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Acknowledgements

Thank you to all those who were interviewed in the course of this research and to
the DfES Young People Learner Support team.
Contents

Executive Summary 6

1. Introduction 10

2. The Learning Experience and Learning Provision 16
   2.1 Introduction 16
   2.2 Young parents’ learning experiences 16
   2.3 Learning provider experience of Care to Learn 21
   2.4 Transport 21

3. Childcare 23
   3.1 Introduction 23
   3.2 The availability of childcare 23
   3.3 The cost of childcare 24
   3.4 Young parents’ childcare preferences 25
   3.5 Young parents’ experiences of using childcare 26

4. Support — Needs and Provision 27
   4.1 Introduction 27
   4.2 Help finding childcare 27
   4.3 The role of childcare providers in supporting young parents 28
   4.4 Support once in learning 30
   4.5 Dropping out 31
   4.6 Young parents’ experiences of support 32

5. Information and Co-ordination 35
   5.1 Introduction 35
   5.2 Spread of information 36
   5.3 Local co-ordination 40
6. The Application Process and Take-Up 43
   6.1 Introduction 43
   6.2 Support provided to young parents 44
   6.3 Young parents’ experiences of the application process 45
   6.4 Length of the application process 45
   6.5 Take-up and coverage 47

7. Conclusions 50
   7.1 The learning experience 50
   7.2 The children of teenage parents 51
   7.3 Flexibility of learning provision 51
   7.4 Provision of childcare 51
   7.5 Advice and support for young parents before, during and after learning 52
   7.6 Management and delivery 53
   7.7 Fulfilling the long-term targets 55
Executive Summary

This is the second in a series of reports designed to provide an evaluation of the first three years of Care to Learn. It focuses on the operation and impact of the initiative over the 2003/04 academic year. Overall, Care to Learn has been well received and more than met its targets for the year. The scheme is having a real impact on young parents and their children. Problems and delays have been addressed as they occurred, and the DfES team and its partners are working together to address processing issues in autumn 2004.

Learning experiences and learning provision

The courses young parents were doing on Care to Learn were leading to qualifications — mainly vocational qualifications — which would improve their potential to learn further or enter a career. The young parents were very positive about their learning experience and particularly valued the social aspects. Becoming a parent had made many more focused on their future ability to earn a good income, and this had increased their motivation to learn. Many were planning further learning, and hoped to go to university.

There are some good examples of learning providers becoming more flexible; however, there are also many cases of providers being inflexible or not seeing opportunities for creating more flexible provision. E2E has already demonstrated significant potential for providing more flexible and relevant courses for young parents. However, this is in danger of being cut back as LSC develops a tighter focus for the programme.

Action points:

• To attract and retain a greater number of young parents into learning, there must be greater flexibility in the parameters for planning learning provision and, in particular, courses that cater specifically for their needs. The aide memoire produced by the DfES and LSC for learning providers demonstrates a failure in the parameters for further education institutions to provide flexible provision for this priority group.

• Young parents are a priority group for the LSC and it is important that current provision of flexible and tailored learning is expanded. Here, E2E is an important response, providing for 23 per cent of Care to Learn participants.

Childcare

There was sufficient childcare overall to meet the needs of young parents. However, there remain some gaps in terms of particular types of care, for example, shortage of places for children under two, lack of provision in the evening, convenience of location relative to home and learning provider.

Many of those consulted have claimed that the available funding is insufficient to meet their childcare needs. Our analysis shows that this varies with the learning hours, the type of childcare provision and the availability and affordability of transport between home and childcare. In some regions, £5,000/£5,125 was insufficient for full-time learning or nursery-based childcare.
Childcare providers and agencies working with them have become increasingly involved in Care to Learn. In some areas, a childcare organisation was taking a key role in co-ordinating the initiative.

Young parents focused on child development needs when choosing a childcare provider. They were satisfied with the childcare they were using. The young parents themselves, childcare providers and other support workers commented positively on the ways in which the children were benefiting from this childcare.

Action points:

- Lessons should be learnt from those areas where childcare organisations are proactively involved in Care to Learn, by those where activities are less well co-ordinated.

- We note that the average level of funding for Care to Learn supported childcare at approximately £3,300 per annum is less than was modelled. If there is scope within the budget allocation, it would be worth considering whether childcare funding could be allocated more flexibly in relation to the overall range of childcare costs. A marginal increase in the ceiling would increase the range of care and number of hours that could be accessed.

**Support — needs and provision**

Care to Learn is removing childcare as a barrier to learning for young parents. However, the focus for support in terms of advice and guidance, information and practical help (including help accessing childcare) that the programme provides is also crucial for young parents entering and remaining in learning. Many young parents felt that they would not be in learning without a range of practical advice and support. Being supported while in learning is key to preventing loss of motivation and drop out. The support needs are often intensive, with support workers having to work on a one-to-one basis with a young person.

Childcare providers play an important role in meeting the needs of young parents and their children. A number wanted more information on the initiative so that they could proactively promote it amongst young parents. The Care to Learn Code of Practice and training video are important in the help they provide with this.

**Coverage**

Care to Learn has been generally well received and knowledge of its existence has spread quickly. It is, however, better known and understood by those working regularly with young parents, and those in education (with the exception of schools) and learning. There are still gaps in knowledge amongst some groups; in addition to schools, social workers and health workers need to be better informed about the initiative.

Evidence shows that where there is effective local co-ordination, a greater proportion of teenage parents use Care to Learn. The initiative is having a positive influence in bringing local partners together and helping to focus existing advice, support and funding for young parents. However, there are still localities where much better co-ordination is needed. The DfES Childcare Managers play an important role in supporting local co-ordination and spreading good practice. It is important that this is all maintained in the longer run.
Action points:

- The evidence from an analysis by DfES shows that where local partnerships work in a co-ordinated way they help more young parents. All local partnerships need to adopt a co-ordinated approach to managing Care to Learn.

- In relation to the helpline, thought needs to be given to how continuity of support can be provided to callers who are likely to have on-going queries on the same matter or application.

- Projects working with young parents need to be better informed about the eligibility of the courses they run for Care to Learn funding.

- Childcare providers in all areas need more information about the initiative.

- Learning providers need to be reminded of their role and responsibilities (especially now all young parents are eligible for Care to Learn).

Management and delivery

Initial delays in the processing of applications caused difficulties for some. However, at the time the case study interviews were conducted, these were becoming less important in people’s memories. Many felt that there were bound to be some problems when a new initiative is set up.

Despite actions being taken to address the type of delays experienced in early 2003/04, at the time the case study interviews were conducted, these were becoming less important in people’s memories. Many felt that there were bound to be some problems when a new initiative is set up.

Some issues were identified in relation to current application arrangements, where it could be possible to make some quick wins in the future. A particular area is in respect of applications that exceed the allowable maximum. It should be possible to have these addressed locally before the form is submitted, rather than forms having to be returned by the delivery agent for remedial action.

The DfES Young People Learner Support team have played a very important role in publicising Care to Learn, supporting local actors, and in monitoring and remedying problems as they arise. It is extremely important to the long-term future of the initiative that this central supporting and problem solving role continues.

Action points:

- It is recommended that, for next year, the application form specifies a maximum that young parents and childcare providers can claim, and that they be asked to review childcare needs and costs rather than submitting applications that exceed the funding maximum.

- If delays in processing applications occur, it is important that there is some contact with young parents and those working with them so that they know what is happening. The fact that Care to Learn funding is an entitlement, as long
as applications are within the financial limit and that other simple rules are adhered to, needs to be reinforced to lessen concerns when any delays do occur. DfES should continue to work closely with partners to improve the efficiency of processing and software.

- The message that provisional applications can be made to Care to Learn, and that ideally these should be made as early as possible, needs to be reinforced.

**Fulfilling long-term ambitions**

The number applying to Care to Learn so far has been greater than the targets set. Over the next few years, targets will become more challenging, and the extent to which it is necessary to introduce more innovative and proactive support measures will begin to emerge. It is not clear how far Care to Learn is currently reaching those who are less motivated to learn, and many respondents felt that more action would be needed to bring these young parents back to learning.

There is evidence that many young parents do not feel ready to return to learning when their children are very young. They also need time out for themselves to adjust to their new roles, arrangements and to decide on their futures. Often they are not ready to learn until they reach 19 or even older. It is reported as disappointing that the Care to Learn age cut-off is set at 19.

Action points:

- Publicity about Care to Learn needs to further emphasise that it is about providing opportunities and removing barriers, it does not aim to force young parents back into learning when they are not ready.
- Consideration should be given to transferring some of the 19+ childcare support funding and responsibilities to Care to Learn, extending the initiative to include at least 19 year olds in further education.
- More publicity is needed on the availability of childcare support for over 19s and those in HE.
1. Introduction

This is the second in a series of reports designed to provide an evaluation of the first three years of Care to Learn. The first report looked at the support available to teenage parents, the impact of a small pilot and the potential for Care to Learn as it was introduced. This report addresses progress over the first year of its implementation (i.e. at the end of the 2003/04 academic year).

In the 2002 Spending Review, the government responded to a bid from the Department of Health (where the Teenage Pregnancy Unit [TPU] was then placed) and the Sure Start Unit to establish a single universal scheme supporting childcare for young parents so that they could continue to learn. Care to Learn has subsequently been taken forward across government by the Department for Education and Skills (where the TPU is now based), Department of Health, Department for Work and Pensions, and the Treasury. It was agreed between the different departments that it should be managed by the Young People Learner Support team in DfES. The team used project management and consultancy to develop the scheme. They were able to draw on a number of lessons from a small pilot that they were already running. This used a central processing function to pool available resources and process applications for childcare support for young parents in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges. In 2002/03 there were 215 applications from 16 to 18 year olds.

Prior to Care to Learn (and the small pilot) teenage parents studying at a sixth form or in further education could apply for childcare support from college Learner Support Funds (LSF). However, this was up to a maximum of £3,000, and the way in which funding was allocated varied considerably between institutions. Furthermore, the availability of these funds was not widely known about. A few colleges were involved in outreach work with young parents and designing courses to attract them back into learning. Through Care to Learn, young parents can apply for up to £5,125 (£5,000 in 2003/04) to cover the cost of childcare and associated transport while studying.

There are a number of major differences to the previous funding. Care to Learn is an entitlement — there is no means testing or rationing. It is not just a funding initiative, but acts as a focus for information, advice and support for young parents. It is envisaged that in each local area, the range of agencies, including childcare providers and those working with them, should be actively involved in the initiative. Care to Learn aims to have a positive impact on the life chances of young parents and their children, in particular helping those who become trapped in a cycle of disadvantage to move away from this.

These points are reflected in, and emphasised by, the Minister’s priorities for the initiative, i.e. that it should provide:

- a range of flexible learning and childcare that is responsive to the needs of individual young parents
- learning that has real impact on young parents’ futures
- a good start in life for children
- adequate funding to meet the costs of their childcare
- effective advice and support for parents, before, during and after learning.
Care to Learn was rolled out in 2003/04 for all 16 to 18 year old parents starting courses, as well as those aged under 16 in four pilot areas (Brighton and Hove, Lambeth, Rotherham and NE Lincs). During this year, the number of applications exceeded the target set. It was aimed to have 2,000 applications and around 2,350 applied. At the beginning of the 2004/05 academic year all young parents under the age of 19 (or continuing a course they started before their 19th birthday) became eligible for Care to Learn, whether studying at a school, sixth form, sixth form college, FE college or a work-based learning provider.

The DfES Young People Learner Support team have been proactively working to promote the initiative and to ensure it runs smoothly. Any problems that arise are addressed immediately and, if necessary, action plans to deal with any reoccurring problems are put in place. Much effort was devoted to sorting out the initial administrative problems that arose in 2003/04. Unfortunately, delays in processing applications and making payments are again occurring as this report is finalised — the causes relate to processing rather than software, and remedial actions are being taken to address these over the longer term.

Two Childcare Managers were recruited to provide a link between the policy team and those working with young parents. They have been key in ensuring information about Care to Learn is widely disseminated. Towards the end of 2003/04, and continuing into 2004/05, they have been visiting all areas starting with the ten best and worst performing (in terms of the proportion of teenage parents applying for Care to Learn) to identify good practice and support localities struggling with low numbers. These visits are continuing to pay dividends in terms of increasing the effectiveness of local partnerships and problem solving.

To publicise Care to Learn, a series of information meetings were held across the country during summer 2003, and in May 2004 one was held in London. These were well attended. The range of organisations represented at the May 2004 meeting was particularly notable, showing the extent of interest in the initiative. In addition, information has been made available through the following:

- An explanatory leaflet — this was aimed at young parents and is also widely used by professionals working with them (120,000 were distributed for 2003/04 and 80,000 for 2004/05, by mid-October 2004).
- Posters — 10,000 were distributed for 2003/04 and almost 11,000 for 2004/05, by mid-October.
- A training and information video was made promoting Care to Learn — for use by young parents and those working with them. By mid-October, 7,000 videos had been distributed, and 100 as a CD-ROM.

At the Minister’s request, a Code of Practice for childcare providers working with young parents was developed. This provides advice to equip them for working with young parents. It explains the nature of their needs and how to work with them; it also signposts other more specialist sources of information and advice. By autumn 2004, 23,000 copies had been distributed. The processing of applications, funding and management information are delivered through a national delivery agent, based in Manchester. It processes all of the applications from young parents, makes payments to childcare providers and collects attendance records from learning providers. It also runs a helpline for young parents, or those working with them, who have any queries about the application process or the status of their own application.
Care to Learn has filled a gap in addressing a major barrier faced by young parents continuing in, or returning to, learning. As well as providing funding for childcare and associated travel, it aims to encourage multi-agency working to ensure that young parents receive the encouragement and support they need to enter and succeed in education.

The initiative has been well received. The following comments are taken from interviews conducted during the most recent stage of the evaluation:

‘It has definitely made accessing childcare easier for young parents.’ (childcare provider)

‘Any support for young parents is brilliant and once this one is off the ground and they’ve ironed out the wrinkles … it will be really good.’ (childcare provider)

‘It’s shown them [young parents] that the government have realised they’re out there and they need support. They’ve grown up either in care or they’ve come through the system … and the fact that there’s been an acknowledgement they exist helps the young person.’ (work-based learning provider)

‘I would say, do it while you’re young and can because Care to Learn is a good scheme. I knew about it and now I think deep about it, it’s a good scheme. It’s giving you the opportunity to do something with peace of mind that your child is getting looked after properly. It’s not short changing you, you’re not struggling to go to college, it all works out. It’s best to do it now before you get over 19; before they stop helping you and you have to do it the hard way.’ (young parent)

‘I’ve been able to come to college and have childcare. If they hadn’t funded it I wouldn’t have been able to come. [Before the funding] I was trying to look for a job, but I didn’t really, because I didn’t have the qualifications.’ (young parent)

‘If I didn’t have Care to Learn, I wouldn’t be able to come to college and get qualifications.’ (young parent)

At mother and baby units in particular, it was reported how Care to Learn had helped them provide a bigger and better service to young parents. These operate on very limited funding, often through combining money from a range of sources. Now that under 16s are eligible in all areas, it is likely that the initiative will have a greater impact on provision for this younger age group. Some examples of how Care to Learn had helped mother and baby units are given below:

‘Care to Learn has enabled us to put more parents through the centre. We wouldn’t be able to afford the childcare or the transport. Without the transport money … we could kind of work it [childcare provision] … but without that transport money … we just couldn’t pay that. Where would you get £4,000 a month from? The first year we had 15 young parents [post-16], this year we have 35 post-16. We have 65 here all in all.’

‘The additional part-time post [ie in the crèche facilitated by Care to Learn funding] means that the crèche can now open through lunch time and gives the young parents some time to themselves, to socialise with other young parents and generally to be a young person.’

‘We’ve only had minimal funding for nursery staff. You always get to the panicky stage where you think you’re not going to be able to get enough staff
for the number of babies and it has been a struggle every year. This Care to Learn money is going to make a big difference. ... The problem has been not being able to get committed staff. We ring up the night before saying “we’re going to have an extra baby in tomorrow can you come in?”... If they come in and we don’t have more than a certain number, we’ve had to send them away again without paying them and we’re hoping to put an end to that with committed staff who will be available. In some of our services we’ve had to cut down on, the nursery manager does a lot of work on parenting skills with the girls. We’ve had to stop some of those classes because we haven’t been able to get staff into the nursery and she’s had to go into the nursery herself. She also goes out and does behaviour support work with post-16s and toddlers, and we’ve had to cancel that because we haven’t been able to get staff into the nursery. With Care to Learn we’re hoping to avoid that happening.

‘Because we have a minimum number of nursery staff we quite often have to interrupt lessons for girls to feed their babies or change them because we don’t have enough spare hands in the nursery to do that. Hopefully the funding will put a stop to that.’

At another mother and baby unit, Care to Learn funding has improved their position by enabling them to maintain OFSTED standards in their nursery and replace things as they are needed. Previously, they relied on a range of different funding sources and would often have to:

‘... scrabble around looking for small amounts, donations, etc. which gives the young girls the impression they are second class in the eyes of the world.’

A college respondent reported how Care to Learn has made a huge difference for all four young parents studying there. One student, in particular, has managed to achieve her Level 1 qualification in hairdressing, and is going on to complete her Level 2 next year. Her child is now two, and by the time she qualifies, she’ll be in a very good position to go straight into work (her son will be of nursery age).

A work-based learning provider reported that Care to Learn funding had enabled them to keep the crèche open all day. They have recently employed an outreach worker and with this and the childcare funding, it is hoped that the centre will be able to encourage more young parents to train.

There was a number of initial problems with Care to Learn — in particular, there were delays in processing applications and in making payments to childcare providers. These were discussed by respondents during the case study interviews and had, in some cases, caused real difficulties. However, these difficulties were beginning to recede in people’s minds. Most accepted that there would be some initial difficulties with any new initiative.

The DfES Young People Learner Support team have been very involved in the introduction of Care to Learn. They have monitored what was happening, through visits made by the Childcare Managers, ad hoc feedback, more formal feedback from various agencies and the evaluation. As problems appeared, efforts have been made to address these. A systems analysis was commissioned looking into how to improve the effectiveness of the delivery agent responsible for processing applications, making payments, and providing management information at

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1 At the time of finalising this report (October/November 2004) delays in the processing of applications and making payments by the delivery agent were unfortunately happening again.
Manchester. As a result, the software was redesigned, a team leader was recruited and the team was expanded. Each Connexions partnership was asked to nominate a central contact; Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators (TPCs) have been tasked with ensuring there is someone responsible for local co-ordination in their area.

The Childcare Managers continue to visit all areas. Through these, they are able to support those areas that are struggling and spread good practice. Their analysis of the ten best and worst performing areas (in terms of the proportion of teenage parents on Care to Learn) shows how important it is for local partners to be co-ordinated in order to provide for young parents and to promote Care to Learn. Most TPCs have responded well to the Minister’s request that they should be involved in co-ordinating this part of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. There is a strong correlation between the well organised and led partnerships, and take up of Care to Learn locally. Following visits by the Childcare Managers, most local partnerships have met and consolidated their arrangements as well as putting together local improvement plans. Regrettably, not all are working well together and in some areas, local difficulties are having a negative impact on the service to young parents.

**Methodology**

This second evaluation report is largely based on the second set of case study interviews conducted in April/May 2004. It also draws on the earlier evaluation, visit notes from the Childcare Managers and the DfES summary of TPC reports on Care to Learn.

The six case study areas selected early in the evaluation (ie Bristol, Brighton and Hove, Rotherham, Lambeth, NE Lincs and Sandwell) were revisited. A mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted. In most cases, the same support workers and learning providers as during the first case studies were interviewed. However, additional or different respondents were included where it was known that, for example, a learning provider had at least one young parent funded by Care to Learn. Some of these interviews were very short — in particular, where a previous respondent had little or no experience of Care to Learn. We included these to try and explore why take-up had been low in some areas. Respondents included Connexions PAs, Reintegration Officers, TPCs, Sure Start Plus Advisers, student support staff in learning providers (colleges, schools, mother and baby units and work-based learning providers) and those working in various projects supporting young parents.

This round of case studies included short telephone interviews with 24 childcare providers. These were selected from childcare providers known to have (or have had) at least one young parent funded through Care to Learn based on a list provided by the delivery agent. A mix of different types of provider were interviewed, including nurseries, childminders and on-site provision at learning providers.

A mix of focus groups and one-to-one interviews were held with 20 young parents funded through Care to Learn. These were conducted by telephone or face-to-face, whichever was more convenient for the young parent. All were young mothers and the majority were 18 or just 19. Five were 16 or 17 and one was 15. Two had two children, the rest one. The majority of these children were under two; however, one was aged three and another was four. Most of the mothers were white, with five from ethnic minority groups. Around one-third were living on their own and one-third with their family (either parents, mother or grandparents). Three were living with their partner. Five reported getting no other financial support (ie in addition to Care to
Learn) for their learning. The rest were receiving Access/Learner Support Funds or EMAs. Some were rather vague about this funding, for example, just saying that they received something from their learning provider. Others were able to be precise about the exact amount — for example, one young woman had received a bus pass (worth £500 a year) and £100 grant at the beginning of the year to help with equipment and uniform from the college she was attending.

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

• Chapter 2 examines learning provision, looking at the experiences of young parents and perspectives of learning providers.

• Chapter 3 discusses issues relating to the provision of and use of childcare, including the impact on children.

• Chapter 4 explores the support provided to young parents as they enter and continue in learning.

• Chapter 5 looks at the publicity around, and spread of information about, Care to Learn and issues relating to local co-ordination.

• Chapter 6 explores the application process, from the perspective of support workers and young parents, and discusses some issues relating to take-up and coverage.

• Finally, Chapter 7 draws some conclusions.

Some recommendations for action are made in the course of the report. These are highlighted in bold italics.
2. The Learning Experience and Learning Provision

Key issues

- Care to Learn is removing childcare as a barrier to learning for young parents.
- Courses that young parents were doing lead to qualifications (mainly vocational).
- Young parents are overwhelmingly positive about their learning experience.
- A key aspect of the learning process is the social side of learning.
- Young parents also enjoyed a wide range of other aspects of learning.
- Becoming a parent and continuing their learning had increased young parents’ aspirations.
- Many were planning further learning, and hoped to go to university.

2.1 Introduction

There is considerable interest in the learning experiences of young parents while on Care to Learn. For Care to Learn to meet its overall objectives, it is important that learning experiences are positive for young parents and that they are progressing, for example, through obtaining more and higher level qualifications.

Young parents are often stereotyped as lacking any interest in learning and having largely failed in education. While there are many young parents who fall into this category, others do not. This chapter illustrates the range of earlier learning experiences reported by young parents in the case studies, and the positive impact of learning while on Care to Learn. Becoming a parent had had a positive impact on the aspirations of a number of young people, and Care to Learn was enabling them to work towards their ambitions.

This chapter examines young parents’ experiences of learning. It looks at the aspirations and motivations of young parents before they took part in Care to Learn. It goes on to examine how young parents got involved in Care to Learn — why they decided to do a course, how they chose their course and learning provider, why they decided to apply for Care to Learn, the course they are doing and how they travel there. It also explores their learning experiences — whether learning provision meets their needs, whether they are enjoying learning, and the impact it is having on their future plans. The chapter finally examines learning providers’ experiences of Care to Learn.

2.2 Drivers for change

2.2.1 Aspirations and motivation to learn before participating in Care to Learn

Young parents had mixed views of their time at school. Some had enjoyed school and attended regularly, others had not enjoyed school and might, or might not, have been regular attendees. Reasons for not enjoying school included:

- finding other girls ‘bitchy’
- teachers who couldn’t control classes
- not enjoying the subjects
- not being interested/being bored.
Reasons for not attending regularly were linked to not enjoying school. Some young parents had played truant with friends or got into the habit of not going, whilst others had stopped attending due to moving out of the school area or moving from one parent to another. Some had a history of personal and family problems which often, directly or indirectly, contributed to a history of poor school attendance.

Despite this, almost all young people interviewed for the case studies had GCSEs, ranging from three to eight GCSEs. One had a High School Diploma from the US, with only a few having no qualifications.

Some had never worked. Others had had part-time jobs whilst at school or college, or during the holidays. These included office work, working in a hairdressers, in shops, and in restaurants. Others had had work placements while attending a mother and baby unit. Some of those who had already left school when they found out they were pregnant had been working during their pregnancy and left when they felt they could no longer work. Two young parents had worked since having their child, one had left her job because she ‘couldn’t handle it’, the other left because her child was ill.

Most young parents interviewed had been aged between 14 and 17 when they found out that they were pregnant (one was 12, and another one was 18 when she found out she was pregnant with her second child). The younger ones were still in school and, where a mother and baby unit existed, usually transferred to this. The older ones had mostly already left education or were planning to.

Many of these young parents had had no particular plans for the future before they became pregnant. A few had wanted to be hairdressers, childcare workers, nail and beauty technicians, teachers and lawyers, and still wanted to. Three young parents had been attending college and continued with their course. There was agreement that having a baby had made them all more determined to restart, or stay on in learning.

Support workers were asked how well motivated they thought the young parents they came into contact with were to learn. Some reported that many young parents are not interested in learning, often because of the complexity of their lives and having to deal with more immediate issues, such as accommodation or learning to be a parent. They highlighted how some young parents had become intentionally pregnant due to a lack of aspirations and lack of awareness of other choices. Family background and cultures of being on benefits had an impact on some young parents’ motivation to learn. Other respondents stressed that the young parents they dealt with were very motivated, with positive goals and career aims, and in some cases wanted to prove the stereotypes about young parents wrong. Those young parents who had made it into learning are very determined and motivated.

### 2.2.2 Getting into learning

Young parents were asked why they had chosen to continue, or return to, learning. There were a few key reasons for choosing to participate in learning:\footnote{1}

- being bored
- wanting to get a qualification
- wanting to provide for their child, with a good job that requires qualifications.

\footnote{1 It should be noted that, for those under 16, participation in learning is compulsory.}
One young parent felt that without qualifications she would be a ‘nobody’. Another described the importance of getting a good job through qualifications:

‘I thought by the time he goes to school I’m going to need a good job, something that will be able to provide for him well. I haven’t got any GCSEs because I left school early to have him, and I thought if I go back to college, get all my qualifications, then I could get a proper job in something I enjoy doing.’ (young parent)

Some young parents were already in education and were encouraged by learning providers to apply for Care to Learn. Others wanted to go to college and were encouraged by family friends or various support workers to apply to Care to Learn as a way of enabling them to get into learning. The support that young parents receive in applying for Care to Learn is examined in Chapter 4. This suggests that Care to Learn is the next logical step for young parents already in learning, or thinking of returning to learning. Few of the young parents interviewed at this stage in the evaluation had been motivated to learn because of hearing about Care to Learn; they were all already motivated to learn. However, Care to Learn provided them with a means of staying in, or returning to, learning.

Some of those attending mother and baby units had not been given the option of remaining in mainstream school, or had found the mother and baby unit a more attractive option than school. Mother and baby units were seen as attractive for a number of reasons: they are small and can provide one-to-one support, they were more understanding of young parents’ issues than larger learning providers, some young parents feel physically vulnerable when pregnant in mainstream school, and because young parents could bring their babies with them to the unit.

Reasons for choosing other learning providers included:

- their friends were going there
- recommendations from family members
- they were conveniently located (to the young parent’s home and/or to the childcare provider)
- they had been shown around by staff who had been friendly and had encouraged them to attend the provider
- they had good academic achievement
- they had links to the mother and baby unit crèche
- they ran the right course.

Young parents interviewed during the case studies were on a wide variety of courses. These included:

- Young Mothers To Be (NVQ Level 1)
- Sport Development (BTEC Diploma)
- Catering (NVQ Level 1)
- Garden Design (City and Guilds)
- Business Studies (GNVQ Foundation)
Evaluation of Care to Learn — Second Case Studies: Second Interim Report

- Childcare (NVQ Level 1)
- Health and Social Care (GNVQ Foundation)
- Maths, English, Science, Art, IT, Food Technology, Technology, Textiles and Childcare (GCSEs)
- Business Studies, English Language, Media, General Studies (AS and A Levels)
- English (GNVQ)
- Secretarial skills (NVQ Level 1)
- Communications (Key Skills Level 3)
- Food Hygiene Certificate (Foundation CIEH)
- Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT).

All the courses were leading to qualifications. The learning that these young parents on Care to Learn were doing is therefore having a significant impact on their skills and employability. In most cases, Care to Learn is increasing the number of qualifications that these young parents have, and in a few cases it is enabling young parents with no qualifications to obtain some for the first time. It is also enabling young parents to do vocational qualifications, which are likely to help them find work that they are interested in.

### 2.2.3 Young parents’ learning experiences

Young parents were overwhelmingly positive about their learning experience and there were very few things that they did not like. A key aspect of the learning process that young parents enjoyed was the social side. Young parents described having been lonely at home and enjoying the social side of learning, and being able to meet new people in a friendly atmosphere. Many had built up friendship networks where they socialised with other young parents and supported each other in looking after their children.

Young parents also enjoyed other aspects of the learning experience. These included:

- work experience
- being taught parenting skills that they did not have before
- getting to know childcare staff so they felt comfortable leaving their child in childcare
- having on-site childcare
- helpful staff
- having good teachers
- being treated as an adult and an individual
- the content of the course
- doing well in exams
- getting qualifications
- getting help with thinking about what to do next
- working at your own pace
- flexibility of the learning provider.

The support that young parents receive when in learning is examined in Chapter 4 P18.

There is mixed evidence on the extent to which learning providers are able to provide the flexibility often needed by young parents. A number of examples can be given of flexible provision. However, there are also many cases of learning providers being inflexible or not seeing opportunities for creating more flexible provision. This is also evident from the visits made by the DfES Childcare Managers — many support workers are telling these managers that colleges are not flexible enough to meet the needs of teenage parents. In putting together the aide memoire which outlines flexibilities for LSC funded providers, DfES and LSC have identified a gap in the level of flexibility on offer.

**Action point:** To attract and retain a greater number of young parents into learning, there must be more flexibility in learning provision and, in particular, courses that cater specifically for their needs. The aide memoire provided to learning providers includes further flexibilities. It should stress these points and how to develop attractive provision.

The funding system is designed so that colleges can put together packages of learning in a way that meets the needs of a particular group of learners, without being restricted by the need for them to achieve nationally approved qualifications. For example, a college can design a course to meet the needs of young parents. The funding system is based on the number of learning hours of individuals. If it takes longer for particular groups, the funding is sufficiently flexible to cope with that. Furthermore, Additional Learning Support (ALS) is available to meet the learning needs of particular individuals. If it is deemed necessary that someone needs extra support, such as support staff or extra facilities, this money can be used to meet those needs. The main constraint seems to be whether colleges actually want to use the flexibility within the system and are imaginative enough to do so.

One training provider had ‘roll-on roll-off’ provision, so that a young parent could start learning any week throughout the year. Another respondent felt that there was more flexibility than there had ever been, with NVQs providing greater flexibility for learners. There was mixed views amongst respondents other than young parents about the flexibility of schools, with some feeling that schools were improving in letting young parents stay on at school for as long as possible during their pregnancy, whilst others still prevented young parents from attending. Some courses that are intensive and move very quickly mean that it can be hard for a young parent to catch up if they fall behind, for example BTEC in childcare. Some respondents did not feel that there was enough relevant provision for young parents and were trying to develop more options for them, such as child development and parenting skills courses.

E2E offers great potential for providing more flexible and relevant courses for young parents. Indeed, management information shows that 23 per cent of Care to Learners are on E2E. However, E2E is in danger of being cut back. In particular, courses that don’t lead to formal qualifications are under threat. These are very important in getting demotivated young people (whether young parents or not) back into learning.
Action point: Young parents are a priority group for the LSC and it is important that current provision of flexible and tailored learning under E2E remains available to young parents wishing to learn.

Participating in learning had increased the aspirations of these young parents. Many of those interviewed had had no plans before they became pregnant. All now had a clear idea of what they wanted to do. Many were planning to go onto another course once their current course had finished (for example, in business administration, as youth workers, as nursery nurses, as secretaries, to get GCSEs). Some were planning to combine this further study with part-time work. One young parent was hoping to get a job in catering when she finished her current catering course, and another was about to start work as a medical secretary.

In five years’ time, around half of the 15 young parents interviewed individually hoped that they would be at university (some were not sure what course they wanted to do, others wanted to do business, forensics, sports science, and design). Others hoped to be qualified and working in their chosen profession, and in some cases running their own businesses.

2.3 Learning provider experience of Care to Learn

Learning providers are required to provide evidence of ‘satisfactory attendance’ to Care to Learn. It was reported that attendance records were already kept and that providing this information was not generally a problem. Colleges are becoming geared up to provide such records for EMA; co-ordinating the two (although the definition of acceptable attendance might vary) would lessen the administrative burden, especially as most, if not all, 16 to 19 year old parents on Care to Learn will be receiving EMA.

Definitions of satisfactory attendance did vary between learning providers: for example, 75 per cent in one mother and baby unit, 80 per cent in a training provider, and 85 per cent in a college. However, there was acknowledgement that attendance for a young parent was a huge achievement, and providers were therefore often more flexible with young parents compared to other students.

These second case studies also examined whether initial concerns raised by colleges as Care to Learn was introduced had been borne out. These included concerns about loss of control over funding, loss of information about teenage parents and loss of LSF (especially the five per cent for administration). These were not raised as issues by the learning providers we spoke to, and when college respondents interviewed were asked directly, these issues had not been a problem.

2.4 Transport

Transport issues are emerging as quite a significant problem for some young parents. There are two issues here: the extent to which Care to Learn funding is sufficient to cover the additional transport costs of travelling to a childcare provider, especially if a journey is long or complicated and/or childcare costs are high; the extent to which learning providers are able to assist with the normal costs of travelling to their site. Furthermore, there was evidence that some young parents remain confused about the fact that the overall Care to Learn allocation is a maximum that covers childcare and travel costs, and then just their additional travel costs.
Transport costs were not an issue for all young parents — for example, some lived close enough to walk to their childcare, or were given a lift by a family member. For others, the cost of travel between their home and childcare provider was significant and, in particular where childcare costs were high, a few young parents were paying at least something towards these costs. Anecdotally, there are examples of young parents who have either dropped out of Care to Learn or not gone ahead with their application because of the high transport costs they faced. The extent to which this is widespread is not yet clear. The forthcoming survey of young parents should provide more data on this.

It is rarely just the additional cost of travelling to their childcare that was causing problems for young parents. It was often a combination of this, the cost of travel to a learning provider and the overall complexity of their journey. Young parents can end up with complex and long journeys, depending on the relative location of home, childcare and learning provider, and the ease of using public transport between these. Travelling on public transport with a young child and all the necessary equipment, often early in the morning, perhaps having to change at least once, is difficult for any parent. For some, a taxi is the only real option. The complexity of young parents’ lives means that transport difficulties can be the final factor that leads to their dropping out of, or deciding not to return to, learning.

For young parents in rural areas, transport is nearly always a problem, unless they have their own car or are given a lift by family or friends. However, difficulties using public transport in many urban areas, and the barrier this creates for young parents, should not be underestimated. **Action point: A strong case emerges for separating the funding of childcare and transport to provide two separate maxima.**

This would remove two possible sources of disadvantage. At the moment, in areas of high childcare costs, young parents are disadvantaged in terms of being able to access Care to Learn transport support compared to others where childcare is cheaper. Secondly, those with high transport costs would be able to draw down higher levels of funding under Care to Learn than those with lower costs.
3.  Childcare

Key issues

- The availability of childcare has not been a major constraint for Care to Learn.
- £5,000 does not cover the cost of childcare in London.
- Whether £5,000 covers the cost depends on study hours, type of childcare provision used and the ease of travel between home and the childcare.
- Young parents focused on child development needs when choosing childcare provision.
- Young parents were satisfied with the childcare they were using. Their children were benefiting from interaction with other children and the childcare environment.

3.1 Introduction

The availability and cost of childcare were raised as concerns during interviews conducted early in the evaluation. This chapter examines the availability of childcare, the cost of childcare in the case study areas, and how these impact on young parents participating in Care to Learn. It also examines young parents’ preferences for childcare and the reasons behind these. It then explores their experiences of using childcare, how they feel about leaving their child — sometimes for the first time, and how satisfied they are with the childcare provision that they have chosen. The support provided to young parents in finding childcare, and the support provided by childcare providers to young parents, is addressed in Chapter 4.

3.2 The availability of childcare

When Care to Learn was first introduced, concern was expressed as to whether a shortage of childcare places in some parts of the country would impact on the ability of young parents to participate. The 2004 case studies found little evidence of a general lack of childcare provision causing problems. However, specific difficulties were being experienced in a few circumstances:

- shortage of places for children aged under two (and particularly those aged under one)
- shortage of nursery provision
- young parents with more than one child could have difficulty placing their children with the same provider
- childcare was not always located conveniently to home or learning provider
- a lack of provision in the evening.

Concern was expressed that where childcare providers have a choice between parents who can pay a deposit and pay the childcare provider directly, and young parents on Care to Learn, providers would opt for older, working parents. This could make finding childcare more difficult for some young parents.

These issues were, however, having little direct impact on the take-up of Care to Learn in the case study areas. They did mean that in some cases, young parents needed more support and encouragement than they might otherwise have needed in finding childcare. For example, the shortage of nursery provision in some
localities, or in the most convenient locations, meant that young parents were being encouraged to use childminders. The case study interviews with young parents again found that nurseries were the more popular option. However, after starting to use a childminder those young parents for whom this was not their first choice were very satisfied with the service provided.

There are a range of activities, being run by Children’s Information Services (CIS), Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs), childminder networks and support workers, to provide more information to young parents about the range of childcare options available. Some mediate directly between young parents and childminders in particular, and are successfully addressing negative attitudes about the latter.

Action point: Lessons should be learnt from those areas where childcare organisations are proactively involved in Care to Learn by those where activities are less well co-ordinated.

3.3 The cost of childcare

The cost of childcare was of much greater concern. This was especially pronounced in London. In Lambeth, there was a general feeling that the financial support for childcare available through Care to Learn does not reflect the cost of childcare in London. This was particularly the case when young parents were using, or wanted to use, nursery provision. Respondents from Lambeth nurseries all felt that £5,000 was not enough to cover nursery provision, whilst some childminders did feel that £5,000 was enough. There were differing views about the amount of funding needed: for example, a nursery manager reported that £5,000 was not enough to cover five months; a work-based learning provider reported that childcare cost one young parent £154 a week (and as the training is all year this was over £7,000).

In the other case study areas, views differed about whether £5,000 was enough to cover the cost of childcare. For example, in Bristol and Brighton, respondents had mixed views about whether it would cover the cost of a full-time place. In Bristol, several respondents reported that there was a shortfall of around £400. In contrast, all types of respondents in Rotherham felt that £5,000 would cover even a full-time place, and none had heard of cases where the amount had not been enough. In NE Lincs, most respondents thought that this maximum was enough to cover the childcare needs of young parents, but that it would not necessarily cover additional transport costs as well, particularly for those living in rural areas. The cost of childcare was not raised as an issue in Sandwell, which may in part be due to the fact that a high proportion of young parents on Care to Learn were attending a mother and baby unit with a nursery attached.

Whether £5,000 covered a young parent’s childcare costs often, therefore, depended on the hours that the young parent was in learning, and the distance or convenience of travelling between home and the provider. Whether they had to pay for childcare during the holidays was also a factor.

The policy is that if young parents need more than £5,000 to fund their childcare and additional travel costs, they should be encouraged to reassess their learning hours or look at alternative sources of childcare. However, during the case studies it became clear that this was not always happening. A number of young parents and support workers discussed the difficulties of finding additional funding, and how this was causing problems for them. The need to reassess learning hours or look for
alternative childcare is being stressed in Care to Learn information and through information meetings.

There were some examples in the case studies of young parents not being able to afford to attend, or dropping out of, learning because of the cost of childcare and/or travel. The high cost of childcare is also being reported as an issue in a number of meetings across the country attended by the DfES Childcare Managers. However, the real extent to which young parents are being prevented from learning, because of the funding maximum, is difficult to gauge. We are attempting to use the autumn 2004 management information data and a new survey of young parents who have applied for Care to Learn to explore this further.

The budgeting for Care to Learn was based on a modelling exercise that envisaged an average payment of £4,000 a child. Management information shows that the average being paid is nearer £3,300.

*Action point: If there is scope within the budget allocation, DfES should consider whether childcare funding could be allocated more flexibly in relation to relative childcare costs.*

This would need to be given careful thought in the light of the more robust information that should be available from the autumn 2004 applications. Furthermore, childcare costs do vary considerably within local areas as well as between areas; it might be difficult to impose blanket rules about where higher payments would be allowed. There is no intention through Care to Learn to drive up existing childcare costs, and it would need to be ensured that this does not happen.

### 3.4 Young parents’ childcare preferences

Young parents, like all parents, use a number of criteria when choosing a childcare provider, and rarely gave a single reason for choosing a particular provider. Sometimes one was chosen after looking at a number of providers; others were happy with the first provider they saw and decided to use it.

The reasons young parents had chosen the childcare provider (whether a childminder, nursery or other provision) they were using, included:

- the provider being near to their home
- the provider being en route to the learning provider
- the provider taking children under two
- the provider providing the child’s food
- having new toys and equipment
- activities for children
- the learning environment
- teaching children about health and hygiene
- the children there looking happy
- interaction with other children.

The attitudes of childcare providers towards young parents are very important in their decision whether or not to use a particular provider. For example, one young mother and her support worker both described how a number of providers they
visited had talked to the support worker, not directly acknowledging or asking the young mother for her views. The one she chose talked directly to the young person, acknowledging her role as the mother and that she was making the choice, not the support worker. This emphasises the need for some childcare providers to become more aware of how to work with young parents. The recently developed Care to Learn Code of Practice and information video both address these types of issue. Visits by the DfES Childcare Managers since the case study interviews have been conducted, have found that the Code of Practice is being used to help train childcare providers to work with young parents. There is evidence in some areas of much effort being put into assessing and mediating the needs of teenage parents and childcare providers: for example, through CIS, EYDCPs and other parts of early years services being actively involved in Care to Learn, sometimes taking the lead co-ordinating role.

It was common for support workers to highlight how difficult it is for young parents to make decisions about childcare. Some felt that young parents could be wary of any type of childcare provision for fear of being accused of bad parenting. It was also stressed that it is very common for young parents to say that they do not want to use childminders, often due to the bad press that childminders have received. However, the survey of young parents funded through the 2002/03 pilot found that 23 per cent were using childminders. The 2003 and 2004 case studies found a number of examples of initiatives bringing young parents and childminders together; furthermore, support workers aim to inform young parents about all the alternatives. Although a lack of nursery places in some areas was reported as making it more difficult for some young parents in their search for childcare, this was not causing a major barrier to their entering Care to Learn.

3.5 Young parents’ experiences of using childcare

This was often the first experience young parents had of leaving their child, let alone using childcare, and it had been very difficult for some. This emphasises the need for childcare providers to be sensitive to the particular needs and concerns of young parents. Where young parents had had time to settle their child into childcare provision before starting their course this had worked well. The attitude of a young parent was also important — some continued to feel guilty especially if their child cried; others were more pragmatic.

Most young parents were satisfied with the childcare they were using, had not had any problems, and felt their child was benefiting from being there. Having on-site childcare, and/or being satisfied with the childcare provider, meant that leaving their child became easier.

Young parents commented positively on the impact of childcare on their child — they enjoyed being with and benefiting from interacting with other children; were stimulated through being in the childcare environment and mixing with other children.

Other respondents also commented positively on the impact of childcare on the children. A childminder commented on how the child she looked after appreciates the social opportunities of being with other children. A Sure Start Plus adviser reported:

‘I bumped into a girl today, the difference in her esteem, her son’s at nursery, which he enjoys, she gets a break from him and she’s achieving an education.’
4. **Support — Needs and Provision**

Key issues

- Support is crucial for young parents to start and stay in learning, and the support often needs to be intensive.
- Young parents often need considerable support when looking for childcare.
- Childcare providers play an important role in meeting the needs of young parents and their children.
- Being supported while in learning is crucial in preventing loss of motivation and drop-out.
- Learning providers are working hard to prevent drop-out.
- Many young parents felt that they would not be in learning without a range of practical advice and help.
- Some young parents need more financial support.

4.1 **Introduction**

This chapter explores the support needed by, and available to, young parents during different stages of the process: accessing childcare, while using childcare, and throughout their time in learning. It also examines young parents’ experiences of support. By support, we mean the whole range of advice, guidance and practical help needed by, and provided to, young parents.

A generally positive picture of the advice, guidance and help provided for young parents emerges. Many young parents have intensive and wide ranging support needs, and this chapter provides examples of how it is possible to meet these in a range of different ways. The case studies and other sources of information show that there are many positive examples of the provision of support. What is important is that the necessary support, advice and guidance is available. It is less important how this is structured in each area, as long as the structure is sensitive to the needs of the young parents it is trying to reach. However, there are still some gaps, in that advice and guidance is not always available to all young parents, or that some parents manage to ‘fall through the net.’

4.2 **Help finding childcare**

Professionals working with young parents all felt that they needed a great deal of help, advice and guidance when looking for childcare, particularly as this is often the first time they have used childcare.

Finding childcare can be daunting for young parents. Many are worried about needing to prove that they are good parents. They feel that leaving their child might be seen as evidence they can’t cope or are not dedicated as a parent; or that their parenting skills might come under observation and be seen as lacking. It can also involve significant effort, involving researching the options, visiting providers and making an assessment. They were often scared of making the wrong decision. Other young parents may take the first option they are offered without finding out if it is what they really want, and this can lead to problems at a later stage.

Young parents therefore often need quite intensive advice and guidance, which can be demanding (in terms of time and resources) for those providing this support.
Advice and guidance was being provided in a range of ways. This does not matter; what is important is that the necessary support is available to young parents. The case study evidence suggests that a range of sources of support and advice were available to young parents, although there were still gaps. This is further supported by the DfES Childcare Manager visits. These visits do, however, also show that progress is being made in many areas.

Young parents need to understand their childcare options. There are many examples of local initiatives to address this. For example, one local Sure Start Plus had organised sessions bringing together childminders and young parents to break down the mistrust that young parents have of childminders, and the stereotypes that childminders often have of young parents. They had also produced information for young parents about childcare. A Children’s Information Service was producing an information leaflet specifically aimed at young parents.

Learning providers differed in the levels of support that they were able to provide. One training provider did not have the time to help young parents to find childcare, but instead let them use the telephone to ‘phone around childcare providers. At another training provider, when children reached aged two and could no longer use the on-site childcare, staff would help young parents to find suitable alternative childcare. Learning providers in some cases referred young parents to Connexions for support in finding childcare, whilst in other cases, Connexions referred young parents to the person in the college who had links with childcare providers.

This all reinforces the need for co-ordination between the agencies working with young parents. There is much that could still be done, especially in some localities; however, the focus provided by Care to Learn is contributing to building up and strengthening partnerships between a wide range of agencies. The involvement of TPCs by the Minister and visits being made by the Childcare Managers, are further contributing to partnership development.

4.3 The role of childcare providers in supporting young parents

Childcare providers reported that teenage parents did often need more help and advice than other parents. Most saw it as part of their role to provide support — they enjoyed this and found it rewarding. Most of the support provided or asked for, was around parenting and childcare or practical issues related to using childcare. Providers reported that young parents needed everything to be as simple as possible to enable them to use childcare and attend college, and that they often needed more guidance than older parents. They felt that they themselves needed to be more understanding with young parents who might not always be aware of the need to keep their childcare provider informed (eg if their hours change or if they are going to be late collecting the child). It was reported that, due to their own limited life experiences, young parents are not always aware of the needs of their child and that some needed help with planning ahead. Childcare providers needed to listen to any concerns that young parents may have and give appropriate advice. They had also found that it was helpful to young parents to give reassurance and advice when children are ill. Young parents may sometimes need help accessing funding.

Providers highlighted how it can be hard to get the balance right between providing advice and guidance while not taking on the role of mother to the young parent. The young parents are ‘still children themselves’. One childminder reported how she
had only known a young mother for two months and felt unable to tell her when she
did something wrong. However, she did feel that once she knew the young parent
better she would be able to tell her. A nursery had young staff and used these staff
to communicate with young parents. Some childcare providers reported the need to
put a lot of effort into building a relationship with a young parent at the beginning.

There was a wide range of different types of advice and help provided by childcare
providers to young parents. Some would ‘phone a young parent to follow-up when
they had not brought their child to childcare; some ‘phoned young parents in
advance to remind them to bring in what the baby needed, and some nurseries had
created a facility so that parents could ‘phone in and find out how their child was
getting along. Childcare providers helped young parents with feeding their child; a
mother and baby unit had a nursery officer who covered child development and
parenting skills with parents; and a nursery had a baby unit information evening.
Providers highlighted the importance of having a settling-in process three weeks
before learning started, so that the first few weeks of term are not further
complicated by also trying to settle a child into childcare.

Childcare providers were asked if there was anywhere they could go for advice and
information related to working with young parents. Some were not aware of who
they could go to for support, whilst others were in close contact with colleges, Sure
Start Plus, Early Years Services and Social Services. Some childminders were
members of the National Child Minders Association (NCMA) and/or local
childminder networks, which they used for information and advice. Some had been
on courses to build their skills as childminders, run by NCMA or Early Years
Services or local childminding networks. One childminder was a member of a local
support project for special needs childcare providers and had on-going training
through that.

At the instigation of the Minister, a Code of Practice has been developed for
childcare providers working with teenage parents through Care to Learn. This
provides guidance to childcare providers on the needs of young parents and how to
work with this group. It also tells providers where to go for more information on
particular issues. This code was finalised and circulated after the case study
interviews were completed, and addresses many of the concerns raised by
childcare providers. By mid-October 2004, nearly 23,000 Codes of Practice had
been distributed. Visits by the DfES Childcare Managers over summer 2004 show
how, in a number of areas, training is being provided for childcare providers, using
the code as a focus. The video (released after the case study interviews were
conducted) is also playing an important role. In addition, in some localities,
EYDCPs, CIS and other Early Years Services are actively working to support Care to
Learn and ensure that the needs of teenage parents are mediated with local
provision.
Below are a few examples of the support available to young parents from childcare providers.

A young parent came into the nursery very upset because she said the doctor had told her that her baby was obese. Once staff had calmed the young parent down, it emerged that the doctor had told the young parent that her baby was overweight. The nursery staff are now working with her on healthy eating.

A young parent is about to have a second child and has struggled with the routines of having a first child. The nursery staff help her establish a routine, including making sure the child attends nursery on a daily basis. The young parent is now planning to return to the training provider with an on-site crèche after her second child is born.

One young parent was using a nursery one day a week and having a lot of trouble settling the child. This was stressful for her every time she left the baby. The nursery asked the young woman to bring in the baby for more days one week and stay with her until she settled. That worked well. The nursery did not charge the young parent for these days — they were able to do that because they are a big nursery.

A young parent had almost given up on toilet training. She thought she had tried too early and it wasn’t going to work. The childminder was able to reassure her that it was worth persevering, as the child was indicating that he was ready, eg by wanting to take his nappy off and sit on the toilet.

These show the importance of the role played by childcare providers in supporting young parents, and how childcare providers can be sensitive to the needs of young parents and their children.

4.4 Support once in learning

The majority of young parents on Care to Learn who were interviewed during the case studies were very determined and motivated. However, even for these young parents, personal problems can lead to a loss of momentum. Problems include accommodation, finances, issues with family and partner arrangements, or routine difficulties that become overwhelming, such as a child being ill, or the parent not getting enough sleep. Young parents may also struggle to keep up with the requirements of the course. Help — in terms of advice, guidance and reassurance — is therefore crucial to keep even the more determined young parents motivated and in learning.

Young parents often need more than the standard advice and guidance that might be available to students generally. On-going, often intensive, support may be necessary. The way in which such help is delivered to those on Care to Learn does vary between areas, depending on, for example, local structures and traditions. This does not matter; what is important is that support is available if needed.

The following are examples of the help provided to young parents on Care to Learn:

- Support group for young parents, run by Connexions and Sure Start Plus, which they could continue to attend once in learning.

- Regular meetings between Connexions PAs and young parents, providing help as needed with financial issues, benefits, housing, health issues, and attending court.
• A Reintegration Officer was giving young parents a lift from home to school to make sure they attended their GCSEs.

• Helping young parents progress between learning providers by taking them on visits and to interviews, generally helping them with the application process.

• Mentoring for young parents entering a training programme. The mentor liaised with other agencies to ensure consistency of support.

• One-to-one support from tutors, backed up by college Student Support Services.

4.5 Dropping out

Young parents are at risk of dropping out of learning for a number of reasons. These include:

• problems with housing

• being offered a job and deciding to take it

• family problems

• emotional problems

• childcare difficulties, eg their child not settling, difficulties travelling to the provider, generally not being happy with, or getting on with, a provider

• being on the wrong course; not happy with a specific learning provider

• financial problems

• travel issues

• low self-esteem

• finding it hard being in a large group of people

• problems around the administration of Care to Learn (in particular childcare providers not being paid on time and delays in processing applications in the case of two young parents).

It is rarely one reason that leads to drop-out but rather a range of issues until finally these become too much for a young parent to deal with. It is therefore important that mechanisms are in place to spot the potential to drop-out, and to provide help with a range of personal problems in addition to those directly related to learning. Evidence from the case studies and visits made by the Childcare Managers provides a mixed picture — while there are some very good examples of monitoring, help and advice for those on Care to Learn, there are also gaps.

Attendance monitoring is an important means of identifying those at risk of dropping out. Both learning and childcare providers have a role in providing information on the attendance of young parents on Care to Learn to the delivery agent. The funding can be withdrawn if it is felt a young parent is not showing satisfactory attendance. Evidence from the case studies provides a mixed picture on the extent to which learning providers were identifying young parents at risk of dropping out and putting preventative mechanisms in place.

In some colleges, student support advisers have caseloads of those at risk of drop-
out, or on courses where drop-out rates are high, for example. These students often received weekly contact and help. However, advisers in other colleges were not always informed in time if students were at risk of dropping out. Some learning providers go to considerable length to follow up absences, for example:

‘Every day I will go through the register and check to see who isn’t here, and if we don’t know why they’re not here then we get on the ‘phone, or go out and visit that same day. If we’ve got a really good attendee who suddenly misses one day we might not, but that person is more likely to ‘phone to let us know she isn’t coming and why. We work very hard to ensure they attend.’ (learning provider)

A range of actions might be taken if a young parent is identified as being in danger of dropping out of Care to Learn. This can include changing the hours of learning, helping young parents get on a more suitable course, and keeping them motivated. A Connexions adviser based in a college explained what she would do if someone was in danger of dropping out:

‘Find out why, what’s going on, anything we can help sort out — perhaps money, transport to college, risk of being homeless, family or emotional issues. I had one recently because she wasn’t claiming benefits, she didn’t have money, she was relying on her mum’s benefits when she was entitled to claim in her own right. It was a matter of getting Income Support for her and her child independently.’

Once a young parent had dropped out, most respondents saw it as the role of Connexions PAs or Reintegration Officers (for those under 16) to keep in contact with the young parent and encourage them to return to learning. Where there was a mother and baby unit, this was often part of their role. For example, staff described how they kept in contact with young parents not in learning and tried to assess when they might be receptive to returning.

Again, what is important is that some monitoring and support is available for those on Care to Learn who want and/or need it. It does not matter how this is provided; indeed, there are many different traditions of providing such support that have worked well in particular areas. However, the case study interviews and DfES visits show that although there are many good examples of support structures available to young parents, there are also gaps in provision that need to be further addressed.

4.6 Young parents’ experiences of support

Most young parents had found the help given to them, eg when applying for Care to Learn, selecting and applying for a course, searching for childcare and while in learning, very helpful. Many felt that they would not be in learning without this support. However, some said that they did not have any help from professionals and did not know where they would go to get assistance with problems they were having.

These young parents would often approach different people for help depending on the nature of their problem — for example, going to one person to talk about personal issues, and another to talk about learning.

Young parents reported receiving help and advice from a wide range of people, including:
• family and friends
• health visitors
• social workers
• Connexions
• learning providers
• childcare providers
• Sure Start Plus
• local projects
• churches
• homes for young parents.

It is notable that the type of support provided by each was wide ranging. Professionals from very different backgrounds were providing help on varied issues, not just those they might be expected to be most expert on. For example:

• Social workers had helped some young parents think about going into learning and had helped with housing issues.

• Connexions had helped some young parents make the decision to go into learning and with finding the learning provider and course.

• Local projects had provided young parents with support with education and financial problems, and with talking about personal issues.

• A local church had helped a young parent find accommodation and given financial support. They had helped her move from a hostel into a flat, and had continually written letters to the council to ensure she got a flat before she had the baby.

• Mother and baby units provided help with finding courses, applying to Care to Learn, finding childcare, parenting preparation and skills, and in contacting other support such as midwives, benefits advice and counsellors. One young parent went back to the mother and baby unit rather than to staff at the college when she needed help with coursework as she found them easier to approach and more understanding.

• Support staff at colleges had helped with financial issues. Tutors had given advice and help with assignments, had been understanding about childcare problems, helped young parents catch up if their child had been ill, provided one-to-one support sessions, and in one case offered to collect a young parent and bring her to college when it was very cold.

Young parents suggested needing more help with:

• benefits
• housing
• finding employment, especially good quality, well paid employment
• confidential advice on personal problems
• their financial situation.
Evidence from the case studies shows that support is available for young parents in many areas; however, there are still considerable variations and room for improvement. The case studies were conducted at a time when momentum was building to ensure that better support structures were in place. For example, in one area, some key posts had been vacant or covered temporarily; as these were filled, actions were being taken to better co-ordinate support for young parents. The review of TPCs’ progress reports (June 2004) conducted by the DfES Care to Learn policy team provides further evidence that support for young parents on Care to Learn does vary between geographical areas. While there are some excellent examples of co-ordination and support, further action is needed in other areas.
5. **Information and Co-ordination**

Key issues

- Care to Learn has been generally well received and knowledge of its existence has spread quickly.
- Care to Learn is better known and understood by those working regularly with young parents, and those in education (with the exception of schools) and learning.
- There are still some gaps in knowledge, especially amongst those who work less regularly with young parents. Childcare providers in particular would like more information about Care to Learn.
- Actions taken by DfES to ensure good publicity about Care to Learn are being successful.
- Local co-ordination of Care to Learn is very important, especially if the full range of actors are to be informed and involved.
- Care to Learn is having a positive influence in bringing local partners together and helping to focus existing advice, support and funding for young parents.
- There are many examples of good local co-ordination and these need to be maintained in the longer term.
- The DfES Childcare Managers play an important role in supporting the local co-ordination of Care to Learn and spreading good practice. They are currently actively working with those areas where co-ordination is less well developed.

5.1 **Introduction**

This chapter looks at how those involved had heard of Care to Learn, how well the initiative is understood and where people go for information. It also explores the extent and nature of local co-ordination of Care to Learn.

The 2003 case study interviews concluded that the brand name of Care to Learn was becoming established and that initial publicity had been effective. There were still some support agencies that were less well informed (eg those not often involved with young parents or less well networked locally), and organisations in which it was taking time for information about Care to Learn to reach all who needed to know (eg Connexions, schools, health workers). Since the initial launch of Care to Learn, the DfES Young People Learner Support team have taken a number of actions to spread information about the initiative. The two Childcare Managers have attended meetings in many areas and with many different organisations. They are currently focusing on areas where take-up during the first year was particularly low. A meeting of 200 people was held in London in May 2004 to inform as many as possible about the coming year. This was well attended by representatives from a very wide range of organisations. TPCs, on advice from DfES, have taken on, or allocated, responsibility for co-ordinating Care to Learn in their area. They are charged with networking, distributing information, using the national programme information and evaluation results to monitor performance with their local partnership. Each Connexions partnership has a nominated contact for Care to Learn. These actions are on-going, and evidence emerging since the case studies were conducted earlier in 2004 suggests that local co-ordination and the spread of information are progressing well in many areas.
Care to Learn has been very well received. Respondents agreed that it filled an important gap in support for young parents:

‘People have been very impressed.’ (Sure Start Plus adviser)

‘It’s been received positively. Awareness of it is growing and young parents are getting to know it exists.’ (Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator)

‘It is the mother and baby unit that has had the main benefit and I think it has been fantastic. It has enabled them to increase their post-16 work [at the centre] hugely.’ (TPC)

There were some complaints about its implementation, ie early delays by the delivery agent in processing applications and making payments to childcare providers. However, the interviews were, in general, not swamped by complaints about these. There were some examples of young parents dropping out due to the delays, difficulties caused to childcare providers when they were not paid on time, and difficulties in getting information. These are discussed at various points in the report. Most of these early implementation issues have now either been resolved or are being addressed. However, the near doubling of targets for coverage year on year, will continue to test the systems and processes. This is likely to be particularly demanding during the September peak in applications.

5.2 Spread of information

A wide range of sources, both formal and informal, were spreading information about the funding. There were examples of young parents hearing about Care to Learn from project staff, social workers, health workers, etc, as well as Connexions, Reintegration Officers, learning providers. This is important because young parents come into contact with many different agencies and support workers. It is rarely the case that all young parents are in contact with the same agencies or types of support worker. Informally, information on Care to Learn is beginning to be passed on through families and friends. The combination of formal and informal means of spreading information promises well for the further roll out of Care to Learn.

The majority of case study respondents had, however, heard about Care to Learn from a fairly limited number of sources. For example, childcare providers had mostly heard about the initiative through the young parents themselves, perhaps when a young parent came to enquire about their services. Others were already working with young parents. A few childcare providers had heard through a learning provider. Several childcare providers were already caring for the children of students, and Care to Learn was an extension of this.

Most young parents had heard about Care to Learn from their learning provider, whether this was through Welfare or Student Services, Connexions, a tutor, seeing some publicity; although, as said above, others had heard through a range of different sources.

During the first round of case studies, some respondents felt that Care to Learn would become more widely known as young parents benefited and told their friends about it. This was reiterated during these interviews. There were a few cases of information spreading by word of mouth during the first year. One Connexions PA commented:
‘... some message must be getting through because I had other people who came along specifically because it [ie Care to Learn] was there and it was an opportunity to get back to college. I don’t know how the message is getting out; some people are getting to hear about it and others are not.’

One young mother had heard through a family member:

‘I think it was his dad’s big sister, she does youth work and she knows all about these schemes. So when I thought about going back to college ... I said what about him who’s going to look after him because I can’t just leave him with anybody and then she told me about the scheme and she got it on the computer for me.’ (young parent)

The mother of another young parent worked in a school where there were some teenage parents, and obtained information through this.

Another point to emerge is that information is beginning to penetrate through the larger agencies and organisations. A particular example is the Connexions partnerships where many PAs might only come into contact with young parents on an ad hoc basis. Information does, however, seem to be spreading more quickly in partnerships where there is a PA responsible for teenage parents or someone else who plays a co-ordinating role. As early as late summer 2003, a survey of Connexions PAs found that 72 per cent of those who responded had heard of Care to Learn. Although many had only a vague understanding of the details of Care to Learn this does not really matter; what is important is that anyone who might come into contact with young parents knows that funding is available.

Information is still slow to reach schools, although a range of awareness-raising activities are happening. For example, one Reintegration Officer described how she was visiting all schools to tell them about her role generally as well as the availability of funding for childcare. One difficulty is that most schools will rarely have to deal with teenage parents and staff will not always know where to go for information. In local authorities where there is a nominated person, for example, a Reintegration Officer, it takes time and effort for information to permeate through. Where there is no co-ordinating role, it is even more difficult. In addition to the leaflet, the video should be very useful here as it is a resource that can be made readily available in all schools. Already almost 7,000 videos have been distributed this academic year.

Overall, information about Care to Learn has spread quickly during the first year. It would not be expected that everyone who works with, or might come into contact with, teenage parents — especially given the wide ranging nature of these people — would know about an initiative.

The case studies, backed up by the DfES summary of TPC reports and visits made by the Childcare Managers show that there are still gaps in knowledge. In many localities these are being addressed, especially now that TPCs have been charged with ensuring co-ordination happens. There are still some areas where a lot more action is needed. It is not really possible to generalise for the whole country which agencies/organisations are most likely to need further information as this does vary. However, overall there are some groups amongst whom more publicity is clearly needed. These include various health workers, social workers and those working less regularly with young parents.

A point which comes out, both implicitly and explicitly from the case studies is that the message about Care to Learn needs to be constantly reinforced. For example:
‘... still some gaps, but it’s more well known than it was, and its promotion needs to be continuous because unless the professionals have had to use it, they won’t remember it, so it needs to have a constant presence and promotion.’
(Sure Start Plus)

Furthermore, those working with young parents need to remind them about the funding and regularly reinforce the message that learning with a child is possible. In one area, information on Care to Learn is being included in the information pack which midwives give to all young parents they come into contact with:

‘... it is about when young people are ready. They get too much information when they have just had their baby so it is about giving information at the right time. We are producing a young parent’s directory, a local one, and that will have information about Care to Learn in it and that will be something that midwives will give out so young people will have it as a resource they keep.’

A Sure Start Plus adviser commented:

‘They see the booklet and then I tell them what it’s about. Sometimes it gets left there … and they tend to forget it’s there. Unless individual workers are pushing it, it’s not as well received as it could be. You need someone to go round to organisations on a regular basis with the booklets and pushing.’

It is important that publicity efforts are maintained, especially at a local level. This should happen now that a strong emphasis has been placed on local co-ordination. Over the next few years, as Care to Learn becomes more widely established, and it becomes seen as an initiative that is here to stay, Care to Learn will become an established part of the information held by all those working with young parents, and passed to those new in post. As each new cohort of teenage parents emerges, it is likely that support workers will have to start again working on the motivation to learn of the majority. Care to Learn will be an important part of that.

**Understanding Care to Learn**

The majority of case study respondents felt that Care to Learn was a clear initiative to understand. Where they had queries these had either been answered by written documentation, ‘phoning the helpline, etc, or were addressed as they became more familiar with the programme.

As would be expected with any new funding initiative, there are a number of uncertainties amongst respondents about some details. For example, there were uncertainties as to eligibility of particular courses or learning institutions, whether childcare would be paid during the holidays, the funding of travel costs, and the range of organisations that might have a role in Care to Learn, or more generally supporting young parents in learning.

Many of these uncertainties were being addressed as people became more familiar with the initiative. Others were being helped by visits from members of the DfES team, including the Childcare Managers, referral to the website, ‘phoning the helpline. The real test will be the extent to which uncertainties are still being reported in a year or so. However, it must be remembered that some support workers only come into contact with young parents occasionally — there is always likely to be some uncertainty amongst this group on some of the detail.
One difficulty during the first year of the funding was that the helpline was not able to meet the level of demand. This should now have been addressed as more lines have been put in and the delivery team has been expanded. It should be emphasised that although a number were very critical of the helpline, the majority had received an immediate and useful response.

The biggest frustrations occur when applications peak in the early autumn leading to delays in processing applications and in making payments. As a result, many more calls are made to the helpline, and queries related to these delays contribute to further backlogs. As this report was being finalised, such delays and backlogs were again occurring, despite measures being taken earlier in the year to try and avoid such a situation. DfES are working with the delivery agent to address turn around times. Measures include the streamlining of data inputting, ensuring that the full functionality of the software is used, and that a firm line is taken when chasing detail on incomplete applications. This area is critical to the smooth operation of Care to Learn and its reputation. It is therefore subject to close and on-going review.

One issue relating to the helpline that needs to be addressed is continuity of response. Where problems had been on-going and a number of calls had been made, the individual concerned had nearly always spoken to a different person each time. It was frustrating for them to have to explain again each time they called and possibly be given a different answer.

*Action point: While this can be a common problem with helplines, thought needs to be given to how continuity of support can be provided to callers who are likely to have on-going queries on the same matter or application.*

This should be relatively straightforward to address with the expanded team and new team structure at the delivery agent.

Another situation needs to be clarified. Projects working with young mothers can receive funding from a range of sources, including charitable and public sources. It could be argued that as they already receive some funding, Care to Learn is in effect double or substitute funding. However, many projects are not well funded, their funding is nearly always uncertain and the funding they receive is for a range of, rather than specific services; they make it stretch as far as possible to best address the needs of young parents. Accessing Care to Learn funding for young parents on training courses could help them expand and improve their service, and we found evidence of this happening. Furthermore, this could also help more young parents become motivated to learn — through adding to the flexibility of learning provision and providing a non-threatening route back into, or means of continuing, learning.

*Action point: Projects working with young parents need to be better informed about the eligibility of the courses they run for Care to Learn funding.*

Childcare providers particularly wanted more information about Care to Learn. They had usually been given information by young parents approaching them (and this was often only the application form). Almost all those interviewed during the case studies said they would like more information and to be circulated directly. This was
partly so that they would be generally better informed, but some also wanted to promote Care to Learn. For example, one reported being in contact with young parents who would be eligible for the funding and didn’t know about it:

‘We would like to use it as fully as possible’.

A few had received information from local learning providers or Early Years/CIS. Evidence emerging since the case studies — for example, from visits of the Childcare Managers — suggests that the circulation of information to childcare providers is beginning to be more widespread. Furthermore, almost 23,000 Codes of Practice had been distributed by mid-October 2004, which suggests that childcare providers are interested in finding out more about working with teenage parents.

*Action point: Ensure that information on Care to Learn is being given to childcare providers in all areas.*

### 5.3 Local co-ordination

There has been considerable emphasis on local co-ordination of Care to Learn. On the advice of the Minister, TPCs have been charged with either undertaking this co-ordination themselves, or delegating responsibility and making sure it happens. Each Connexions partnership has a nominated co-ordinator. The two Childcare Managers have been visiting areas with particular low take-up to work with them in improving this.

The case study interviews provided mixed evidence on the state of local co-ordination towards the end of the 2003/04 academic year. Evidence collected since then suggests that considerable efforts have been made in many areas to provide sound local co-ordination, although there is still much that can be done.

Evidence from the case studies, and subsequently from the Childcare Manager visits and the DfES summary of TPC reports, emphasises a number of important elements of successful co-ordination. The DfES analysis of the most and least effective areas in terms of attracting young parents to Care to Learn found that effective partnership, co-ordination and action plans are crucial to the successful take up and use of the initiative. The work of the two Childcare Managers with TPCs and local partnerships is playing an important role in improving local partnership and co-ordination.

A key point is that it does not really matter who takes the lead, as long as that individual/agency has the relevant contacts, knowledge, resources and drive. The lead agency on Care to Learn varies between areas, including Connexions, Sure Start Plus, TPCs, Reintegration Officers and Early Years, CIS or EYDCPs. A recent development is that it is known that in two areas a post is being funded specifically to undertake the co-ordination and promotion of the initiative — one through Sure Start and the other through Connexions. The involvement of childcare organisations in co-ordinating Care to Learn in some areas is interesting. This brings in agencies that have not traditionally been that involved with young parents, but which do provide an important input and level of support. A Code of Practice has been written for childcare providers. This is very timely given the evidence emerging on the supportive attitude of many childcare providers and organisations to young parents. The number of codes already issued is further suggestive of the level of interest and support.
A further point about co-ordination is that it has to reach a wide range of individuals and agencies. In many areas Teenage Pregnancy Boards have a wide representation and are fully involved in the implementation of Care to Learn. However, not all of those who might come into contact with teenage parents are represented on these boards.

In any area there is a wide range of agencies working with teenage parents. Some of these deal with young people exclusively and others on a regular basis. However, there are many others for whom teenage parents are just one group they might come into contact with in the course of their work. Engaging and informing this range of agencies and individuals is a challenge for Care to Learn, and much is being achieved, although some areas are lagging behind. As the initiative becomes established and part of the general support structure for young parents, a wider range of groups will become knowledgeable. However, it is important that there is more and sustained local publicity to speed up this process.

This publicity also has to be multi-faceted. Some agencies will be represented at meetings, and the challenge then will be to ensure that the representative disseminates information to their colleagues. Local co-ordinators will, in some cases, need to be proactive to make this happen. There is evidence in the Childcare Managers visit notes that this is happening in many areas, but others are less proactive.

The case study interviews found that it is often difficult to involve some local agencies, and which these agencies are will vary from area to area. This again puts an onus on the local co-ordinator to be proactive in involving all relevant local agencies, not just relying on those which turn up for meetings or make contact.

Related to the points made above, large organisations and agencies need an internal Care to Learn co-ordinator or main point of contact. As already mentioned, all Connexions partnerships now have a nominated contact. These are beginning to become established, although co-ordination is working better in some partnerships than others.

The case studies found that there could be a problem in FE colleges. There was often no one central person to co-ordinate Care to Learn, sign the forms and deal with information requests from the delivery agent. In some cases, because so many different people were helping young parents, they were not aware of who in the college had that central role. In many colleges, this will probably be addressed as the scheme beds in. However, it is also likely that in others this will remain an issue. Application forms now require a specific contact name at the place of learning which should help address this issue.

Colleges are large organisations, in contrast, for example, to most work-based learning providers, and mother and baby units. There therefore needs to be someone with clear responsibility for co-ordinating Care to Learn. One reason for application forms being referred back by the delivery agent was that they were not signed by someone with the relevant responsibility at a learning provider.

**Action point:** Learning providers need to be reminded of their role and responsibilities (especially now the initiative applies to all young parents).

As reported above, some colleges were not very co-ordinated in relation to Care to Learn or had not taken a very active role in any local co-ordinating activities. Others were, however, seeing Care to Learn as an opportunity to network more widely with
other agencies, or to become engaged in, or expand, their outreach work to attract more young parents.

One issue that can be a barrier to effective local co-ordination is key staff leaving and posts remaining vacant for some time. This was clearly shown in the case study interviews. In two areas the TPC and Reintegration Officer had both left, posts were either vacant or covered by someone on a temporary basis (in addition to their own job). In both cases, this meant that the promising start at the beginning of the 2003/04 academic year in promoting and co-ordinating Care to Learn was not initially fulfilled. Once these posts were filled, this changed, and numbers on Care to Learn increased along with co-ordination and publicity activities. However, the message is that it is important that posts are filled quickly or, if this is not possible, that someone else takes on responsibility for making things happen. This will be especially important during the early years of Care to Learn.

Significant progress has been made in local co-ordination in recent months. This needs to be maintained in the longer term. There are still some localities which are less proactive and co-ordinated (as also shown in the DfES summary of the TPC reports and from visits made by the Childcare Managers). The current efforts being made to support these areas and spread good practice (by the Childcare Managers in particular) are important and need to continue.
6. The Application Process and Take-Up

Key issues

- Most young parents need support at some point when applying for Care to Learn.
- Young parents were receiving help with their application from a wide range of different agencies.
- There are many examples of good support being provided; however there are still some gaps.
- The application and registration forms have both been adapted to simplify the application process.
- Initial delays in the processing of applications caused difficulties for some; however, at time the case studies were conducted these were becoming less important in people’s memories. Many felt that there were bound to be some problems when a new initiative is set up.
- Young people will continue to apply at the last moment, and the bulk of applications are always likely to be in the late summer/early autumn.
- Although overall take-up of Care to Learn has been higher than expected, this was not the case in all areas.
- Much effort is being put into addressing low take-up where this is happening.
- Consideration needs to be given as to how best to reach the hardest to reach young parents and whether the upper age limit for Care to Learn should be increased.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores respondents’ experiences of the application process. In particular, it looks at the amount and type of support given to young parents, and the time taken for applications to be processed. It then goes on to consider some issues relating to take-up and coverage.

While some young parents coped well with the whole application process, there is evidence that many need a considerable amount of support. This is not just in filling in the form, but also in following up what is happening with their application. This is not unexpected. The evidence suggests that, in general, this support is available, although there are still some gaps.

The need for follow-up was greater early in 2003/04 than would normally be the case due to initial delays in the processing of applications. Nevertheless, this emphasises the need for applications to be processed quickly and for young parents (and those working with them) to be notified if there are going to be delays.

Overall, although a few respondents were very critical of the initial problems experienced in processing applications, the majority were fairly sanguine about this. They accepted that a new initiative is bound to have teething problems. The situation had improved and memories of initial problems were dwindling. There were some clear examples given of young people dropping out, at least in part, due to either the lengthy application process or delayed payments to childcare providers. Remedial action was taken following the delays experienced during the autumn of 2003. The targets for Care to Learn nearly double year on year and applications will continue to peak each September/October. This will continue to test the systems
and processes. DfES are working with the delivery agent to further refine these processes, and the situation is subject to close review and monitoring.

### 6.2 Support provided to young parents

There were mixed views on the amount of help young parents needed when completing the application form; however, in general the balance of opinion was that they needed a lot. Professionals could only comment on the needs of the young people they dealt with. They did not know how many had successfully applied without any help. Furthermore, a number only had contact with young parents when there was some sort of problem in relation to their application. Their views were therefore likely to be influenced by the more problematic situations. There is no doubt that the initial delays in processing applications meant that early in the implementation of Care to Learn young parents needed more help and advice than should normally be the case.

A wide range of people were providing support to young parents during the application process: for example, Sure Start Plus advisers, social workers, childcare providers, Connexions PAs, learning providers. This backs up points made in earlier chapters — many different agencies work with young parents providing them with wide ranging support. Care to Learn appears to be becoming part of this range of support.

The majority of support was coming from Connexions PAs and staff based in learning providers. Other workers would often refer young parents to these for much of the help and advice they needed with the application process. This is not unexpected, as Connexions PAs and learning provider staff do have a key role in helping young parents access learning.

Where there was a mother and baby unit, these were providing a considerable amount of support to young parents throughout the whole process of applying for learning and Care to Learn. Indeed, much of the completion and submission of application forms was done by staff in these units, rather than the young parents themselves. Some units cater for young mothers up to the age of 16; others cater for 16-19 year olds as well. They were often providing support to young parents after they had left to continue their education elsewhere. For example, there were many examples of staff in mother and baby units helping young mothers apply for Care to Learn funding for a course at an FE college.

There was evidence that, in some areas, there is still work to be done informing all those who work with young parents of the existence and role of other support agencies. This will partly come through the greater emphasis on local co-ordination that is occurring. However, there is also a role for Teenage Pregnancy Boards more generally, in ensuring that more information on the range and role of those working with teenage parents is made available to all others involved. For example, those working outside the education arena were not always sure about the role of student services and Connexions PAs; many working with young parents knew little about accessing childcare. Care to Learn seems to be providing some forum for the spread of this information and for agencies to work together.

As might be expected, some young parents needed no help with the application process, or at least no external help (for example, due to having supportive families). They were well able to cope with completing the form and passing it on to their learning and childcare providers to complete. Those with whom support workers
came into contact had varying needs, ranging from answers to a few specific questions to someone sitting with them and completing the form for them. It was reported that many needed to be reminded that they had to complete and send off the form. The evidence we have so far is that this support was generally available when young people needed it.

Those providing support often have to be very proactive. It was reported how young parents had a tendency to ignore problems and assume they would go away. If they didn’t they would often give up, unless working with a support worker who could reassure them and help them to sort things out. Many very positive examples of the support being given to young people emerged during the case studies. However, gaps do still exist; the most notable example is in support for pre-16 year olds, especially in areas where there is no Reintegration Officer or mother and baby unit. Around 90 LEAs have a Reintegration Officer, whilst others have staff in another role taking similar responsibilities. However, there is sometimes a gap in support for the younger age group.

### 6.3 Young parents’ experiences of the application process

The young people interviewed during the course of the case studies generally reflected the points made in the previous section. They had needed and received varying levels of help when applying for Care to Learn funding. The majority felt the form had been easy to fill in and reported that when they had questions there had been someone to help them. A few had found the process more difficult, but again had been given all the help they needed.

There was evidence that some young parents had not taken on board that £5,000 (at that time) was the maximum amount of funding available for both childcare and travel.

**Action point:** It is recommended that for next year the forms specify a maximum that young parents and childcare providers can claim. They should be prevented from sending in larger claims through being advised to check childcare and learning hours, and to look at more affordable alternatives.

This would prevent the delays and frustrations of high claims being referred back.

Since the case studies were conducted the application form has been simplified. This should make it easier for young parents to apply for the funding; however, we have no evidence from the research conducted so far to support this.

During 2003/04, the registration form had created confusion for some young parents. A few had filled it in, not realising that they could make an application directly without going through the registration process. This had both lengthened and complicated the process for them. The registration process has now been reduced to a simple expression of interest and is intended to trigger follow-up action at a future time to suit the young parent.

### 6.4 Length of the application process

The delivery agent aims to process applications and inform young parents of their entitlement or, if necessary, send a letter requesting further information within five working days. At the beginning of the 2003/04 academic year, this was taking
much longer — due to the necessary software not being available, the sheer number of applications, and insufficient staff to deal with applications manually. Many of these problems have now been dealt with. New software has been commissioned and installed at Manchester, the team has been expanded with a clearer management structure. The July 2004 Service Performance Report to the DfES reports that applications were being turned around in five working days during the summer term of 2004. However, this has fallen well behind again, following the large volume and peak of applications during September/October 2004. As reported earlier, remedial action is being taken to address these issues and prevent further reoccurrence.

During the case study interviews, we did explore how long it was taking young parents to hear whether and how much funding they were receiving. A number of points emerged.

Perceptions of the speed of the application process varied considerably. The acceptable length of the turn round period depends on a range of factors: for example, when the young parent applies in relation to when the course starts, the urgency of confirming a childcare place, the attitudes, confidence, etc of the young parent. However, the majority of young people do apply near the beginning of term and often need to confirm a childcare place quickly — emphasising the need for a speedy application process. As the fact that Care to Learn is an entitlement becomes more widely understood, uncertainties around the application process should be lessened.

Initial delays in processing applications had caused much uncertainty for those young parents affected. Although Care to Learn funding is an entitlement, it is natural that many young people would not feel sure of the funding until receiving personal confirmation. A number had sent in a second application form as they were not sure whether the first one had arrived.

*Action point: If delays do happen it is important that there is some communication with young parents and their support workers so that both know what is happening. The fact that as long as a young parent’s application is within the financial limit and that other simple rules are adhered to, Care to Learn funding is an entitlement, needs to be reinforced to lessen concerns when any delays do occur.*

Most young parents do still apply around the beginning of term and in many ways this is unavoidable. Those starting a new course simply don’t get round to applying until the end of the summer. A complication is that college timetables are not always available in advance, and sometimes not until term actually starts. Until timetables are available, a young parent cannot confirm their childcare arrangements, and make a firm application to Care to Learn. It is possible to make a provisional application for funding and it seems that this is not widely recognised. However, although quite a few are made, these also tend to be at peak periods.

*Action point: Reinforce message that provisional applications can be made to Care to Learn, and that ideally these should be made as early as possible.*

Once again, although a number of respondents were very critical about the initial delays in processing applications, at the time of the case studies memories of these delays were dwindling. Indeed, many appreciated that there might be ‘teething problems’ with a new initiative.
6.5 Take-up and coverage

This section addresses some issues relating to take-up and coverage. Although the total number of applications for Care to Learn exceeded the target for 2003/04, take-up was much lower than expected in some areas. There were a number of reasons for this. Any new initiative takes time to become established, understood and known about. Some reasons for low take-up are now history: for example, relating to initial misunderstandings about the scope of the funding, key posts being vacant, initial delays in the processing of applications. Others reasons are still being addressed: for example, the Childcare Managers are visiting areas of low take-up to explore how this can be addressed. In some, this is due to poor local co-ordination and little dissemination of information, and this is being dealt with. In others, it is reported that young parents — especially those aged under 19 — are simply not motivated to learn. In many localities, the programme is helping bring together different services to work together in the interests of young parents, thus providing the support that the Minister sought.

There remain two particular issues — the extent to which Care to Learn is reaching the least motivated, and whether funding should be extended to those aged over 19. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

Reaching the hardest to reach

The case study interviews suggest that more could be done to reach young parents who are less motivated to learn. This is not just an issue for Care to Learn, but for teenage pregnancy strategies more generally, and presents a major challenge for those working with young parents.

To reach the targets set for Care to Learn over the next few years, it is likely that even more emphasis will need to be placed on the support available to young parents. It is clear that the most motivated to learn are already on, or considering, Care to Learn, and there are also many receiving the funding who have had considerable effort put in by support workers to bring them into, or retain them in, learning. It seems likely that more of the latter group will need to be reached for Care to Learn to achieve its longer-term targets. Furthermore, there is also an equity issue, in that some of the least motivated are also the most isolated. Providing them with information on other options might help them to move on and consider other lifestyles. This will not be easy, and some young parents are very good at avoiding any authority figure.

From August 2004 Care to Learn is also available to young parents under the age of 16. As reported earlier, evidence suggests that schools are one of the institutions amongst which greater publicity is needed. The case studies (and other research1) show that provision and support for teenage parents amongst schools and LEAs is very patchy. To fully engage young parents in learning, it is essential that both develop positive inclusion policies.

Extending Care to Learn beyond 19

This was an issue raised by a number of respondents during the first case studies and discussed in the first interim evaluation report. It was further commented on during the follow-up interviews by representatives of a number of different agencies and young parents themselves.

A number of quotes illustrate the perspectives of different respondents on this issue:

‘I’m finding many are having babies at 16/17, so they’re not ready to go back. If you were an older mum you’d have six to nine months off; then they often want to do a two year course and they can only do a one year. By the time they’re ready they’re 18/19. [Name] she could only do a one year course, I made her sign up. She was due to be 19 in September last year and in August, I said "get that form in and get a year out of it.”.’ (Sure Start Plus)

‘We have young women post 16 who are like sponges. … I think another year of funding … a lot of the young women here aren’t eligible for Care to Learn. But you have to say they are still very young mums. They may have had their babies at 16/17, gone out and want to continue now at say 20. You’ve got a huge amount of maturity coming in at that age. I bet half of ours don’t qualify.’ (mother and baby unit)

‘Because they have to do it by the time they’re 19, then a lot aren’t ready. They do a course because they know the childcare’s there and it might not be the right course. You might find if you’re getting a high drop-out rate it’s because they’re not ready. They can’t get a permanent tenancy until they’re 18 so they’re in temporary accommodation and they may have up to four moves. The money is sparse and they’ve got so many problems that doing a course at that age isn’t viable. Those who have lots of family support tend to be more motivated and tend to return and stay but those that haven’t tend to give up. They’re not ones I’ve directly worked with. Couldn’t they allocate the money and say “you can go back when you’re ready.”? They sign something to say “I will use two years of Care to Learn but I’m not ready to go back yet — maybe when I’m 20 or 21.” You can have a high failure turnover; they’re not going to be ready. Some are — those with family support — but those without and the issues of moving two, three sometimes four times is a lot. When they move they have to change their details, benefits, they’re missing time out of college. Gas, electricity, buying furniture, trying to get a grant or loan for furniture — it’s a lot. And whatever personal issues they’ve got.’ (Sure Start Plus)

Possibilities for extending the age range for Care to Learn were discussed in the first interim report, and one of the quotes above raises another option. Whether this is possible will be a policy decision, and will also depend on the availability of funding. However, the available evidence suggests that this would greatly benefit a number of young parents, and disproportionately extend the impact of Care to Learn.

Action point: Consideration should be given to transferring some of the 19+ childcare support funding and responsibilities to Care to Learn, extending the initiative to include at least 19 year olds in further education.
Many of those working with young parents and the young parents themselves did not know that Learner Support Funds are available for parents over 19 and that childcare support is available for students in higher education. Alongside publicity on Care to Learn these points need to be made.

*Action point: More publicity is needed on the availability of childcare support for over 19s and those in HE.*

One person was concerned that Care to Learn was aiming to push young people back into education and training when they had just had their baby. Some want to spend more time with their baby and they need to be able to bond. Some are not ready for education, or feel that their baby is too young to be left with someone else.

*Action point: Publicity about Care to Learn needs to further emphasise that it is about providing opportunities and removing barriers; it does not aim to force young parents back into learning when they are not ready.*
7. **Conclusions**

Care to Learn has been well received and the number of applications for 2003/04 academic year exceeded the target set. It is generally agreed that Care to Learn removes a major barrier faced by young parents wanting to return to, or remain in, education. It has helped some organisations (for example, mother and baby units) provide an expanded and better service for young parents. Some colleges are using Care to Learn as an integral part of their outreach and access work among young parents.

This is only the first year of Care to Learn and it only became fully operational from August 2004. It is beginning to become established as a single universal childcare scheme for young parents. Although teenage pregnancy and parenthood are a priority policy issue and can have serious consequences for young parents themselves in terms of longer-term social exclusion, disadvantage, poverty, etc, they are a relatively small group amongst all young people. In addition, a large range of different agencies work with young parents. It will always be a challenge reaching and engaging all these. Over the first year, the Care to Learn publicity has made a very good start at reaching all those concerned. There are bound to be gaps in reach at this point in time, and the success of the first year needs to be maintained and built on.

7.1 **The learning experience**

Many of the parents interviewed at this stage in the study were very motivated to learn. However, Care to Learn was enabling some young parents to return to or remain in, learning who would otherwise have dropped out. Others were able to do more learning than they would have done without the financial and other support they received.

Financial support for childcare is extremely important. However, for many young parents, the help and support they receive in terms of, for example, advice, practical help with other financial and personal issues, help with accessing childcare and learning, were also essential. The funding would not be nearly as effective without such help and support being available.

The majority of young women interviewed were very positive about their learning experiences since becoming involved with Care to Learn. They were on courses leading to qualifications — usually vocational qualifications — which built on their existing qualifications. A few were obtaining qualifications for the first time. Many had specific career aims in mind.

For a number of the young people interviewed, teenage pregnancy had been a positive experience. Becoming a parent with responsibilities for the life of another person had led to a change in attitudes to learning. They wanted to sort their lives out, obtain qualifications and find employment that would lead to possibly a career, but at least a stable income and work history. They had often had no such aims before becoming a parent. Care to Learn is making an important contribution in supporting these young women.

Young parents had particularly benefited from the social side of attending a school, college or work-based learning provider. They had made new friends and developed new social networks, often amongst both their general peer group and other young parents. For some, becoming a parent was an isolating experience as they were unable to engage in the same way as previously with their long-term friends. Attending a learning provider had helped address this.
7.2 The children of teenage parents

Young parents were concerned about the development of their child, despite many not previously being that interested in education and learning themselves. One reason for their choice of childcare provider was the approach of the provider to children. One of their key concerns was that their child would not like being left. Childcare providers often had to work flexibly and sensitively with the young mother to ensure they were reassured.

Childcare providers and young parents themselves commented positively on the benefits to the children of interaction with other children, and adults; and the range of activities they could participate in.

In addition, many childcare providers were providing reassurance and information to young parents on aspects of childcare. A few — mostly those based at learning providers — were also providing a more formal input into parenting skills. This all contributes to improving the parenting skills of young parents, but perhaps most importantly reassuring them, for example, that they are not doing things wrong or that their child is not different or backward compared to others.

7.3 Flexibility of learning provision

A general point emerges that in addition to support, more flexible learning provision is needed to attract young parents. This includes short ‘return to learn’ type courses, and flexible timetables. Learning providers need to think more proactively about how they can make timetables more flexible, help students catch up, drop in and out of courses, etc. Outreach is also very important to help less motivated young people return to learning. A few colleges were using Care to Learn, and other initiatives to develop these activities. However, these were in the minority.

Actions are being taken in this area, and some colleges are moving ahead. E2E also offers considerable potential, through providing ‘return to learn’ and other similar types of course which enable young parents to return to learning.

Mother and baby units are able to provide one-to-one, intensive, and specific support that is not always possible in other types of learning providers. They were also meeting other educational needs of these young parents: for example, more vocational learning and other courses of relevance to the position of young parents. In schools, it is not always possible to treat particular groups differently according to what they want from education and teaching methods. However, to engage more young people in education, it is possible that new methods of delivery will have to be considered.

7.4 Provision of childcare

The cost of childcare has been a major concern, in particular whether £5,000 (now £5,125) is sufficient. The evidence on this is still mixed and further analysis will be conducted using management information on the 2004/05 applicants and data from the forthcoming survey of young parents on Care to Learn. There are many anecdotal examples across the country of the total being insufficient. In some areas, it was felt that students wanting to study full-time might struggle finding childcare within the maximum. The main problems were reported in London.
During the first case studies it was reported that the availability of childcare would be an issue; this has not emerged so far as a major barrier. However, there were issues around the location of childcare relative to learning providers and the cost of transport (especially, but not just, in rural areas). The cost of transport, whether from home to childcare provider, or from there to learning provider, was reported to be a barrier for some young parents (and this was raised at meetings attended, not just through the case studies). There was some confusion amongst respondents about how the transport element of Care to Learn worked and what it covered. Separating the transport and childcare elements of the funding would help address this. However, it is possible that transport costs will emerge as a more important barrier to participation in learning, now that childcare has been addressed.

There were gaps in some types of provision: for example, childcare for babies and children under two, care outside normal hours particularly in the evening, very part-time care. There are a number of national initiatives addressing the provision of childcare in Britain, and these will go some way to addressing such issues. However, most childcare is run as a business; providers, whether nurseries, childminders, etc, have to earn income and cover their costs. They cannot be endlessly flexible, although as demands for flexible care become evident, it is likely that supply will increase. Some young parents will need to book and pay for care that more than covers their learning needs, to fit in with what is available, and Care to Learn will have to bear the cost of this.

Childcare providers wanted more information on Care to Learn, partly so that they could provide a more informed service to young parents and so that they had information to promote the initiative. They were keen to help young parents, and many were providing help on parenting issues (see above) and on practical issues (eg about arriving on time, regular attendance, etc). Few had been asked for advice on other issues, although some had been required to help in emergency situations.

In a number of areas someone from the childcare arena is playing an important role co-ordinating Care to Learn. At a meeting attended in the North East, it was reported that a childminding network was setting up an out-of-hours enquiry line for young parents. This was welcomed by some childminders who, in addition to wanting to help young parents, were being given an opportunity for training and widening their longer-term career potential. It seems there is scope to expand the role of childcare providers in providing support for young parents.

**7.5 Advice and support for young parents before, during and after learning**

The young parents interviewed reported having their support needs met, and many other respondents were providing considerable amounts of support for young parents. Some young parents do not feel they need any support, or they have supportive families that are generally able to help with all their information and advice needs. However, it is important that external support is available, especially to help deal with any problems that arise. There are some gaps, and more effort needs to be put into supporting young parents in some areas and organisations — for example, in schools, and particularly in areas where there is no Reintegration Officer.

The nature of support work with young parents can be very intensive: for example, Reintegration Officers talked about getting young people out of bed and taking them to school for their exams. Those in mother and baby units discussed the wide ranging and on-going support they provided for young parents.
Schools and local education departments have a crucial role to play in regard to under 16 year olds. Some schools are still reluctant to deal with young women once they become pregnant. This can often be on top of a history of truancy and disengagement, however, it is sometimes pregnancy per se which causes a rift. It is important that in all areas (whether they have a high level of teenage pregnancy or not) young women are not allowed to drift and lose contact once they become pregnant. Schools do not want to be seen to be condoning teenage pregnancy and have a lot of issues to deal with; however, local authorities do have a role in making such that all young people under 16 are included in education, and the particular needs of teenage parents should be taken more fully into account.

The young parents on Care to Learn were receiving the advice and support they needed to access learning, and during their time in learning. It is too soon to tell whether they will receive sufficient help afterwards. However, the evidence is promising. Those working with teenage parents are extremely committed to their role. During the case studies, we found a number of professionals going beyond their immediate job to help young parents who had already moved on: for example, those in mother and baby units continued to work with some young parents after they left the unit.

7.6 Management and delivery

7.6.1 Process

Early in the 2003/04 academic year, there were delays in processing the applications and making payments to childcare providers. These had a serious impact on some providers, support workers and young parents. Some young parents had dropped out of learning and, although delays were not always the only factor, they had played a role. However, when the case studies were conducted, we were not inundated with complaints about these early problems. Things were running smoothly during spring/summer of 2004; applications are being processed quickly and payments are being made on time. Memories of early problems have, on the whole, dwindled in people’s minds. A number of those interviewed commented that any new initiative was bound to have ‘teething problems’.

In early 2004, a range of actions was taken to address the delays. A review was conducted of the IT and management systems at the delivery agent, the software for processing applications was refined and the application form revised, a team leader was appointed and the team expanded. Unfortunately, as this report was being finalised, delays in processing applications and making payments were again occurring. Further remedial actions have been taken and the situation is under constant review. The bulk of applications will always be around the beginning of the academic year. Many young people do not make final decisions about study, or take action to enrol on a course until well into the summer. College timetables are rarely available in advance, and until these are available, young parents are unable to finalise their childcare arrangements and their funding needs. Furthermore, targets for Care to Learn almost double year on year, and the number of applications is expected to increase sharply. This is a situation that will continually need to be dealt with.

There were a number of complaints about the operation of the helpline early on. In particular, it had been difficult to get through, and when dealing with on-going issues it was difficult to get continuity of response. The introduction of additional lines and an increase in the team at the delivery agent will help. Many who used the
helpline for general queries valued the useful response. Those using the helpline during summer 2004 reported an improved service.

Some other areas where change could be considered were raised during the evaluation. For example, childcare and learning providers wanted payments to be accompanied by a clearer explanation of what each was for and the period concerned. Letters confirming that the funding has been approved need to reiterate information young people have already been given — they forget or do not properly understand (for example, the allocation of a maximum amount between childcare and travel). In the event that there are delays again, it is important that young people are informed what is happening — to prevent uncertainties about whether any funding will be forthcoming and additional application forms being submitted.

Care to Learn has become established quickly. At the time of the case studies, some support workers and young parents themselves were unclear about some of the details of Care to Learn. This is not unexpected with any new initiative, and as it becomes more established these uncertainties will diminish. There is already FAQ, etc on the website and people valued the helpline. However, it might be useful to have simple summary sheets (eg bullet points) that are sent out with application forms and/or confirmation letters, reiterating the key points of Care to Learn.

7.6.2 Co-ordination and communication

There has been a considerable amount of publicity about Care to Learn, and this has reached many people over the first year. There are still some gaps in that not all the necessary groups or individuals are properly informed (eg schools, health workers and social workers), and in some localities publicity has been better than others. However, a very good start has been made and efforts are currently being made to address the gaps — both at a local and national level. It is important that this momentum is maintained.

Co-ordination of Care to Learn at a local level is essential, in terms of publicity generally but also to provide a local point of contact to address problems and issues as they arise. There has been significant progress in promoting this, especially since the TPCs were given responsibility to ensure this happens. The Childcare Managers have also played a key role: for example, visiting areas where participation in Care to Learn is low to help explore how this can be addressed. This good start needs to be maintained and built on, and there are many good ideas emerging from the more ‘go ahead’ areas. However, there are still gaps, in that some localities are lagging behind in the co-ordination of, and publicity around, Care to Learn. It is important that the resources are maintained, for example, through the Childcare Managers, to help these areas become more organised.

It is crucial that those involved with under 16 year old parents become better informed about Care to Learn, and the involvement of schools is essential here. In areas where there is an active Reintegration Officer (or someone with a similar role) they can take the lead. Where there is not, or the post is vacant, this activity is often lost. Those parents under 16 who are already disengaged from education, need considerable amounts of support and encouragement to remain in education. For Care to Learn to operate effectively, this support also has to be available.

7.6.3 National co-ordination

A new issue has recently arisen — that is, whether Care to Learn should remain the responsibility of the DfES or should be devolved to another agency, for example, the LSC. Care to Learn is much more than other funding structures supporting various
disadvantaged groups. The provision of funding for childcare is central to the initiative. However, unless this is backed up by appropriate support structures it is unlikely to have a greater impact.

A number of activities which remain core to the DfES are involved in Care to Learn, including the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and Teenage Pregnancy Unit, school education, Reintegration Officers, Connexions, childcare and Sure Start. There needs to be co-ordinated action from all of these to ensure that Care to Learn is not lost or just regarded as another funding stream. The Teenage Pregnancy Unit and TPCs have a cross-departmental role. Health visitors, midwives, social workers and leaving care teams are also concerned with Care to Learn. It is important that the initiative is centrally placed and proactively co-ordinated so that actions can be taken to involve all these groups.

The current DfES team have been very important in Care to Learn becoming as established as it has. Relationships have been built up between team members and particular areas; it is known that the Childcare Managers are available to visit, provide information and discuss issues in any area or for any organisation that wishes. Furthermore, the DfES team have been an important point of contact for telephone and email queries. Continuity of management, that also brings together all the areas mentioned above is crucial.

This all suggests that responsibility for Care to Learn needs to be within a central department through which the wide ranging contacts, pressures, networking, etc can be maintained.

### 7.7 Fulfilling the long-term targets

The young parents interviewed during the case studies were generally well motivated to learn, although they had not always been. Support workers discussed the efforts they had to put in to encourage young parents to remain in, or return to, learning, or simply to help them ‘get their act together’ to apply for the childcare funding and a course. Nevertheless, it does seem that Care to Learn is, at the moment, mostly reaching the most reachable.

It is not clear how far it is reaching those who are less motivated to learn, and many respondents felt that more proactive action would be needed to bring these young parents back to learning. This is not just an issue for Care to Learn but a broader issue, related to teenage pregnancy but also for those working more generally with disaffected young people.

How far this will be a barrier to Care to Learn reaching its longer-term targets remains to be seen. Progress on numbers so far has been very good. Over the next few years, targets will become more challenging, and the extent to which it is necessary to introduce more innovative and proactive support activities will begin to emerge. In terms of addressing disadvantage amongst young parents, activities to reach the less reachable will be more equitable. Many of these may be so disengaged that they can see no other life other than remaining at home on benefits. Changing these perceptions will be a major challenge.