

# **Provision of Flexible Learning Opportunities for Young People in Lancashire**

## **Gap Analysis Report (Part 2) Risks to Provision**

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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to identify the flexible, mainstream/core funded opportunities for learning provision in Lancashire<sup>1</sup> and to discuss the areas of risk to provision in the context of potential future gaps in discretionary funding.

## **Background**

This report discusses the learning provision for young people aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) which is flexible and available throughout the year. It does not look at full year courses in school sixth forms and colleges. Neither does it include apprenticeship or traineeship opportunities.

Historically, there has been a range of programmes which have been funded by the Education Funding Agency<sup>2</sup>, the Learning and Skills Council, the Training and Enterprise Councils and FEFC aimed at employability or access to further learning for young people. These have included Entry to Employment (e2e), foundation learning, skills development, directions programmes etc.

Alongside these core funded programmes, there is a more recent history over the past 10 years of European Social Fund (ESF) supported programmes which reach these young people.

This paper discusses only those core funded flexible programmes currently running in Lancashire (not ESF provision) to give the baseline of provision when discretionary funding is not available.

The research resulting in these findings has been undertaken by the Strategic Partnership Manager – Young People through meeting with a range of providers of learning and other partners across the area as well as interrogating data available.

## **Current Position**

### **Type of Provision**

The flexible, core funded learning opportunities discussed in this report are available in 13 towns/cities in Lancashire. These opportunities are funded mainly through the Education and Skills Funding Agency core budgets to providers and include:

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, Lancashire refers to the three local authority areas of Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire

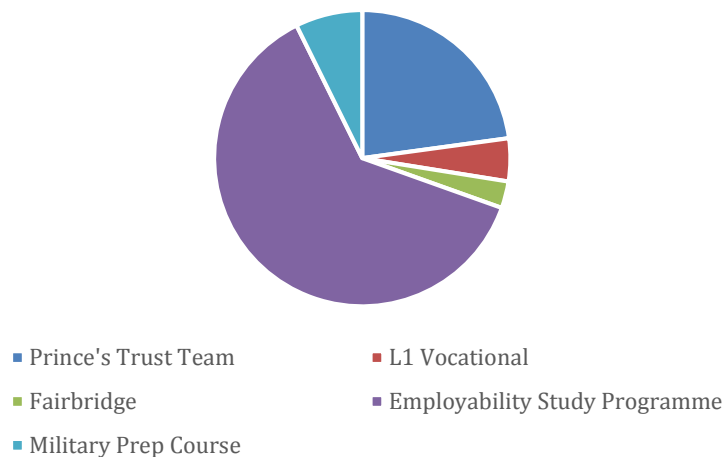
<sup>2</sup> Now the Education and Skills Funding Agency

- Employability study programmes
- Entry level and level 1 vocational programmes
- Prince’s Trust Team programme and Fairbridge programme
- Military preparation courses

This report does not include details of individual opportunities which occur throughout the year. For example, some FE colleges may not promote ‘courses’ which start throughout the year, but across the county it is estimated that over 100 young people per year are engaged by colleges through the year on individual bespoke programmes.

The following chart shows the proportion of different types of provision which are offered in Lancashire over the year:

Volumes of available flexible study programme provision by programme type

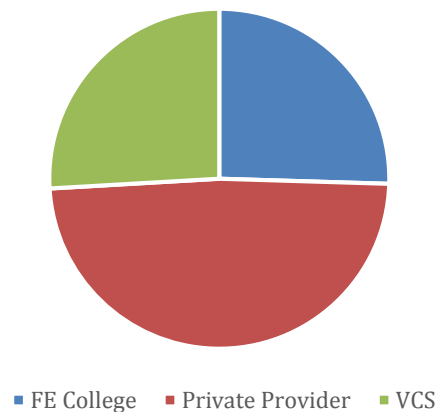


The total volume of learning offers available across Lancashire amounts to 2049 places. These courses typically last between 13 and 26 weeks and look to progress the young person into further learning and work at the end of the course. Recruitment to the courses is through the delivery organisation’s own advertising, working with local referral agencies, such as youth offending teams, the New Directions team in Blackburn or Connexions in Blackpool, or internal referral across organisations where a young person is leaving other learning options.

## Providers of Flexible Learning

Flexible study programmes funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency are delivered by nine providers in Lancashire, three of whom are FE Colleges, two are work based learning providers and four are voluntary, community and public sector organisations.

Volumes of flexible study programme provision in Lancashire by provider type



As can be seen in the chart above, the two private providers offer nearly half of the flexible provision available in Lancashire. This includes military preparation courses, Level 1 vocational provision and a range of employability courses. FE colleges offer a mix of employability courses and some Prince's Trust Team provision. Voluntary<sup>3</sup>, Community and Public Sector organisations offer the majority of the Prince's Trust Team provision, the Fairbridge programme and employability courses

In recent years, changes to core Education Funding Agency (EFA) funded programmes and rationalisation and movement of provision has meant withdrawal of a number of offers in Rossendale, Chorley, Preston, Lancaster, Fylde, Blackpool, Blackburn, Burnley and West Lancashire. There is a separate report<sup>4</sup> which looks at provision and geography, reporting on potential gaps of this type of provision.

<sup>3</sup> Rathbone Training is included in the VCS group, as whilst it is a part of the Newcastle College Group, it still operates as a charitable organisation in its own right.

<sup>4</sup> Provision of Flexible Learning Opportunities for Young People in Lancashire, Gap Analysis Report (Part1), Geographical Needs

## Risks to provision

As can be seen from the information presented, the core funded flexible offer in Lancashire is provided by a relatively small number of providers. This is supplemented by the ESF provisions, with the Moving On project<sup>5</sup> offering 3,600 places over 2 years to July 2018 and the Invest in Youth project<sup>6</sup> offering 770 places over 3 years to September 2019.

The main risks to provision are through the supply chain with the following particularly key:

- 996 (48.6%) places are with two private work based learning providers<sup>7</sup> with study programme contracts with the ESFA. This activity takes place in 6 locations<sup>8</sup> across Lancashire. Should one or both take a strategic decision to reduce their provision or withdraw from this activity, it would severely curtail options available to young people.
- A further 468 (22.8%) places are offered through the Prince's Trust Team programme. Should a key delivery partner<sup>9</sup>, or the Prince's Trust itself, withdraw this would create a serious gap in flexible provision.
- In addition to the risk of losing a delivery partner for the Prince's Trust Team programme, this programme is funded through FE college 'subcontracting' arrangements with several colleges across the county<sup>10</sup>. If, for qualitative, financial or policy reasons, any of those colleges ceases to partner fund provision, this provides a risk to programmes in related locations.
- Lancashire Fire and Rescue, a key deliverer of the Prince's Trust Team programme is looking to add new delivery locations to the offer, following discussions with local councils. If a funding partner is not available to offer core FE young people and adult funding, this cannot take place.
- The military preparation and level 1 vocational courses are programmes which consistently result in work outcomes for young people, either in military service or traineeships. These are delivered by the two work based learning providers and therefore again, if there is a decision by these providers to withdraw this provision, it would impact negatively on outcomes for young people.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.movingonlancs.co.uk](http://www.movingonlancs.co.uk)

<sup>6</sup> <http://selnet-uk.com/invest-in-youth/>

<sup>7</sup> Training 2000 and North Lancs Training Group

<sup>8</sup> Accrington, Blackpool, Blackburn, Burnley, Fleetwood and Nelson

<sup>9</sup> Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire, Merseyside; Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service; West Lancs

<sup>10</sup> Accrington & Rossendale College, Nelson & Colne College, Preston's College, West Lancs College

- The military preparation course is further dependant on co-operation and input from military service recruiting teams (for example, provision of a residential learning opportunity for participants), which, if withdrawn, could have a severe impact on the viability of the programme .
- All of these provisions need to secure participants and recent changes to the roles and responsibilities of local authority teams working with young people has already resulted in some providers receiving fewer referrals to their programmes. Where providers cannot gain access to young people who are NEET through referral this can increase marketing costs and potentially jeopardise provision through low numbers on courses.

## Conclusions

It is clear from the risks listed above that flexible provision for young people in Lancashire faces a number of potential threats.

Whilst none of this provision is in jeopardy at the time of writing this report, not all of this provision is yet fully secured with funding for the 2017/18 academic year.

The highest risk factor is the proportion of this provision which is delivered by just two organisations. This situation has occurred in the main due to a range of private and VCS providers withdrawing from this type of provision in Lancashire over time (Age UK, NACRO, General Physics, EYS).

Certain FE colleges who previously ran flexible provision such as e2e also no longer have a 'NEET' programme, in some cases considering their partner arrangements for the Prince's Trust team programme as fulfilling this need in their locality.

This is the next highest risk factor – loss of the Prince's Trust Team programme, or loss of the key delivery partners, in particular Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, as this offers 23% of the total places available across the year. There are complex factors of funding and positioning of the organisations involved in this programme which impact on viability year on year.

The ESF funded programmes, in particular, Moving On, will offer places for young people who are NEET up until July 2018. Approximately 60% of the project places for Moving On will attract this client group, so about an additional 2100 over two years. This increases the available places by about one third. Decisions have yet to be made as to if and how further ESF funding can be accessed to 2020 for this work.

Beyond 2020, whilst there is expectation of a domestic social programme post Brexit, no detail is yet known as to how this will target young people who need flexible learning provision.

## Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to identify risks to provision to inform those working strategically to plan the structure of learning in the area for use during their decision making process.

It is therefore recommended that:

- These findings are considered by the Area Based Review working group to ensure that flexible provision is considered during structural discussions.
- These findings are used by the LEP machinery to help inform future calls for activity for discretionary funding.
- These findings are shared with organisations considering acquisitions or mergers of those providers involved in the delivery of this flexible provision to ensure its consideration in decision making processes.
- These findings are shared with upper tier local authorities (Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire) for consideration alongside their Statement of Priorities for post-16 education and training and their subsequent discussions with the ESFA.
- These findings are used to support sustainable funding discussions for the Prince's Trust Team programme with colleges in Lancashire.
- Maximum opportunity is taken to promote the new on-line mapping tool<sup>11</sup>, which includes details of this provision, to a wide range of referral partners to support recruitment to these programmes.

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<sup>11</sup> Opportunities in Lancashire will be available as an interactive information point for flexible learning opportunities for young people at [www.movingonlancs.co.uk/opportunities-map](http://www.movingonlancs.co.uk/opportunities-map) from September 2017.