The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in human resource issues. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For over 30 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has over 60 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet.

IES aims to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management. IES achieves this by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.
Executive Summary

Key findings
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.
Information and co-ordination

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 of finalising this report and following a virtual doubling in applications (2332 as at 12th November 2004), delays had unfortunately occurred again. Measures have been put in place to address inefficiencies in processing arrangements and to closely monitor the central delivery of the funding. Young people continue to apply at the last moment, and the bulk of applications are always likely to be in the late summer/early autumn. The delivery agent must be prepared for this which will remain a challenge as targets for participation rise year on year and the numbers applying increase.

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.