had increased for all ethnic groups compared to the previous quarter. Young people of mixed background continued to have the highest adjusted NEET % for the Black Country. Within this group White and Black Caribbean young people had the highest adjusted NEET.

### 3.2 KickStart performance at May 2007

The following table summarises the performance of the KickStart programme in terms of achievement against the key indicators which trigger funding under the current programme. There are additional qualitative ways in which KickStart might be measured, some of which are detailed later in this report. However, the figures in the table below say much about the successes and challenges of the programme and the range of ways in which it is supporting young people.

Output	Profiled target to be achieved by March 2008	Actual achieved at May 2007	Actual % of lifetime target achieved at May 2007	Predicted % achieved at March 2008, based on current rate
Initial assessment	1330	<b>552</b>	42%	64%
Learning plan	1330	<b>539</b>	41%	63%
Start - non accredited	199	<b>80</b>	40%	61%
Start - Entry 3	530	<b>156</b>	30%	46%
Start - Level 1	600	<b>235</b>	37%	56%
Achieved - non accredited qualification	100	<b>82</b>	82%	125%
Achieved - Entry 3	250	<b>90</b>	36%	55%
Achieved - Level 1	275	<b>178</b>	65%	99%
Completion of work placement	190	<b>118</b>	62%	95%
Progression - to training or FE	859	<b>270</b>	31%	47%
Progression - to full time employment	110	<b>7</b>	6%	9%
Progression - to part time employment	59	<b>3</b>	3%	5%
Activity training	990	<b>121</b>	12%	18%

The final column, 'predicted % achieved at March 2008' was calculated assuming the rate of achievement remains at same rate as for the first 19 months of the programme.

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Across the whole programme the highest achieving areas against target are; achievements of non-accredited qualifications (82% of target), Level 1 qualifications achieved (65%) and completion of a work placement (62%).

The lowest achieving areas against target are; progress into part time employment (3% of target), progression into full time employment (6%) and activity training (12%).

#### **4. The KickStart providers**

The following brief descriptions of the providers are based on short (half day visits) to each. The text under each of the subheadings is based entirely on these visits. It has been included in order to provide some context for the analysis which follows and to give an indication of the first impressions which the providers are giving to their learners.

##### **4.1 Age Concern**

###### *Environment and facilities*

The training facility is located on Bridge Street, a major retail street in Walsall. The facility is on the second floor of a building also housing the local courts. The reception area is relaxed and welcoming, if a little crowded. The training facilities appeared to be very good. There were numerous training rooms at the centre. The trainee population is mixed and includes some older learners.

The room used for KickStart learners was well furnished and contained three or four PCs. Work and testimonials from KickStart learners were displayed on the walls.

###### *Programme delivery*

The programme is delivered over 16.5 hours per week on Monday-Wednesday. There is a strong classroom based focus to the programme with learners completing a City & Guilds certificate in literacy and numeracy as a minimum. Sessions are designed around a variety of topics and foci, ensuring that learners are not always aware that they are focusing on literacy and numeracy. Other sessions include drug awareness, personal hygiene, food hygiene, health & safety, equalities & diversity. Several of these sessions are run by people from other agencies. Learners also do sessions on budgeting, diet and life skills. The programme is 8 weeks in length and few learners go beyond this.

###### *Client group*

Age Concern has run 10 KickStart groups over the life of the programme to date, varying in number from 4 to 12. A significant number of learners report that they were bullied at school (by either peers or teachers). Lack of confidence is reported as the key issue for almost all learners. Some are ex-offenders, others drug users and most have been in the NEET group since leaving school. Clients tend to come from families who historically have not worked.

###### *Unique aspect of programme / speciality*

Some learners have chosen to in-fill in some of the health & social care modules which take place in other parts of the training facilities.

Good links with local agency 'Keep Young People Engaged' has led to a number of referrals who are offenders and have been in prison. Care is taken to ensure that there are no more than 2 such clients in each group. The make up of each group is seen as crucial – much care is taken to try to get the 'mix right'.

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Age Concern see themselves as very successful at entry 3 or level 1 achievements in literacy or numeracy and good at delivering essential skills. The organisation also believes that they have a strong reputation with other agencies as a result of their commitment to do the best for every young person and to provide what they say that they will provide. Age Concern also has an annual 'learners forum' in which around 50 learners, including some from KickStart, evaluate the programmes on offer.

## **4.2 Electric Palace**

### *Environment and facilities*

The Electric Palace training facility is housed in a centre for young people based in Bloxwich, North Walsall. As well as KickStart and E2E training the Electric Palace offers a range of services including a multi-media Cyber Café, counselling service, support & guidance, free condom distribution, pregnancy health counsellors, health information, youth clubs (Under 13 and Over 13), detached work for youth, learning & support mentors. The Electric Palace was established 8 years ago and is part of the Bloxwich Community Partnership.

The training room for KickStart learners is spacious and welcoming though could do with some decoration. It had a more 'social atmosphere' than the relatively more formal learning environments of the other training providers visited. This atmosphere is likely to appeal to some learners more than others.

### *Programme delivery*

Parts of a scheme of work for KickStart were available to view. The social programme includes on going key skills work and sessions on understanding Europe, relationships, drug awareness, nutrition, sexual health, and homelessness. All KickStart learners also complete a CV and a covering letter for prospective employers. Staff interviewed indicated that there is a high degree of focus on social and personal development at Electric Palace – generally learners are by no means ready for employment after 8 weeks.

### *Client group*

Enrolments onto Electric Palace's KickStart programme have been lower than hoped despite the centre being 'young people friendly' and employing detached youth workers, part of whose role is to recruit onto KickStart. Those who have completed the course have been a mixed group, all with significant personal and social needs as well as having a need to improve their key basic and employability skills.

### *Unique aspect of programme / speciality*

Electric Palace has a more relaxed atmosphere and more social facilities than other providers visited. There are also a number of personal, social and health support agencies based in the same building. These are unique features which will appeal to some learners. Electric Palace specialises in providing high quality learning in the area of sexual health.

## **4.3 Nacro Oldbury**

### *Environment and facilities*

Nacro Oldbury is one of three Nacro centres running KickStart programmes. For the purpose of this evaluation, this was the only Nacro centre visited. It is located in the Oldbury district of Sandwell. It is well situated within easy reach of the local bus station. The main entrance is located at the back of the building which can appear confusing to newcomers, but the reception is roomy and friendly. The training centre has disabled access, a canteen is available on site for hot meals and snacks, plus a drinks machine located near the canteen area.

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There is currently one base room used by KickStart learners, plus 5 other rooms for various training sessions depending on what is being delivered e.g. IT, cooking, drama, gardening etc. The room is exceptionally attractive, colourful and welcoming, with lots of the learners' pictures, profiles, photographs, project/written work and achievements displayed on the walls. Much effort has been made to create a personalised space which reflects the group of individuals using it. The group have negotiated buying a goldfish as a shared pet which they take turns in feeding and have their own gardening section for growing flowers and vegetables.

#### *Programme delivery*

Sessions run from 9.30am to 1pm every day, with sessions sometimes switching to the afternoons if some learners find it particularly difficult to attend in the mornings. There are usually a group of 8 learners in at any one time. The programme aims to run for 8 weeks, but frequently goes on for 10-12 weeks if the needs of the group require more input. Learning concentrates on three main areas: literacy and numeracy, social support needs and a vocational element. The vocational element may be a week's taster session. The programme is delivered by the programme co-ordinator, a basic skills worker and an IT specialist. Other sessions include health and safety, budgeting, social skills, personal hygiene, drug awareness, equality and diversity, drama, art/drawing and gardening. Other external agencies are also brought in for specific sessions.

#### *Client group*

Most of the learners are in supported housing or living independently. Many have a background involving offending and drug taking (especially heroin). In addition, many learners have mental health problems.

#### *Unique aspect of programme / speciality*

Drama is an extremely positive element at NACRO. This appears to have been an unexpected benefit, yet has proved a huge success, not just as an activity but as a medium through which different aspects of the programme have been delivered (for example, delivering health and safety through drama). Likewise, the delivery of the Arts Award has been highly successful, with learners having choreographed and produced their own performance, including the sound and lighting. The success factors at NACRO are perceived by staff to be very much linked to the diversity in the way the programme is delivered.

## **4.4 NOVA**

#### *Environment and facilities*

The NOVA KickStart programme is run from premises well located in the centre of Willenhall. The training centre is well appointed and presented. The KickStart learners have their own room towards the back of the busy facilities, though the learners appeared to be well integrated with other staff and learners on other courses. The room has a modern and professional feel and there is learners' work and testimonials displayed on the walls.

#### *Programme delivery*

Group size is 3-6, deliberately low to increase individual time which is necessary. It is an 8 week programme with learners who are not then ready for E2E being referred elsewhere. The induction week includes a project at a local library, to assess learners' skills and abilities. Other key sessions include numeracy and literacy, health & safety training, key skills target setting (including time keeping, cleanliness, cooking, and some personal skills to develop. The final week is set aside for the learners to plan and organise their own trip/outdoor projects) and a lot of team building to improve confidence. The programme includes learners making a

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presentation about their work. The tutor interviewed characterised the course as 'soft and spongy', to allow

#### *Client group*

Learners have typically done nothing since leaving school. Some are offenders (through YOT), and many are in foster care, with drug issues or with other particular need such as ADHD.

#### *Unique aspect of programme / speciality*

The KickStart programme at NOVA is particularly strong in the area of maintaining boundaries, ensuring learners are aware of the importance of areas such as time-keeping: 'Firm but fair'. The KickStart tutor has access to a people carrier and takes the groups out on learning visits on a regular basis.

### **4.5 Rathbone**

#### *Environment and facilities*

Rathbone Training is situated on the first floor of a large multi-purpose building at Newy Business Park in Tipton, an area of high deprivation and unemployment. Although the side entrance and stairwell leading up to the first floor are in need of some decoration, the reception area to the training centre is very welcoming and friendly. Training rooms, administrative/staff offices and communal areas lead off from the main corridor. The rooms are decorated to a good standard are well lit and equipped. There is a communal area where learners can meet at break and lunch times.

#### *Programme delivery*

Learners attend sessions from 9.30am until 1.30pm, four days a week. Although the funding only covers an 8 week period, most of the learners here need longer than that before feeling ready to move on to further training or placements. Learners are kept on the programme for as long as possible. Although numbers vary and can be quite low, the success rate of those who start on the programme was reported as very good and has produced a 41% positive progress rate. The programme is delivered by the KickStart Training Advisor and one key skills worker, with supplementary support from external agencies (for example, child protection advisor, pastoral support). Senior management emphasised the enormous part played by the staff describing them as '*fantastic and dedicated... We could not achieve what we do if it was not for the staff. I cannot praise them enough*' (S11).

#### *Client group*

The typical background of learners attending Rathbone comprises young offenders and young people with learning difficulties. The majority come from a deprived family background lacking in work ethic or support, and 50% learners attend as part of a court order. Much emphasis is put on pastoral support, given the high support needs of the learners.

#### *Unique aspect of programme / speciality*

Rathbone is different in that they offer almost an open door policy, willing to take learners at almost any level. They also practice a roll on-roll off approach to running the programme, as attempting to deliver to a set cohort of learners for a fixed period would not be possible. This is seen as a positive aspect, since it enables them to adapt to the specific needs of the learners at any one time. Another unique aspect is that Rathbone offer a breakfast club between 9am and 9.30am and provide lunch for learners, both of which are free. In addition, they provide the learners with free bus passes. Lastly, Rathbone concentrate where possible on one to one support, having recognised that any one to one support has proved highly beneficial. '*Individual*

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*support and guidance has become one of the most important aspects of the programme.....this often goes unrecognised'. (S12)*

#### **4.6 St. Thomas's Community Network**

##### *Environment and facilities*

St Thomas's Community Network is a community learning centre, registered as a charity, with a brief to develop education, training and community activities in an informal setting located within a housing estate in Dudley. The site includes much youth provision, including youth social and sports clubs, a day nursery, school exclusion unit, after school and holiday clubs. The KickStart provision is focussed in the same portable building as the E2E programme. Both programmes have their own classroom in a large portable building, but share social areas.

##### *Programme delivery*

The programme is run Monday-Thursday, 9.30-2.50 with appropriate breaks. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the learners attend the learning centre on site, to do their literacy and numeracy work. Other topics on the programme include; improving own learning, sexual awareness, skills for life, CV work, application forms, gym, European Union, working with others and motivational skills. Most learners attend for around 10 weeks, although if learners are not ready to move on, then they are maintained on the programme (some for more than 20 weeks).

##### *Client group*

Learners typically have multiple needs, some being referred by the YOT, some with drug problems and some who have not attended school for several years. St Thomas' has noticed that the level of learners being referred to KickStart has noticeably dropped over the past 18 months. Initially, learners were at level 1 with a number of other personal issues but recent referrals are lower level and require a great deal more support.

##### *Unique aspect of programme / speciality*

Young mothers have been a notable success, some of them coming back after having their baby. They are said to do better if they start on KickStart early in their pregnancy. St Thomas has also had particular success with KickStart learners going on activity residentials. The results of some of these were described as spectacularly good, especially in the areas of relationship and confidence building. The residential is linked to a qualification: 'working with others'.

The advantage of a mixed community venue is that St Thomas staff have often known the KickStart learners since they were at primary school, having been involved in other services.

#### **4.7 Trinity Training Services**

##### *Environment and facilities*

Trinity Training Services are located on the second floor of a large, multi-purpose building in Wolverhampton. It is situated close to the central bus station and near the Metro link. The training centre has disabled access and a tuck shop is available to learners selling healthy option drinks and snacks. The KickStart learners use one main room but also have access to two other rooms. The area used by KickStart learners is clean, decorated to a good standard and provides adequate room for study. The corridor and training room walls display a range of both learners' work, information about complementary support services and photos/feedback relating to recent trips and events experienced by learners.

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### *Programme delivery*

Groups start every 8 weeks on average. Induction is in house for one week, including detailed assessment. Tuesday and Thursday are used for key skills. The rest of the sessions are varied, including sexual health, motivation, and drug awareness. On Wednesdays there are motivation sessions, jointly with some E2E learners, and these are seen as critical. During weeks 6 or 7 learners do work experience. Many learners go beyond the 8 weeks; one learner even went to 20 weeks. A maximum of 12 learners can be offered places at any one time.

### *Client group*

Many learners come from backgrounds where it is not the 'done thing' to learn, so Trinity Training tries hard to make it worthwhile for the learners to attend. They receive a number of pregnant learners, several through the YOT. Most come from deprived families, family breakdown or have suffered some form of exclusion.

### *Unique aspect of programme / speciality*

Trinity Training believes that they are known for their work with the 'hardest to help.' This service places high emphasis on developing good personal, social and employment skills amongst their learners. The strong leadership and management skills maintained by the staff, coupled with presenting as particularly approachable and accessible to all learners, has resulted in a consistently high success rate for learners on the KickStart programme.

## **5. The learners' perspective**

### **5.1 Who is on the programme and why?**

The majority of learners interviewed for this report had been signposted to the KickStart programme from Connexions. Four learners had learnt about the programme from friends already participating on the programme and had been inspired sufficiently by what they had heard to approach the training provider directly. A small number had been placed on the KickStart programme as part of a court order. All learners had to meet the eligibility criteria to be accepted onto the programme.

From the learners' perspective the overriding incentive for applying for KickStart was to improve numeracy and literacy skills, in order to progress to further training (E2E) and to increase opportunities for college admission or for gaining future employment. Many learners recognised the need to improve their key skills level, but at the same time wanted to increase their levels of confidence and receive support and guidance in relation to future training/work possibilities.

### **5.2 What is working well for learners?**

A number of aspects worked particularly well for KickStart learners. The key beneficial points raised by learners interviewed are as follows;

#### **Basic skills training**

Most KickStart learners had reached the stage where they realised and accepted the fact that key skills at a basic level are necessary, in order to have choices about what to do with their lives: *'KickStart has helped me focus, set goals and decide what I want out of life'* (L18). For the majority of learners, therefore, the learning focus was on improving numeracy and literacy skills, which they saw as the first and essential step to gaining further training and future employment. One learner commented that the KickStart programme has *'helped me get key skills back on track. Now I have a clearer vision of what my future could be like.'* (L3)

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### **Building confidence and a future**

*'KickStart has increased my confidence so that now I feel able to think about the future and be confident enough to try out different aspects of training' (L7).* Many of the learners meeting the criteria for KickStart have experienced low levels of confidence and self esteem, a lack of direction in life and are in need of guidance and support in order to move forward. KickStart provides the necessary building blocks, both on an educational and a pastoral level, which enables the young person to set targets, visualise goals and create a pathway towards the future they want:

*'Without KickStart, I wouldn't have been able to improve my grades and hopefully get to college' (L1).*

### **Small group and one to one tuition**

Many learners commented that being in a smaller group than they had been in mainstream school made a significant difference both to their attitude to the learning process and to their ability to absorb and understand the skill areas being taught. Where it could be offered, one to one tuition proved to be highly beneficial to learners, especially those who were lacking in confidence or experiencing specific learning difficulties.

*'There is lots of praise and encouragement which is good for me because I am quite a nervous person' (L19).*

This one to one, highly personalised support played an important role in progressing a number of learners in basic skills to a level they would probably not have achieved otherwise.

*'One to one support has really helped me' (L2).*

Other learners commented on the fact that smaller groups equated with a much quieter environment which was more conducive to concentrating and learning.

*'It's quieter in the classroom than at school, so I can get my head down and don't mess around' (L20).*

### **Learner-tutor relationship**

Learners gave very positive feedback on the KickStart tutors, particularly enjoying the less formal relationship between learner and tutor. Learners appreciated the fact that they could be on first name terms with their tutors, something which created less of a divide and made learning more fun. Learners generally had a more equal and supportive relationship with their tutors, compared with their experience at school, offering them the experience of a more learning-centred approach to teaching.

*'Tutors are more friendly and approachable. They are there to help you get to where you want to be, not to tell you what to do' (L18).*

### **Work placement tasters**

Learners who had been given the opportunity to undertake a work placement taster had enjoyed and gained from this element. For some, the experience had been essential in building up confidence to a level where they felt more able to explore possible future training opportunities. One learner, who had taken up a placement in a PDSA shop, commented:

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*'They built up my confidence by putting me in a situation which is completely different and new for me. Working with new people and the public really helped my confidence.'* (L19).

For other learners, a work experience taster provided the opportunity to try working in different fields to get a better idea of what they might want to do in the future.

*'The opportunity to try things out (taster sessions) works well for me, because I have to experience things first hand to see what I like.'* (L6).

### **Local visits and residential trips**

Learners talked with great enthusiasm and animation about day trips and longer residential trips as a group. One learner said of the trip to Think Tank *'I've never seen anything like that before. I didn't even know it existed!'* (L12).

For many learners these outings provided a first experience of a local place of interest or activity, as well as the opportunity to interact and bond as a group beyond the framework of the daily 'classroom' programme. In relation to the residential trips, it was often the first time a young person had been away from the Black Country and their family. This experience can offer unique and unprecedented benefits to a vulnerable young person in terms of personal development and social/life skills within safe and secure boundaries. One learner, who had been bullied at school, had subsequently found it hard to open up to people and trust them. Having gone to Wales on a residential trip, she described it as *'a totally new experience for me, which helped me to make closer friends'*. (L6)

### **Creative/innovative approach to learning**

Employing a more innovative approach to developing skills and knowledge appeared to prove particularly successful with the type of learners participating on KickStart, as opposed to more traditional classroom teaching. Learners appreciated the opportunity to participate in art and drama, even though many had no previous experience of expressing themselves in these ways. Creativity enables young people to develop individual skills and confidence in new areas; one learner who did not feel comfortable participating in a drama production being staged in the local theatre, elected to be in control of the sound and lighting for the production. He was evidently thrilled at this achievement as he had *'never done anything like that before, and didn't even know I could do it'*. (L7)

By introducing a creative approach to learning, not only can many of the key skills be developed in an enjoyable way, but many of the necessary procedures can also be relayed to the young people extremely effectively. For example, one training provider used role play and drama as a medium to go through health and safety procedures.

### **Practical support and an alternative to life now**

Given the background and vulnerability of the young people on KickStart, it is not surprising that they are particularly appreciative of the more practical/social support they can receive through the programme. It is important, therefore, to highlight some of the practical benefits that were mentioned during interviews. The most frequently mentioned benefits were the following: being given an alarm clock, having a free breakfast and a free lunch, being given a free bus pass and getting a £30 weekly allowance. For learners with low motivation or perceived incentive to learn, KickStart provides an alternative to how they are currently living their lives, and will hopefully go on to motivate them further:

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*'I like coming – it's better than staying in bed'. (L11)*  
*'If I stayed at home I would just play PS games all day. I wanted to get out of the house'. (L12)*

### **Vignette 1**

'One young female learner came to us for initial assessment. She was so lacking in confidence that she was too frightened to even come into the room, despite a family member being with her. She had been terribly bullied at school and had been out of school for 18 months. She did turn up for assessment and induction and began to make some friends. She got through health & safety, entry level 1 literacy, did our key skills. She finished KickStart in May 2006, moved through E2E and is now on a care programme here doing her NVQ. It's helped that she has been able to do all that here. I honestly think that without KickStart to begin with she would not have achieved any of that.'

### **5.3 What are the barriers to progress?**

It is essential for a programme such as KickStart to be aware of the barriers to progress, as seen through the eyes of the KickStart learners themselves. Learners found it genuinely difficult to highlight elements of the programme that were not working for them or that they would like to change, perhaps as a result of their low self-confidence or limited experience of different learning environments. However, the following views were recorded:

#### **Length of programme**

One of the recurring comments from the learners was that a programme of 8 weeks was too short. Many felt that they needed more time working to improve their numeracy and literacy skills, before progressing on to E2E or further training courses. There is a danger that some learners do not feel ready or confident enough after only 8 weeks to take the step up from KickStart to E2E, and if the timescale were to be adhered to rigidly, these young people would not be able to cope with the increased demands of training and work placements. In addition, some learners who have been out of school for a considerable length of time need time to get used to a structure in their lives, working in groups and building up trust with peers and adults. This process in itself may take a number of weeks, during which time the more academic demands of the programme are not being met.

#### **Group dynamics of learners**

Where a group of new learners can all start at about the same time, the group has every chance of bonding and interacting well. This is often not possible, however, where learners are accessing the programme at different times, causing conflict between those who have been on the programme for some time and those who have joined more recently. In addition, a couple of learners disclosed that they did not get on very well with some of the others in their group. Given the high vulnerability of the young people involved, together with the vast range of needs displayed, the incredible challenge of meeting the needs of a particular group as well as the specific needs of an individual should not be underestimated. There are advantages to having groups with mixed experiences, personalities and needs but such heterogeneous groups require a great deal of skilled management if they are to gel and each individual is to achieve.

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### **Vignette 2**

Learner R has been a great success on KickStart but demonstrates the difficulties of working with this age group. He was described by his referrer as an aggressive and difficult young person but the trainer now describes him as 'a pussy cat once you get to know him'. R has achieved well on KickStart, attending every day for the full programme, enjoying it so much that he regularly stays later than he is required. He has just reached 18 so his foster placement is about to end. His social worker has met him on KickStart premises with his KickStart trainer, as that was the only time the social worker knew where R was to be found. The trainer is happy to provide this support but it is time consuming for him. R will need to be moved to a hostel from foster placement and the trainer is aware that the hostel will provide further challenges for R who does not have support from many other adults. R is about to complete KickStart but is by no means ready for E2E. His provider is talking to the Prince's Trust about providing R with further basic skill training before he returns to enrol on E2E in a few months time. Having invested such time and effort in R and having had some success they strongly hope that he succeeds and returns to them.

### **5.4 What does the future hold for KickStart learners?**

The majority of the KickStart learners interviewed had already reached the stage where they understood and accepted the fact that it was necessary to gain key skills at basic level in order to achieve what they wanted out of life in terms of further training, college and future employment. For some learners, therefore, the focus is on improving numeracy and literacy skills, and possibly taking up a placement taster, in order to gain a better idea of what further training they may want to do. For other learners, they have already have a clear idea of what sort of occupation they would like to take up and are working towards further training through E2E and the opportunity to experience a work placement in their chosen area of interest.

The learners interviewed reported to be aspiring to:

- Apprenticeship (e.g. in mechanics)
- Further education at college
- Going to college to do IT based course
- E2E programme and future training
- Helped me think about training in office administration/IT – now going on to do a placement in an office
- Trying out other training tasters (e.g. catering)
- Work placement in a restaurant
- Work placement in mechanics
- Want to go to Dudley College

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### Vignette 3

This learner is male, 17 yrs old and is in his 5<sup>th</sup> week of the KickStart programme. He had not found it easy to engage at secondary school, often truanted and saw no relevance in what was being taught in the classroom. He never attempted to do homework, often asking his sister to complete his homework for him. He came from a large family, his parents were very encouraging of educational attainment and his siblings all enjoyed school and strove to do their best. He was not disruptive but gradually became less and less motivated to attend school, missing out on basic skill development particularly in literacy. He began spending less time in school and more time 'on the streets' or at home. His parents became increasingly worried about him and what his future held. For the past year he has spent most days watching television and most evenings out on the streets with his mates. By this point he was beginning to realise that, without basic qualifications, he could end up with a life on the street and no job prospects. This realisation coincided with a friend of his, who had recently started on KickStart, telling him about the programme and how well it was working for him. He felt it was the right time to change his focus in life and so approached the training provider directly. *'I reached a point where I wanted to do something for myself. I knew that if I stayed on the street, I'd end up with a criminal record'*. He met the criteria, was assessed and is now thoroughly enjoying the course and where it is taking him. *'Now that I've come here, I know I'll have a different future. KickStart is taking me places I never thought I'd go'*. He commented on how his whole family thought he would give up after a day, but are now astonished that he attends every day and even takes work home so that he can study in the evenings. He feels that KickStart has helped him focus on what he really wants to do with his life and has given him the opportunity to get where he wants to go. *'I wouldn't be doing any kind of training or job without KickStart'*.

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## 6. The providers' perspective

### 6.1 Strengths and success factors

The staff interviewed, both managers and trainers, generally agreed that the KickStart programme has achieved a number of significant successes in its brief history and has addressed a real and continuing need. However there was also agreement that it has not quite reached its potential in terms of the impact which such a programme could have on this group of the NEET cohort:

*'We've had very good progress – very few have left without any success. KickStart is definitely different from E2E and other programmes... Our biggest successes have been those who have moved on and progressed – those who in the first session wouldn't even write their own names.'* (S10)

*'Within the constraints of KS I'd say we have been very successful'* (S8)

*'It's a good programme but it needs tweaking. It's not meeting all NEETs' needs because it should be about breaking down barriers before moving on to other things.'* (S3)

*'The basis of KickStart is very good, the concept is fantastic, but the programme has become too target-led'* (S7)

### A varied and relevant learning programme

Providers were reluctant to generalise too much about learners' needs, however all of the providers have developed a scheme of work which forms the basis of an 8 week programme and which has been improved over time as KickStart learners' needs have become better known.

A successful programme in the majority of cases included the following agreed elements; a programme run over 3 or 4 days' training each week; an ongoing focus on key skills (particularly literacy and numeracy); opportunity and expectation that learners would gain key skills and other qualifications; an emphasis on good time-keeping and expectations of behaviour appropriate to a workplace; popular modular sessions included sexual health, drug awareness, health and safety, communication skills, team working, general employability and motivation; some project work based on trips to social and work environments.

Indeed more than one trainer would have liked to have taken the young people out more, believing that this is a particularly good way to improve communication and socialisation skills. *'When I started I thought it was going to be more about trips out. We do take the learners out, but not as much as I'd like.'* (S11)

Trainers agreed that a good session is one which is highly interactive and which has a theme of direct relevance to the young people's lives. Sessions which were deemed more unpopular were those which the young people perceived as more distant – for example the European Union or Citizenship.

Other strengths of the programme have been the work experience week(s) towards the end of a Kickstart programme which were universally seen as beneficial to almost all who participated.

### Small groups and personalisation

Small group work was identified as one of KickStart's strengths, allowing for relationships to develop between learners and tutors and for more one-to-one

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opportunities. This is more important for this group of learners than many others, because many of them have limited communication skills and past experiences of learning mean they take time to trust a tutor.

All of the providers have a main tutor working on KickStart who sees each small group through the programme from start to finish. Again this was identified as a strength, giving the tutor chance to really get to know individual learner needs and tailor the programme accordingly.

Only one of the providers reported a roll-on roll-off approach to the programme, having had difficulty recruiting groups of learners at the same time.

### **Atmosphere, trust and potential – less tangible success factors**

There seemed to be a number of factors associated with success for KickStart clients which were less tangible and seemed not to be associated with simple programme design. These clustered into three areas:

The first factor is providing the right atmosphere for learning. This is difficult to achieve for a group of young people who have often had almost entirely negative previous experiences of learning. Important elements are a positive experience of interview, assessment and induction; time given to allow members of the small group of learners to integrate; and a neat and organised but non-threatening learning environment. A further important element to 'atmosphere' is that of maintaining boundaries. Providers were again in agreement that while KickStart learners have often had poor experience of learning institutions, these young people still benefit from and ultimately ask for firm boundaries with regard to time keeping and behaviour. Again several providers gave examples of learners with whom they had worked for weeks simply to establish good time keeping or appropriate language.

*It's a good starting point for those with low self esteem and low confidence. Just to retain them and get some on to E2E is a success. Just to get some of them to write a full sentence is a bonus.' (S9)*

The second less tangible success factor is the fostering of trust. Interviews with providers indicated that this relies on the interpersonal skills and experience of the trainer and again is directly associated with the time devoted to getting to know the history and personalities of each member of the group. In a short programme there may be pressure to move straight from induction to project work linked to qualifications. However, a week or more may be better spent in developing trust within and between the groups of learners.

The third key success factor is finding the best time and place to expose KickStart learners to their own potential. Several providers talked of the importance of one session each week when KickStart learners work with E2E learners – time in which they could begin to see that they have the potential to succeed and move forward onto higher level training and employment. Other examples given were taking groups to workplaces and following these up with discussion about the steps learners need to take to achieve their employment goals. A further way in which potential can be successfully emphasised is by acknowledging success. Certificates and other achievements need to be publically awarded and positively acknowledged, work displayed in walls, and initiatives such as 'learner of the month' can be hugely beneficial. For many young people on KickStart this will be the first occasion on which such public statements of success have been made.

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*'KickStart hasn't just appeared – we have been working with this NEET client group for a long time so it's developed over time.... for success you need caring staff, a free and friendly atmosphere, some structure and an output at the end of it.'* (S12)

## **6.2 Barriers to achieving**

The most frequently identified barriers to learners' achievement have been summarised in the following section. Some of the barriers to providers in delivering the programme which they would have liked to are also identified in the following section on 'additional issues'. The two sections should therefore be read very much in conjunction with each other.

### **Length and minimum requirements of the programme**

There was unanimous agreement that the KickStart programme needed to be longer to maximise the benefit and meet the needs of most of the young people. It was acknowledged by all providers that contractually the programme need not necessarily be 8 weeks, but the funding structures and early planning guidance were such that providers were all working to an 8 week programme for most learners:

*'We thought the bid was for a programme for young people who needed a lot of work but it didn't come out that way. The rigidity comes from the LSC.'* (S1)

*'If someone comes in at entry level 1 and moves to entry level 2 they can become highly motivated but there is no time to take them on.'* (S2)

*'Some don't even want to come into the building when they start – 8 weeks is not enough.'* (S4)

*'Should be a longer programme – we should not be setting them up to fail.'* (S11)

*'With a few adaptations KickStart could be really good – maybe go to 12 weeks.'* (S10)

Ideal length of programme is a fine balance to achieve as touched upon by the following quote from a trainer, *'... to be fair we don't want a long programme going on and on. Time bound can be advantageous because it makes you assess people in a short period.'* (S5)

Extending the length of the average programme would not preclude the occasional need to move young people on quickly however;

*'Recently we had a lad doing catering work experience – they wanted to keep him on so he's gone straight onto E2E catering. All he wanted was a bit of confidence and some strategies for his literacy problems.'* (S10)

There was also agreement that KickStart would be improved by allowing greater flexibility in terms of requirements while on the programme. Currently there is pressure on trainers, both real and perhaps perceived, to ensure learners achieve those milestones which trigger funding. In many instances however the young people would be better served being allowed and encouraged to shift their focus onto achieving softer and less tangible outcomes. For example:

*'In some cases just getting them to attend on time is a triumph'* (S7)

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*'I know it's difficult to build everything into the programme but we do a lot of multi agency work - e.g. arrange counselling, victim support, advice etc which is not recognised.'* (S10)

*'Make qualification requirements softer – look at ASDAN'* (S3)

*'Some on E2E with poor punctuality we have taken off and put on KickStart for a few weeks. This has worked. It's having flexibility because we are the experts we know the learners better than anyone.'* (S2)

The requirement for weekly learner review also felt onerous to many trainers. Again flexibility was requested in this regard: *'Fortnightly reviews would be fine and leave more time for us with the learners on other things'* (S2).

### **Eligibility criteria**

Eligibility was the second most frequently mentioned barrier after length of programme by all providers. There was unanimous agreement that the initial and current eligibility criteria had mitigated against some young people accessing KickStart who could have benefited hugely.

Issues around eligibility criteria were two-fold. Firstly there was unhappiness that the criteria had appeared to change more than once during the short life of the programme and that this had caused some confusion and anxiety for staff, some of which had been transmitted on to potential learners.

The second issue regarding eligibility was that KickStart providers were required to reject learners with achievement at or above level 1. However a number of examples were quoted of young people who had achieved at this level but who had other significant needs which meant that they were not suitable for E2E or equivalent programme. Typically these additional needs included poor interpersonal skills, extreme lack of confidence, drug or alcohol problems, family or other social problems. These additional problems are those which are frequently found within NEET young people. Indeed they are recognised in terms of their inclusion on the list of eligibility criteria for KickStart. The key point is that undue importance was placed on prior academic achievement in defining which young people were eligible.

*'Some learners are quite good academically but their communication skills so poor that they can't possibly go on to E2E. The other problem is that criteria have changed during the life of the programme.'* (S4)

*'We should be able to take level 2 people onto KickStart. They are deemed 'over qualified' for KickStart but are often not up to E2E.'* (S7)

*'There is nothing about 'social needs' on the eligibility criteria – this is the key thing that is missing.'* (S7)

*'It has been a mistake to introduce this level 1 or below' requirement – some of our young people are working towards level 3 but hit other criteria.'* (S8)

### **Recruiting learners to KickStart**

Providers all stated that they had not achieved the number of learners which they had anticipated and hoped for. There had been spare capacity in the system. Some of this capacity would ideally have been taken up by longer and more flexible learning for existing clients as detailed above. Nevertheless there remains a need to

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identify whether more young people could be attracted onto KickStart or similar provision.

Describing and explaining the underachievement of numbers against target is not possible by simply comparing total numbers in the NEET cohort with places on KickStart. This type provision will only ever suit a limited number of young people within the NEET group. Section 3.1 above indicates that the 'NEET cohort' is made up of young people with a variety of needs. As one tutor said: *'I think there are a maximum number of NEET clients who can manage this particular kind of programme'* (S1).

Several providers identified Connexions as having failed to signpost as many learners to KickStart as they might have done. Only two of the providers were very positive about their relationship with Connexions in regard to KickStart referrals. There was some concern that the processes and systems for referral had not been clearly defined, others who believed that Connexions staff were reluctant to refer as there was no financial benefit for doing so, others who believed it was a legacy of Connexions not running the KickStart programme themselves.

As with any programme hoping to engage young people in the NEET group there needs to be concerted effort and significant investment in the recruitment phase of the programme. Organisations and individuals need to be motivated and incentivised to recruit and refer young people.

*'I can't understand why there hasn't been more take up. They get the £30. I think one problem is the initial assessment which they don't like.'* (S5)

Innovative methods of recruitment are always worth trying.

*'We even tried offering financial incentive to learners to 'bring a friend' We've had some success with that I think.'* (S9)

An indication that improved marketing could produce results was implicit in the report from most providers that many of their referrals come from friends of current learners. It would appear that once learners have been introduced to KickStart they see its benefit and often know others who would also benefit.

### **Additional barriers to learning**

Providers reported a very small drop out rate of KickStart learners once they had gone through induction. Those who had dropped out had done so usually due to changes in personal life; *'We have only had two not achieve, one moved to Newcastle, the other dropped out to ensure he could claim benefit while living in a hostel.'* (s6)

There was also some but limited report of peer pressure applied by friends in the NEET cohort, discouraging their peers from continuing to attend.

In many cases it was additional care and support given by trainers which enabled some of the many and varied barriers to be breached.

*'Some of the young people we are getting now haven't been at school since year 7, can't tell the time, read or write so they obviously need a lot of support'* (S9)

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*'We had one girl who was visibly losing weight. We found out she was having her food stolen at her hostel so we bought her a microwave and did a week's shopping for her.'* (S10)

### **6.3 Additional issues in delivering KickStart**

There are a number of other issues which have impacted on providers' ability to achieve the maximum benefit for the maximum number of young people. These are summarised below, roughly in order of perceived significance and frequency of mention by providers.

#### **Funding**

The most frequent suggestion regarding improving financial arrangements was to include an 'on programme payment' of some sort for learners. If necessary this could be up to a maximum number of weeks but certainly significantly more than 8. There was an understanding that achievement needs to be incentivised also but that this on-programme payment would reduce the perceived need for KickStart to be such a short programme and allow for some of the more complex needs of the young people to be met.

*'I know that the programme is not fixed at 8 weeks but with £30 / week payment to learners and no on-programme payment it's not affordable to keep them on.'*

A further common financial suggestion was to reduce the gap between payment for 'progression onto E2E' and payment for 'progression into work'. The large difference between these payments was inevitably distorting providers' judgement about some young people's suitability for employment, pushing a small number of learners towards E2E unnecessarily. The programme achievement profile in section 3.2 above confirms this, as it shows that progression onto employment has the lowest achievement rate against target of all the indicators reported.

A further group of issues surrounding finance were raised by more than one provider:

*'Entry levels 1 and 2 should be included in qualifications payments for this group, to ensure the programme is at the right level for all potential learners.'*

*'Lower level, entry level 1 and 2 qualifications need to be funded on KickStart.'* (S9)

Work should be done on payment for softer outcomes, some of which are measurable if necessary (e.g. observe eye contact, positive body language, achieve independent travel etc.)

*'The young mums have been a success but they are not viewed as a positive progression'*(S8)

Issues around the financing of a project such as KickStart go right to the heart of its success, as they directly or indirectly define who the programme is for and what those people will be doing.

Providers were in broad agreement that while they understand the financial imperative to maintain control over budgets, the providers are the 'experts' with this client group and could be granted a greater degree of flexibility in deciding the priority learning needs of these young people. Higher level programmes are predominantly if not totally centred on achievement of measurable learning outcomes. KickStart exists to prepare young people for these programmes in the future and therefore should be

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much less about pushing the young people to achieve measurable outcomes. Some suggestions regarding alternative funding for future programmes are made in the final section of this report.

*'Should be quality not quantity. We are skimming the surface sometimes just to reach the targets.'* (S3)

### **Staff**

The staff who deliver KickStart on a day to day basis were reported by managers and learners as the most important factor in the success of individuals once enrolled on the programme. As mentioned above, learners were unanimous in recognising the value to them in forming trusting and non judgemental relationships with tutors and in the value of sound advice and guidance. Project staff were all willing to put in a huge amount of time and effort into supporting individual young people. During the 6 days of fieldwork for this report, a number of instances were witnessed of staff providing advice, guidance and practical support to young people, which lay outside the formal remit of KickStart learning. Staff who have the required levels of skill, experience and this additional motivation are central to success with this challenging group of young people.

Two of the tutors reported some sense of isolation as a result of them being almost solely responsible for the KickStart learners. This is something which providers would do well to consider as retaining quality staff is vital.

One tutor reflected on the speciality of preparing a programme for this group of learners; *'I was given a scheme of work by managers which just would not have worked for this client group – it was too prescriptive - so I re-wrote my own based on my knowledge of their needs.'*

### **Evidence/auditing**

Providers agreed that the evidencing and auditing of KickStart to date had been onerous. The staff interviewed were experienced and understood the need for evidence and audit of publically funded programmes, but felt that the experience on KickStart had been more stringent than that on similar programmes.

Several providers indicated that they had been asked for evidence of eligibility of learners who had completed the programme previously, in some cases where existing evidence was felt to be sufficient or where obtaining further evidence was very difficult. Providers reported that separate audits had been carried out resulting in a sense of duplication of effort. It was felt that some of this could have been managed better as it had detrimental effect on staff.

*'One young person last week did not know his own address so getting other information out of him was difficult.'* (S4)

*'The goalposts have been moved over the life of the project and this can be de-motivating for staff.'* (S4)

More than one trainer in one of the providers identified the latter concern, which referred to perceived changes in requirements for auditing and the provision of evidence overall. Nonetheless all training providers are aware that when the LSC auditors review files, evidence that has been deemed as acceptable can be queried and more information requested. Although stressful, the results of the vigorous auditing procedures carried out by BCTG have ensured that no monies have been clawed back from providers. This would have had an even more detrimental effect on staff and the provider's finances.

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## **Progression**

KickStart trainers universally expressed commitment to providing the best service possible to young people. Nonetheless there was acknowledgement that pressure to progress learners on to E2E as quickly as possible and certainly within 8 weeks had sometimes led to a reduction in learning experience.

*'When the pressure is on providers to get 60% onto E2E then the pressure is on to change the client group slightly – take on slightly higher level learners.'* (S7)

*'Don't put pressure on young people to move on unrealistically – quality not quantity – I always think what I would want for the young person if it was my son or daughter.'* (S12)

## **Activity residentials for learners**

There were varying views on benefits and management of activity / residential for learners on KickStart. Some providers very keen and saw it as highly successful. Others were not so keen, stressing the need for learners to be focussed on working in-house on basic skills. To some degree the opinions seemed to be dependent on individual trainer's experience, skills and willingness to run residentials. Those trainers who had experience of running residential and took their KickStart learners away were certainly very positive about the experience.

*'We have found the residential to be brilliant. We were hoping to be a specialist provider in this area but that's not happened.'* (S11)

## **Relationship with BCTG**

The relationship between providers and BCTG was not an explicit area of focus in the interviews. However, managers at two of the providers reported the relationship with BCTG as good and improving further as a result of KickStart and viewed the strategic position of BCTG as helpful in overseeing the programme. Two others viewed the close monitoring by the contract manager as a strength.

*'One benefit of the programme has been establishing a relationship with BCTG – we knew them previously but had never had a contract with them before.'* (S8)

## **Networking**

Network meetings between providers were seen as very useful ways to exchange practice and ideas. There was agreement that these had been too frequent in the early months but that meeting every two months or so is valuable.

## **Learner Payments**

The overall perception gained from interviewing both staff and learners was that the weekly £30 allowance for learners is welcome and contributes to maintaining motivation but that it is certainly not a decisive factor in learners completing the programme. Some providers offer financial help with travel and food, others do not. This informal flexibility appeared to be sensible and effective, dependent on local decisions regarding accessibility and the needs of each group of young people.

## **Involving providers from bid to delivery**

The managers who had been involved in the initial bid writing for the KickStart programme each felt that the final programme has significantly altered from the original conception.

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*'Originally we wanted a programme not so target driven, longer than E2E. Young people would come in to a learning gateway, move to a life skills programme then on to E2E. But those who wrote the bid put 10-12 weeks, the training organisations who need to make a profit said they had to have £x per head so it all got shrunk.'* (S8)

There are clearly many pragmatic reasons why a programme such as KickStart will change over the months between the initial bid writing and the delivery phase. However, managers in at least two providers expressed frustration and disappointment that during this period some of the fundamental aims and philosophy behind the initial plan had been lost. They did not appear directly to associate this shift with LSC or ESF funding requirements.

*'It was planned as a pre E2E programme including social engagement and addressing barriers to learning. E2E then went more towards qualifications and for all sorts of reasons KickStart came down to 8 weeks.'* (S4)

#### **6.4 The future**

The statistics regarding the current NEET population coupled with the KickStart performance data and data gathered at interview all go to indicate that there is a real and continuing need for KickStart or a similar programme. Staff were unanimous in this view.

*'There will be nothing to fill this gap if KickStart ends.'* (S2)

*'I just hope something comes to take its place. These young people at these levels need something like KickStart. It's opened my eyes to young people at this level.'* (S9)

*'We need a number of programmes to run at entry levels – i.e. 'pre-KickStart'* (S7)

Some work is already going on to ensure something is in place when KickStart funding comes to an end.

*'We have done a bid for a 'community based' project for NEET, then encourage on to E2E'* (S1)

*'We have been invited to tender for another NEET project in partnership with Connexions to the LSC. This will be less target driven. The bid will include fully funded staffing – it will be more of a sign-posting project, working with other agencies.'* (S8)

It is suggested that the planning of future KickStart type programmes should take account of the following:

- Use the many and varied lessons which have already been learned during the planning and delivery of KickStart, many of which are highlighted in this report.
- Avoid losing experienced and motivated staff to other initiatives.
- Reduce the confusion to young people which inevitably follows the re-branding of programmes – awareness among local young people of what KickStart offers will be lost if a different programme is put in place.

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## 7. Conclusions

Over the first 18 months of the KickStart programme 539 young people have completed an initial assessment and learning plan. Current local figures indicate that at November 2006 the total NEET population in the Black Country was estimated at 2,757 (approximately 9% of the total population in this age group). Of these, 497 were identified as being in the group most likely to benefit from the KickStart programme. There is certainly a significant and continuing population of young people which is in need of the support and learning currently being provided by KickStart.

### 7.1 Is the KickStart programme achieving its aims and meeting the needs of the NEET young people?

From talking to all seven training providers delivering the KickStart programme and to a wide selection of KickStart learners, it is evident that the programme has achieved a great deal.

It provides young people with essential pastoral/social support and guidance at a crucial stage in their lives. It has offered them opportunities to move into future training or employment which might not otherwise have been available. Hundreds of young people living in the Black Country who have benefited from this programme now have higher qualification levels, increased confidence and independence and greater options in relation to future training and employment.

The areas in which KickStart has achieved its strongest quantitative results are in achievement of both non-accredited and accredited qualifications, largely in the areas of key skills. Most learners interviewed reported significant improvements in their literacy and numeracy skills over a short period of time. Actual numbers of learners attending work placement and activity training are comparable and encouraging (approximately 25% of KickStart learners in both cases).

In terms of more qualitative achievements, KickStart is performing extremely strongly, in particular in the following areas:

- Significant improvements in learners' self confidence
- Improving attitudes to learning
- Focusing on key employability skills – time keeping, use of communication, social skills etc.
- Increasing motivation to succeed – KickStart learners reported a much clearer view of their potential futures than before the programme.

### 7.2 Key strengths

The research suggests that the key strengths of the programme, which derive from a combination of organisational management and trainer support, are:

- **Small group and personalised learning**
- **Pastoral and social support alongside more formal learning**
- **Exposure to new experiences in a supportive context**  
e.g. work experience, activity training, visits to a range of venues
- **Use of creative and varied approaches to learning**

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- **Creation of a friendly but professional learning atmosphere**  
Most providers have gone to great lengths to ensure the learning environment is appropriate.
- **Appropriate time devoted to assessment, induction and relationship building**  
Not rushing learners, bearing in mind the constraints of the programme (see below)
- **Staff quality and commitment**  
The vast majority of staff were highly motivated to deliver a high quality and structured programme. Most were also willing to 'go the extra mile' with this challenging group of young people. Some KickStart staff act as advocate for and counsellor to young people, as well as trainer.

### 7.3 Key barriers

The key barriers to learning identified by learners and/or providers are:

- **Length of programme**  
Most said it was too short for learners to achieve their full potential. Such a programme should not be open-ended but should allow for differing needs of the young people. Several providers reported that if 8 weeks is adhered to rigidly there is a danger that some learners will ultimately be set up to fail and to repeat previous negative experiences of learning. Providers acknowledged that they can choose to keep learners on the KickStart programme beyond 8 weeks but that financial considerations preclude them from doing this as often as they would like. Including an 'on programme' element to the funding regime could alleviate some of the pressure to complete in 8 weeks.
- **Group dynamics**  
Some learners found some of their peers difficult to work with, though providers appeared to be doing all they could to mitigate this.
- **Rigidity**  
Some KickStart learners need the opportunity to focus on particular areas of their personal or social development rather than having to achieve some of the pre-determined milestones – more flexibility of provision is needed for some learners.
- **Eligibility criteria**  
The current eligibility criteria were identified as disallowing a number of young people who were perceived to be potential beneficiaries of the programme. Future programmes could consider allowing providers greater flexibility in this regard. (Perhaps 20% of enrolments could be at the providers' own discretion – they are the local experts who understand best the needs of this client group.
- **Recruitment**  
There were clear indications that greater investment in recruitment would be worthwhile – the NEET group are always going to represent a challenge in this area but increased investment in recruitment strategies might be effective e.g. formalising and incentivising the referral process from Connexions; increasing investment in detached workers; formally using current and previous KickStart learners as 'peer recruiters'.

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- **Funding**

Providers will always suggest improvements to funding regimes. In this case however some of the specific suggestions for tweaking the financial trigger points appeared well thought through and might bring benefit to learners' experience. In particular some kind of 'on programme' payment for this group of young people is needed, as acknowledgement of their varied needs. There are also alternative achievement and progression routes which could be acknowledged as significant for this client group by a wider range of financial trigger points.

- **Recognising the wide needs of NEET young people**

It was acknowledged by providers that there is already recognition of the significant personal and social needs of some of the learners on KickStart. There were some instances however where these complex and varied needs were perceived to be overlooked in pursuit of achievement of pre-determined targets. Young people who have been failed by the education system for many years and for a variety of reasons will need significant investment in terms of support and learning to move them on to higher levels of training and ultimately into employment. The KickStart programme has begun to provide this investment for many young people of the Black Country. Providers and funders are now in a position to learn from the first 18 months of this programme and to ensure that future provision is even more effective.

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## Appendix: Schedules used for guiding provider and learner interviews

### PROVIDERS' QUESTIONS

1. What were the aims of the KickStart programme – generally and for your organisation in particular?
2. Please summarise how your organisation runs KickStart- what sessions do the learners receive, when, for how long, who are the staff etc?
3. Broadly speaking what numbers of learners have you had and what success rates?
4. What are the typical backgrounds of the clients which you have worked with on KickStart?
5. How successful would you say you have been in delivering the original aims of KickStart?
6. Have there been other benefits which you did not expect?
7. What have been your biggest successes of the programme? Which elements of the programme have been most positive?
8. When clients have dropped out or failed to complete what would you say have been the main reasons for this?
9. Which elements of the programme would you say have been least positive?
10. What other issues have impacted on your delivery of KickStart?
11. Given the choice, what changes would you make to the organisation of the KickStart programme to improve its results?
12. Is there anything else you would like to say about the KickStart programme – in particular your perception of the success factors of the programme?

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## CLIENTS' QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been attending the KickStart programme?
2. What sessions / learning have you completed so far?
3. Why did you sign up for KickStart? What were you hoping to get out of it?
4. What sessions have you enjoyed the most?
5. What sessions have you enjoyed the least?
6. What sessions have been most useful to you?
7. What sessions have been least useful to you?
8. In what ways has KickStart helped you to move on in terms of your training or employment?
9. Where do you hope to move on to next in your training or employment?
10. Has KickStart helped you in any other ways to move towards the future you would like for yourself?
11. What one thing would you change about the KickStart programme in order to make it better?

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