



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



The Learning Coaches of Wales

Summary Document

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Learning Coaches of Wales – Executive Summary Document

Audience	This will be of relevance to all those involved in the delivery of Education in the 14-19 age range
Overview	This summary document presents detailed research investigation Involving the first cohort of the Learning Coaches in Wales
Action required	No response required
Further information	14-19@wales.gsi.gov.uk www.wales.gov.uk/learningpathways
Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website at: http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills
Related documents	Government of Wales Act 2006 Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance I Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance II Learning Pathways 14-19 Learning Coach Support Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure

1. Introduction

Learning Coaches work with young people in schools, colleges, workplaces, careers centres and youth clubs. The coaches have diverse backgrounds including teaching, careers guidance, classroom support, and company training. Two key interests underpin their work: (i) helping 14-19 year olds develop appropriate study skills and (ii) facilitating choice between options made available by the Learning Networks in Wales. This is a summary of a more detailed research investigation¹ involving the first cohort of Learning Coaches in Wales; it begins with the design and delivery of a national training programme and ends with a set of recommendations based on evidence drawn from surveys and case studies of coaches and their learners.

The defining characteristic of the Learning Coach is “anogaeth” – encouragement – based on helping young people to make sense of various learning worlds which extend beyond the classroom.

...although coaching is about techniques, it is primarily about attitude. It is about challenging the popular culture that says 'things are terrible and we can only expect worse' and replacing it with a mindset that says 'anything is possible if what we believe in is worth it and we will find a way to achieve it'.

It is not just about school and college, or qualifications and exams. The Learning Coach inspires young people with confidence and curiosity in order to develop their interests and achievements; things that can often go unnoticed in standard measures of attainment. Informal and non-formal learning are therefore key concerns which accompany formal education and qualifications.

Wales defines itself as a Learning Country³ containing pathways which young people follow in order to develop skills and employability. Pathways can be created as well as followed, and support is needed when young people are confronted by a forest of institutions and professions

¹ Saunders D (2008) *The Learning Coaches of Wales: policy, principles and practice*; Welsh Assembly Government: Cardiff

² Thomas W and Smith A (2004) *Coaching solutions – a practical way to improve performance in education*; Network Educational Press, Stafford (page 25)

³ Welsh Assembly Government (2006) *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*; Welsh Assembly Government: Cardiff

associated with education and training. The length of the journey becomes ever more complex as learning providers share resources and form network consortia in order to increase options, opportunities and choices for young people. Policy surrounding the Learning Country's vision therefore stresses the key role of the Learning Coach⁴:

Probably one of the biggest changes will be the introduction of Learning Coaches. These will work alongside your teachers and your careers adviser to help you plan your Learning Pathway. It is proposed that, just like a sports coach, a Learning Coach will meet with you regularly to offer advice and encouragement all through your learning Pathway.

The geographical metaphor for a nation dedicated to learning journeys is significant. There has to be information and guidance about how to recognise a pathway, when to join it, where it goes, how it branches off, who is there to help along the way, and directions to take. More than this – the pathway should challenge and stretch interests and abilities, and it will even appeal to travellers who may not want to make the journey in the first place.

Policy comes to life when it has evidence based on action. This is what happened when one comprehensive school in Merthyr Tydfil experimented with the role of a “development coach”, drawing in a team of expert youth workers who helped disengaged young people through an alternative curriculum. The project inspired a further eight pilot studies throughout Wales before a formal training programme recruited Learning Coaches from the twenty-two Learning Network engine rooms located in every local authority throughout Wales.

These important early experiences need to be documented and what follows is a summary of a full research investigation detailing the background literature, the training programme, case studies of coaches and learners, and a series of suggestions for future development. The experience of the first cohort provides an illustration of multi-agency working based on the ways that Learning Coaches can complement the work of other professionals and experts who support young people.

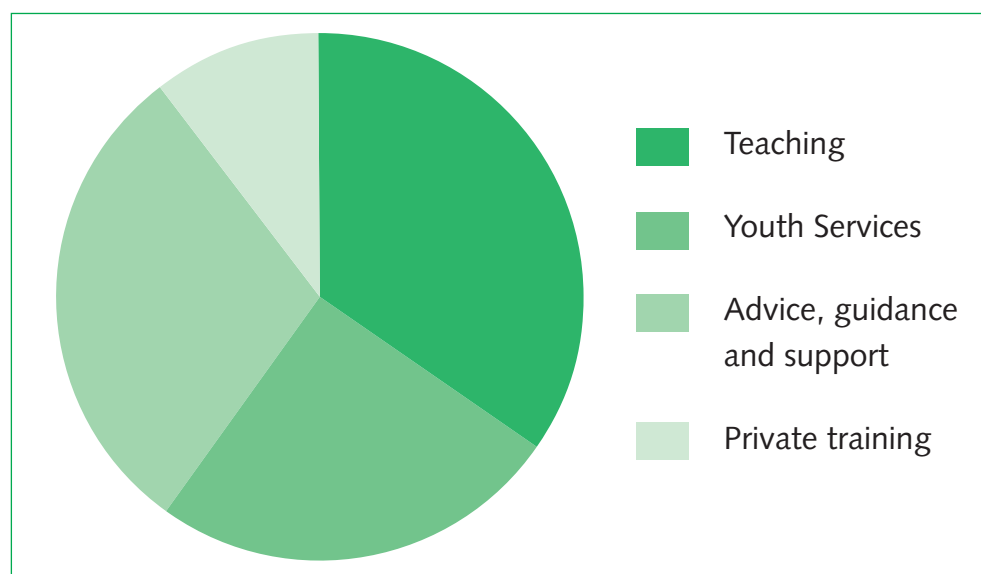
⁴Welsh Assembly Government (2006) *14-19 Learning Pathways Guidance Notes II*; Welsh Assembly Government: Cardiff

2. The Training Programme

In 2005 the *First Campus* higher education partnership⁵ and the Welsh Assembly Government designed an accredited training programme for the first cohort of Learning Coaches. Following a detailed stakeholder consultation exercise⁶ five core subject areas were identified: The Mentoring Process, Coaching for Learning, Study Strategies, Legislation, and Referral.

Over the next 19 months the training programme for the first cohort of coaches involved 140 workshops using 18 venues throughout Wales. There were 299 participants, of whom 210 completed all of the training. Two thirds of the coaches are female, one tenth were below the age of 30 at the start of training, and the majority were qualified to level 4 and above (with less than five per cent qualified at level 2 or below⁷). Further statistics note that one quarter live in Mid and North Wales, one fifth have a working knowledge of the Welsh language, and the major location for coaching support is the school or college.

Figure 1: Occupational backgrounds of Learning Coaches



⁵ One of the HEFCW funded Reaching Wider consortia involving the Universities of Glamorgan, UWIC, Newport and Cardiff. First Campus targets under-achieving learners who experience significant levels of educational disadvantage.

⁶ Over 70 participants attended curriculum workshops in North and South Wales representing schools, colleges, youth services, Careers Wales, private training providers, local authority learning networks, young people partnerships, teaching unions, and the Welsh Assembly Government.

⁷ As defined by the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

The Welsh Assembly Government defined three distinct outcomes for successful completion of training: Recognised (for those who had engaged in all of the training workshops but who did not submit coursework for assessment), Accredited (for those who had passed all 5 modules after submitting coursework assignments), and Qualified (a longer term future outcome following on from the pilot phase based on the completion of additional credits leading to a higher education award).

The first year of training was externally evaluated⁸, with the following conclusions being made:

- The future recruitment of coaches should value a core set of social and emotional skills which enable them to work with young people, other professionals, and in some cases, young people's families.
- Coaches and Network co-ordinators value the training, although they identified teething troubles for some of the delivery and with the accreditation of prior experiential learning.
- Networks should establish more systematic systems of recruitment and support for Learning Coaches, which in principle should complement the training of coaches.
- Recognised status for Learning Coaches has proven popular and should continue
- The evidence for the effectiveness of Coaching is encouraging, but patchy and incomplete.

The evaluation therefore stresses the need for more evidence about the impact of coaching based on the use of rigorous before and after measures, where appropriate.

During the first year of Learning Coach training the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned more wide-ranging market research⁹ for the entire 14-19 Learning Pathways programme, including the

⁸ **Holtom D and R Bowen (2007)** *Evaluation of the First Campus*; Welsh Assembly Government Learning Coach Training Pilot People and Work Unit: Abergavenny

⁹ **GfK NOP (2007)** *Learning options for 14-19 year olds in Wales*; Growth for Knowledge and DCELLS, Welsh Assembly Government: Cardiff – including surveys of 1750 young people and parents plus 100 learning providers; followed up by focus groups and interviews

The Training Programme

Learning Coach element. The purpose was to investigate levels of awareness amongst young people themselves, their parents, and their providers. The beneficial aspects of the Learning Coach were evident, with over three quarters of respondents claiming that the effect had been positive. Three fifths of the providers particularly valued the support that Learning Coaches give to young people through introducing and explaining the range of options available and choosing the best learning methods. There was also an expectation about the future impact of coaching on disengaged youth in terms of building up confidence about choosing options (60 per cent of respondents) as well as general improvements in academic attainment and attendance (50 per cent of respondents).

The Learning Coach, who has the capacity to provide on-going support to young people in their decision making is widely welcomed by providers, and recognised as being able to make a significant contribution to a more effective system (GfK NOP 2007, page 86)

Nonetheless, it should be noted that problems had been experienced on occasions. A third of the respondents identified limited resourcing, excessive time commitments for training, difficulty in recruiting suitable staff, uncertainty about the status of the Learning Coach, and lack of capacity given the sheer volume of work entailed in making coaching support an entitlement for all young people in Wales.

...questions remain about the feasibility of providing the number of coaches to deliver the level of support required, it is not merely a case of allocating responsibility to existing members of staff (GfK NOP 2007 page 86)

The survey data also revealed two serious challenges for future learning support. First, approximately one quarter of young people and parents reported on having little knowledge of the range of qualifications on offer. Second, a third of young people were unable to cite examples of learning that helped to develop the skills of 14-19 year olds outside the

classroom. These are important observations for the future work of Learning Coaches in terms of helping young people to plan their pathways and to make more sense of their informal and non-formal learning activities and opportunities.

3. About the coaches

Twenty-two Learning Coaches contributed to case study analysis. They were categorised into three groups:

- Coaches located within a single secondary school (coded S)
- Coaches operating within a single further educational college (coded F)
- Coaches using a variety of settings associated with youth service and careers advisory support (coded Y)

The case study interviews revealed themes which covered such topics as transition experiences, reasons for early involvement, caseloads, coaching environments, activities with learners, management and networking, future aspirations, and special issues. Extracts from the full study are offered for these eight categories.

a) Transition

Learning Coaches can specialise in supporting learners as they prepare for movement between school, college and the workplace. Empathy is crucial, and it is therefore important to note the coaches' experiences of transition at the end of their own compulsory education. The classic and conventional story – noted in five of the case studies – involved moving from fifth to sixth form, and then to university.

After achieving three A levels (at grades A, B and D) she went to college and gained a BEd and went straight into teaching (S)

About the coaches

In seven cases different kinds of experiences were evident, based on leaving formal education altogether at the age of 16 and following a vocational route into full-time employment:

...when she left the lower sixth form to work in London as a nanny (S)

He worked as a factory cleaner before completing some careers aptitude tests which pointed to a strong interest in engineering. The result was employment as an apprentice by the National Coal Board. (Y)

She left school with five O levels, qualified as a hairdresser, and ran her own shop before starting a family (Y)

After finishing her A levels she could not afford to go to university, although she wanted to apply for a BEd and become a teacher. Instead she went out to work as a wages clerk. (Y)

b) Reasons for early involvement

All of the interviewees were asked about their reasons for wanting to engage with young people and provide support. In some instances there was a strong vocational calling from the very start:

...defines her ambition in a very clear way: "to help as many children as possible to reach their goal in life and be happy, because I work with a lot of children who are unhappy – just to make them smile". (S)

...notes that his interest in coaching "has always been there". (Y)

In other cases the Coaches drew parallels with their own early experiences and with later parenting and employment insights – and the subsequent transfer of experience and knowledge to working professionally with young people:

Partly as a result of her interest in her own daughters' schooling, she helped on a part-time unpaid and voluntary basis in a primary school before gaining paid part-time employment in pupil support within a local comprehensive school (F)

Her own background, and her volunteering work, led to a realisation that many young people simply make the wrong choices. She comments “young people, however bad/sad/strange or off-track they are, can always change and I think too many educational establishments want targets and success but go about it the wrong way, especially with rebellious youth” (Y)

Key people were also recognised as gatekeepers within organisations. These important figures provided positive feedback, alerted the coaches to issues and training opportunities and also arranged for resources to be available in support of the role and the training.

The crucial catalyst who raised awareness of this kind of career was a senior manager in Youth Cymru, and the key gatekeeper who provided resource and direction for the training programme was the headteacher...(S)

A friend from the youth services recognised her strong interest in working with young people, and asked her “to do a few hours” in a youth centre (Y)

c) Coaching caseloads

The volume and organisation of caseloads varies across sectors and individual organisations, and much depends on whether coaches operate individually or in teams. Some have coaching as full-time employment, compared with others who combine such support with a variety of other responsibilities. Where teamwork is involved in schools, the coaching caseloads were divided typically into specific year groups. In two case studies, for example, the coaching teams target lower, middle or upper school learners (with one coach being assigned to a particular age range). The predominant concern is with improving low exam results based on under-achievement, and working with disengaged young people. This includes children in need, young carers, looked after children, gifted and talented students, underachievers, and

About the coaches

able pupils with behaviour problems. The coaches commented on the relatively large number of learners within their caseloads coming from areas associated with very high levels of deprivation.

In other instances coaching support involves one individual working to very specific targets – for example year 10 and 11 students likely to get D-G grades, those who are C/D borderlines, and specific individuals with severe emotional difficulties. A strong pattern emerges regarding the need to work with young people who have very little belief about their academic abilities and skills:

...he notes that there appears to be little or no history of educational success within the families of the learners, and little ambition to do well at school. He comments: "I have just seen one young man who could get 13 GCSEs, but his target is to get three" (S).

The caseloads varied in terms of group work activity compared with individual one-to-one support at more intensive levels. There was also a variety of support for a smaller number of students who were intensively helped on a number of occasions (in two cases extending to over thirty support sessions throughout the year) as compared with a larger number receiving support through one-off meetings. It is clear that the coaching relationship can build up expectations amongst learners which eat into the allocated caseload time for the coaches. One interviewee commented on having just completed 42 intensive sessions over a four month period, mostly on a one-to-one basis, and with an official timetable of one day a week – a significant underestimate given the kind of intensive activity which was needed.

The complexity of caseloads emerges especially for those coaches who cross organisational boundaries and work in a variety of initiatives and networks. Within the youth and careers service contexts coaching caseloads included a vast amount of multi-agency working behind the scenes, in addition to managing or coordinating teams of colleagues who have other functions.

He now leads a team of three coaches, two having specialist study skills and one having specialist counselling backgrounds. The annual caseload involves approximately 30 year ten and eleven students who spend three days a week at a further education college, one day at school (where they develop key skills) and one day in work experience settings (Y)

d) Coaching environments

The case study interviews recorded details about coaching locations and the design of working environments. They ranged from using quiet and confidential areas of a school or college through to being at the very heart of the institution:

This is a busy place with students dropping in all of the time outside of lesson time. During classes more confidential and scheduled meetings take place on a 1:1 basis in the Coaching Room. (S)

Some coaches also emphasised the importance of using open areas within an institution - such as a learning resources centre and a sixth form room. These spaces are visible to all, thereby publicising the work to students and staff alike:

...also likes to work with students in the canteens and libraries of schools, where "you can have a private conversation but you are not alone" (F)

It should be noted that in cases where there was no dedicated coaching space, separate specialist rooms within the institution were in all cases available for more confidential support. A very different picture emerges for coaches associated with youth and careers services, where a variety of locations are used throughout a geographical area:

The coaches also use community youth centres as appropriate and often this kind of arrangement means that "the boot of my car becomes my office." (Y)

About the coaches

In the youth centres there are catering facilities, digi-labs, pool tables, and sofas – in addition to a private office for more confidential conversations ...the team has mobile communication support, and they can store and share files via internet systems – an important administrative feature when a number of coaches might be working with the same individuals in a variety of locations. (Y)

All of these locations depend on multi-agency partnerships and the sharing of facilities; the downside of such an arrangement is that it becomes very difficult to establish an advanced coaching resource centre.

The coaches consider it important for their study skills environments to be informal and comfortable with lots of daylight and colour. They note the ambivalence of having to relax students through using conversation and music and activities, whilst also helping other learners who want to study quietly without interruption. For these reasons the coaching should be distributed in a number of locations depending on the needs of the learners (S)

e) Coaching activity

Coaching activities outlined by interviewees fall into five broad themes. First, the combination of direct learning support with detailed administrative backup:

...combined study skills support with very clear administration based on the rigorous development and use of procedures and systems which can then demonstrate impact via tangible improvement in learning performance over time (F)

Administrative activity also dominated coaching time for those individuals with responsibilities linked to organising work placements, including the design of guidelines, the production of placement directories, and briefing learners about what to expect and what information they should gather whilst working with an employer.

The second theme involves building relationships, where the coaches describe their learners as young people who are in need of emotional support because they are lacking confidence and want direction. The central tenet for coaching is developing belief about what can be achieved and showing improvement at every opportunity, no matter how slight it may seem. This growth in optimism and ambition inevitably means forming a relationship:

...there should be an unspoken trust and respect, with success and disappointment being felt equally by both because you're on the journey together (F)

Students say that "Mrs...is safe;" she "does crazy things;" "has time", and is "someone who listens." The coach sometimes describes herself to people as "the grit in the oyster producing pearls" (S)

Study skills emerge inevitably as a third key component of coaching activity. Learners helped their coach to establish starting baselines, agreeing learning contracts, listing non-formal and non-accredited learning achievements, and setting short and longer term goals. Early study skills support often revolved around time management, agreeing targets, developing skills, and demonstrating learning techniques. This included off-the-shelf learning style inventories, plus the design of original materials:

She has devised original learning exercises for students (especially through the use of visual graphics and drawing tasks). Examples include Stepping Stones (where students draw diagrams or pictures showing critical moments in their lives), and an icebreaker card sorting game where adjectives are grouped into three piles labelled "this is me", "this is me sometimes" and "this is not me". The result is a list of descriptors about that individual which help to shape target setting; these lists can be returned to and revised at future coaching sessions before leading into the writing of personal statements for use with future job or university applications. (F)

About the coaches

A fourth key theme for coaching support involves helping learners to identify and use options menus at different stages in their studies, leading to pathway planning. The coach would typically discuss with individual learners their favourite subjects, and explore the reasons for their enjoyment of learning within those contexts. By contrast the youth services were more concerned about the unrealistic and short-term perceptions of employment and careers that many young people have when they are outside the formal education system:

The coaches note “we think there’s a vast swathe of young people out there with no idea of training or what employers want. They say “I want to be a plasterer, but I don’t need to get qualifications or training. I’ll just get a job as a plasterer” (F)

The fifth and final theme is significant management responsibility for Learning Coaches who lead a team of colleagues in order to spread out the coaching functions amongst a larger group of experts:

...also manages ten other coaches..., and this responsibility includes helping them with any difficulties, planning and monitoring delivery, and running support sessions with them on such topics as groupwork, and study skills (Y)

The coaches – especially those who are in the youth and careers services – also network extensively through crossing numerous sector and organisational boundaries during the course of their work:

The coaches also escort learners to the work environment and act as the go-between with employers, and this includes helping to arrange the work experience placements. (Y)

The coaching team then meets up with a variety of teachers within the schools following the induction programme in order to discuss an action plan for the next school year for each individual student (Y)

One key aspect of management however was absent in most of the case studies, and this involved evaluation. Most of the Learning Coaches did not appear to have proof and detailed evidence about the impact of their support on learners.

f) Organisation and management features

The case studies from schools and colleges reflect the evolution of learning support from more established pastoral systems and responsibilities¹⁰. When it comes to the organisation of coaching within youth and careers service context, a far more complex picture appears as compared with the relative simplicity of developing coaching within a single institution. This is partly because youth and careers services often have to operate at area and regional level, networking with a wide range of organisations and institutions. It also involves multi-agency teamwork through fulfilling a variety of support roles for young people who value a more flexible non-institutionalised and informal relationship with support workers. Furthermore, there may be no single physical base for coaching. It may instead be organised around existing resources in a number of institutions, and dependent on clear communications and agreements with other agencies and professions.

Hence in the youth services case studies the coaches devote a proportion of their time to direct coaching activity, but they also have many other responsibilities associated with more general youth support. At the same time the youth services are concerned about the 14-19 Learning Pathways pre-occupation with support programmes that operate entirely through schools and further education colleges. The reminder is that many 16-19 year olds have left formal education, and the coaches emphasise:

“we are not anti-school, it's just that there's more to it than this” (Y).

g) Special issues

During the course of the case study interviews, some of the coaches discussed issues which appeared to be especially difficult to resolve. A key concern was child protection and the possibility of false allegations

¹⁰ Detailed further within the full report through two advanced case studies: for Saint David's Sixth Form College, and St Cyres School.

About the coaches

of abuse. They therefore designed the environment and organised coaching support in ways that allowed for confidentiality and privacy via one-to-one meetings, whilst at the same time ensuring that others were nearby and proceedings were publicly visible.

Another related issue emerged whenever confidentiality was declared as a ground rule for coaching discussions. This was based on the occasional identification of disclosure during discussions which demanded follow-up by other authorities:

One incident in particular has highlighted the need to warn everyone about policies and procedures for informing students, parents and teachers before coaching begins. It is very easy for the coach to declare confidentiality at the start of discussion, and very hard to then break this promise should an alarming disclosure appear and one that simply cannot be ignored. The result is lack of trust – and this can spread very easily to the rest of a peer group (S)

In other cases coaches noted that they often have meetings with family members, and sometimes these can become awkward. Some interviewees commented that on occasions discussions with parents became very heated and there had been instances of assault.

The importance of clear communication with colleagues, and the need to highlight a new role within an organisation, was emphasised as core activity. This was especially linked to the need for clarifying expectations about what coaching involves, the status of a trainee coach, and who does what:

She notes that when it comes to the training programme, then this should be completed successfully before declaring to the outside world that “you are a Learning Coach.” (S)

At a more extreme level two coaches located within the youth and careers services, who visit schools in order to provide learning support, comment:

Another aspect of coaching which requires careful consideration involves dealing with what appear to be an aggressive attitude from some teaching professionals towards the role of the coach. The coaches note that “some teachers just don't like us” (Y)

These interviewees identified at least two possible explanations. First, a Learning Coach can sometimes be seen as someone who confirms an unfavourable criticism of a school through working with excluded students or following up on special measures recommendations from Estyn inspections. This perception applies especially to coaches who have a regional or local authority role rather than a specific affiliation with a single school or college. Second, the Learning Coach can implicitly threaten the established and traditional classroom practices used by teachers who have the keeping of discipline as their number one priority rather than promoting very varied learning styles and study skills methods. The coaches also emphasised that this is not a general observation of the teaching profession; instead they suspect it applies to a very small minority of teachers who are prone to criticising new initiatives across the board.

h) Aspirations

A final consideration within the case study interviews involved identifying the coaches' future hopes and ambitions regarding their own career pathways. Feedback was unanimous: they all wanted to continue with some kind of continuing professional development.

In the longer term she would like to study for a degree in Coaching – if one becomes available (Y)

The coach would welcome a formally recognised professional pathway, and suggests that there should be a transparent overarching salary scale which rewards the advanced skills and expertise of those people working alongside teachers and careers advisors: coaches, teaching assistants, and youth counsellors (S)

About the learners

Three interviewees further commented on their interest in helping other colleagues to engage with coaching, including the possibility of mentoring or training future coaches that join the accredited training programme.

4. About the learners

The learner case studies and sketches depict a wide variety of support provided by Learning Coaches for young people. There is evidence of targeted and strategic intervention for particular populations, as well more general open-to-all drop-in support. Broad categories for coaching support are dominated by themes of underachievement, specific learning needs, discipline difficulties, peer group problems, internal and external truanting, and catching up on missed classes and coursework. Less prominent is the provision of support for those learners who may go unnoticed despite being in the category of more able and talented learners.

Coaching activity in schools and colleges is linked to practical help with study skills, the exploration of preferred learning styles, supporting emotional well-being, and facilitating choice of options linked to pathways planning. The visual-auditory-kinaesthetic typology appears to be popular with learners although there may be a danger of such categorisation for learning style being taken too literally and uncritically on occasions. Coaches demonstrate a balance in the support they provide in terms of offering very practical “hints and tips” whilst also developing a longer term empowerment of young people through building up their confidence and learning insights.

Coaches are supporting learners who otherwise slip through the net once they leave a particular college or school. This includes visiting the home or workplace, helping students who have been excluded, or keeping in touch with young people trapped in employment which frustrates them.

The case study interviews included a request for information about particular instances where in the opinion of the Learning Coach they have made a difference to individual learners. The result was a series of 41 descriptions divided into more detailed “cases” (again labelled S, C or Y - depending on whether there is a school, college or youth centre context) and briefer “sketches” depicting support for learners (who have been given fictitious names).

Theme 1: specific learning difficulties

...has Asperger's Syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). His attainment levels for year 10 are low with predicted GCSE grades within the E-G band across the board. He has a history of truanting which led to the verge of permanent exclusion from his former school. It was agreed that the coach would provide 10 hours intensive support per week following a statement in lieu from Pupil Support Services (S).

The coach provides a sketch of “Andrew” as having a different kind of intelligence which can cause difficulties for any organisation or social group associated with him: He responds very badly when people talk to him in the wrong way, often resulting in him stone-walling the teachers and withdrawing from situations for long periods of time if he sensed that people were angry, or talked down to him (S).

The coach noticed that one of her greatest concerns was note taking in class – she simply found it difficult to keep up. Prior to the coach's intervention there had been no previous attempt to provide any additional support. He suspected that the underlying difficulty was mild dyslexia, and found that no assessments had thus far been made. The coach made a referral to the school's dyslexia centre and accompanied her on the first visit (S).

About the learners

...a student with a history of mental health issues, bullying and ADHD. He moved from high school into a local specialist unit attached to the college, and during this time he discontinued his Ritalin medication. His history of learning difficulties, and special needs statement, entitled him to additional support tutorials and an interview was arranged with the Learning Coach as well as other specialists (F).

It should also be noted that the category of 'specific learning difficulties' posed problems for some of the youth service interviewees who emphasised their reservations about labelling learners within institutional settings. These Learning Coaches add a reminder that youth centres have the advantage of providing more informality as an alternative to conventional educational support – and this therefore leads to a movement away from using formal labels or diagnostic titles.

Theme 2: catch-up

Coaching support was also evident for learners who have missed significant amounts of classroom contact with teachers.

...provides a further illustration based on prolonged absence from school. She is in year 11 and is described as a bright, lively, 'outgoing' and confident learner who is underperforming. She lives with her father after the recent separation of her parents. Case S was referred to the coach for help with completing overdue GCSE coursework as she had missed a lot of school due to illness, including a stay in hospital. Her teacher asked the coach to help with an assignment about a national supermarket chain which has local branches. Case S needed to present a balanced argument about the 'pros' and 'cons' of the effect of this store on the local community and then conclude by giving her opinion. She found this difficult, as she had missed so many lessons. The coach showed her how to write an essay plan using

bullet points which summarised contrary points of view, so that she could present a balanced argument. When she had finished this task the coach then explained that she needed to write a conclusion and make her 'position' clear (S).

...Is in year 12 with two younger brothers in years 9 and 11. They are all living with their father following family break-up. Her mother has a history of mental health difficulties, and her father has had very serious physical health problems because of his need for intensive dialysis, leading to a transplant that was only partially successful. She is therefore defined as a young carer, receiving support from the Education Welfare Officer. She is viewed as an average but struggling student, who is very conscientious and motivated and secures outcomes through hard work. Because of her recent caring responsibilities she has missed coursework deadlines as well as some of the classes. Counselling support had been provided by the school, but despite good relationships with relevant staff she requires more direct help with study skills. (S).

...a 15 year old with sporadic health problems caused by a serious food allergy. She was achieving D grades at GCSE level but the school has in the past predicted outcomes at grade B. This learner is very nervous about attending school and went through a phase of fainting at the gate each morning due to anxiety. The school began a programme of support following an interview between case Y and the head of year prompted by her non-submission of coursework. This led to a referral to a Learning Coach who was linked to Careers Wales, using a variety of youth centres. Early sessions involved relaxation training, positive visualisation, and discussion of health problems and relationships with friends (Y).

About the learners

Theme 3: disruption

Ten of the Learning Coaches' descriptions of learners included reference to discipline difficulties, including:

...a year 12 student who joined the school when she was 15 years old when her parents moved to Wales from abroad. She gained 10 GCSEs (mostly at grades A and B) and is now completing four A levels. Her projected grades are three Cs and a D. She was referred to the coach by the head of the sixth form and her form tutor because she was missing lessons, had a "negative attitude", and when in class she was described as "drifting off and looking out of the window all the time. (S)"

"Anna" is in year 10 and part of a group of students viewed by their teachers as being generally rude with a very negative attitude towards authority. A particular difficulty involves "being chatty" in class, and taking a long time to settle into each lesson – much to the frustration of her teachers and many of the other students around her (S).

Other illustrations involve coaching which follows up on learners who may return to earlier problematic behaviour:

He is in year 11 and is described as quiet and detached from others in school but without being unpopular. Internal truanting had become a recent problem, and he was only going to classes that he enjoyed. His relationship with his form tutor had deteriorated, leading to missed registration periods, but then arriving for his second lesson. His previous performance suggested he is an A and B grade performer, but when the assistant headteacher looked at his work during detention she realised that he was more likely to get Cs and Ds. She personally escorted him to the coach at that point in time (S).

Discipline difficulties continue into further education rather than just being confined to compulsory schooling. Case F is an 18 year old student with parents who have offender and drug user backgrounds. He enrolled on a level 3 vocational programme at the college but continued to respond aggressively to figures of authority. After completing the first year he was refused entry to the second year by his course tutor because of outbursts of anger which some of his fellow students and college staff found very threatening. The curriculum manager for the college referred him to the Learning Coach, and in the first few meetings a series of options were discussed, ranging from leaving college and becoming unemployed, getting an unskilled manual job, trying to enter into a trade, or changing his studies and trying to continue towards some kind of qualification. He completed over nine coaching sessions involving a series of activities which revealed reasons for the underlying feelings of distrust and anger with adult authority figures, as well as a fundamental desire to stay at college and get a qualification (F).

A different kind of illustration is based on a case of serious referral to other authorities. The Learning Coach describes her work with this learner as:

...my biggest challenge so far. She was referred for coaching by her tutor who was concerned about her attitude and motivation, and early in the coaching meetings she made a disclosure about being sexually abused. The coach's first priority was to discuss what would happen as a result of her disclosure and the steps that would now be taken. The coach attended a subsequent police interview and followed up with further discussions that were made possible through building a trusting relationship as well as arranging specialist counselling support (F).

Youth centres also offer opportunities to work with young people who have histories of disruption within secondary schools, offering opportunities for a fresh start with different kinds of support professionals.

About the learners

Case Y involves a group of four friends aged 16 who all went to the same comprehensive school. Two have learning disorders and all have been described as very low achievers who would most likely leave school with nothing. The group has a history of repeated offences in school, including violence and damage to property. This resulted in a series of fixed term exclusions, with one individual also getting into simultaneous trouble with the police and a criminal gang based on his theft of drugs from a dealer. Three of the boys have now been permanently excluded from school because of their aggression, disruption and in some instances drug taking. The group was referred for coaching support by a Deputy Headteacher prior to the exclusions. The coaching team from Careers Wales subsequently came to an agreement with the school whereby the learners were to be allowed to attend some special physical education coursework revision sessions and to sit their exams but otherwise they had to be escorted on and off the school premises by the Learning Coaches. They met the boys outside of school in a youth centre and drew up a contract based on expectations of all parties, definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, and targets. Because they escalated their problematic conduct when in the company of one another the coaching sessions worked with individuals rather than the group. Furthermore, the history of violence and confrontation meant that another Learning Coach always had to be nearby during any consultation (Y).

A final illustration covers teenage pregnancy. The Learning Coach reports:

...three generations of her family were young mothers, and she herself is aged 14 with a 10 month old baby. She had not attended school since the age of 12, and following visits from the Education Welfare Officer her mother came very close to having to pay a large fine for her daughter's non-attendance. Because she had no money this could have meant a custodial sentence – the coach emphasises that this would have disrupted family life

even further. An attempt at providing case Y with home tuition was unsuccessful because a chaotic and very busy home environment made private or sustained study sessions impossible. She was then referred for coaching support via the Young Mums project in the local authority (Y).

Theme 4: study skills support

The theme of detailed study skills support dominated most of the interviews, although it was emphasised by interviewees that often this emerged gradually as relationships between coaches and learners developed. It should also be noted that the effectiveness of coaching could be shown through giving very practical drop-in support to students who were experiencing crisis with their coursework, as these examples show:

“Ben” is in year 10 and does not do any homework. His current performance is at grade D with projected grades of C at the start of the year. Although he would write in coursework tasks and deadlines in his planner, he would not look at this once he got out of school. The coach noted that he had lots of motivation and enthusiasm whenever talking about his studies; but other interests seemed to get in the way and he seemed to forget about priorities (S)

“Delyth” turned up to the coaching room prior to one of her exams with files of notes that were totally disorganised – she could not see the connections between different parts of the course, or see where the notes and the underlying knowledge followed any kind of sequence or narrative (S)

“Evelyn” revealed her lack of confidence when it comes to revising her copious notes from lessons. She said that she was drowning in words and could not remember anything (S)

About the learners

S left school early in the second term of year 11 and went to work for a flooring company. The coach still maintained contact and one morning he visited the school to say that the shop manager has offered him a permanent position and an apprenticeship on the guarantee that the school was happy with this arrangement. The coach and deputy head used this request to full advantage by setting up a meeting with S and his parents in order to try and get him to complete his GCSEs so that he had some qualifications to fall back on. It was agreed that the coach would support him through weekly visits to his workplace, where he also received encouragement from the staff in the shop (S).

The skills of combining youth leadership with learning support is demonstrated through a case from the voluntary sector:

...speaks Welsh as her first language, and has a family background in teaching. Her parents and grandparents would like her to continue this tradition, although she herself is undecided between youth work, teaching, or para-medicine. Following discussions with the Learning Coach she decided to go to university and study for a degree linked to Education as a safe strategy whilst she considers her career options. Case Y is also a volunteer within a local Welsh language organisation, working with people of all ages in order to help them learn Welsh. Her coach offers this description:

very quiet, very shy, with lots of skills – she is organised, good at building relationships with young people, she can tell when someone is upset and their mood has changed and always wants to help" (Y).

Theme 5: pathway planning

The theme of pathway planning involves support in recognising and choosing options at critical times within learners' lives. A rare example of group coaching provides further detail:

The coach has been working with two year 11 students "who are best friends", with very similar family backgrounds. Both appear to have very low self esteem when it comes to their intellectual abilities and life skills. There is a long history of unemployment within their families stretching back over three generations, and both describe themselves during conversations with the coach as "thick". Both come from large families living in council accommodation; their older siblings had previously attended the school, and there was a pattern of very low attainment; in the coach's view the children had "been brainwashed" into being non-achievers from the very start of their schooling. The Learning Coach elaborated on the interest that both girls expressed in hairdressing, with one in particular having a dream of eventually owning a chain of salons. They invented a 10 year plan using mind maps for setting up their own hairdressing business, and they went to see a separate careers advisor to find out about start-up grants for young people who have entrepreneurial ideas (S).

Interests and hobbies emerge as important considerations when recognising the everyday interests of young people. In a case from the youth services the coach can detail the following learner's background with ease:

He has one sister, his mum is a nurse and his dad is a bus driver. He is good at kayaking, and enjoys the D of E (Duke of Edinburgh). At the end of his fifth year at school he got six GCSE passes which he was disappointed with because the grades were not good enough for going into the sixth form which is what he wanted to do. So within a few weeks he got a full-time job in the warehouse of a local department store. The coach says:

About the learners

“As a youth worker I know this kind of thing about the young people I work with – but other professionals tend not to have this information to hand once a young person leaves school ... he had given up on any further study ... he saw the bar at four grade Bs at GCSE, and he had ended up with three.”

Looking back on this case, the Learning Coach emphasises the importance of maintaining contact with young people once they leave formal education. This learner had given up because he thought his grades were not good enough, and he closed down his own potential and ambition. He did not realise that he could talk to admissions tutors and negotiate alternatives” (Y).

Pathway planning is also important for young people who have to contend with transition to other institutions following exclusion, and who nonetheless have strong career ambitions. A case from the youth services involves a learner who comes from a farming family, with her older brothers having a history of truanting from school and subsequent poor educational attainment. She is described as academically very capable but with no stable social circle outside of school - in part caused by the rural location of her home.

The Learning coach notes that in year seven she was severely bullied and because of this missed a lot of time from school. In year 8 she found a peer group which encouraged difficult behaviour, and this situation escalated into three fixed term exclusions in years 9 and 10. The school had tried to give personal support via the year tutors, in addition to some mentoring and the use of report cards for monitoring attendance and punctuality and behaviour. One of the school governors knew about the coach's reputation in youth work, and rang the coach to ask if there was any more support that could be offered outside of school in order “to socialise” case F more effectively. The coach visited her in school, and during the periods of exclusion they met regularly in a youth centre to discuss various options as well as longer term ambitions (Y).

5. The distinctiveness of the coaching role

The Learning Coaches often emphasised that their work involves undertaking a wide variety of roles, although this does not necessarily confuse the young people who get the support they need. It is more a matter of accepting the inevitability of overlaps, and trying to clarify each role to practitioners (and their colleagues) within more local organisations. In this way flexibility of support activity can be more easily and confidently recognised, and criticisms about wasteful duplication of resources minimised. If this clarification can be achieved then teachers, youth workers, careers advisers, and learning support assistants comfortably slip into coaching mode as appropriate. Where learning support becomes a dominant part of their everyday work then the use of an employment title of “Learning Coach” becomes more practicable. The name of the game appears to be in achieving enough flexibility so that organisations can adapt and accommodate coaching in ways that fit into their own operations and terminologies.

The *First Campus* team analysed the distinctiveness of the coaching role, with two broad conclusions being reached. First, the specification for the Learning Coach role contained within the guidance notes for the 14-19 Learning Pathways held water in terms of defining and encouraging the breadth of activity relevant to learning support for young people. This can in part be attributed to the detailed grassroots consultation exercise with stakeholders during the CQFW core training phase of the Learning Coach project. Second, it is helpful to also provide guidelines about the other roles linked to coaching, and suggest notional boundaries which are understood by everyone. With this aim in mind the Learning Coach operational and advisory groups established by the Assembly were then asked to identify the key roles and features associated with the provision of support for young people.

The distinctiveness of the coaching role

Table 1: key features of support roles for young people

Role	Key features
Learning Coach	Study skills, learning styles, breaking down barriers to learning, facilitating choice between options, solving problems
Mentor	Guiding and advising, motivating, having knowledge, asking direct questions, more senior, trusted adviser
Careers adviser	Employment specialist, planning careers pathways, developing plans, liaising with the world of work
Teacher	Educator, a subject specialist with advanced skills, working with large groups as well as individuals, assessing, a leading authority figure
Learning support assistant	Working with a teacher, helping and giving extra support in the classroom, involved with special needs, administration
Youth worker	Improving confidence and self esteem, communicating in different ways, a friend, engaging in social activity, informal, working outside school, an all-rounder
Counsellor	Expert listener, unravelling problems, dealing with serious issues, improving health and emotional well being, confidential

The response lists inspired the construction of an “Approximations Matrix” detailing the properties of key roles. The final matrix within the full report extended previously published work¹¹ and more detailed exploration was then completed through workshops and desk research¹² in order to detail the properties and functions of key roles.

The final task within this analysis involved making sense of the amount and style of learning support needed at different times within young people’s 14-19 Learning Pathways. The Approximations Matrix led to a pilot study involving Learning Coach and Careers Wales specialists in order to detail a central “timeline” which included on the one side careers advice and on the other coaching support. The outcomes were beneficial in terms of identifying respective responsibilities and deadlines for action within a multi-agency team of specialists who support young people in various ways during their education and training journeys between the ages of 14 and 19.

6. Coaching pathways

The Learning Coaches expressed a marked interest in their own further training and continuing professional development. In some instances this was because they wanted to hone specific coaching skills, in others there was more of a desire to move towards professional status. For these individuals coaching experiences have acted either as a catalyst or a stepping stone to further career progression.

Recurrent curriculum topics for additional staff development included:

Learning styles	Emotional intelligence
Child and adolescent development	Using information technology
Child protection	Legislation
Groupwork	Specific learning needs
Counselling	Teaching

¹¹ Parsloe E and Wray M (2000) *Coaching and mentoring: practical methods to improve learning*; Kogan Page, London

¹² Involving especially Careers Wales for distinguishing between careers advisor and coaching functions, and Swansea Metropolitan University for distinguishing between learning support assistant and coaching functions.

Coaching pathways

The coaching feedback suggests therefore that there is a need for Learning Coaches not just to be familiar with the options available to their 14-19 year old learners, but for them to also be aware of the training options that are available to themselves as coaches. A CQFW hierarchy of accreditation is identified for supporting the further professional development of coaches:

Table 2: Proposed Learning Coach qualifications

Level 3	In 2007 the Welsh Assembly Government requested, via the Learning Coach Advisory Group, the design and validation of a <i>Learning Coach OCN Wales level 3</i> award, using the same five core training modules and learning outcomes within the CQFW unit database. This OCN has now been approved by the sector skills council LLUK. The OCN qualification will therefore be available in 2008
Level 4	<i>Transcripts</i> for core training (50 credits)
Level 4	The <i>Certificate of Higher Education</i> at level 4 necessitates an additional 70 credits, effectively “topping up” on the Learning Coach core training transcript via completion of further modules accredited by higher education partners
Level 5	A new 240 credit <i>Foundation Degree</i> award is proposed, to be designed and validated by one or more higher education institutions and recognising credits imported from the level four core training programme
Level 7	A <i>Masters Degree</i> route encompassing professional practice and development programmes as offered by a variety of universities.

The coaching feedback also emphasised that some individuals are prepared to be more diverse, and they would consider a range of alternative routes in terms of their on-going professional development. Examples of potential progression include the provision of Foundation Degrees for learning support assistants, teacher training programmes, and Careers Advice and Counselling Diplomas.

7. Recommendations

The *Learning Coaches of Wales* research study generated a series of recommendations for the further development of Learning Coach support in Wales. The overall picture emerging from the case studies and evaluation feedback is positive and optimistic: Learning Coaches are welcomed by young people and parents, and they make a difference to young people in ways envisaged by Learning Pathways policy. As the Assembly introduces legislation for entitlement to learning support for all young people there are however inevitable challenges and difficulties which demand more detailed strategic planning and resource management. In the full report 67 recommendations about future developments are divided into four clusters. Some of these recommendations are now highlighted in this summary document.

Cluster 1: role definition

There is a need for individual 14-19 networks to clarify role overlaps between four support functions, using as a starting point the Approximation Matrix. The first involves the coach and the mentor, the second is the coach and the careers advisor, the third is the coach and the counsellor, and the fourth is the coach and the learning support assistant.

Recommendations

The training programme for the first cohort of Learning Coaches began at short notice, leading to occasionally hasty recruitment of participants within some Learning Networks. It is therefore recommended that the training programme:

- convenes a pre-induction workshop for all interested parties in order to outline the role and the training
- defines minimum admissions criteria and develops selection procedures for entry into training, in partnership with the 14-19 network managers
- Runs an induction event for eligible Learning Coaches prior to the start of module 1.

The vast majority of coaches are linked to school and college environments, even though they may not always be employed by those particular institutions. Young people – especially those who are outside education, training and employment – may be excluded from these dominant locations. A quota system for training should be considered in order to encourage the recruitment of more coaches through:

- voluntary sector organisations and community partnerships
- private training providers specialising in apprenticeship support
- youth workers and Youth Gateway advisers supporting young people who are defined as homeless, looked-after, carers, affected by mental illness, or drug dependent
- prison and probation services working with offender and ex-offender populations
- special educational needs coordinators working with disabled learners after they have left school or college.

The roll-out of the Welsh Baccaulaureate qualification is leading to a specialist role for Learning Coaches within some schools and colleges, based on a dominant interest in developing portfolios that document the key skills of learners. The provision of more general learning support may benefit from more structured applications around such key skills areas as problem solving, the management of learning and communication. The function and role of the Learning Coach within the context of the Welsh Baccaulaureate demands further case study exploration.

Cluster 2: the training

There is broad agreement about the applicability and relevance of the core curriculum covered by the five modules, thanks to an earlier stakeholder consultation exercise which informed curriculum design at the very start of the programme. Nonetheless there were some teething troubles with the training, and modifications are advised as follows:

Module 1 should be renamed Coaching Relationship, in order to minimise confusion between mentoring and coaching.

Module 3 offers essential legislative detail about child protection and safety, which Learning Coaches require at the very outset of training. At the same time there is an immediate need for coaches to engage in relationship building with young people, as outlined in module 1. Some of the legislation content should be drip-fed to those Learning Coaches who need urgent information about legal frameworks from day one of induction. These materials can be reinforced subsequently by open and distance learning resources and case studies. In this way flexibility is provided for Learning Coaches who require immediate access to legislation training content, rather than having to wait for a formal start to the legislation module.

¹³ Appendix 1 of the full report highlights examples from Caerphilly and North East Wales local authorities

¹⁴ Williams G.H: Whitmore R.J. and Watts P. (2003) *The Pupils Attitudes to Self and School User Manual*; W3 Insights: Wolverhampton

Recommendations

Learning Coaches are work-based learners who engage in training and simultaneously explore applications within their work environments. The assessment of learning outcomes by the providers of accreditation should recognise this process more fully and devise assessment tasks which are more appropriate and relevant to coaches' needs, but which also respect the confidentiality of the young people that coaches work with. This should include the assessment of live or simulated performance, rather than relying on the repeated use of portfolios, essays and case studies.

A follow-up training model is required for the provision of additional modules and qualifications based on their appeal to the specialist interests of Learning Coaches who complete the core training programme.

Advanced coaching practices in some local authorities¹³ reveal that in some cases the Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS) rating scale¹⁴ is an effective and tested measure of learners' attitudes towards themselves, their peers, and their school or college. PASS – or suitable alternatives – should therefore be promoted more widely.

The use of the Visual-Auditory-Kinaesthetic (VAK) learning style framework is a popular and effective application; the coaches find that VAK concepts simply make sense to the young people that they work with. Coaches and trainers should however be more aware of research which questions the validity and reliability of such measures, and a more rigorous critique should be offered within the core Learning Strategies training module.

Terminology used within some off-the-shelf inventories on study skills and learning styles is not always appropriate for use with 14-19 year olds, especially in terms of supporting educationally disengaged populations. There is a unique opportunity for developing a national bilingual 14-19 Pathways inventory for learning styles measurement

in Wales. This would be characterised by user-friendly applications which adapt available instruments, with easy access via national databases and websites – including Careers Wales on-line.

The training programme piloted a scheme for recognising prior experience, but with a very small number of completions based on the complexity of the task and the difficulty in gathering evidence. It is advised that the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) continues to be offered to future candidates, but that it moves towards a series of live assessment tasks based on the observation of performance, rather than relying on portfolio building.

It is recommended that some learning outcomes within the Learning Coach training programme should be embedded within other awards offered by universities and colleges. The curriculum design process would then allow for more detailed mapping of outcomes that makes the future recognition of qualifications allied to coaching more probable. Examples might include teacher training, careers guidance, counselling, youth leadership and learning support awards.

Successful completion of the accredited core training results in a set of credit transcripts from the First Campus universities. They are sent to individual coaches following award boards within higher education institutions, and this typically spans a three month period. Higher education consortia linked to the accreditation of a national training programme should develop a more coherent and unified method for rewarding achievement through the production of a combined credit transcript.

It is argued that a level 4 “short award” is needed for Learning Coaches successfully completing 500-600 hours of learning which nonetheless reflects a substantial amount of training. A higher education short award for work-based learners should be explored, using the Learning Coach national training programme as an example.

Recommendations

Cluster 3: increasing capacity

Learning networks may benefit from the agreement of a matrix for coaching as well as other support functions; the starting point being use of the timeline analysis and Approximations Matrix. It will thus be important to regularly define and monitor the “who does what where and when” learning support elements for the different age groups within 14-19 pathways, including:

- Advice on key stage four options within year 9
- Facilitating and monitoring the choice of options at the age of 16
- Choice and organisation of supervised work experience placements
- Supporting movement from school to college or the workplace
- Identification and analysis of informal and non-formal achievement

Within each Learning Network the entitlement agenda should be linked to a project management framework based on accountability in the provision of learning support. This would include targets and quotas for individual organisations and partnerships, with associated drivers, deadlines and milestones. Such accountability should also be reinforced through monitoring by public sector resource providers as well as Young Peoples Partnerships and ESTYN inspection teams.

The majority of Learning Coach activity involves one-to-one support for young people. In order to raise capacity for an entitlement agenda, whilst at the same time recognising the importance of peer group relations in learning, more engagement by Learning Coaches in groupwork should be encouraged.

Positive as well as critical feedback has been documented from evaluators, coaches, learning network managers and tutors regarding the national training programme. The logistical challenge

¹⁵ Webb A Drury S and Griffiths G (2007) *Promise and performance: the report of the independent review of the missions and purpose of further education in Wales*; Welsh Assembly Government: Cardiff

of delivering the core training throughout Wales by a central team of trainers has been considerable, and this situation will be exacerbated through further expansion of the Learning Coach programme. At the same time the learning networks have commented on their need for a more local agenda for training, as well as the need for increasing training capacity in order to accommodate more coaches in the future. This position will become even more urgent once access to a Learning Coach becomes a legal entitlement for all young people. It is proposed that a new training model be implemented which retains national accreditation and quality assurance via higher education consortia in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government, but introduces local training delivery by the 22 Learning Networks.

It is proposed that a “head coach” network be established in order to develop an additional tier of support for new trainee cohorts by Learning Coaches who have successfully completed the national training programme.

The case studies revealed instances where Learning Coaches have increased learning support capacity through initiating and coordinating undergraduate and sixth form mentoring and student tutoring programmes. As suggested in the independent Review of Further Education in Wales¹⁵ there is a need to review mentoring initiatives and to recognise the Learning Coach as a key potential figure active in the overall management of mentoring and student tutoring within Learning Networks.

Recommendations about devolved training, mentoring networks, website editing, consortium based accreditation, and the provision of core open and distance learning materials, underline the need for a core Learning Coach administrative team that services all of the Learning Networks.

Recommendations

The creation of an OCN level 3 award for Learning Coaches necessitates the involvement of one or more further education providers. Consultation with colleges and private training providers, including networking with *Fforwm*, will identify appropriate regional and local college partners for level 3 training accreditation.

Cluster 4: demonstrating success

There is the possibility of tension for Learning Coaches who are employed by one organisation, but with a brief to offer advice on the use of the options menu within an entire Learning Network. Put bluntly, given the current funding system for providers, it may be more profitable for individual organisations to retain young people rather than encourage them to choose options which involve other rival providers. The brokerage role of the coach may be reinforced through impartiality and a code of practice which all providers sign up to. One solution would be the employment of coaches by the Networks themselves rather than individual schools or colleges. Another possibility involves the management of Learning Coaches by Careers Wales, an organisation which declares impartiality as one of its defining features.

As the Welsh Assembly Government moves towards a position of entitlement and the provision of statutory legislation for 14-19 Pathways, there is a need for quality assurance in order to ensure that all young people have the learning support that they require and deserve. The criteria used by ESTYN in recognising and assessing good coaching practice should be defined through a series of stakeholder consultation workshops that mirror the grassroots methodology used within the training design phase.

In order to demonstrate what might become “a world class act” within Wales, further evaluation is needed. This should include detailed tracking analysis of pathway progression by young people, with a view to compiling evidence and a critique of impact on learner support.

There is a need to engage more closely with the Young Peoples Partnerships and such organisations as Funky Dragon in order to gather more information about coaching as perceived and experienced by young people themselves. This should move beyond the limitations of the current research, which relies mainly on feedback from the Learning Coaches and the Learning Network managers.

The longer term and indirect consequences of coaching support on achievements should also be considered through recognising potential impact in areas of well-being outside of the immediate education environment – examples including improved health, welfare and relationships.

Examples of successful coaching practice should be documented and shared across learning networks via the creation of a national coaching newsletter and website, and these illustrations should also be included within the content of training resources.

Despite the extent and volume of Learning Coach activity within the first full year of application, there is a need to raise awareness about the role of the Learning Coach within some senior management circles. Target groups for dissemination should include resourcing gatekeepers and opinion leaders within colleges and schools, to include representatives from *Fforwm* and the *General Teaching Council for Wales*.

The case study data has demonstrated that informal learning support is being achieved via coaches linked primarily with a variety of youth services and *Youth Gateway*. Furthermore, young people who would

Recommendations

otherwise disappear from the educational map can be supported effectively by youth workers once they leave school or college. The Learning Networks are however dominated by school and college contexts, and more involvement of youth services is needed in order to highlight and disseminate more effectively the kinds of effective coaching support which is taking place outside formal learning establishments.

Learning Coach pilot work should explore the feasibility of extending the coaching role to other age groups outside of the 14-19 Pathways applications.

Wales is developing considerable expertise in training large numbers of Learning Coaches. This continuing growth in coaching could be reinforced through the creation of an all-Wales National Centre of Excellence for Learning Support.

These are 33 recommendations drawn from a full list of 67, and they reflect on a journey that started with the making of ambitious policy and ended up with applied practice. It took three years from the pilot studies to the completion of accredited training throughout the 22 Learning Networks of Wales. And because of the declared evolutionary status of the Learning Pathways Guidance Notes, the recommendations have drawn on available evidence which supports change and progress linked to future entitlement and legislative developments surrounding support for young people.

Raymond Williams noted that being truly radical means making hope possible rather than despair convincing. The Learning Coaches give hope during a time when education and training statistics alongside international skills audits might otherwise cause despair¹⁶. The case studies give examples of young people who are recognised as learners outside the classroom, and provide some welcome colour to what would otherwise be a stark black-and-white photograph of attainment. The coaches identify learners who may be experiencing difficulties and who have been referred for special help. But they can also work with

¹⁶ Bradshaw J, Sturman I, Vappula H, Ager R and Wheeler R (2007) *Achievement of 15-year-olds in Wales: PISA 2006 national report (OECD Programme for International Student Assessment)*; NFER: Slough

those young people who are more invisible; as one coach commented “a part of the wallpaper” of an educational institution. These learners may not cause any problems, but they are not stretching out and achieving their potential. In order to engage with all these functions the Learning Coach cohort has a very diverse and interesting profile including careers guidance, teaching and classroom support.

The entire Learning Coach initiative might also be viewed as radical, based on the real and perceived overlaps between coaches and the work of other established professions. Some teachers might say that this kind of learning support is already provided by, for example, personal tutors. Careers advisers might point to their traditional guidance duties when it comes to helping young people choose between employment options. Youth workers might comment on their informal encouragement of confidence and self-esteem in peer groups outside school and college. This research has noted that these pessimistic objections are in fact rare; instead there is optimistic and constructive agreement about the need for sharing resources and forming partnerships and finding ways to provide more high quality learning support for young people.

It should however be noted that the research presented within the Learning Coaches of Wales is based on a sample of enthusiasts who were pioneering a new role and engaging very positively with the training programme. There is a need for further investigation of future cohorts using random samples, control groups and impartial interviewing methods. Furthermore, the case studies only indirectly view the young people themselves, based on Learning Coaches’ descriptions of individuals and their respective circumstances. There is now a need for conducting research into the views and experiences of the learners’ own reported stories and experiences, perhaps using as a starting point the Young People’s Partnerships in Wales.

Recommendations

This has not just been a study about Learning Coaches. It has also been an exercise in the design and delivery of a substantial work-based learning programme at a national level. A group of universities has combined forces in order to validate and accredit a set of core modules following detailed stakeholder consultation which then guided the design of the training curriculum and the definition of learning outcomes within the CQFW. Sector and organisational boundaries have been crossed: colleges, schools, careers agencies and local authorities. The research would not have been possible without the enthusiastic cooperation of all the Learning Coaches who took part in the surveys and contributed to the case studies, but who alas for reasons of confidentiality cannot be named.

The coaches would also like to thank all of the learners that they have worked with over the past two years. The author is also indebted to the following for all of the information and support provided during the course of the study: the YALO and CQFW divisions within the Welsh Assembly; Careers Wales; the First Campus Learning Coach training team; Jacquie Turnbull, Aly Acreman and Kevern Kerswell alongside colleagues within the University of Glamorgan, the 14-19 Learning Network managers; teacher training and mentoring specialists from the universities of Cardiff, UWIC, Newport, Bangor, and Swansea Metropolitan; staff within Pen y Dre and St Cyres Schools, Saint David's College, and Caerphilly local education authority; OCN Wales, the LLUK sector skills council; and the People at Work Unit.

