

An Evaluation of the Career Connect Co-Location Model



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Executive Summary

Evaluation Background

It is not a new concept that young people considered to be disadvantaged are more likely to become disengaged with education and work, and ultimately risk becoming NEET (not in employment, education, or training). In 2018 the Manchester Local Authority NEET Reduction and Prevention project was launched by Manchester City Council which introduced the co-location of a careers service across the Local Authority. The contract, which was awarded to Career Connect, focusses on the prevention of NEETs, and more specifically works with young people, parents and service partners to get young people already classed as NEET into education, employment or training and increase the participation and engagement rates of those young people considered to be high risk of becoming NEET in the future by addressing the barriers that they may face.

Career Connect advisers are located across five settings within the Manchester Local Authority which were decided by both Manchester City Council and Career Connect based on data gathered showing where the most disengaged and at-risk young people were based. The five settings therefore that were chosen were:

- Manchester Secondary Pupil Referral Unit (MSPRU)
- The Endeavour Federation - Social Emotional and Mental Health Provision (SEMH)
- Care Leavers Service
- Youth Justice Team (YJ)
- Locality Teams - The Manchester College

In May 2021, a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers within the International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the NEET Reduction and Prevention Project.

The evaluation of the co-location model set out to:

1. Evaluate the impact of the co-location model in achieving the aims set out in the research brief and improving the outcomes for young people at risk of becoming classed as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
2. Explore the impact of the co-location model in Youth Justice and the Care Leavers Service which aimed to improve the numbers of young people moving into a secure Education, Employment or Training (EET) destination

Methods

The evaluation set out to capture the views and experiences of those who had been most affected by the co-location of Career Connect services, this included local authority stakeholders, host setting staff, Career Connect advisers, parents and young people. Interviews were undertaken with 25 participants however due to restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic these were undertaken both over the telephone and virtually. The

pandemic also affected the ease in speaking to young people about their experiences and consequently a survey was also produced as a means to engage more young people who had spoken to a Career Connect adviser.

Findings

The evaluation of the co-location model found there to be numerous benefits to the co-location of Career Connect advisers within their host settings, both for the advisers and young people, however this does not mean that there are not areas for improvement.

What works?

- Integration

The co-location model worked well where Career Connect advisers were well integrated into their host setting. Through integration advisers were able to build strong relationships with staff within their host setting, as well as with the young people. This was as a result of them being able to have structured and productive conversations as well as having a ‘known face’ which allowed for ad hoc discussions and the advisers to be recognised around the site.

- Communication

Communication is key to a well-run service. In settings where the model was well run monthly meetings took place and there was a good understanding of what the role of the Career Connect advisers was and how they could be used to support teachers and other staff within the settings. This was often a result of productive and well thought out continuing professional development (CPD) sessions with both advisers and host setting staff.

- Specialised Knowledge

The knowledge and experience of the Career Connect advisers was highly important to the co-location model. Their knowledge of Labour Market Information (LMI), providers in the local area and SEND specific requirements meant that the advisers were able to help young people in ways that mainstream providers would not have been able to.

- Added Value

Being able to work alongside the host setting and complement each other brings a wealth of added value to the co-location model. The proactivity of the advisers to be able to ‘pick up’ young people who are becoming disengaged, or do not know what to do once they leave education, and work with them to provide options means that they are able to provide a service that the host setting often lacks the staffing to be able to offer.

Impact on Young People

The young people who participated in the evaluation research were very positive about their experiences with their Career Connect advisers. The young people found the advisers and their guidance sessions helpful, and they felt supported. The advisers reaching out to the young people during Covid-19 was recognised as being particularly helpful in maintaining a good relationship whilst the advisers could not visit the settings in person. Many of the young people highlighted how they felt more engaged as a result of their meetings with the Career Connect advisers and explained that without their help and support they do not know what they would have done or where they would have accessed advice and guidance.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Understanding Roles and Responsibilities

The need to understand roles and responsibilities was highly important in the success of the co-location model. Where the model did not work so well was in settings where host setting staff did not understand the purpose of the Career Connect advisers and what their role was within the setting. Added to this, in some settings there was friction as to what types of advice and guidance the advisers were delivering and what was the responsibility of the host setting.

- Space and Capacity

Physical space for advisers to work in is important for them to be able to carry out their role and ensure that their young people feel safe and comfortable. Some advisers found themselves working in open spaces where it was difficult to have quiet confidential conversations. With this is also the issue of capacity and the ability of the co-located staff to work effectively and efficiently 100% of the time. Increasing the capacity of staff would allow for more young people to be seen but would also mean that there could be an individual responsible for the data and tracking of young people.

Recommendations

Recommendations have been made for the future of the co-location model:

- Stakeholders should work to integrate Career Connect advisers as closely as possible within all host settings
- Host setting staff and Career Connect Advisers should have a good understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities
- There needs to be increased clarity and improvement in the sharing of data
- Career Connect advisers need appropriate space to work in their host setting. If this is not available, then an assessment should be made as to whether the host setting is appropriate.

Introduction

The concept that disadvantaged young people face more barriers during their education and route to employment than individuals who do not experience disadvantage is not new (Pennacchia *et al.*, 2018; Demie and Lewis, 2010; MacLeod *et al.*, 2015), but what does it exactly mean to be ‘disadvantaged’ in this context? Disadvantage could be linked to poverty and the young people defined, for example, as individuals who qualify for free school meals or pupil premium, but Ofsted (2016) suggest that disadvantage is more complex than this. This is because whilst poverty can be understood as the driving force for being classed as disadvantaged, it is something that can also have a significant influence on quality of parenting, home environment and life outlook. Crenna-Jennings (2018) argue that disadvantage arises from gender, ethnicity, first language, SEND status, family history and geography. As such it is difficult to treat all young people classed as disadvantaged the same; it therefore follows that personalised solutions must be found. The concern with disadvantaged young people is that the issues that affect them are often multifaceted, and these issues consequently affect their educational experience and learning which then has a knock-on effect on their transition at post 16. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007, p.1) for example, explain that ‘less advantaged children are more likely to feel a lack of control over their learning and become reluctant recipients of the taught curriculum’.

Research by Buzzeo *et al.* (2016) suggests that disadvantaged young people are at more risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) due to the social, economic and cultural barriers they face, such as poor educational experience and low attainment, financial pressures, low confidence and personal motivation, and poor mental health. It follows that to tackle the problem of young people becoming NEET, one must remove or reduce the barriers that disadvantaged young people experience. Karyda and Jenkins (2018) observe that priority needs to be given to tackling disadvantaged neighbourhoods to support young people who are at risk of becoming NEET and who would benefit from effective early interventions with regards to their future careers and education. PHE (2014, p.20) asserts that reducing the number of NEETs has multiple benefits for Local Authorities, including “reducing anti-social behaviour and youth offending, increasing attainment in education, improving health-related behaviours, and impacting positively on physical and mental health” as well as potentially saving money in the longer term. PHE (2014) recognise the importance of collecting and sharing data in order to identify where resources are needed and to target those most at need. There is also a recognition that provision should be flexible, bespoke and tailored to individual needs. One-to-one contact may be necessary to engage NEET young people, and advisers who have specialist knowledge of a vulnerable group can be particularly effective by, for example, providing “better links to external services such as youth offending services, leaving care teams, housing departments, teenage pregnancy support services, Sure Start centres, youth services and social services” (PHE, 2014, p.37).

Research by the Association of Colleges (2012, p.6) states that the co-location of careers services is an ‘essential part of making impartial, professional careers advice accessible to all those who need it’. The locating of a sub-contracted careers service provision which is

delivered within a host setting (usually college or school) means that young people are able to access more tailored career guidance, which more importantly is impartial. The research stresses the importance of developing partnerships that can be mutually beneficial and that can 'provide a more comprehensive and integrated advice service' (2012, p.8). Through good communication, clear expectations and mutual understanding, the AOC (2012) suggest that co-location models for careers guidance and support can benefit all individuals involved.

In their evaluation of the co-location of Next Steps within Jobcentres, Bowes et al. (2012) noted that issues such as a lack of shared understanding of the purpose of co-location and a lack of shared systems need to be addressed for co-location to be successful. Ginsberg (2008) also noted that organisational issues, such as how organisations will be linked, the amount of physical space needed, and staffing issues, need to be tackled. The need to satisfactorily address the physical space needed by co-located workers has been supported more recently by research by Everitt et al. (2018) which emphasises the importance of guidance professionals having access to appropriate spaces to work in. In this sense, the term appropriate space refers to a space which is private, comfortable and of sufficient size. This is also highlighted by Westergaard (2012) who notes the importance of ensuring that students are provided with a safe, secure and private space, particularly when the careers conversations may be the only opportunity for the young people to feel safe and able to talk freely. Ginsberg (2008, p6) suggests further that organisations 'may need to define their roles, develop a common language, and agree on approaches to sharing [...] information and data'. Bowes, et al., (2012, p51) found that the working operations for the implementation of co-location in Jobcentres were 'sub-optimal' and needed further development, thereby highlighting the importance of addressing such issues at the outset. Memon and Kinder (2017, p.400) note that there are benefits to co-locating local public services, including cost benefits, but argue that one of the key points of co-location is 'its catalytic role in innovation, especially where co-location is accompanied by a service integration strategy and the encouragement of informal learning, playing with new ideas and senior management willingness to support experimentation'. In summary, these authors suggest that co-location works best where organisational issues are addressed; there is a shared understanding of the different roles and approaches that co-located and host organisations have; and knowledge and data systems are shared. Co-location can be a catalyst for further innovation for the benefit of service users as organisations integrate services, knowledge and understanding.

Manchester City Council/Career Connect Co-location model

The Co-location Model was introduced in Manchester in 2018 to deliver the Manchester Local Authority NEET Reduction and Prevention contract. Prior to this, Career Connect had already been delivering a targeted youth support service in the City of Manchester between 2015 and 2018. The new 2018 contract awarded to Career Connect focussed more on the prevention of NEET and on specifically working with young people, parents, and other service provider partners to increase the participation of those considered to be most at

risk. Through discussions and consultation between Manchester City Council, Career Connect and partners, a new delivery model was designed which included the co-location of a team of Career Connect staff into the services and settings that work with young people most at risk of becoming NEET and who are already classed as NEET. Young people engaged by the contract have multiple barriers to participation which puts them at a disadvantage in relation to others in their year groups. Those barriers need to be addressed to enable successful transition into employment, education or training. Barriers include those associated with being involved in the Youth Justice system, having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), leaving care, and/or being in alternative educational provision. The co-location model was implemented with the aims of:

- Developing an improved and enhanced offer to young people, to help them secure an appropriate post 16 destination.
- Reducing barriers to participation in NEET services and providing support through transition.
- Strengthening partnership working between Career Connect and key services working with the most at-risk cohorts.
- Developing a more coordinated approach to delivery and building effective relationships between staff and young people.
- Building capacity in the teams of staff employed by the co-located settings in the NEET/EET, post 16 landscape.
- Understanding how to work more effectively to help young people secure, engage and progress in a EET destination of their choice.
- Informing and shaping the provision / offer at-risk young people and NEETs receive both pre and post 16 through working closely with co-located teams, post 16 providers and wider partners (Career Connect).

Manchester City Council and Career Connect decided that Career Connect staff should be co-located in:

- Manchester Secondary Pupil Referral Unit (MSPRU)
- The Endeavour Federation - Social Emotional and Mental Health Provision (SEMH).
- Care Leavers Service.
- Youth Justice Team (YJ).
- Locality Teams - The Manchester College.

The work with the MSPRU and Endeavour Federation focuses on pre 16 age groups whereas the co-location with the YJ Team and Care Leavers Service includes older young people who are at high risk of becoming NEET (Career Connect).

About the evaluation

Manchester City Council and Career Connect commissioned the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby to undertake an evaluation of the co-location model to explore its strengths and benefits, areas for improvements and the impact of the model on young people using its services. The research team worked with Career Connect to facilitate introductions to the different settings and to organise interviews with participants.

Research Methods

The overall purpose of the evaluation was:

3. To evaluate the impact of the co-location model in achieving the aims set out in the research brief and improving the outcomes for young people at risk of becoming classed as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
4. To explore the impact of the co-location model in Youth Justice and the Care Leavers Service which aimed to improve the numbers of young people moving into a secure Education, Employment or Training (EET) destination (Career Connect).

Career Connect and Manchester City Council commissioned iCeGS to implement a qualitative research approach which was undertaken through a series of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (including commissioners, setting staff, and Career Connect advisers), young people and parents. The evaluation set out to identify what has worked in the implementation of the co-location model in Manchester, and where there were opportunities for improvement.

Scoping interviews were first undertaken with commissioners of the evaluation which enabled the research team to gain a deeper understanding of the co-location model as a whole, its purpose and its aims. Following this, interviews were organised and conducted with managers and members of staff in the four settings. Where possible, Career Connect advisers co-located within those settings were also interviewed. From the interviews with Career Connect co-located staff, we were put in touch with a selected number of young people who had used the Career Connect services and a small number of parents.

Despite numerous attempts being made to contact the young people and parents who were referred to the study, the research team experienced difficulties in engaging sufficient numbers of young people and parents in the research. There appeared to be a number of reasons for this, including the timing of the study at a period when young people were busily engaged in transitions; the impending summer holidays; and the fact that many of the cohort are dealing with complex issues. A decision was made, in consultation with the

research commissioners, to offer young people a financial incentive in the form of a £10 voucher and also to create an online survey for young people to complete. Vouchers were also given to the young people who had participated in interviews during the interim period. Whilst statistics are provided within the report it must be highlighted that these findings are representative of only a small proportion of individuals who were engaged in the co-location model.

Table 1- Characteristics of Participants

Number of Young People	Number of Staff	Number of Advisers	Number of Parents
14	12	4	2

Findings

Introduction

The overall aim of implementing the co-location model of delivery in Manchester was to enable Career Connect to focus more on reducing the barriers faced by young people at risk of becoming NEET and who are already classed as NEET. With this in mind, host settings were chosen based on NEET and destination data gathered by Manchester City Council. The implementation of the new model in those settings was described by a stakeholder as being designed to provoke a ‘culture change’ within Career Connect and partner settings which would result in them proactively developing a range of creative solutions for young people and providing a service that would be complementary to the careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) already offered within the settings, rather than providing mainstream CIAG. Indeed, it was hoped that co-location of services would ‘get the best’ out of Career Connect and that it would enable closer relationships between Career Connect and host organisations. As a result, those closer relationships would promote improved targeting, with more focus on NEET than had been the case with the previous targeted youth support service contract. The proposed system integration was designed to bring efficiencies such as fewer issues with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

The evaluation research found numerous benefits arising from the co-location model which were experienced by host settings, young people, and careers advisers. However, this is not to say that there are not opportunities for improvement across the contract. The following sections explore the findings from the research and, by drawing on an analysis of interview and survey data, we describe what has worked in the implementation of the co-location model to reduce barriers for young people.

What works?

What the report means when it states that something “works”, is that it:

- i. is fulfilling the objectives of Manchester City Council and Career Connect in implementing the co-location model, and
- ii. corresponds to the effective practice outlined in the brief literature review.

In Manchester, co-location was found to be working better, and Career Connect were adding value, in settings where effective practice included:

- Career Connect advisers being integrated into host settings.
- Good communication between Career Connect and the host organisation.
- Career Connect and host organisations understood each other’s roles.
- Career Connect staff had a good understanding of the cohort and appropriate provision.
- Career Connect work was additional to that of the host organisation.

These characteristics are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Integration

One of the benefits of the co-location model is that, because of their proximity with staff located in host organisations, Career Connect advisers can build trusting relationships with those staff and, where relevant, with young people. In these settings, strong partnership working can be engendered, working at operational and strategic levels. This means that as well as having the ability to have structured conversations which allow for planning and development, having a ‘face’ within the host setting enables staff to have ad-hoc discussions with Career Connect advisers around the host setting and that staff, advisers and young people are able to recognise each other around the sites.

‘Having that base for [Career Connect] worked really well. It meant that the rest of our team within the [setting] did have a referral point, did have somebody they could actually speak to regarding somebody who they were concerned about’ (Stakeholder).

In addition, those conversations can happen more quickly than was previously the case, leading to issues being addressed more speedily.

‘Just those fluid conversations that happen in corridors lead to share opportunities in a more timely manner, rather than waiting for a meeting or an email’ (Stakeholder).

Where integration is most fully realised, the Career Connect adviser is almost a part of the host organisation.

‘[Previously] we still did partnership work and saw the same youngsters, but I think it’s different now because, obviously, being co-located you feel a lot more integrated’ (Career Connect Adviser).

The more closely a co-located member of Career Connect staff is integrated within the whole setting, the better the model works for the benefit of all parties involved, including setting staff and young people. Because of their proximity with staff located in host organisations, co-located Career Connect advisers can build trusting relationships with those staff and clients which in turn enables more productive sessions to take place and therefore lead to more engaged young people.

'The main positive impact [of co-location] was that working alongside the staff, the staff get to know you and there's trust ... you are more visible with the young people. So that helps with rapport. It's more of a joined-up service' (Career Connect Adviser).

'It is good to have that face or that person that you do know and someone who can signpost you' (Career Connect Adviser).

Co-location, then, enables Career Connect and host organisations to develop and maintain good relationships, to quickly share knowledge, and to be 'available' to young people and staff. Interestingly, in some cases it has been possible to maintain good relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic in settings where physical co-location has been replaced by a blended approach, using a mix of face-to-face where possible and technology such as Microsoft Teams or phone calls.

'Engaging with CC staff remotely has not been an issue. Have all managed to work remotely and some of the blended approach and ways of working will move us forward anyway' (Stakeholder).

Further to this, one stakeholder observed that one benefit of the Covid-19 pandemic is that tools that have been available for some time, e.g., Teams, are getting used more and used more effectively. The stakeholder explained that personally they like, 'the personal touch' but recognise that there are benefits which have become apparent during Covid-19. There is, for example, 'no need to drag people halfway across Manchester to attend a meeting when they can join it online' (Stakeholder).

Whilst remote working has not been ideal for everyone or considered to be a wholly suitable replacement for face-to-face meetings, the implementation and use of WhatsApp Messenger, Microsoft Teams, and other technology between Career Connect staff and young people has enabled them to keep in touch throughout 2020 and part of 2021. This was something that some young people noted as being particularly helpful and made them feel like Career Connect were putting in the effort to check up on them.

'we started speaking to her through WhatsApp...she's been doing quite a lot through lock down to try and help me find a job and stuff...she was the only person who stayed in touch during lockdown' (Young Person).

'you get daily phone calls from the adviser' (Young Person).

However, when one young person was asked if it would have helped them if they could have met in person with their adviser over the past 12 months, they responded that, ‘yes, *definitely it would.*’

Communication

In settings in which advisers are more fully integrated, it appears to be a contributing factor for effective communication.

‘We always [communicated] in the past but we’re meeting a need more now for the youngsters. I think they have benefitted because we are more present and integrated. They’re familiar with us...communication has got a lot better’ (Career Connect Adviser).

Where there is a shared vision, especially when backed by effective Service Level Agreements (SLAs), communication appears to be enhanced. Good communication involves regular meetings, often these are monthly in order to share knowledge and understanding of the current situation:

‘Communication has been really good – always talking about NEET figures, the unknowns, and withdrawals so can discuss with managers [and] colleagues at Career Connect’ (Stakeholder).

In order for co-location to be successful, it is important that there is a shared understanding of each other’s roles. In some settings, this has improved during the co-located period.

‘Engaging with each other, having regular meetings, discussing the workload that we have all got so that we can come together and actually support each other has improved how we work’ (Career Connect Adviser).

Advisers have utilised Continuing Professional Development opportunities to disseminate about Career Connect roles to host staff.

‘When I was first co-located, I gave talks about what Career Connect does, what role we’ve got. I did talks with [a] Team about how we’ll fit in with them. I went to their meetings. Similarly, I went into the managers, I explained how I fit in with the IAG. And then, yeah, then I did training to them on, basically, how our contract had changed and what my role was in NEET Reduction’ (Career Connect Adviser).

Similarly, advisers have also used meetings to explain about other aspects of their work with young people.

‘And then I saw the [other staff] and did the same talk to them but, what they asked for, was an overview of the post-16 landscape and the options etc. They thought that was useful’ (Career Connect Adviser).

Good communication works both ways and it is necessary for Career Connect staff to understand the roles and responsibilities of staff in the host setting, ‘*I think we have a great*

understanding of what each other's role is' (Career Connect Adviser). However, getting that shared understanding can take time.

'We had, probably, I would say two or three months where we were introduced to college staff, and that kind of... getting to know them and them getting to know us' (Career Connect Adviser).

Effective communication enables Manchester City Council, Career Connect and the host organisation to work strategically for the benefit of young people.

'We have a monthly exchange of information [with Career Connect] on our NEET cohort, daily operational email between offices around where young people are. If a young person drops out or if there is an incident, we and Career Connect get copied into emails. Helps us to understand where the cohort is rather than waiting 12 months and then finding out they're no longer [EET]' (Stakeholder).

Such sharing of information can highlight limitations in the data which, once identified, can be overcome. Where this has worked well, it has resulted in the closer integration of IT systems and data sharing.

'[We] worked at quite a high level, swapping data at a regular basis, swapping information, to get to the stage now where data is really matched. This has given the teams a better understanding of the issues as they arise and therefore, they can be better addressed' (Stakeholder).

When co-location results in a shared understanding of the issues that young people face, better data, and closer working arrangements, Career Connect are able to work pro-actively to address those issues.

'From the previous contract to what they are now, I think [Career Connect] were quite reactive before, they would wait for someone to go to them and then deliver a service in isolation and now they're more proactive in what they get involved in' (Stakeholder).

Specialised knowledge

In settings where co-location is working well, the knowledge, experience and expertise of the Career Connect advisers is beneficial to the work that they are carrying out for their cohorts.

'Having someone who really knows that group of young people well, rather than it being spread amongst a whole range of staff, I think that works well' (Stakeholder).

Co-located Career Connect advisers need an expert understanding of the cohort. The cohort often require personalised responses that mainstream provision cannot offer such as local Labour Market Information and SEND specific requirements.

'It's not the kind of [setting] where you can be prescriptive about what you can and cannot do because the young people need to have a flexible, personalised response. You need to have a can-do attitude' (Career Connect Adviser).

'We've got lots of people at [the setting] who have additional needs but they can be met by a universal offer, we've then got [young people] who are on intensive support [including] a higher number of personal and social development periods, the work that they do will be much more around social emotional development, and then at the very top end we've got [young people] who we deliver very personalised learning programmes' (Stakeholder).

In addition, co-location enables Career Connect advisers to build up specialist knowledge of provision in localities.

'Being co-located is great because it gives you that working knowledge of the area that you're working in. You can make, I think, really positive connections with the local communities, organisations, and you can find out about things that are going on as well with other agencies.' (Career Connect Adviser)

One stakeholder observed, *'The [provider] landscape can become a bit confusing for [settings] and also for partners in terms of what resources and opportunities are available'*. Therefore, it is advantageous if, as well as being aware of local provision, advisers are able to contribute to ensuring that provision is suitable for the cohort, something about which stakeholders and advisers are particularly concerned.

'[The adviser has] had a greater voice beyond the [setting] in terms of the suitability of provisions because [they're] a great advocate for our kids ... the offer for these kinds of kids has always been atrocious.' (Stakeholder)

There is evidence that advisers and stakeholders can work together, each bringing their specialist knowledge to the table, in order to ensure that provision is appropriate.

'In a nutshell, we work with Career Connect on an operational level and at a strategic level, sharing information to make sure the information is correct but then looking at solutions for the young people that they are working with, they [Career Connect] understand the young people'. (Stakeholder)

Added Value

Where co-location is working well, co-located Career Connect work complements the work of the host organisation and adds value.

'Working in collaboration, working as a partnership, appreciating what each other brings to the role. We're not stepping on each other's toes, but we do complement each other's services. [...] That has developed over the last two years. Really proud of what we're achieving and supporting each other' (Stakeholder).

Such work adds value in several ways. For example, some of the young people engaged by co-located Career Connect advisers have previously been involved in mainstream activities but have become disengaged for reasons unknown to the provider.

Because [young] people, they can be doing fine, they're mainstream, then, all of a sudden, things can happen, they can go off radar, then I'll come in (Careers Adviser).

Sometimes, the young people are at a key stage of transition but have no plans for future engagement and are therefore at risk of becoming NEET.

'As young people are coming towards the end of Year 11, we pick up the young people that don't have any plans to go onto further education or training. We get direct referrals from schools, from their Careers Advisers' (Careers Adviser).

Host organisations might not always have the capacity to reach many of those young people and provide the range of solutions necessary to get them back on track. Career Connect advisers were described by one stakeholder as needing to have 'tenacity' and be 'pro-active', characteristics that enable them to engage young people with multiple and complex barriers.

I complement [the host organisation's IAG] because I am seeing a lot of the hardest..., the more vulnerable, and the more complex ones. (Careers Adviser).

'If [young people] disappeared [from mainstream services] Career Connect can actually do that intense support, they can go knocking on doors whereas we can't. They meet up with them in their local community, be it McDonalds, it could be on one of our premises, it could be anywhere' (Stakeholder).

While tenacity and a pro-active mindset are characteristics that many in the sector share, co-located Career Connect advisers are seen as having the advantage of 'time' to devote to re-engaging young people:

'[Host organisation staff] would be looking at referring to Career Connect who do have different skills in that they can go out, they can engage with some very difficult and hard to reach students and put the extra time in to trying to get them back in' (Stakeholder).

'But they have time to do the follow up work with the ones that we cannot reach' (Stakeholder).

The complementary work undertaken by co-located advisers prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, enabled more young people to benefit from the service, young people who were otherwise at risk of becoming NEET.

'What we've got is quite a few of our young people who have got school-based anxiety issues who aren't attending school and therefore the only way to get the service to them is if we [visit them at home] and [the adviser] is brilliant at getting out and building relationships with young people' (Stakeholder)

Unfortunately, during the Covid-19 pandemic, advisers have had limited opportunities to meet face-to-face with young people.

'Recently, we just try, kind of doing home visits but pushing cards through saying, 'sorry we missed you, can you please contact me.' (Careers Adviser)

However, this approach is reported to have had only limited success and advisers have been utilising technology and other strategies such as Teams and WhatsApp which has been successful to an extent, but which is not appropriate for all the young people engaged due to personal needs and limited access to appropriate digital devices.

Impact on young people

The addition of co-located Career Connect advisers within settings across the city of Manchester has provided support to young people in the host settings who were most at risk of becoming NEET or who were already NEET. The evaluation research has found that both parents and most young people interviewed and surveyed felt that they had been well supported by Career Connect advisers (75% of young people strongly agreed that their adviser had been helpful). Whilst some young people could not recall how many times they had seen their adviser, 62.5% of those who completed the survey had seen their adviser more than three times, and most young people noted that they had seen the same adviser throughout, something that was raised as being an important aim by Manchester City Council. Whilst most young people reported having seen (or in most cases spoken to) their adviser in the six months prior to the research taking place, other young people stated that the last time they engaged with their adviser was over six months ago, with two being in the previous year group.

Even when the Covid-19 pandemic affected the ability of advisers to see the young people in person as they were restricted to remote working, advisers were still in frequent contact with their young people, and this was something that had not gone unnoticed by young people or parents.

In all cases parents and young people felt that the advisers had been supportive in providing signposting for young people towards employment, training, courses or further education. When asked what the advisers did that was helpful responses included:

'Helped me with everything to get onto my apprenticeship' (Young Person)

'Helped me get into college and enrol me in college and supported me' (Young Person)

Some young people observed that they did not know where they would be or what they would be doing if it was not for the advice they had received from the Career Connect adviser.

'I don't know what I would have done' (Young Person)

'if [the adviser] wasn't there I think I'd still be without a job to be honest' (Young Person)

These attitudes towards advisers were a by-product of the positive relationships that developed throughout the course of the young peoples' engagement with them, with 100% of young people stating that they felt comfortable with their Career Connect adviser and believed them to be helpful and polite. The young people valued the personalised approach they received from their advisers, for example, ensuring the young person knew how to get to interviews and making sure they had sufficient funds to use public transport. One parent, whose child had been advised by two Career Connect workers because they had moved from sixteen-and-under into the post-16 category, explained that the advisers go 'above and beyond'.

'The advice that I've been getting is amazing. That's what I can tell you about Career Connect. I don't know what other people are like but the two people that I've dealt with from that company work 'above and beyond [...] if you want to know anything about the way that they handle things, all I can say is they go above and beyond what they need to do.' (Parent)

When asked what type of help they had received, this parent observed that advisers had helped in too many ways to list. However, they did explain that the adviser, working with other agencies, had helped to get their child back into education after they had been removed.

'[The adviser] just helps me out with things that [my child] needs. Help with... Recently [my child] had, what can I say, [they have] ADHD but there's certain things, with [their] attention... you know like, if there's cameras hanging around and what have you, [they] tend to turn them because [they don't] want people looking at [them]. So, [they were] removed from somewhere (sic) but [the adviser and special needs worker] got [them] back on it.' (Parent)

Other young people explained that they had been helped to improve their motivation and build confidence, thereby removing barriers that had held them back.

'I was telling [a member of staff] I'm not going to do my last assessment, I'm probably going to fail, and stuff and [the adviser] came in and said, "That's the wrong thing to think about". And I was telling [them], "It's the right thing to think about, I probably am going to fail my GCSEs". And [they] had a motivational conversation [with me], a one-to-one conversation [...] If I ever do make it, my GCSEs and do that course [they advised], I'm going to come back to [to the adviser] and say [their] the one that motivated me.' (Young Person)

'It boosted my confidence to focus on what I wanted [...] [the adviser] turned round and told me to believe in myself more.' (Young Person)

All the young people who were surveyed stated that they had been supported in multiple ways by their advisers including 'exploring further education courses', 'getting a job' and 'looking at/applying for apprenticeships'.

There is, then, evidence to suggest that the co-location model has been impactful in terms of getting young people at risk of becoming NEET to explore their post 16 and post 18

options, and in some cases has led to young people entering employment, training or further education. In addition to the experiences above, one young person explained how they had been helped to secure a 12-month apprenticeship, explaining how had it have not been for the adviser's 'firm but fair' attitude, they would have 'still be living off universal credit'.

Nonetheless, one young person observed that the adviser could have done more to challenge them and suggest more opportunities to them.

'[The adviser could] possibly have been more, erm, maybe try to find more, like [work] experience. Because I never really had any work experience or anything like that, so it was more a case of, I don't know, I felt like I was coming up with the ideas myself and that [the adviser] was, kind of going along, "ok, ok" and taking my ideas down rather than ... kind of guiding me.' (Young Person)

However, this young person did observe that the Covid-19 pandemic had possibly reduced the options available to them.

'[The pandemic has] affected other people, maybe in contacting me as much or having more opportunities to kind of come forward to me with. You know, if that's the case, that everywhere's been short [of opportunities] then obviously they're not going to be saying, "oh yeah, well we've got this opportunity, we've got that experience you could do, I've found this for you" ... I think it kind of messed it up a little bit. I think if it wasn't for Covid-19 there would have been a lot more communication'. (Young Person)

Opportunities for improvement

The aspects of co-location identified as effective are not all present in all settings, including those in which co-location is relatively successful in terms of achieving the aims of the contract. However, it appears clear that co-location works better in settings which are better integrated. The following sections set out opportunities for improvement. They are mostly designed to promote the benefits that come with better integration of co-located workers into host settings in order to enhance the possibility of achieving the co-location contract's aims.

Understanding roles and responsibilities

One of the ways that co-location could be improved in some settings is to promote a better shared understanding of day-to-day roles and responsibilities. This is recognised as important by Public Health England (PHE, 2014) and could address problems in settings where currently there is a disconnect between the host settings and Career Connect advisers which risks diminishing the impact that the co-located model can have if it is not adopted effectively by the host setting. For example, in one setting there appeared to be

little understanding of the different approaches that co-located advisers have adopted with the new contract.

'I think it's slightly changed, the way that the Career Connect worker works. I don't know whether that's just a change in their remit or what really.' (Stakeholder).

One careers adviser thought that there was institutional resistance to their work that had not yet been adequately addressed.

'One of the things [host staff] will say is that 'well, we've been doing it this way for... ', you know, or 'we've tried that, but it didn't work'. So, I feel like the service is a victim of that, it's kind of stuck in a certain 'level' and it's just not going to change.' (Careers Adviser)

Misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities can lead to confusion about who is ultimately responsible for delivering careers interventions to the cohort, as can be seen by the quotes below.

'That's an issue, understanding roles and responsibilities, that it is actually [host staff's] role to do it [give careers advice] and I'm supposed to be there helping them to do it, advising them to do it but not actually necessarily always doing it myself.' (Careers Adviser)

'[Career Connect] have staff that it's their role to get young people into places whereas our role just is vast, and obviously getting them into employment is a very key part of it, but I think just... them having the skills... I'm not that experienced in writing CVs for other people, I can do that but that's obviously their role and that's what they're good at.' (Stakeholder)

The above exchanges point to a need for improved communication between Career Connect and host organisations and vice versa, preferably starting with effective Service Level Agreements and continuing throughout the contract so that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood. Some settings acknowledged this and explained that, initially, setting staff may not have known who the Career Connect staff are or understood their purpose within the setting but that this had been addressed. For example, one Stakeholder explained how they did not originally want Career Connect staff to come into the setting and do what they felt was the right thing to do, as such they explained that *'there were a couple of blips, but the good thing was that it was worked through over a period of time'*.

Although problems do remain, it is encouraging that some advisers reported that they had started to witness a closer working and sharing relationship since the implementation of the co-located model. The mutual understanding of roles had improved, suggesting that once roles and responsibilities are established between advisers and host settings a more cohesive approach takes place.

Space and Capacity

It is not clear if physical co-location is suitable in all settings or if the cohort could be better engaged through location in other community settings. In one setting in particular, a Career Connect adviser felt that they were not offered a suitable space to be able to conduct their jobs effectively. The Career Connect adviser explained how,

'We didn't physically have a desk; we didn't physically have anywhere. We were just, kind of, stuck in the middle of the library, it didn't feel like we belonged anywhere... You couldn't hold a private conversation with anybody, especially young people, and then sometimes there'd be groups of students. It just wasn't ideal.' (Careers Adviser)

The setting manager acknowledged that the location was not ideal but, at the time of writing, a solution had not been found. However, it is clear that for physical co-location to be successful, suitable accommodation needs to be made available. This is supported by Everitt et al (2018) and Westergarrd (2012) who note the necessity for comfort, privacy, and security.

In almost all settings, even those in which co-location is working relatively well, there appears to be insufficient Career Connect capacity. Whilst this is no doubt a funding issue, it was observed by stakeholders and advisers that settings would benefit from increased capacity in order to allow all young people to be reached effectively and helped by advisers. One host organisation team explained that, when they worked with Connexions, the programme was just as effective and there was increased capacity *'so they could see every young person that came through the door which isn't the capacity now'*. They stated that because demand outgrew capacity the adviser had to become *'a bit more selective'* with regards to which young people they helped. This was also a concern for one host organisation as they were aware of the long hours that their co-located adviser was working, with the Stakeholder explaining *'I have to stop [them] working ridiculously long hours...we need more capacity as we grow'*. The issue with capacity however was acknowledged by one stakeholder who explained that,

'if it was an ideal world they could do with more staff, it isn't enough, what they've got isn't enough to serve what we need them to do and because of the budget cuts at the council it got cut more than it should have been cut.' (Stakeholder).

Some stakeholders observed that it is not clear who had responsibility for tracking young people during key transitions, for example when young people have disengaged from school and ought to be referred to Career Connect. While there is evidence that those referrals are taking place, those roles and responsibilities could be clarified across the settings. Similarly, there is some doubt about who is responsible for tracking at post-16 in some settings. One stakeholder observed that there is a need to identify who is responsible for tracking a young person in those months after they leave school.

Whether it is Connect service's responsibility to keep tracking young people right through to perhaps the March of the year after they start [a course] in September to make sure that they are not in any danger of dropping out. Or, if they are going to drop out, they can be moved

swiftly on to something else appropriate for them. Who manages that? Is it the provider that they [Career Connect] commission, is it Connect, or is a shared responsibility, and how do we make that happen? (Stakeholder)

Additionally, some stakeholders thought that impact measures could be improved. For example, it was observed by one stakeholder that there is too much reliance on destination data and not enough longer-term evidence that destinations are appropriate for young people.

'Our destinations were "offers this, offers that". That doesn't mean that what they were offered was suitable. I could offer ten jobs today that might not be suitable, they might say no to. But I might have done well in terms of my targets there, but I've not actually really achieved anything. It needs to be looked at. I think they continue to be monitored on the number of destinations rather than the actual outcome'. (Stakeholder)

However, it is not always clear whose role it is to collect such data. This could be clarified in order to implement monitoring and evaluation processes and tools that adequately assess the impact of the co-location model.

Conclusion

The overall purpose of the evaluation was:

1. To evaluate the impact of the co-location model in achieving the aims set out in the research brief and improving the outcomes for young people at risk of becoming classed as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
2. To explore the impact of the co-location model in Youth Justice and the Care Leavers Service which aimed to improve the numbers of young people moving into a secure Education, Employment or Training (EET) destination (Career Connect).

With regards to evaluating the impact of the co-location model, the aims of co-locating staff in settings in which there are cohorts of NEET or potentially NEET young people which are outlined at the beginning of the report have good consistency with the characteristics of co-location outlined in the brief literature review. They show, for example, that there was an intention from the beginning to reduce barriers to participation, to innovate, to work more effectively, and to integrate services by developing a more coordinated approach to delivery. This evaluation has found that the co-location model has started to achieve these aims but is more effective in some settings than others for a number of reasons including but not limited to communication and understanding of roles and responsibilities. Nonetheless, participants in the evaluation have given evidence to suggest that barriers to participation are being reduced, young people have found the Career Connect advisers helpful and encouraging, and there is, without a doubt, a better feeling of co-ordination in some settings compared to the previous advice services which the contract replaced.

With regard to exploring the impact of the co-location model in Youth Justice and the Leaving Care Service, the evaluation found that improvements could be made as to how the model is currently implemented within those settings. It is noted that, in both settings, a new adviser was recruited during the Covid-19 pandemic and it is not entirely clear if this has adversely affected the potential for successful implementation. For example, in Youth Justice it was not known if the adviser would be physically co-located once conditions allowed or if they would continue to work remotely. In the Leaving Care Service, there was not a fully shared understanding of the adviser's approach, roles, and responsibilities. In both cases, our recommendations for better integration and improved understanding of roles and responsibilities are particularly apt and should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Overall, the co-location model being used by Manchester City Council and Career Connect appears to be having a positive impact to the extent that relationships have been developed and there are systems in place to help young people. Something that improvements are often dependent upon however is funding to both continue and to expand projects. The evaluation data found that both Manchester City Council and host settings are aware of the capacity issue of Career Connect and to work more effectively more staff are needed, something that is not viable without the financial input. However, one of the aims of co-location is to build capacity in the teams of staff employed by the co-located settings. One way of improving capacity is to work smarter. This could be achieved by improving data and ensuring that Career Connect and host organisation data systems are more closely shared. There is precedence for this within EHCP and MCC and the learning from there should be disseminated across all settings.

Currently it is difficult to concretely say that the co-location model is having its desired impact, this could be down to both Covid-19 and that the model has yet to be adequately integrated. However, this does not mean to suggest that the model is not working, with a smarter and more cohesive approach to the model, as proposed in the recommendations, the co-location of Career Connect staff in settings across Manchester could be impactful for all involved.

Recommendations

The overall perception from the evaluation research is that the co-location model has been well received by Career Connect advisers, most host settings, and young people. There is anecdotal evidence that the partnership is working or, if it not working so well, that might be a result of operating under restrictions imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the model does seem to be working in some locations better than others as has been seen in the discussion above. Through the evaluation and analysis of the data, we have identified several areas where improvements could be made to the co-location model

and, if the recommendations are taken on board, they should help ensure the continuation of the co-location model in a more effective form.

It is important to acknowledge the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the young people, the advisers and the host organisations. The pandemic has affected the co-location model in numerous ways which has meant that in-person advice sessions have not always been able to take place, and this needs to be taken into account. Hopefully, in the coming weeks there will be a return to pre-Covid working conditions, or to something resembling them, which will enable advisers and young people to engage together in a face-to-face format.

The production of this report, at a time when Covid-related restrictions might be ending, is an opportunity for stakeholders to review the co-location model in light of the evaluation and tackle issues where there are opportunities for improvement.

➤ **Stakeholders should work to integrate Career Connect advisers as closely as possible within all host settings**

Co-location works better in settings in which co-located Career Connect staff are more closely integrated into host settings. Whilst it did appear that, where integration is not so strong, it could have been exacerbated in settings where a new adviser was recruited during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is evidence that there could also be structural barriers to overcome. A first step to closer integration should involve reviewing Service Level Agreements to ensure that roles and responsibilities are fully agreed between key stakeholders, i.e., relevant managers/heads of department at MCC, Career Connect, and within host organisations

➤ **Understanding of roles and responsibilities**

There should be continuous work to disseminate knowledge about co-located roles and responsibilities within host settings to ensure, for example, that any new host staff understand what co-located advisers can offer them and their cohort. This can be achieved during monthly meetings where intelligence could be shared (both within and across host organisations), but also through the implementation of CPD sessions from Career Connect advisers to staff within host settings to ensure that there is a shared understanding of what each other's roles are and how they can work together to share knowledge and resources. More specifically, by enhancing the mutual understanding of roles between setting staff and Career Connect advisers, it would be beneficial to the model and could serve as a model for capacity building. Similarly, across the host settings, there needs to be more clarity about how the model will be implemented in the mid-to-longer term. Again, this could be outlined and reviewed in the Service Level Agreements.

➤ **Clarity and improvement in sharing of data**

Some stakeholders observed that it is not clear who had responsibility for tracking young people during key transitions, for example when young people have disengaged

from school and ought therefore to be referred to Career Connect. While there is evidence that those referrals are taking place, those roles and responsibilities should be clarified. Some stakeholders thought that impact measures could be improved. For example, it was thought that there is too much reliance on destination data and not enough longer-term evidence that destinations are appropriate for young people. However, it is not clear whose role it is to collect such data. This should be clarified in order to fully assess the impact of the co-location model. The Year One Performance data provided during this evaluation compared numbers within certain categories (such as NEET, EET or Unknown) but not rates. **It is therefore further recommended that the percentages of young people in those categories are included in performance and other data** and that comparisons are made with rates for England, and possibly, at least one comparator city. This would give a better indication of the reach of the colocation model and its impact over the years.

➤ **Place and space**

Within some host organisations, space to host the Career Connect advisers was limited. Particularly in the case of locality teams, a review should be undertaken to assess if co-location within the setting is appropriate. If so, then suitable accommodation should be found for advisers and young people to meet. If not, then appropriate community locations should be identified and utilised.

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