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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1. This study concerns transport provision and support for students in Further Education (FE) and their effects on choice of educational institution, participation and retention rates.

2. The issues around how local transport policies and practices influence students’ decisions are complex, and the study reveals the extent of this complexity and the variety of experience for students when travelling to and from college and school sixth forms across the country.

3. The research concentrated on those who have already decided to take up FE and those already in FE. We have not researched the extent to which transport support influences the decisions of those who choose not to participate in FE.

Findings

4. Financial help for students in FE through the Learner Support Funds is targeted at 9.8% of students. For those aged 16-18, 14% receive support and 52% of these funds are spent on their transport and residential needs.

5. Among the young people participating in FE it was clear that they did not often consider transport when making their application - the course content and college/school environment were more important - a key reason being that potential students were rarely faced with good transport information and often not in a position to make informed judgements.

6. For students’ parents, transport costs featured alongside college reputation and course content - parents considered that transport could be difficult and expensive: for those that could afford it these costs were worth putting up with.

7. In rural areas it is acknowledged that transport can be costly and FE is difficult to reach.

8. Transport costs can be a material consideration if overall costs are part of the reason for whether a student chooses to withdraw from FE. Transport is rarely the sole factor - here other factors such as opportunities to enter the job market and earn wages also influence students.

9. We suspect that for young people who have decided not to take part in FE, financial considerations (and the costs of transport in particular) could have been a factor. Further research is needed to confirm this.

10. The last decade has been a time of considerable change in the delivery and regulatory processes for FE. It is clear that the variety of different approaches and experience in providing transport services and student support has become more marked and the impact on students more varied, to the extent that some parents and students feel that the system is unequal. However, there are a significant number of locations where there is evidence of good practice.
11. Developments in the delivery of FE over the coming years will have further impact on transport provision. In particular, the development of Centres of Excellence and Centres of Vocational Excellence will mean that, for some students, the appropriate college will be further away from home so journeys will be longer and possibly more complex.

12. There is evidence that investment in efficient and effective transport provision will help many students. In addition to better targeting of support to students who need it, there is also scope for more effective use of funding by LEAs and colleges.

13. More effective transport procurement will also assist in ensuring funds are used efficiently, allowing wider coverage than might otherwise be possible, and will also contribute to wider Transport and Environment objectives.

14. Local authority transport planning has been revolutionised in the recent past and the intention to achieve improved bus and coach service networks, interchanges and information provision is central to all local authorities’ forward programmes. Investment in local public transport has increased markedly and the ambitions are for modernisation of provision and significant growth in use.

15. LEAs and Passenger Transport Groups have a wide range of involvement in terms of administration, policy on eligibility for transport provision, and in terms of the amount they are prepared to spend.

16. Colleges across the country have differing levels of involvement in terms of financial support and in terms of buying in their own contract bus services, operating their own vehicles or in working alongside their LEA.

**Students with disabilities**

17. There are marked differences in the judgements made by LEAs in assessing whether students have special education needs, as the proportion of total students recorded with special needs varies substantially across the country.

18. Students with special needs in receipt of free transport have no restriction on their choice of college since they do not bear the costs. They do, however, find the scheduled times of transport provision inflexible in terms of not reflecting their school/college attendance pattern.

19. Transport for students with special needs, once assessed, is provided but there is widespread variation in the duration of its provision with adverse effects on students trying to catch up on time lost earlier in their education.

20. Some authorities set minimum distance criteria before students with special needs become eligible for free transport.

21. Mobility training offers students the opportunity to use mainstream passenger transport and develop independence. In the long term it also reduces the costs to LEAs of providing special needs transport. Where offered this policy is very well received.

22. There is an increase in accessible transport to improve travel opportunities for students with disabilities. Mainstream passenger transport provision rarely offers the
door-to-door convenience that students with special needs require, and the resources available to provide such services are extremely limited.

23. Students of 19 and over do not feature in the equation as far as LEAs are concerned except for those with special needs or disabilities.

Conclusions

Partnership

24. There is a need for Department for Transport and DfES to work together in ensuring that local authority transport plans embrace fully the government’s objectives for transport for FE students.

25. Partnership working between LEAs, Passenger Transport Groups and colleges maximises effectiveness of funding and removes competition for scarce transport resources.

26. Ministers have decided that LEAs should lead the partnerships as they are better positioned to co-ordinate transport arrangements locally and should undertake to deliver:

- policy on the provision of passenger transport services and support to students attending Further Education;
- assessment of needs against the criteria set in accordance with these policies;
- planning of transport services to meet these needs;
- procurement of these services in the most cost-effective manner; and,
- monitoring of needs and performance of the transport services provided against pre-determined criteria.

27. However, in areas with many colleges and catchment areas overlapping many LEA boundaries, in metropolitan areas and in London, the LEA should consider delegating its authority to another organisation i.e. the Passenger Transport Authority/Transport for London.

28. More effective arrangements for partnership working should be implemented through a more effective statutory framework to provide a clarity of purpose and a clear budgetary and accountability regime for the partnerships.

29. The principle of local discretion to suit local needs and local budgets is important but more central direction in aspects of transport provision and support is now appropriate to ensure more consistency, better targeting and equity.

30. The experience of the past decade has shown that different organisations make important contributions in the supply of FE transport. Colleges are often closer to individual students than other bodies and are more aware of their particular needs. In many cases colleges have intervened to provide transport services in the absence of local authority involvement, but LEAs are in a better position to see the area-wide requirements and to co-ordinate transport service provision.
31. Teams of professional staff dealing with integrated passenger transport planning and procurement are available to assist in each area to good effect and these are based in the local authorities in passenger transport groups or, in the metropolitan areas, in the PTEs. Colleges procuring their own services without the benefit of the wider perspective offered by these teams do not achieve the same levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

**Students**

32. Consistency in transport service provision and student support should be offered to students across the country.

33. Insufficient transport provision and support are barriers to some students in the decision to participate, and transport should figure more highly than it does when choices are made. Many students do not receive detailed information about transport issues when they decide to apply, and some do not make objective decisions about the transport difficulties they will face when they attend the college they select. Therefore students and their parents would benefit from good quality and timely information.

34. Students who choose to continue at a school sixth form do so for reasons of closeness to home, familiarity with the school and teachers, and because it meets their course requirements. They benefit from access to existing contract bus services and their journey lengths and travel patterns tend to be shorter and less complex than those attending colleges. These students, therefore, have less need of additional transport support once they reach the sixth form. There will be some requirement for transport provision to meet the needs for those who have changed school at the end of Year 11.

35. In general, fewer students of 19 and over have need for transport assistance given higher income levels, but where assistance is needed it is more acute and more complex to meet (a higher proportion today are in part time courses and have more complicated travel needs, fitting in with work and child care etc).

36. Students with special needs have special transport arrangements planned for them, but these can be short term, arranged at short notice, and of uncertain duration.

37. Little information is available about the impact of transport issues on non-learners – young people who have decided not to participate in Further Education or who have failed to complete their course. Few authorities or colleges have systematic exit interview or other processes to understand why students leave and whether transport was a key reason. Better information and further research is needed to assess the importance of transport in non-participation or retention.

38. Travel patterns will continue to change and are likely to require more effective and flexible student support. Better research, locally, into student transport needs is necessary if partnerships are to target support in response to local circumstances and individual needs.
**Funding**

39. While efficiency gains could be made through better organisation and planning of transport delivery, these are only capable of achievement in the medium term. Some increased funding is required to provide a catalyst for change in the short term. Furthermore, there is a serious imbalance between the regions in the amount spent so there is a need to redress this imbalance through careful targeting of these funds.

40. In the more urban areas the partnership should target financial support to students in need (of particular relevance where an EMA is in place, but the EMA may not be sufficient to cover high travel costs) and many of them can be carried on existing transport services at marginal cost. In less urban areas and in rural areas the partnership should both offer financial support to students in need and also procure appropriate transport services not currently provided by bus operators or local authorities meaning that costs per head will be higher than in urban areas.

**Recommendations**

41. Section 509 of the Education Act 1996 should be revised to set out the role and responsibilities of LEAs and their partners in providing effective transport support and services for students in FE.

42. A local partnership should be created comprising (at least) the LEA, the local LSC, local colleges within the LEA area and the local authority Public Transport Group, with the structure and membership designed to suit local circumstances. The partnership should work in accordance with the revised legislation and guidelines set out by DfES, working with the national LSC, and recorded in formal Service Level Agreements.

43. The duties of each partnership will be to identify student needs, record clearly all current spend in this sector and determine what impact it has on meeting these student needs. Transport provision should be focused on those in most need.

44. Students should expect to receive a policy statement, set locally by the partnership stating under what conditions transport is provided, and how the partners intend to provide for students for whom transport services are not adequate or available and for these arrangements to continue until the student's needs or circumstances change or they complete their course. The policy should include:

- use of criteria in respect of time, distance or costs;
- eligibility criteria and the financial support available for students on low incomes;
- access to transport services for students at a cost to be met by the student;
- transport provided for students with special needs irrespective of the distance from their home to college;
- mobility or independence training for students with special needs to help offset the requirements for special needs transport; and,
transport until the age 25 or when they leave Further Education, whichever is sooner for students with special needs.

45. If improved access through transport is to be pursued, then today's low-spending authorities will need further funding but this should be targeted in a manner that contributes to transport for post 16 students who need it. To improve low spending local authorities by bringing them up to today's median level of spend (in terms of individual authority spend) would cost £9-10m pa for non-disabled students. This is a crude approach and does not take account of retention levels or measures of local deprivation. It can also be seen as "rewarding" low-spending authorities at the expense of more generous authorities.

46. A better approach, at least initially, would be via developmental work in the form of "pathfinder" projects. "Pathfinder" projects should be supported through additional funding in certain parts of the country from September 2002 onwards. The work of the ‘pathfinders’ will usefully inform the accessibility audit and plan proposed by the Social Exclusion Unit.1

47. Funding options that are worth considering include:
   - provide all funding to Local LSCs for use in local partnerships;
   - a coalescence of existing transport budgets currently resting with colleges, the LEA and public transport authority, to be distributed by the transport partnership;
   - funds for student transport channelled via the college and ring-fenced for transport, and the college in turn committing them to the partnership; and,
   - funds for student transport removed from college access funds, passed to LEAs, ring-fenced for transport, and spent under the direction of the partnership.

48. These funding arrangements might be supplemented locally by the colleges’ own funds to increase transport support if appropriate, but must be applied by the responsible partner in the full knowledge of the others.

49. There should be no national minimum entitlement to transport for students in FE, the transport provision and support should be needs led and all students should be provided with clear and timely information on what transport is available to them.

50. DfES should develop guidance in tandem with Department for Transport in order that monitoring might relate as closely as appropriate with Local Transport Plan requirements. Each partnership should report back to DfES on progress against these indicators.

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1 For more information visit [www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk) and see the report ‘Making Connections – Transport and Social Exclusion Interim Findings’.
Recommendations for students with special needs

51. The criteria for judging whether students have special educational needs (and the resultant impact on transport provision) should be reviewed to:
   - identify better these students;
   - assist in the allocation of financial support;
   - determine uptake of Further Education; and,
   - monitor transport provision for this group.

52. More central direction on the principal components of operational criteria for transport provision and support for students with special needs is also appropriate.

53. The maximum age entitlement for students with special needs should be resolved with an assured provision up to a common age – this could be 21 or 25 depending on need and available funding. More work is needed to cost this.

54. The minimum eligible distance for students requiring special needs transport should be removed and thus enabling more to access FE. At the same time, students with special needs who can use mainstream public transport should be encouraged to do so. Again, further work is needed to cost this option and assess the benefits.

55. Further funding may be required for students with special needs, for widespread provision of mobility training and for meeting the transport needs of students beyond the age of 19. It is not possible at this point to gauge the level of additional support needed, but given the additional funding suggested in paragraph 46 and the use of development “pathfinder projects”, it should be possible to test whether the additional funding envisaged is sufficient.

56. Accessible transport and demand responsive services should be made more readily available to offer students with special needs the same travel choice and flexibility of the time of travel that other students can enjoy. More work is needed to determine how these services can be developed and their costs and benefits.

The consultants would like to record their appreciation for the advice and support provided by the DfES officials (and in particular Martin Camillin and Lindsey Baker), the project Steering Group and all the contributions from the LEAs, other Local Authorities, the Colleges and other bodies which took part in the research.
SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICE

The Student Life Cycle

(i) Circulate easy to understand information to potential students at the earliest opportunity. Include details of local policy, how and where to apply for student support, where to catch bus services and how to buy the best tickets.

(ii) The LEA and/or the college to offer advice on transport issues and ensure transport is discussed in interviews with potential students.

(iii) Offer provisional support for transport if a student's circumstances have not been fully investigated to help with first trips to college.

(iv) Design the processes for provision of transport services and applications for student support to make it easy for students to apply.

(v) Undertake surveys of parent and student opinions about transport, check on the effectiveness of the promotional material and hold exit interviews with students who decide to withdraw and check whether transport was a factor.

Students with special needs

(vi) Clear and simple guidelines on entitlement to transport support.

(vii) Consider a wide range of disabilities and be prepared to provide support up to at least the student's 21st birthday and consider any costs over and above those faced by non-disabled students.

(viii) Design transport services that fit closely with student needs and which adapt to meet changing needs.

(ix) Provide mobility or other independence training.

Transport

(x) Provide access to appropriate bus and train services, with attractive ticketing enabling access to the most convenient colleges. Make the student's choice of ticket easy, spread the costs, and use smart card technology where practical.

(xi) Co-ordinate demands for transport in ways that complement existing services and that offer benefits to all public transport users. Work closely with transport operators but colleges/LEAs to keep control over cost and quality.

(xii) Where possible, offer students access to the whole public transport network even in rural areas, offering wider social and educational benefits.
Organisation and model arrangements

(xiii) Seek to integrate transport procurement and student support functions in LEAs and PT groups with effective communication between functions and develop single points of contact for students to access information and advice.

(xiv) Enable transport operators to design the best routes and times by providing them with essential information on student locations and needs.

(xv) Partnerships to have clear objectives, transparent decision making, clear policy on funding and resources, to make best use of local knowledge and expertise.

(xvi) Encourage use of public transport, undertake regular research into student needs and from the outset collect good quality information for monitoring purposes.
2. INTRODUCTION

Overview

1.1 This guide is intended to show the way towards better and more effective transport services and support for students wishing to access Further Education (as it is a developing sector there will be a mechanism to keep it current – probably via a web-site and this will help all to learn of and disseminate other examples of good practice). It is not intended to be prescriptive nor to suggest that there is one solution for all, but the recent report¹ identified a need for guidance since many LEAs and colleges will have little experience in developing targeted transport provision and student support.

1.2 To develop an effective focus, given its anticipated broad readership, the core of the document is based around the lifecycle of a typical student from the time they consider Further Education (FE) to the time that they complete their course.

1.3 In compiling this guide we acknowledge the substantial contributions made to our understanding from the project Steering Group, the DfES and all the colleges, LEAs and others who contributed to the study. We have added examples of good practice derived from the study where this contributes to better and more effective support and suggested good practice is highlighted in italics.

Context

1.4 The study considered the relevance of transport provision and student support in taking up and staying in FE by:

- 16-19 year olds;
- all continuing students post 19;
- students with learning difficulties; and,
- disabled students.

1.5 The starting point was the recognition of a lack of research in this area, but there were indicators that transport was a significant problem for some students (of Government provided Access Funds for 16-19s, 52% is spent on transport and residential costs and 9.8% of FE students benefit from the Access Funds) and widespread support for this research.

1.6 The main conclusions from the study that affect this good practice guide are:

- investment in efficient and effective transport provision and student support will help students where they encounter difficulties with:
  - high transport costs,
  - lack of appropriate transport services,
  - inappropriate/inconvenient timings/routings of services;

¹ Steer Davies Gleave (2002), Transport for Students in Further Education, report for DfES Young People Learner Support
• more efficient and more effective transport provision will improve access to FE and will contribute to Government’s wider transport and environment objectives;

• the involvement of different parties (LEAs, colleges, Public Transport Groups, Passenger Transport Executives, transport operators etc.) in the provision of transport and student support in different parts of the country has achieved varying results - inconsistent treatment and inequitable effects on students;

• those arranging transport services and support should follow the national guidelines and legislation in framing policies and practices to meet local needs;

• all policies and practices should demonstrate:
  • clarity of purpose,
  • clear budgetary and accountability regime.

• for students with special needs there is a need for consistency in:
  • assessment criteria,
  • the range of transport support (in terms of eligibility criteria and the nature of the transport provided) – flexible provision that lasts until the end of their course, and
  • the provision of mobility training and other independence training.

1.7 A key development path to test improvements in current arrangements for transport provision and student support is the programme of “Pathfinder Projects”. The DfES is offering additional funds to selected LEAs to form partnerships with colleges and other bodies to develop new arrangements and report back on progress.
3. THE STUDENT LIFE CYCLE

Considering Further Education

2.1 Many students do not consider transport issues this early on and both they and their parents may have little idea of the importance of transport in the decision process. This means that transport is not given the importance it deserves and students and their parents rarely have enough information to consider rationally the effects high transport costs and poor services can have.

2.2 The supply of simple and basic information about transport will go a long way at this stage. Useful means of doing so include the circulation of leaflets setting out the local LEA/partnership’s policy on transport (how it is provided, what is provided and the nature of any financial support and eligibility criteria) and advice on where and how to apply for any support that might be available would be very helpful. Many colleges set out transport issues in their prospectus and provide relevant web-site references. The prospectus is a good place to describe how accessible the college is – and it can also show the main means of access to the college from its catchment area, what transport is available and how to apply for student support. When staff from Rother Valley College (South Yorkshire) visit schools the staff take along sample route timetables to show which bus services students can use to reach the college.

Applying for Further Education

2.3 At the time of application, the student needs to consider how they are going to get to the college of their choice and what it would cost. Provision of information such as route maps or the arrival and departure times of the main bus services at the college will help the student to understand how easy or difficult it may be to get to that college. Rother Valley College provides a list of bus services that serve the college with every interview letter sent to potential students.

2.4 Another way of reaching the students and their parents is for the LEA or the college concerned to offer to answer any transport related enquiries. It can help those who are uncertain about how to get there and have questions to ask. A further approach is to ensure that in any interviews the college staff may hold with students or their parents that transport is discussed. The interviewer can ensure that transport has been raised and can gauge from the response whether further support is required and this can be fed back to the college or LEA. It is also a means of testing the effectiveness of any of the other methods cited here.

Induction

2.5 The first time that the student attends the college at the beginning of the course or for induction can be the most difficult – they may be faced with using different public transport arrangements or they maybe confronted for the first time with the transport costs they will face on every trip in future.

2.6 For those students who have applied for and may be expecting some form of financial support, the funding body will consider whether to offer some provisional support from Learner Support Funds. If the student's circumstances have been
identified, the student is assured that they can get to the college and any uncertainty over initial eligibility for support is removed, and the first trip is made easier. Some LEAs recognise the difficulty of the first trip, and more importantly attendance at the induction session(s). In Gateshead, for example, they make provisional awards to ensure the student can get to college for the first day or two without the authority having to make the more serious decision for ongoing support.

2.7 Since not all students will be eligible, those involved in transport provision and student support should rehearse what other means exist to help students to use public transport. If students are expected to travel independently then show them how to purchase appropriate tickets, where to get the best deals and what restrictions exist for special offers etc on the college’s web-site or via leaflets to potential students.

2.8 Students’ initial journeys can be made easier by providing them with specific information about their journey – the services they should use, where the nearest bus stop is, the likely cost and the times of convenient buses that will get them to their course at an appropriate time. Also inform them of contact numbers for the local bus companies and any travel information services that are available so that they can make their own arrangements in future.

2.9 In some LEA areas, the application process for travel support and any means-tested benefits can be onerous and some students and their parents may find it both a difficult and an anxious time. Processes that are designed to suit the needs of students and their parents rather than the administrative processes in the college and LEA will encourage some of the more uncertain applicants to persevere.

**During the course**

2.10 It is important during the course for the college to ask the student how they are getting on and whether they face any difficulties with regard to their transport. Alton College (Hampshire) has formal surveys of both students and parents to learn about what they think of the course, college and transport arrangements. This allows:

- a means to measure the effectiveness of current travel arrangements;
- determination of whether to change current arrangements; and,
- an assessment of the need for to make changes to future travel arrangements.

**Withdrawal from the course**

2.11 Many colleges and LEAs do not use “exit surveys” to find out from students why they want to leave and whether it is a failing with transport support arrangements or other influences are the reason for such decisions. Some authorities do keep records of students who withdraw, but do not follow them up and ask them why they left.
4. STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Assessment of special needs

3.1 There is wide variation in how students are assessed as to whether they require transport to help them with their special needs. Difficulties are faced with the transition from compulsory schooling (up to the age of 16) to Further Education with responsibilities shifting within or between LEA functions leading to uncertainty among students and their parents. Furthermore, the uncertainty over assessment can spill over into uncertainty about transport with late announcements by LEAs of transport arrangements to students just before the course starts and later budget cuts causing transport to be reduced or cancelled part way through a student's course.

3.2 There is no common means of to assess students’ special needs for transport across the country and it is hoped that the DfES/LSC will offer a stronger steer. Without a common assessment framework it is difficult for students to be certain whether (and where) they are in the system or of their transport entitlement. Clear guidelines for use by the LEA and delineation of responsibilities and sharing these processes with students and their parents will help significantly both in reassuring them of progress and ensuring equality of treatment. Where there are different bodies involved (e.g. in Gateshead) there is a concerted effort to work together to ensure continuity of service to all students as they move from compulsory schooling to FE.

3.3 In some authority areas there is some quite restrictive eligibility criteria applied for entitlement for transport. In some cases there is a minimum distance criterion, similar to that applied to non-disabled students in compulsory education. The implied assumption is that students with special needs will have no greater difficulty in obtaining their own transport. Many, however, are unable to use conventional forms of public transport and therefore face higher costs and more limited availability of the transport that will suit their needs.

3.4 Here three issues are important:

- the nature of disabilities that should be supported;
- the ages at which students will be entitled to support; and,
- the expectation of whether students should contribute to their support.

3.5 In response to these issues we recommend that:

- any disability which prevents a student from travelling safely and flexibly should be considered for support;
- students should be eligible until at least their 21st birthday or when their course ends; and,
- any costs faced by students with disability over and above what another student would face should be considered for support.
Transport specification for students with special needs

3.6 Transport needs of students in FE with special needs are different from the needs of similar young people in compulsory education. No longer is there a constant attendance pattern across the week. Beyond the age of 16 young people have other aspirations. Yet, special needs transport is often provided to a fixed route and timetable every day of the week. Some students, therefore, have to wait in college for significant parts of the day, as they have no other means to get home or go elsewhere, and face restrictions on their mobility not faced by non-disabled people.

3.7 When special needs transport is not used as it was intended the student may also face significantly higher transport costs to get home at times convenient to them (significant, because special needs transport is free of charge and they need to procure additional accessible transport to get home). Provision of transport services that fit more closely with college attendance patterns would assist students a great deal.

Adjustment of transport to meet changing needs

3.8 Attendance patterns at school or college can change during the year, but sometimes transport is not adjusted to suit, thus inconveniencing the student and wasting public funds. For example, a student with special needs attending a course in Nottingham had a taxi arranged to take her to and from college each day. Their course pattern changed meaning that on at least one day per week she no longer needed to be in college in the afternoon, but the taxi was still arranged to collect her at 17.00. The student had the choice of waiting in college all afternoon or paying for her own taxi to go home earlier. There needs to be a mechanism where the transport procurer is in better contact with the user so that changing needs are identified and met.

Mobility and independence training

3.9 For some, conventional public transport is too daunting a prospect to use, but this may be as straightforward as not being able to cope with money. Some authorities such as Gateshead, Swindon and Nottinghamshire offer training in mobility or independence to help students overcome some of these difficulties. The difficulties can also be avoided if the student is provided with a pass so that they do not need to use money every day. The result is greater use of public transport, increased independence for the students and reduced demands on the provision of expensive special needs transport welcomed by students, parents and transport practitioners.

3.10 Some colleges undertake this training as part of their normal course content for students with special needs, but can be frustrated by the lack of suitable public transport in the area where they are based. They can be helped through the provision of travel passes which can be used on all operators’ services. Even where students with special needs do use mainstream passenger transport they face greater difficulties. In one example, a visually impaired student chooses to use a longer and circuitous service rather than two quicker services to get to college so as not to have to change buses and risk boarding the wrong one.
5. TRANSPORT

Provision of transport services

4.1 A key aspect in the improvement of access to FE colleges and school sixth forms is being able to reach these facilities. Both rural and urban areas can suffer from a lack of convenient or appropriate services.

4.2 The important issue throughout the approach to student transport provision is to offer access to bus or train services that meet students’ needs. For many young people, their previous experience will have been based on use of school contract services and many would not have to face long journeys, having to buy tickets or having to change services to reach their final destination. With societal encouragement to learn to drive, and a desire for a degree of independence, many students would not choose public transport if they have a choice. Assessing their needs and providing services that get them to college at times to meet their attendance pattern and with ticketing schemes attractive to student needs will help a great deal.

4.3 Even in urban locations with high densities of bus travel, there maybe parts of the catchment area of the college or school that are not well served or only reached by students having to change services. Although from a public transport practitioner’s point of view this level of service is more than sufficient, it may not be enough for some students or institutions. Listening to the students and institutions concerned will help to identify significant gaps in provision and there may be funds offered by colleges or other bodies to help fill these gaps.

4.4 Public transport provision in rural areas is very different. Some colleges with predominantly rural catchment areas face great difficulties in offering sufficient access to their students. In many rural areas, a low level of public transport may not be enough. The contribution of additional demand, and possibly additional funds, means that it can be possible to add further bus services and to plan them so that they serve the college at appropriate times. Such a result can also offer other members of the public additional travel opportunities so all gain from this co-operation.

Flexibility of provision

4.5 College attendance patterns change and this can affect the levels of demand for public transport. In urban areas changing demand levels are not likely to cause too many problems, but in rural areas use of bus services can fall off dramatically across the academic year and this can have a significant impact on the network.

4.6 For colleges in rural areas, there is commonly a single bus service to and from college from parts of their catchment area each day assuming that all students will want to attend for the whole day and every day. This is not commonly the case for FE students. The provision of bus services with sufficient capacity at the beginning of the year may not appear sensible later, as student demand may change. In such cases a mechanism needs to exist whereby the transport provider, the transport procurer and the college monitor the situation and shift the journey times to better times of day, using appropriate levels of resources.
4.7 Some colleges with rural catchment areas, such as Moulton in Northamptonshire, have gone to the extent of buying their own buses and employing their own drivers as well as contracting in coach operators to bus in their students each day. This is in response to insufficient levels of public transport serving the areas where the students live. They have found, however, that mid-way through the academic year the buses that were full at the beginning are now only carrying half that number – thought mainly to be a result of better access to cars.

4.8 Another benefit of operating one’s own services is that it is possible to offer additional services for the benefit of students. At Moulton, they use the minibuses to offer evening trips to and from the town centre for residential students.

**Eligibility criteria**

4.9 There is great variation in the nature and application of eligibility criteria – covering distance, age, the course type and classification, its duration and location. Different authorities have applied different policies towards eligibility and this is likely to continue given the local responsibility for such matters.

4.10 However, there are many variations in eligibility criteria across the country as to what is “full-time education” – most of these definitions are designed to make them simple to administer for the LEA but not to suit educational definitions or student needs. Some are based on course attendance time or attendance pattern and different institutions have different interpretations affecting students’ eligibility for transport and student support in different ways in different parts of the country. A more consistent approach will enable students to be treated more fairly across the country.

4.11 Eligibility for transport should not be restricted because it is more convenient for a student to travel to a college outside the LEA boundary. Eligibility based on course content for individual students adds to the LEA’s administrative burden.

**Student travel concession or travel pass**

4.12 To make passenger transport more attractive there may be a range of travel concessions, season tickets or passes on offer to FE students. To promote a pass or concession or season ticket provides the means by which an LEA can offer some form of subsidy to reduce or remove the cost to the student of transport in some or all cases. Where an authority provides its own pass or concession then it needs also to take on the burden of administering it and reimbursing participating transport operators. Care is needed not to offer too many alternatives or some students will be put off by the difficulty of making a choice.

4.13 Depending on where the student lives and how often they wish to travel one product may be more appropriate than another. A commercially provided season ticket saves much of the problem for the authority, but the services provided by the operator need to suit the students’ travel patterns sufficiently to make it worth the effort. Often season tickets are priced on the basis of a discount for travelling at least five days per week so the cost to the student will be much higher at the outset than paying a reduced daily fare.
4.14 Some authorities expect students (or their parents) to pay for the pass or concession at the beginning of the financial year. Since the cost can run into hundreds of pounds this can be very onerous. Other authorities accept staged payments and some accept payment by credit or debit card as well as cash or cheque. To make it attractive the scheme should allow for the costs to be spread across the year. The introduction of smart card technology and in particular the Connexions Card will offer authorities better control over cost and feedback on take-up and use.

**Involvement of transport providers**

4.15 Colleges and local authorities should work closely with transport providers as they know a great deal about the local transport network. With their active involvement they are more likely to be persuaded that the young persons’ travel market is worth pursuing. There are some bus operators (e.g. in Swindon), that do not believe that the young person’s travel market is worth pursuing since their buses are already operating at capacity. With the colleges and local authorities working together they should be able to present a case to the transport operators of sufficient robustness to convince the operators that it is worth pursuing. The transport operators should be approached in a way that ensures the colleges and local authorities retain sufficient control over cost, quality and route specification.

**Access to the wider bus network**

4.16 For many students the main additional advantage of a season ticket, travel concession or pass is if it offers access to the bus network as a whole. With such a benefit, young people would be more attracted to public transport since they can undertake a range of other activities and it again reduces pressure for them to consider buying a car.

4.17 In large urban areas the facility of accessing the rest of the network is straightforward, at low cost and the benefits are substantial since the passenger transport authority will already have the administrative infrastructure in place to manage such schemes. In Tyne and Wear (Nexus) the provision of the TeenTicket and its use on all services is recognised by the LEAs as offering students part of a wider education outside college.

4.18 Given the difficulty in operating a comprehensive bus network in rural areas it should be recognised that students living there will never be able to achieve the same degree of mobility on public transport as their counterparts living in urban areas. Local authorities in rural areas should, where possible, try to offer some network wide benefits and also recognise that where they offer individual students personalised passes restricted to specific journeys they are adding to their own administrative costs in doing so and making public transport less attractive to the students.
6. ORGANISATION AND MODEL ARRANGEMENTS

LEAs and Passenger Transport Groups

5.1 Current thinking is arguing for continued progress towards integration of transport provision expertise drawn from social services, education and passenger transport and based within the passenger transport group (e.g. Audit Commission report, Going Places, November 2001). Such integration will bring a number of benefits but needs to be carried out in a way that loses none of the expertise gained by the individual departments. Such an approach encourages the cross-fertilisation of ideas between experts, and encourages the integration of transport services so that they can be shared by students and other members of the public either at the same time, or the vehicles can be used for different purposes at different times of the day.

5.2 In larger metropolitan areas the responsibilities of education and passenger transport are split between different organisations and this can lead to confusing variants in benefits and eligibility to the student.

5.3 There is a need for some caution in seeking closer working within or between authorities particularly when working with students with special needs. There will still be the requirement for a rigorous needs assessment process and if the provision of special needs transport becomes the responsibility of the passenger transport group then there is need for good communications with the LEA.

Involvement of colleges and other stakeholders

5.4 Close working between only the LEA and the PT group is not sufficient to meet the needs of FE student transport as neither body is particularly close to the students making needs identification more difficult. In Hereford the local colleges working together have procured transport services for their students, shared the costs and offer travel passes to students not eligible to students under the county’s scheme. The local LSC also has a role to play here.

Provision of detailed information to transport operators

5.5 Bus operators are not in the best position to provide the most appropriate transport services to students without knowing where the students live or where they want to go. The LEA and colleges can help by providing information to them about the location of students and of the colleges to encourage the transport operators to use their skills to design effective routes and timetables.

Single point of contact

5.6 When considering FE, students are presented with a range of information dealing with subjects that are new to them – including access to appropriate public transport, a choice of colleges and courses as well as learning of any benefits to which they might be entitled. In trying to learn more about students’ needs and to provide a single point of contact, organisations in Gateshead have worked together on a student-mapping project, thus learning more about student needs and then
able to provide better and more focused support systems for students from a single location.

**Model arrangements**

5.7 The main emphasis is on a partnership with common objectives, a widely known set of local policies and a transparent funding arrangement. In particular, local partnerships (their structures and objectives) need to take account of:

- student home and school/college locations (both within and outside the formal boundary of the partnership);
- course types available at these school/colleges;
- the needs of full time and part time students;
- access to a range of different types of FE colleges;
- student age and other parallel requirements; and,
- availability of EMAs and other support systems.

5.8 The main responsibilities of the partnership are to:

- identify college, school and student transport needs;
- be aware of current transport provision and its gaps; and,
- spend collective budgets to best effect.

**Partnership working**

5.9 The partnership should be balanced and not dominated by one party to the exclusion of others to enable reasoned debate and should not ignore the needs of certain parties that may be less well represented or contribute less of the finance.

5.10 Where LEAs have limited their responsibilities for FE students to only meeting the requirements of those with special needs and those on low incomes, the colleges have had to procure the transport services without any special expertise and a lot less buying power than the LEA. The college can become the sole provider of public transport in certain areas. In some cases, colleges acting alone have competed with the LEA and PT group for scarce transport resources meaning that these resources may not be directed to the best result and pushing up the prices for all concerned.

5.11 Partnerships can therefore achieve:

- sharing of expertise, information and knowledge; and,
- a single approach to solving common problems.

**Clear policy on transport provision and student support**

5.12 LEAs will be judged on how they go about the effective provision of transport and student support with their partners. The first stage is to set out their joint policy and then to promote the relevant parts of this to the students. The basic requirements of the policy for students are set out below in Figure 5.1.
FIGURE 5.1: STUDENT TRANSPORT CHARTER

Students should be able to expect the following when considering Further Education:

- a policy statement, set locally by the partnership stating under what conditions transport is provided, to provide for students for whom transport services are not adequate or available and for these to continue until the student’s needs change or they complete their course. The policy should include:
  - use of criteria in respect of time, costs or distance;
  - eligibility criteria for and the financial support available for students on low incomes;
  - access to transport services for students at a cost to be met by the student;
  - transport provided for those with special needs set in relation to differential costs they face relative to other students;
  - mobility or independence training for students with special needs to help offset the requirements for special needs transport; and,
  - transport until at least 21 or when they leave Further Education, whichever is sooner for students with special needs.

5.13 The process of adapting this to suit the local environment encourages the partners to come together in a manner to make best use of local finance and best meet student transport needs.

Transparent decision making

5.14 One LEA was keen to develop new transport services, but lacked the finance to provide them. It was aware that a local college had Access Funds (which could be allocated to transport) and asked for a contribution, but this was refused. The result was that transport services to meet identified needs could not be provided. Each of the parties needs to be prepared to be open with its perspective on the policy and be prepared to help fund the transport and student support to help meet joint needs.

Needs identification

5.15 Often transport services for students are laid on without the backing of any research or consultation. There follows some degree of surprise when the services are not used as expected. The process of consultation with the students should encourage some use of public transport in itself. It should also improve the chances of the services being used in the manner that was intended.

5.16 Like any sector of the travelling public students have certain travel needs to reach school/college at times convenient to attend their desired courses. Colleges can help LEAs and operators since they can reach the students more easily and can
control – at least to some extent – student attendance patterns. It should therefore be possible to reach a position where courses are laid on at times which are convenient to students and operators and operators can provide services that the students want to use.

5.17 Research into student transport needs should happen on a regular basis, and some of it can be carried out during the student’s application process and use of the transport services can be monitored through contact with the users via the college.

5.18 As part of the process there should be recognition that conventional bus services may not be the answer in all cases. For small pockets of demand or irregular needs, a taxi type service may be more appropriate. Furthermore, for students with special needs, a special needs transport service operating to a fixed timetable is not always the most appropriate solution and dial a ride or demand responsive services may be more attractive.

**Budgeting**

5.19 The partnership is expected to make best use of available funds so all parties will be expected to contribute – not necessarily with finance, but possibly with services in kind (e.g. provision of information). There should be openness about the funding of such services, but that certain parties should be able to contribute in addition to any agreed sum if they want to supplement any basic service. The framework in which the partnership operates should be flexible enough to allow such actions.

5.20 There is a great need for stability. Funds pledged by the partners should not be withdrawn suddenly at a later date. It should also be recognised that the desired level of service and significant levels of use are unlikely to be achieved for several years. This requires a sustainable period of consolidation, service development and marketing.

**Use of local knowledge and expertise**

5.21 The partnership’s activities should be concerned in identifying and applying the best local knowledge and expertise. This will involve the LEA, the PT group, the local LSC and staff from the colleges and transport operators and should lead to more effective spending.

**Monitoring and reporting**

5.22 The LEA and its partners will be expected to report to local people and the authorities from time to time on the progress being made and to demonstrate that it is achieving value for money in what it is doing. It is important that from the outset basic data is collected about the amount spent, the services provided and the use made of them. Over time the LEA-led partnership should be able to demonstrate the progress being made and good practice should be shared to improve the situation for all FE students.