

Evaluation of the St Stephen's Enterprise Project

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Work to establish the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project began in May 2000 and it became operational in 2004. The Project is based within a state-of-the-art technology centre within a previously disused wing of St Stephen's High School in Port Glasgow. A key part of the learning experience is the provision of extensive ICT facilities in the Centre which is seen as being an important resource for secondary pupils and their wider community. The main aims of the Project are to:

- Promote, stimulate and enable lifelong learning and employability in the community of Port Glasgow through the development of a community-based facility that encourages self-directed learning, appropriate learning behaviours, team-working and core skills, while utilising ICT as a learning medium.
- Enhance the employability and motivation of all pupils with a particular focus on disaffected secondary pupils, and encourage a 'can do' attitude.
- Offer a 'virtual work experience' programme to all S2 pupils in St Stephen's and Port Glasgow High Schools.
- Improve the administration of education for work/enterprise activity in order to increase engagement with the local business community.

From the planning stage onwards the management of the Centre has actively sought to involve local community partners, including business, to develop and support wider learning opportunities. Businesses are also encouraged to use the resources and facilities at the Centre.

The Centre has received funding from the Scottish Executive's Future Learning and Teaching (FLaT) programme. Other funding has included significant financial and in-kind contributions from the EU, the local enterprise networks and the business community, including National Semiconductor, T-Mobile and IBM, making the Centre a partnership between the public and private sectors, led by Inverclyde Council.

The external evaluation

In October 2004, under the Framework Agreement (ref QLC/2/5/41) between the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) and Professor J. E. Wilkinson of the Faculty of Education in the University of Glasgow, the SEED commissioned an external evaluation of the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project. The evaluation was conducted by a team from the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Centre and the Department of Educational Studies.

The main aim of the study was to provide an independent external evaluation that focused on key outcomes of the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre. The specific evaluation objectives were to assess:

- The extent to which the Centre has promoted and stimulated lifelong learning and employability in the wider community of Port Glasgow, particularly concerning targeted groups who are traditionally difficult to attract into learning and training.
- The extent to which the Centre has developed a flexible and tailored curriculum that caters for the needs of all learners.
- The impact of the Centre on participating secondary pupils, including:
 - The specific impact of the *Virtual Work Experience* (VWE) course on pupils in relation to their application and attainment when they return to mainstream education
 - The impact of the Centre on disaffected pupils. This includes any improvement concerning their achievement, attendance, employability and motivation to learn.
- The extent to which the St Stephen's and Port Glasgow High Schools and the Enterprise Centre have worked together to develop relevant school development plans.

To address these aims, a range of quantitative and qualitative methods were seen as appropriate. The overarching research design for the project was based upon three overlapping stages with a final fourth stage, involving a synthesis and analysis of collected data and information.

Stage 1: Preparatory phase

The first stage entailed:

- Refining the research design with the SEED and the Research Advisory Group, and holding initial meetings with project management at the Enterprise Centre and other key informants to gather contextual information and further details necessary to inform the design of methods used in subsequent stages.
- Establishing an electronic forum for stakeholders accessed via the SCRE Centre website to allow them to contribute additional information and to provide feedback.

Stage 2: Assessing the nature of provision and participation

The second stage provided an assessment of the courses at the Centre, of underlying planning, and of patterns in the participation figures to date. To do this, the research involved:

- Face-to-face and telephone interviews to gather information from key informants involved with the management and administration of the Project and the delivery of the courses. Relevant individuals in the local

community, partner organisations and businesses were also interviewed to obtain information on the development and planning of the Project.

- Examination of documentary information held at the Centre to establish: the nature and scope of participation and the nature of the curriculum (including bespoke courses available through the project, the use of ICT and the range of learning and teaching approaches).

Stage 3: Assessing the impact of the Project

The third stage focussed on the impact of the Project to date and involved:

- Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, including participating pupils from St Stephen's and Port Glasgow schools, teachers from both schools and representatives from local businesses and relevant agencies in the community.
- Collation and analysis of pre- and post-course questionnaires, administered by staff at the Centre
- A brief follow-up survey of participants from both St Stephen's and Port Glasgow schools. This questionnaire was administered by researchers approximately six months after pupils had taken part in the VWE course.
- Telephone interviews with a sample of parents of participating pupils from St Stephen's and Port Glasgow schools. The researchers had wanted to conduct 50 telephone interviews with parents of pupils who had participated in the VWE (half from St Stephen's school and half from Port Glasgow). The final number of interviews was just under half this total. However, the fact that the information emerging from all interviews was revealing similar patterns and perspectives regardless of the school at which their child attended meant that further parental interviews would have provided limited additional insights.

Stage 4: Analysis and reporting

The fourth stage involved final synthesis, analysis and reporting of the information from Stages 1, 2 and 3 to address the main research objectives set out in the specification and associated research questions. The original research objectives and questions set out in the Research Specification provided the overall framework for the analysis.

Summary of key findings

The main findings to emerge from the study are presented below and are arranged using the main research objectives.

A shared vision of aims and purposes

- Stakeholders generally see the aims and purposes of the Centre and VWE programme as developing relevant core skills in participating pupils and adults, to promote their life chances and employability, and to foster positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and work across the community.

- A strong theme to emerge was that these aims, particularly those concerning promoting employability and attitudes to learning and in the wider community, were ambitious and would require time and sustained effort to address.

Providing an appropriate and relevant curriculum

- Overall, the content of programmes offered by the Centre was seen as appropriate to meet the aims of the Project. The VWE programme is seen as particularly well designed to engage with disaffected pupils and those who struggle with traditional lessons.
- Pupils greatly valued the opportunity to work in a 'business-like' environment, and the fact that they were treated like young adults with high levels of autonomy.
- The Centre is seen as a unique environment with contemporary surroundings and high quality ICT resources. This motivates pupils and facilitates their access to learning approaches currently unavailable in many of their lessons.
- Interviewees highlighted the relevance of programmes for many adults, with reference to the high levels of participation in those courses offered. However, some interviewees suggested that the Centre should continue to monitor whether popular computer courses such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) were suitable for those people in the community who were traditionally difficult to attract.

The impact of the Project

a) Impact of the Virtual Work Experience (VWE) course on pupils

- Since the beginning of the VWE programme at the Centre, 608 pupils have participated in the VWE course (209 from Port Glasgow High School and 399 from St Stephen's High School). This figure includes 20 St Stephens' pupils who participated in the pilot version of the VWE course in 2003.
- Overall, the VWE was seen as having a positive impact, at least in the short-term, on pupil participants, including those identified as disaffected with school.
- Initial positive outcomes for pupils were seen as increased communication skills, self-confidence, team working abilities and specific ICT skills.
- The majority of pupils who were seen as having problematic behaviours were more motivated to study and work on tasks. However, some interviewees reported that often these pupils' behaviour patterns re-emerged soon after returning to their normal lessons in school.

b) Impact of the courses on adult participants

- Initial analysis of the Centre's participation data reveals that between the start of operations at the Centre and November 2005, 229 adults have

participated in courses. One hundred and eighty-one (181: 79%) of these registered learners were female.

Data available from the Centre on types of participant further reveals that:

- The largest group of registered learners (37%) is in the 31–45 age bracket; and the second largest group is the 46–60 age range, with 26% of the total. 10% of all course participants are aged over 61.
 - 25% of registered learners are aged 16–30, and within this group, those aged 16–20 represent 10% of all participants.
 - 53% of registered learners are in employment.
 - 9% of learners are students, mainly between the ages of 16 and 20.
 - 7% of learners are disabled.
 - The Centre combines retired and unemployed participants into a single category, and these made up 31% of learners. There was no available gender or age breakdown for this category.
- Adult participants reported an initial positive impact concerning their computing skills, self-confidence, ability to help others learn and opportunities for further learning and employment. It must be stressed, however, that only a small proportion of those involved in the focus groups were participating for vocational reasons.

Promoting lifelong learning and employability in the wider community

- There was consensus that because the Project has been operating for a relatively short time it was unrealistic at this stage to expect a notable impact on promoting lifelong learning and employability in the wider community. Nevertheless, there was consensus across stakeholders that the Centre was largely developing in line with its main objectives and had the potential to make a substantial and positive impact if longer-term support was available.

The above participation figures for adults indicate that the Centre faces a challenge in terms of attracting male participants to do courses. This is particularly so for the 16–30 age group, one of the target groups, where only 3% of participants were males. Such challenges were recognised by the management at the Centre, partner organisations and participating adults. There was consensus that the Centre was not fully engaging with local adults who could benefit most from the courses on offer, ie those who traditionally do not participate in learning and training such as disaffected males who were long-term unemployed with few or no qualifications.

- Qualitative information gathered from adult participants and partner organisations working in the community highlighted that, for adults in the target groups, a lack of self-confidence was an important barrier to returning to learning. Providers also highlighted “territorial/geographical issues”

which meant people were reticent about travelling outwith their neighbourhoods to access services and facilities.

- Suggestions from stakeholders, including those adults who had participated in courses at the Centre, for promoting greater participation among target groups included the following:
 - Using more outreach work and targeted marketing would help encourage those who lacked confidence to participate or approach an education provider. Word of mouth was seen as one of the best ways to promote interest in the Centre among local adults. Interviewees believed that this was how most of the adult participants had become aware of the Centre and courses. Adults also suggested that encouraging whole peer groups to participate would address the self-confidence and peer pressure factors that often acted as barriers to participation.
 - Any impact on promoting positive attitudes to employment and learning among target groups would have to take into account local culture, including challenging the views of some who see no utility in education or lacked the confidence to participate in learning, training and employment. Again this process would take time and require sustained and appropriate provision.
 - Education, guidance and other relevant partners should continue to combine their efforts and resources to focus on particular groups to offer advice on accessing training/education and/or employment. (Examples were given of the local Job Centre and Careers Scotland services increasingly working with the Centre to target particular groups and develop targeted programmes.)
 - Setting aside part of one day per week as a drop-in time at the Centre for people to discuss returning to study or employment with relevant agencies.
 - Some interviewees suggested that more marketing of the Centre was required. Adult participants and business partners, in particular, stressed that they had seen little active marketing and advertising of the Centre and courses.
 - Providers suggested that greater use of the Centre by pupils outwith the *Virtual Work Experience* programme could be encouraged by teachers in the two High Schools.
 - Parents of pupils at the two schools were also seen as potential participants and a Communications Strategy group was being established as part of local *Determined to Succeed* initiatives, with the aim of targeting parents. The two High Schools were seen as playing a key role in encouraging parents to use the Centre.

Developing a flexible and tailored curriculum

- Some interviewees from partner businesses stated that they had limited knowledge of the precise curriculum and methods adopted across the

courses. Teachers, course providers and others from partner organisations were better placed to assess the curriculum and methods used in the courses. There was consensus across these stakeholders that the range and nature of the courses were appropriate for all learners. Importantly, participating pupils and adults also concurred, highlighting the varied and stimulating course content and methods of delivery.

- The Senior Management Team members at both High Schools believed that the VWE course addressed most of the National Priorities for Education and articulated well with curriculum areas. The course and other opportunities provided via the Centre were also seen as relating to initiatives on citizenship and enterprise. Teachers generally believed that the programme was designed to suit the needs of all pupils, commented on the excellent environment of the Centre, and stressed how much the pupils enjoyed using it.
- Most stakeholders, including participating adults, saw the courses offered by the Centre as relevant for many local adults and highlighted the high levels of participation in those courses offered. However, some interviewees, including providers at the Centre suggested that the Centre should continue to monitor whether popular computer courses such as the ECDL were suitable for those people in the community who were traditionally difficult to attract.

Partnership working

- There was consensus that the varied range of partners involved with the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project had worked well together from the inception and planning stage through to supporting the operation of the Centre.
- Some professional stakeholders reported that there was room for further development in terms of the amount of partnership and levels of collaboration between the Centre and the two High Schools. Teachers and providers reported that teachers and their pupils at the two High Schools could make greater use of the Centre. Some departments were said to make more use than others of the facilities and services at the Centre to enhance their lessons (ie English, Art, Modern Languages).
- The already well-established partnerships and networks involving public and private organisations in the Port Glasgow area were seen as an important factor in supporting the Centre.
- Most of the representatives of supporting partner organisations and businesses cited the work and commitment of the Centre's manager and his staff as being pivotal in sustaining these partnerships and in the efficient running of the Centre.

Issues and recommendations

The findings raise particular issues for innovative programmes and centres that address aims pertinent to the *Determined to Succeed* initiative and, indeed, the wider *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Promoting greater participation among target groups in the wider community

The Centre's own participation data indicated that certain computer-based courses are very popular with local adults and even oversubscribed. This data also reveals, however, that there are issues concerning attracting males of all ages to do courses. A strong theme in the interviews with providers and adult participants was that a culture of apathy and/or low self-confidence exists across a 'core' of people in the community. This meant that such people rarely sought out education and training or even employment.

Recommendations

- Providers at the Centre and partners in the local authority, support services and business should continue to explore measures that aim to promote the participation of target groups in the local community. Recent developments in interagency partnership working have seen the implementation of collaborative projects that could impact on target groups. Careful monitoring of the impact of these projects, including highlighting effective practice (eg the approaches and projects that work best to encourage participation and effective outcomes for adults), would be extremely valuable and should be incorporated into the design of the projects.
- Providers should take cognisance of the views of adults who currently participate and use these to inform measures to attract others. The evaluation found that adult learners at the Centre possessed useful insights concerning why their peers did not participate and provided sophisticated suggestions concerning possible strategies to address non-participation. For example, greater use of outreach approaches and working with adult peer groups to encourage participation could be considered.

Encouraging Port Glasgow High School pupils to use the Centre in their own time

The Centre encourages pupils to use facilities after school hours. However, the Centre's capacity to provide pupils with access after school at any one time is limited to relatively small numbers (approximately 12 pupils).

While some pupils have used the Centre after school, a theme arising from focus groups and the VWE participant survey findings indicate that Port Glasgow High School pupils were more likely than those from St Stephen's to be reticent about using the Centre in their own time. Some Port Glasgow High School pupils saw the Centre as a resource for St Stephen's High School only. Others believed that pupils at their neighbouring school would not welcome them dropping in to use the facilities during lunchtime or after school. This theme also emerged in two of the parental interviews.

Promotion of the Centre within Port Glasgow High School is ongoing with leaflets to all senior pupils encouraging them to use the Centre to assist them with employability issues. Staff and pupils are encouraged to consider computing courses between the hours of 3.30 and 8.30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Previously, both the Careers Adviser and the Principal Teacher for Enterprise within Port Glasgow High School have also booked time at the Centre, to provide Port Glasgow High School pupils with career planning lessons and assistance with PowerPoint presentations.

Recommendations

- While Port Glasgow High School and staff at the Centre are clearly working to promote pupil access and use of the facilities, the views of some Port Glasgow High School pupils highlight that such measures need to continue. Particular effort is required to address pupil perceptions about the Centre as a resource for their use.
- To address those attitudes and perceptions that can act as barriers to participation, staff at the two High Schools and the Centre could look at ways to challenge the views of some pupils concerning the ‘ownership’ of the Centre. Some form of organised access, possibly facilitated by staff at the Centre or teachers, might promote participation by Port Glasgow pupils, or using pupil facilitators or ‘buddies’ from St Stephen’s High School to accompany peers from their neighbouring school while they attend the Centre. In time, it would be hoped that such strategies would not be needed and pupils from both High Schools would use the Centre without inhibition.

Meeting the long term objectives of the Centre

The majority of those involved with Centre believed that it was having a positive impact on those pupils who participated in the VWE programme and on the adults who were attending courses. Those interviewed, however, stated that to address the longer-term aims of the Centre, such as promoting employability and attitudes towards learning and work across the community, would require many years of sustained work.

Recommendations

- If the Centre is to meet those objectives that focus on promoting lifelong learning and employability among the local community, then adequate long-term funding will be required to maintain appropriate programmes and necessary staffing.
- The Centre will require systematic and appropriate monitoring of provision and impact and continued partnership working to make efficient use of resources, services and provider skills.
- The Centre should continue to develop partnerships with other providers and services that play a key role in developing programmes to address lifelong learning and employability for key groups in the community.

- Follow-up courses for pupils, possibly variations on the VWE programme, could be provided every two years to ensure that improvements to pupils' self-esteem, team-working, communication and ICT skills were not lost.
- Teachers could look at ways to use the centre to enhance their lessons and curriculum and consider ways of promoting greater access to the Centre by pupils during school hours.

Maintaining positive outcomes for disaffected pupils

A strong theme to emerge from the findings was that those pupils seen by teachers as disaffected with school had largely engaged with the VWE programme, with reported improvements to their core skills and, initially, their behaviour. However, stakeholders were not sure how permanent such changes were. For example, the initial benefits for disaffected pupils, who were often frustrated by 'traditional teaching approaches' and resources, were lost when they went back to lessons in school.

Recommendation

- It is suggested that teachers at the two High Schools could consider ways of incorporating aspects of those learning and teaching styles and resources that disaffected pupils have found particularly enjoyable and productive in other areas of the curriculum. Making school lessons more like the approaches used in the VWE presents certain challenges and might require greater resources, but all pupils, not just those disaffected with school, reported positive outcomes and high levels of engagement. Such goals are also in line with the aims of the *Determined to Succeed* initiative and the *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Promoting links between the VWE course and the schools' curriculum and methods

Senior management in both High Schools stated that, where appropriate, they were looking at how the school curriculum could relate more closely to the content of courses at the Centre. In some departments (for example, English and Art) teachers in St Stephen's High School were beginning to place a greater emphasis on resources such as ICT.

Recommendation

- More teachers should be encouraged and supported to become familiar with the pedagogical arrangements at the Centre. This could be facilitated through discussions between teachers and the Centre staff to ensure more continuity between Centre and school approaches to learning.
- Again, related to reinforcing positive outcomes from the VWE, teachers at the two High Schools and the staff at the Centre should, where appropriate, continue to explore ways to articulate the content of the VWE and any similar courses with the wider school curriculum.

The role of key personnel in the success of the Centre

Almost all of the partner organisations and school managers highlighted the role of the Manager and staff at the Centre in the efficient set up and running of the Centre. Furthermore, they stated that the initially positive outcomes observed for pupils such as increased motivation and communication skills were largely attributable to the learning and teaching styles and approaches of the Manager and his staff. This raises two issues: firstly, other centres and initiatives, particularly those that target disaffected pupils might benefit from sharing practice and ideas with the Centre; secondly, these key personnel appear to be playing a very important role in the success of the Centre, and, therefore, a key question is, to what extent would the Centre be successful if these personnel moved on?

Recommendation

- The historical factors and circumstances that have led to the setting up of the Centre, and the mix of staff who have developed it to date, may be unique. However, given its initial success, it seems likely that the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre provides a good model for wider adoption in similar social and economic contexts. It is recommended that similar centres be developed with the caveat that sustained funding is required if the principal objective of such centres is to work with others to promote employability and lifelong learning. Careful selection of managers and presenters will also be required to ensure appropriate and effective pedagogical approaches are used.

Addressing parents' awareness and involvement

The very low level of parents' awareness of the VWE course, demonstrated during the telephone survey of parents and in pupils' accounts, suggests that an opportunity was lost for promoting the image of the Centre and its value among the wider community. Parents limited awareness also meant any positive support parents might have given to pupils concerning the course was reduced.

Recommendation

- Staff at the two High Schools, the Centre and other partner organisations should work to raise parents' awareness of programmes provided by the Centre and other associated services. A range of publicity and dissemination could be considered, including information leaflets sent home with pupils, and making reference to the work of the Centre in general correspondence to parents. Open evenings/days or hosting celebration of achievement awards at the Centre might also be an appropriate way to involve some parents.

Maintaining greater interest and involvement by teachers

Some of the professional stakeholders suggested that greater teacher involvement with the Centre could further increase teachers' awareness of the programme and the facilities at the Centre. This could then help promote greater

use of the Centre by teachers at both High Schools, to enhance their provision and help them to build on the outcomes of the VWE course.

Recommendation

- Teachers are busy and have many demands on their time; however, pupils greatly appreciated the presence of their teachers at the end of course presentations. Pupils also saw teachers dropping into the course as evidence of their interest in what pupils were doing and as an indicator of teachers' value for the course. It is recommended that teachers and staff at the Centre explore ways in which teachers could play a greater role in using the Centre and observing their pupils while they do the VWE.

Long-term objectives require long-term evaluation

The majority of professional stakeholders and adult participants in courses stressed that the aims and objectives of the Centre that concerned promoting lifelong learning and employability among the local community would take years to demonstrate any significant impact. The scale of the challenge and the complex range of factors involved in such a task, therefore, meant that the current evaluation could not adequately measure the impact of the Centre in terms of these criteria.

Recommendation

- As stakeholders have stressed, any meaningful evaluation of the Enterprise Centre's objectives that concern promoting lifelong learning and employability among the local community will require long-term evaluation. Such an evaluation should include on-going monitoring of data on the types of participants in courses at the Centre, and a sufficiently rigorous and in-depth exploration of the benefits for participants and 'distance travelled'. For example, any further research should be able to demonstrate whether those who participate in courses at the Centre benefit in terms of developing more positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and have greater life chances and employment prospects. This would likely involve tracking participants for some time to assess whether their participation had been beneficial, in what ways it has helped them and what factors facilitated or inhibited their using what they had learned on their courses.

1: Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction

In October 2004, under the Framework Agreement (ref QLC/2/5/41) between the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) and Professor J. E. Wilkinson of the Faculty of Education in the University of Glasgow, the SEED commissioned an external evaluation of the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project. The evaluation was conducted by a team from the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Centre and the Department of Educational Studies. This report provides an account of the external evaluation, summarises the main findings to emerge and highlights points for consideration and, where appropriate, makes recommendations. The first chapter provides a context for the report by presenting a brief overview of the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre and details of the evaluation aims and approach.

1.2 The St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project

Work to establish the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project in Port Glasgow began in May 2000 and it has been operational since 2004. It is an example of recent initiatives that focus on enterprise as one way of promoting social inclusion and addressing the needs of a community. The project was established within a bright, modern, state-of-the-art Enterprise Centre within a disused wing of St Stephen's High School. The facility originally aimed to provide all S2 pupils in the school with an opportunity to participate in a wide range of innovative learning experiences, including the *Virtual Work Experience* programme. Although this is a resource for the whole school, it was specifically designed to engage disaffected and underachieving young people. For example, the *Virtual Work Experience* aims to provide a more flexible curriculum tailored to pupils' individual needs to promoting core skills, citizenship and employability. It is also delivered in an alternative learning environment believed to be particularly stimulating and relevant to young people. A key part of the learning experience is the provision of extensive ICT facilities in the Centre. This is also seen as being an important resource for the wider community. The programme is now also provided to S2 pupils at the nearby Port Glasgow High School.

While the focus of the *Virtual Work Experience* programme is on school pupils, the Centre is designed to provide courses and resources relevant for the whole community. For example, the Centre is intended to help parents and other members of the community with their own learning and development, as well as in support of their children's learning by 'providing a state of the art learning environment which will inspire them to re-engage in learning'.

From the outset the management of the Centre has actively sought to involve local community partners, including businesses, to develop and support learning opportunities for the local community. To this end, a wide range of stakeholders, including local businesses, have been working in partnership with

the school to develop strategies that will interest target groups. Businesses are also encouraged to use the resources and facilities at the Centre.

1.2.1 The aims of the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project

The main aims of the Project are seen as being to:

- Promote, stimulate and enable lifelong learning in the community of Port Glasgow through the development of a community facility that encourages self-directed learning, appropriate learning behaviours, team-working and core skills, while utilising ICT as a learning medium.
- Enhance the employability and motivation of all pupils, with a particular focus on disaffected secondary pupils, by improving their capacity to take advantage of opportunities in the labour market and business, through education for work and enterprise experiences and tailored careers guidance.
- Offer a 'virtual work experience' opportunity to all pupils, in their second year (S2) of secondary schooling. The links developed with local businesses will give pupils more of an insight into how business operates.
- Work with a group of disaffected pupils who, as well as being involved in the virtual work experience, will follow a flexible curriculum that will allow more opportunity for access to more appropriate learning experiences and encourage a 'can do' attitude.
- Improve the administration of education for work/enterprise activity in order to increase the engagement with the local business community.

Based on these aims, it was hoped that the Centre could achieve the following outcomes:

- An increase in achievement/reduction in underachievement.
- Positive behavioural changes in pupil participants.
- More adoption of learning technologies by participants.
- An increase the number of entrepreneurial programmes within the school.
- Development of a tailored curriculum for targeted groups.
- Greater engagement by the community.
- More business involvement in the education process.
- Making adults and young people more employable via core skill development work.
- Promoting greater commitment to lifelong learning in the school and wider community.
- Improved local administration of education for work and enterprise.
- Stimulating more opportunities and greater capacity for experiential learning.
- Young people will have a better understanding of the world of work and their place in it.

The relevance of the above aims and objectives is clear when certain contextual indicators are taken into account. For example, the destinations of St Stephen's and Port Glasgow pupils leaving school in 2003/04 highlight that those going into employment are below the average for Scotland. Destinations of St Stephen's pupils also highlight proportionately lower percentages going on to full-time higher education, compared to those in Port Glasgow High School and Inverclyde and Scotland (See Table 1.1)

Table 1.1: Destinations of pupils leaving school in 2003/04

Destination	St Stephen's HS*	Port Glasgow HS**	Inverclyde	Scotland
Full-time Higher Education	16%	34%	28%	29%
Full-time Further Education	21%	***	22%	21%
Training	16%	16%	12%	5%
Employment	***	16%	16%	25%
Other known	34%	19%	19%	16%
Not Known	***	***	2%	4%

* 15% unaccounted for

** 13% unaccounted for

*** percentages based on data for more than 0 but fewer than 5 pupils

A further indicator of local need, highlighting the relevance of the Centre, is the percentage of pupils at the two schools achieving one or more awards at Higher or better (Table 1.2) and three or more awards at Higher or better (Table 1.3) are below the average for Inverclyde and Scotland.

Table 1.2: Percentage of pupils achieving one or more awards at Higher or better

One or more awards Higher or better by end of S5	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
St Stephen's High School	24%	30%	30%
Port Glasgow High School	30%	30%	22%
Inverclyde	36%	41%	35%
Scotland	39%	39%	39%

Table 1.3: Percentage of pupils achieving three or more awards at Higher or better

Three or more awards Higher or better by end of S5	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
St Stephen's High School	9%	12%	13%
Port Glasgow High School	11%	14%	10%
Inverclyde	20%	23%	20%
Scotland	23%	23%	23%

1.2.2 The Virtual Work Experience programme

The *Virtual Work Experience* (VWE) programme is delivered over a four day period by a presenter, rather than a teacher. The presenter is also supported by other staff from the Centre when necessary. During the evaluation, the VWE content and approach was as follows:

Tuesday

Pupils are given a challenge involving team work and problem solving. They are asked questions such as: What does success mean to you? Where do you want to be in 10 years time? They are given an introduction to the Centre and brainstorming sessions designed to motivate. The group is then divided into two teams of approximately eight to ten pupils and given a topic to research and a PowerPoint presentation to prepare. Previous topics have included 'Regenerating Port Glasgow' and preparing a Newsletter.

Wednesday

Using a business model for assessing situations, the groups use the Internet and other sources to generate ideas for their presentation. They begin planning their project and allocating tasks to team members. Pupils are given training in PowerPoint software and how to give a 15-minute slide presentation. They are encouraged to work in small teams, as they might in an employment situation. The staff at the Centre are on hand to help with technical and other issues that might arise.

Thursday

The teams work to complete their project and begin work on their presentations. Pupils develop their presentation skills and practise with microphones and prepare their presentation on a laptop computer.

Friday

In the morning, the teams do a mock run and make any improvements. In the afternoon the teams give their presentation, typically to the headteacher, senior staff and Centre staff. All pupil team members have to take part, talking to at least one presentation slide. Those teachers present can then ask questions of the pupils about their projects. Finally, pupils finish the skills planner that they have been maintaining during the week and the course ends with fun activities.

1.2.3 FLaT involvement

The Centre has received funding from the Scottish Executive's Future Learning and Teaching (FLaT) programme.

The FLaT programme aims to support those working in and with schools so that they may develop and pilot new educational ideas, which have the potential to impact on the future shape of education in Scottish schools. These projects also articulate with wider policy developments such as the promotion of skills in Scotland and the development of the Scottish economy.

FLaT support was initially put towards the cost of building adaptations for the Centre, but has been extended to help develop innovative styles of learning and teaching and strategies that contribute to 'closing the gap in attainment and achievement'.

The FLaT support for the Project is a grant of £160,000 plus evaluation costs, which has been matched by significant financial and in-kind contributions from

the EU, the enterprise networks and the business community including National Semiconductor, T-Mobile and IBM. Overall, the Centre is seen as a partnership between the public and private sectors, led by Inverclyde Council.

1.3 The evaluation

The University of Glasgow evaluation of the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project focused primarily on what the project has achieved so far and how it has impacted on learning and teaching, particularly for disaffected pupils and those at risk of underachieving. It also considered, where appropriate, the impact on the Port Glasgow community.

1.3.1 The aims and objectives of the evaluation

The main objectives of the evaluation are to assess:

- The extent to which the Centre has promoted and stimulated lifelong learning and employability in the wider community of Port Glasgow, particularly concerning targeted groups who are traditionally difficult to attract into learning and training.
- The extent to which the Centre has developed a flexible and tailored curriculum that caters for the needs of all learners.
- The impact of the Centre on participating secondary pupils, including:
 - The specific impact of the *Virtual Work Experience* course on pupils in relation to their application and attainment when they return to mainstream education.
 - The impact of the Centre on disaffected pupils. This includes any improvement concerning their achievement, attendance, employability and motivation to learn.
- The extent to which the St Stephen's and Port Glasgow High Schools and the Enterprise Centre have worked together to develop relevant school development plans.

1.3.2 Methodology

The research team recognised that, at the time of the evaluation, the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre had been operating for a relatively short period of time and any assessment of impact had to take this into consideration. Given the above aims and objectives of the evaluation, a range of quantitative and qualitative methods were seen as appropriate. For example, it was important to elicit the views and experiences of pupils and adults who had participated in courses at the Centre as well as the perceptions of key teachers, relevant business people and local organisations involved with the Centre. Therefore, qualitative methods were seen as particularly suitable, including semi-structured, face-to-face and telephone interviews, focus groups and analysis of relevant documentation.

It was anticipated that parents of pupils who had participated in the initiative would have varied levels of recollection of the Project. Therefore, a structured

survey with fixed response categories would be of limited use; rather, semi-structured telephone interviews with a sample of parents were seen as appropriate.

Quantitative methods were used, however, to obtain a representative overview of levels of satisfaction of all pupils participating in the VWE. Where necessary, the evaluation also drew on relevant documentary information to provide contextual information and further assist the interpretation of data.

The structure and content of all research instruments were informed by the research questions pertinent to each stakeholder group and by the strand of the evaluation. Details of the main methods used to gather the relevant evaluation data and information are provided in Section 1.3.3 below.

1.3.3 Evaluation methods

The overarching research design for the project was based upon three overlapping stages, with a final fourth stage involving a synthesis and analysis of collected data and information. These four stages are detailed below:

Stage 1: Preparatory phase

The first stage entailed refining the research design with the SEED and the Research Advisory Group, initial meetings with project management at the Centre and other key informants, to gather contextual information and further details necessary to inform the design of methods used in subsequent stages. This stage also involved establishing an electronic forum for stakeholders accessed via the SCORE Centre website to allow them to contribute additional information and to provide feedback.

Stage 2: Assessing the nature of provision and participation

The second stage provided an assessment of the courses at the Centre, underlying planning and principles, and patterns in the participation figures to date. To do this the research involved:

- Face-to-face and telephone interviews to gather information from key informants involved with the management and administration of the project and the delivery of the courses. Relevant individuals in the local community, partner organisations and businesses were also interviewed to obtain information on the development and planning of the Project. Towards the end of the evaluation the management and presenters at the Centre were approached again and invited to provide comments on the implementation of courses and participation levels at the Centre.
- Examination of documentary information held at the Centre to establish: the nature and scope of participation and the nature of the curriculum (including bespoke courses available through the project, the use of ICT and the range of learning and teaching approaches).

Stage 3: Assessing the impact of the project

The third stage focussed on the impact of the project to date with information gathered from pupil participants and teachers from Port Glasgow and

St Stephen's, and representatives of local community and businesses. Relevant information to address this stage's objectives was collected using a range of methods including:

- Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, including participating pupils from St Stephen's and Port Glasgow schools, teachers from both schools and representatives from local businesses and relevant agencies in the community.
- Collation and analysis pre- and post-course questionnaires administered by staff at the Centre.
- A brief follow-up survey of participants from both St Stephen's and Port Glasgow schools. This questionnaire was administered by researchers approximately six months after pupil participants had taken part in the VWE course.
- Telephone interviews with a sample of parents of participating pupils from St Stephen's and Port Glasgow schools. Headteachers were asked for the best way to enlist the co-operation of parents to take part in the evaluation. Each of the schools initially selected a different way to contact parents. In one school, parents were asked if they would give their permission for their contact details to be passed on to the SCRE Centre and a researcher would then conduct the telephone interview. In the other school, invitation letters with reply slips were sent to parents via their children. This latter approach provided very few responses; consequently teachers at this school then directly approached parents.

The researchers had wanted to conduct 50 telephone interviews with parents of pupils who had participated in the VWE (half from St Stephen's school and half from Port Glasgow). Schools provided more names than required to allow for a level of refusals. The final number of interviews was just under half this total: unfortunately, despite the efforts of the school, only a relatively small proportion of St Stephen's parents participated. While there were very few refusals, there was an issue with parents being unavailable or repeatedly postponing interviews over a period of time and eventually falling outwith the evaluation timetable. Sometimes telephone numbers provided by the schools turned out to be unavailable or apparently incorrect. It is possible that the time of year when the interviews were conducted, the school holiday period, also contributed to the difficulties of making contact with the parents. Finally, given the time spent attempting to contact some parents (often several calls were made at different times of the day), further attempts to increase the response rate were abandoned. This decision was informed by the fact that the information emerging from all interviews was revealing similar patterns and perspectives, regardless of the school at which the parent's child attended. The researchers inferred, therefore, that the likelihood, of obtaining new insights from further interviews would be limited. The breakdown of the number of interviews and unsuccessful attempts is provided in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4: Breakdown of parental telephone responses

School	Total identified parents available to telephone	Unavailable/unobtainable	Refusals	Repeatedly postponing interview	Total completed interviews
St Stephen’s	24	2	1	12	9
Port Glasgow	30	9	2	5	14
Total	54	11	3	17	23

Stage 4: Analysis and reporting

The fourth stage involved final synthesis, analysis and reporting of the information from Stages 1, 2 and 3 to address the main research objectives set out in the specification and associated research questions. The original research objectives and questions set out in the Research Specification provided the overall framework for the analysis.

The majority of information from interviews and focus groups was electronically recorded and summarised. This qualitative information was analysed thematically by respondent group from notes drawing on partial transcriptions for clarification and illustration. Emerging themes for each objective and from each strand were examined and compared to assess ‘links’ and patterns to provide more detailed insights. As these themes emerged they refined the analytical framework. Therefore, the flexible nature of the qualitative analysis allowed any unforeseen, yet salient themes, to be identified and incorporated into the findings.

All quantitative data collected directly by the researchers was analysed using a standard statistical analysis package (SPSS) and secondary analysis was conducted on data provided by the Centre. The latter consisted of participation figures for all courses and pre- and post-programme data collected from pupils to assess immediate impact and shifts in their views and self-assessment. Usually, data provided by the Centre was analysed using the Excel spreadsheet that had been used to collate it.

2: Evaluation findings: Evidence from course participants

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the main findings to emerge from the evaluation concerning the participants in courses provided at the St Stephen's Centre. These findings are derived from interviews and focus groups conducted with pupils who have participated in the *Virtual Work Experience* (VWE) course and adults who have done the basic computing and ECDL courses at the Centre. The findings include analysis of quantitative data, collected from pupils by the research team and staff at the Centre, concerning pupils' views of the VWE programme. Data held by the Centre on the types of participants has also been analysed. Where appropriate, insights obtained from observations of the *Virtual Work Experience* programme have been included.

The sections relate to the main research questions and objectives of the evaluation pertinent to participants in courses provided at the Centre. This allows common themes to be easily identified across the stakeholder groups as well as highlighting any differences and similarities between the views of these groups.

2.2 *Virtual Work Experience* course participants

The evaluation team conducted twelve pupil focus groups, six groups with pupils from St Stephen's High School and six with pupils from Port Glasgow High School. Almost 100 pupils were involved in the group discussions. The focus groups were conducted some time after the pupils had participated in the VWE programme.

2.2.1 Pupils' views on teaching approaches used in the VWE

Overall, the St Stephen's and Port Glasgow High School pupils believed that the teaching approaches used in the VWE were interesting and enjoyable. Pupils generally found the first day of the programme more demanding and less interesting than the other three days. They explained that the teaching approaches were largely paper based or involved numerous tasks in relatively quick succession. However, some pupils appreciated that these methods were helping to establish an appreciation for the forthcoming tasks and to get them to look at their own motivation and aspiration. Nevertheless, most pupils thought that it would have been better to break up these tasks with other, less intensive and fun ones.

All but one group of pupils interviewed thought that the teaching approaches for the remaining three days of the programme were appropriate and helped them to learn new skills. They appreciated the opportunity to work in small groups which they had organised on the basis of key tasks for their project. Pupils enjoyed being allowed to largely direct their own work, rather than being told what to do. The pupils generally believed that everyone worked well together in their groups and completed their set tasks. They greatly valued the opportunity to access appropriate and high quality resources to meet their objectives. The

hands-on and practical nature of the work set within a deadline was seen as both challenging and stimulating.

Only one evaluation focus group, comprised of Port Glasgow High School pupils, strongly believed that the teaching approach adopted for their programme was overly strict and interventionist. Despite having been told to expect otherwise, they stated that they were treated like children rather than young adults. They also thought that their set theme for the presentation was particularly dull compared to what other classes had done and stressed that it would have been better if they could have selected a topic from a set of options. Nevertheless, they still believed that the programme had value and was, in principle, a better way to learn than a normal lesson.

Pupils' comments on the teaching approaches were often linked to the wider ambience or ethos of the Centre and the programme. For example, pupils valued the businesslike approach of the programme, whereby they could refer to the course providers using Christian names, could go to the toilet whenever necessary without asking for permission and could use any of the facilities within the centre whenever they needed to for their group task. The pupils welcomed this informal atmosphere and the freedom to work independently and felt that they were being treated as adults. One boy remarked that 'nobody misbehaved when you found out that you could do what you wanted'. Indeed, pupils and course presenters frequently highlighted that there was generally good and focused behaviour among pupils during the course, despite the lack of close supervision.

The research team observed one group of Port Glasgow High School pupils and one group from St Stephen's High School while they did the programme. It was clear that while course presenters did not constantly follow the pupils from task to task, they kept watch from a distance and were alert for signs of misbehaviour or difficulty.

The research observations also highlighted that during each part of the programme pupils were on-task and showed high levels of motivation to complete each stage of their set project. For all but two individuals, this held for pupils who had been expected by teachers to be disruptive and/or disinterested in learning.

Overall, the course providers were popular with the pupils. Pupils appreciated being left to get on with the task but had the opportunity to ask for support when necessary. Pupils believed that the course would not have been as successful if a teacher had delivered it. They thought that most of their teachers would have been unable to adopt the informal-yet-firm style of the course providers. This approach had made pupils feel relaxed and enabled them to work more effectively than usual, they believed. Often, pupils referred to the teaching style adopted by Centre presenters and stressed how it contrasted with that used in many of their regular classes; as one pupil stated, 'People listen to you here – teachers just shout at you if you don't understand something'.

Generally, there was agreement among the pupils that 'school should be more like this' and that 'you would learn more if school was like this'. One pupil remarked, 'It was an interesting way to learn, other classes should use some of these methods.'

2.2.2 Pupils' views on the ICT resources

The initial part of the course used an electronic whiteboard to present ideas and challenges to the pupils on Day One. On Day Two the pupils were taken into the 'Pod' room where they were given a short lesson on how to use PowerPoint for their presentations. During the rest of the week the pupils were given full access to the equipment and facilities within the Centre and allowed to work independently on their group tasks and presentations.

The pupils used whiteboards, computers (in the Pod Room and laptops), a digital camera and the PowerPoint computer programme for their group presentations on the final day, which every pupil contributed to. The course was designed in such a way as to minimise the amount of written, paper-based work for pupils.

Pupils' were impressed with the high specification and quality of the technology available, which they generally said was unavailable to them either at home, in school or locally. Some pupils had computers at home and some of these already had experience using PowerPoint. In one group, the girls had previously spent a week at a local company as part of another initiative and had used computer packages there. The research observations indicated that the pupil leading their group often assigned such pupils, ie those with greater experience of using computers, to constructing the PowerPoint presentation. However, the observations also revealed that all pupils were comfortable about accessing the available computers to obtain relevant information from the Internet for their project and assemble their contribution to the presentation.

Pupils saw the technology as enabling them to quickly address their tasks, and even those who had access to computers at home reported that the programme had promoted their skills in using these resources. While pupils made full use of the available technology, they integrated this with use of flip charts, coloured pens and paper sheets. Such materials were useful for brainstorming and planning tasks.

2.2.3 Pupils' perceptions of the impact of the VWE programme

A small number of the pupils involved in the research focus groups had taken part in the pilot version of the VWE programme two years previously and had some difficulty in recalling what impact the VWE had had for them. Others, however, remembered distinct benefits. Most reported developing new skills as a result of their involvement in the programme. These included: PowerPoint skills; improved presentation, communication and team-working skills; and better researching and time management skills. In addition to developing particular skills, many pupils reported an increase in their own confidence and self-esteem, largely from having succeeded in making the end of programme

presentation to peers and teachers. In general, most pupils in the evaluation focus groups believed that the skills and benefits they had acquired from the VWE programme were likely to be long-term; as one pupil stated, 'The skills haven't left us'. In particular, pupils believed that they would still be able to undertake a similar project and presentation if asked at short notice, and that they could deploy the skills gained when they left school and entered employment.

Of these positive outcomes, pupils appeared most surprised at having made new friends and developing their social and team-working skills. This was largely due to the way in which the class was divided into two groups, ie pupils had to work with peers who were not their friends and with whom they would not normally have had much interaction.

The research observations and pupils', teachers' and presenters' accounts revealed that the course also appears to have had direct impact on certain disaffected pupils, at least in the short-term. For example, one boy who hardly ever went to school came in every day for the course and made a valuable contribution to the group task. Other young people seen by teachers as disaffected felt that they were treated more as equals by the Centre staff and had, therefore, responded by being less rebellious. Indeed, one impact of the programme for many pupils was that it had highlighted the contrast between the methods and resources used on the programme and those in 'traditional' schooling; as one pupil said, 'It made us realise how rubbish school was'.

There was some disagreement among the pupils concerning the issue of whether the programme had made an impact on their wider schoolwork. Some were not sure, while others were certain that in subjects such as English, they were now much more confident about speaking in front of the class, and had used PowerPoint skills in their course work in English, French, History, Science, Art and ICT subjects. In the focus groups conducted with pupils at St Stephen's High School, there was evidence that pupils had used the Centre since their VWE programme, for work on English, French and other projects, as well as for general Internet use.

Obtaining a wider view of the VWE programme impact on pupils

In addition to the accounts of pupils obtained from the evaluation focus groups, the researchers were able to draw on pre- and post-programme data collected by the Centre. The Centre routinely gathers such data to monitor pupils' views on the programme and to assess any impact based on particular shifts in terms of pupils' self-reported items.

In addition to this data, the external research team conducted a survey of all 2005 participants in November 2005. This entailed a brief questionnaire that focussed on particular topics not addressed in the pre- and post-programme questionnaires conducted by staff at the Centre. By collecting information from all participants some time after having done the VWE programme, the researchers aimed to check whether pupils' assessment of their outcomes had changed over time.

Analysis of the Centre’s pre- and post-programme data monitoring reveals positive findings overall concerning the immediate impact of the VWE programme. For example, Figures 2.1a and b, below, show a positive shift following the programme in term of St Stephen’s and Port Glasgow pupils’ self-confidence, presentation, communication and team working skills (based on increases in self-reported very good and/or good responses). However, while pupils from St Stephen’s High School show a post-programme increase in their reported problem solving skills, there was no change for those pupils from Port Glasgow High School. It is unclear why this difference exists, particularly when these pupils, like those at St Stephen’s indicate positive outcomes for the other items. It is also somewhat puzzling why the self-reported rating of problem solving skills is generally low for the Port Glasgow pupils.

Figure 2.1a: St Stephen’s High School pupils’ pre- and post-VWE course views

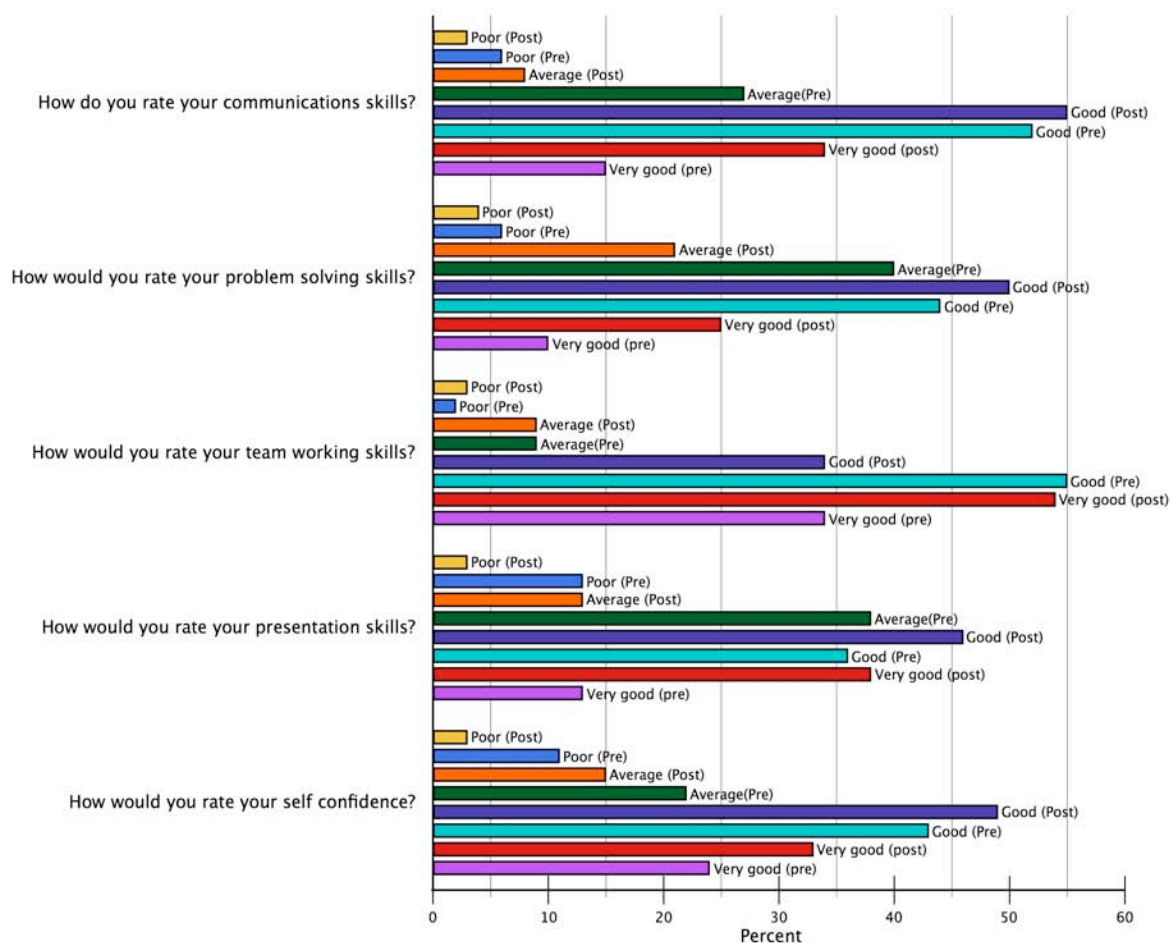
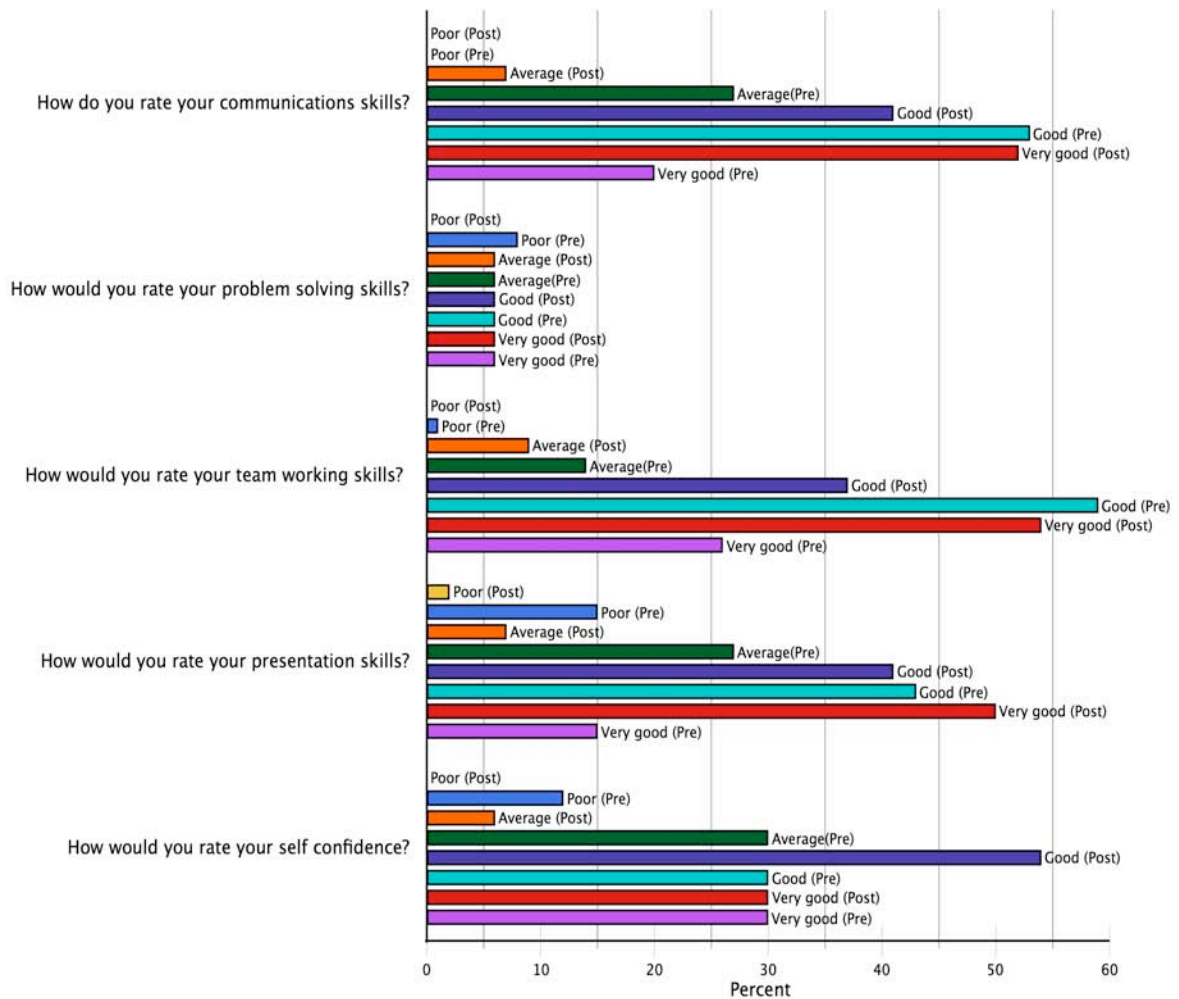


Figure 2.1b: Port Glasgow High School pupils' pre- and post-VWE course views



Figures 2.2a and b below show that pupils across the two schools strongly believe that the programme should be available to all pupils and that their participation has led to them discovering something new about themselves. Importantly, these findings also show a post-programme increase in pupils reported confidence when presenting to groups. The Centre's own data also indicates that participants from both schools have learned more about business concepts such as marketing and learning techniques including brainstorming.

The pre-and post-programme findings also indicate that more pupils reported using the Internet and PowerPoint computer package following the VWE programme. However, following the VWE, fewer pupils at both schools appeared to think that the 'environment where we learn and work is important'. Again, it is difficult to interpret this finding given the positive responses for the other questionnaire items. It is possible that the wording of the question used on the Centre's own questionnaire is ambiguous and unclear for pupils.

Figure 2.2a: St Stephen's High School pupils' pre- and post-VWE course views

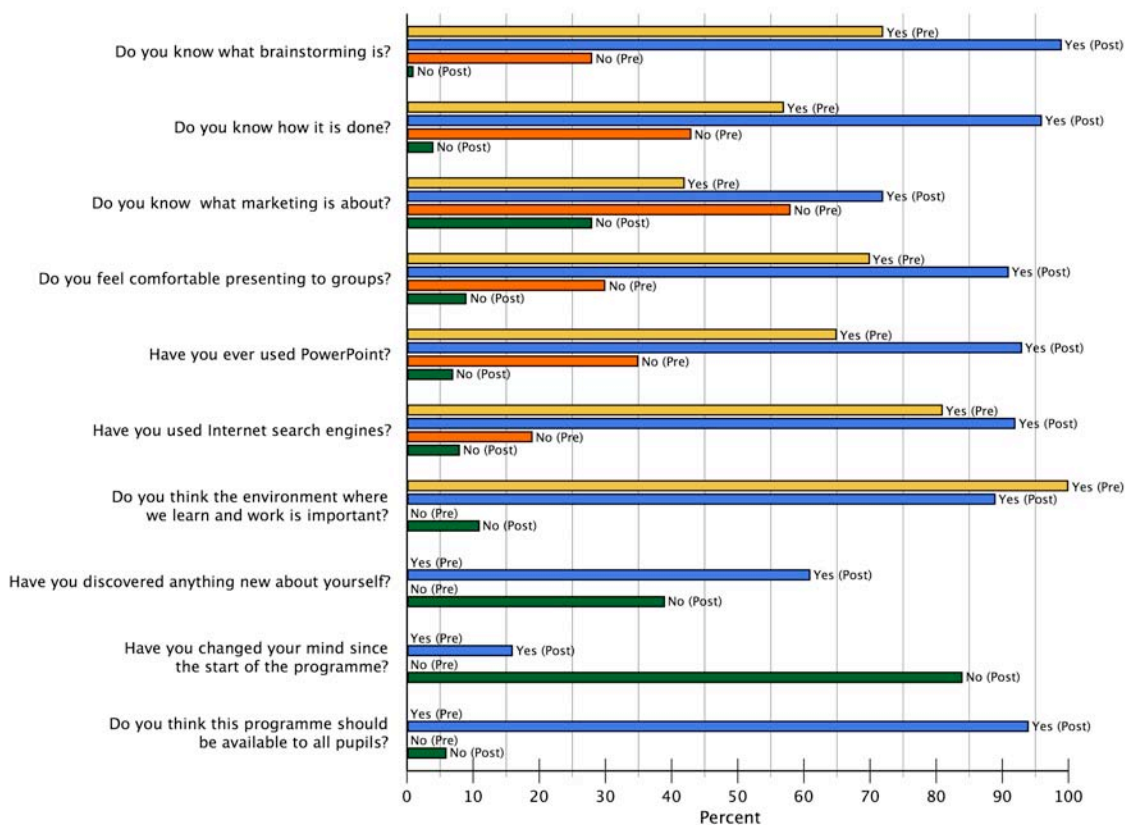
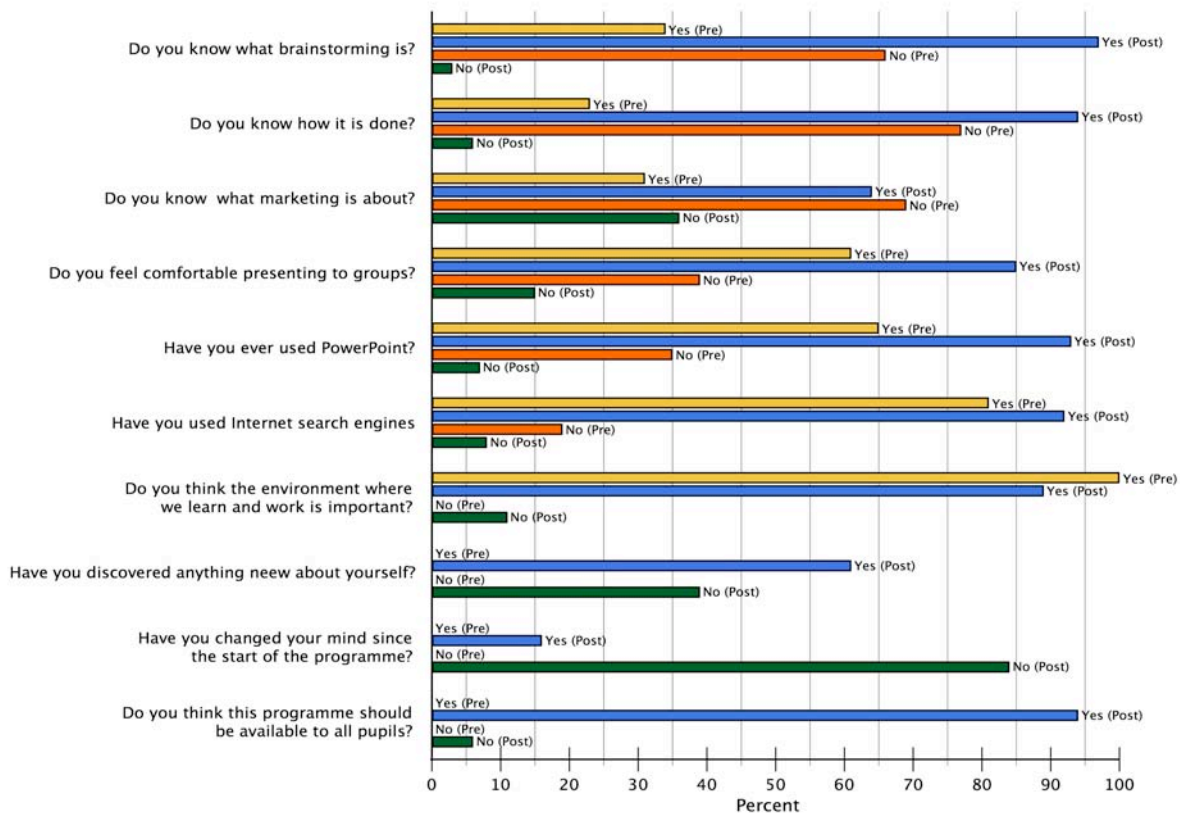


Figure 2.2b: Port Glasgow High School pupils' pre- and post-VWE course views



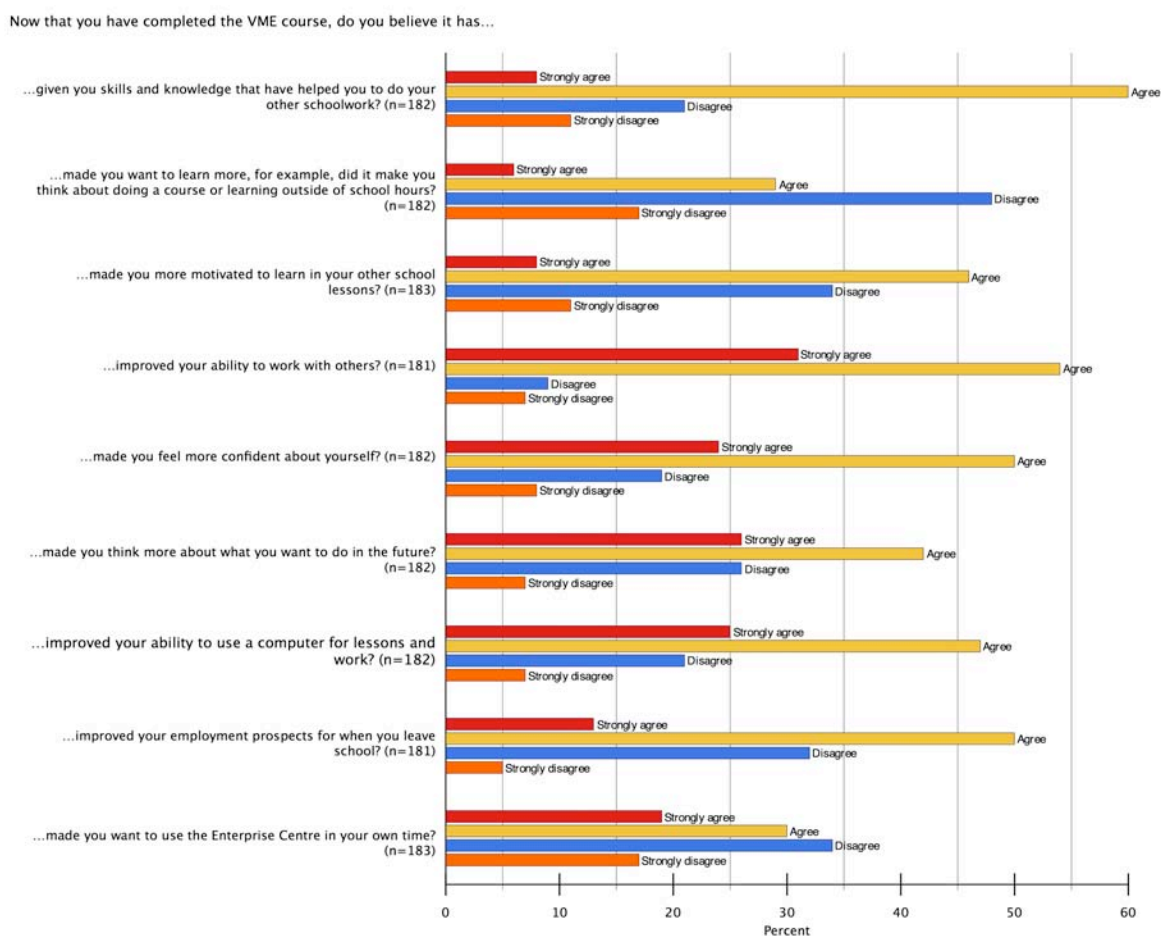
The survey of all VWE participants that was conducted as part of the external evaluation also found that the majority of pupils valued the course and believed it would have a positive impact on them. Unlike the Centre's own evaluation pro forma, the external evaluation survey was conducted eight months after pupils had participated in the VWE course. This meant that pupils had had an opportunity to reflect on the course and this reduced the likelihood of overly positive or enthusiastic responses that can sometimes occur when participants provide their views just after completing a course. The data was analysed using the SPSS package. In addition to assessing the overall impact of the VWE course, the analysis also focused on whether there were any differences in pupils' responses in terms of their school or gender.

A total of 183 pupils responded to the survey (44% from St Stephen's High School and 56% from Port Glasgow High School) which represents almost all of those who participated in the VWE during the period covered by the external evaluation. Fifty-one percent (51%) of respondents were male and 49% were female.

Most of the questions asked pupils to indicate the level of agreement concerning statements about the VWE. They were then asked to provide a summary of the three things they thought the VWE course had done for them, and, finally, they could provide any other comments about the course that they saw as important. Where appropriate, pupils' written comments have been quoted in the following text to illustrate the typical views expressed concerning the impact of the course.

Figure 2.3 provides a summary of pupils' responses to the attitudinal questions.

Figure 2.3: Pupils’ views on the impact of the VWE programme



These findings demonstrate that the majority of pupils (68%) who participated in the VWE course thought that it had improved the academic skills that would help them with their broader schoolwork. Pupils at St Stephen’s High School were more likely than those at Port Glasgow High School to think the course had improved their academic skills (78% compared with 59% respectively). Just over half of the participants’ (55%) believed that the course had made them more motivated to learn in their other lessons. The comments of one male participant were typical of this group: ‘It made me want to work harder at school’.

The majority of respondents (65%) believed that the course would not make them want to learn more outwith school hours. This still means that just over a third of the participants (35%) thought that the VWE course had promoted their interest in some form of systematic learning opportunity outside school hours. Such a figure can be seen as positive given the amount of schoolwork and homework these pupils will be undertaking. Pupils at St Stephen’s High School, however, were more likely than those at Port Glasgow High School to think the course had promoted their interest in learning more outwith school hours (39% compared with 32% respectively – a small but statistically significant difference).

It is notable that the majority of pupils (85%) stated that the VWE course had improved their ability to work with others, and that the course had also promoted their self-confidence (74%). Indeed, the majority of participants' written comments on their questionnaires stressed the impact of the course on their social skills and self-confidence. The comment of one female participant was typical: 'It made me more confident to talk in front of people...able to explain more things to others'. Such findings reflect two of the main themes to arise from the pupil focus group findings in which pupils highlighted that they were surprised at their ability to prepare and give a presentation. This prompted a self-assessment of their own abilities and had thus promoted their confidence.

Pupils also stressed that the process of working on the task required teamwork and consequently had developed their inter-personal skills.

Talk with people in my class that I wouldn't normally negotiate with.

It improved my working with others.

It showed me how to work with others to complete a task.

Male participants

It helped me work in a group.

Made me talk to people more and I learned to listen to other people.

Female participants

The nature of the VWE coursework involved a strong focus on the use of ICT, and it is, therefore, not surprising that 70% of participants believed that the course had improved their ability to use computers, which would help them in their other lessons and in future employment. Pupils' written comments usually highlighted the impact the course had on their ICT skills and in particular, on their ability to use PowerPoint.

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of participants stated that the course had also made them think more about what they would like to do after leaving school. The focus group findings suggest that aspirations had been raised concerning employment prospects; for example, one female participant stated that 'it made me think about business and work more seriously', and two male participants stated that 'It made me think about what I am going to do when I am older' and 'It has made me feel stronger as a person to choose what I want in life'.

The majority of pupils (63%) thought that their participation in the VWE had improved their prospects for employment when they eventually left school. Pupils at St Stephen's were more likely than those at Port Glasgow to think the course had improved their employment prospects (72% compared with 52% respectively).

Just under half of the participants (49%) stated that their experience of the VWE had promoted their interest in using the Centre in their own time. This highlights a latent demand for the services offered at the Centre. However, as indicated in the focus group findings, Port Glasgow High School pupils were significantly less likely than their peers in St Stephen's High School to state they were interested in using the Centre in their own time (70% compared with 32% respectively).

In terms of gender, there were only two small yet statistically significant differences in responses: girls were slightly more likely than boys to think that the course had promoted skills that would help with their wider school work (69% compared with 65%), and also slightly more likely to think that the course had improved their ICT skills (75% compared with 69%).

The volume and positive nature of pupils' additional written comments provided on their questionnaires highlighted that after eight months most pupils still felt strongly that the project had made a positive and immediate impact on their skills and longer-term opportunities. Such comments also provided insights that reiterated themes emerging from the pupil focus groups concerning the effective nature of the learning and teaching approaches adopted by staff at the Centre. Other pupils used the opportunity to stress the need for follow-up courses that built on the VWE.

I feel that the 2nd years that did the work last year should go and do a new course for another week.

Male participant

I think 3rd years should get to use the Centre more. We should get to use the computers for different subjects.

Female participant

2.2.4 Pupils' suggestions for enhancing the Centre and its provision

Pupil comments such as 'the Centre is the best thing that has happened to the school', highlight the value they place on the facility. However, pupils also made suggestions concerning how to enhance the work of the Centre and sustain the impact of the VWE programme. Suggestions were made about extending the course to two weeks and doing another course for 'one week every year from S2 through to when you leave school'. Some pupils said that they were prepared to do another course outwith school time possibly during the summer holidays, because there was 'nothing to do in the summer'. This suggestion, however, was unpopular with a minority of pupils.

Some pupils suggested that the programme could be even more like real employment and perhaps even visit a local workplace. Some pupils suggested that there could be courses available for pupils in S5, such as website design, help with job searches and production of CVs.

A common theme to emerge across the focus groups was that pupils believed every school should have a facility like the Centre and run a course like the VWE. Some pupils suggested that there could be inter-centre competitions with prizes at local, regional and national level.

Suggestions were also made to increase the profile of the Centre in the community. These included: distributing fliers, putting up posters and doing presentations on the Centre at the local town hall.

2.2.5 Pupil accounts of their parents' awareness and value of the Centre

Opinions about how parents viewed the programme were mixed. Some pupils did not feel that their parents had a great deal of knowledge about the course,

while others thought that their parents were very supportive. This extended to some pupils stating their parents had helped by making sure they got up in the morning and were not late. One girl mentioned that her mother worked at the Centre. One pupil reported that her mother enrolled in one of the evening courses as a result of positive comments to her parents about the VWE programme.

2.2.6 Pupils' views on the use of the Centre by the wider community

Most of the pupils were aware that adults used the Centre to learn more about computers and new technology and that the Centre was often so busy that it was becoming difficult for many pupils to make use of the facilities themselves during the day. The pupils noted that they and their peers enjoyed using the Centre because the computers were superior to the ones in both schools, and many of them did not have access to the Internet at home. However, some pupils complained that some peers were using the Centre as a common room and pretending to do work when they were really playing games, thus depriving those who really wanted to use it for project work. Pupils noted that staff were now more likely to discourage such behaviour.

Overall, the pupils thought that it was a good idea to have the Centre as a community resource for both students and adults to use. There were some complaints made by pupils from Port Glasgow High School who felt that the location of the Centre within St Stephen's High School meant that it was really for St Stephen's High School pupils. These Port Glasgow High School pupils would either like something similar built for their school or to have the Centre renamed the 'Inverclyde Centre'. Other Port Glasgow High School pupils mentioned that they had not returned to use the Centre since participating in the VWE course, because it was part of the other school. Clearly, for some pupils, there appear to be territorial issues to be resolved before all young people in the community will access the Centre.

2.3 The experiences and perspectives of adult participants

The researchers conducted two focus groups with adult participants in courses provided by the Centre, one group comprised of those doing the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), and the other group involving those doing a basic computer course. The main purpose of the focus groups was to explore adult participants' views on the Centre, their satisfaction with the provision, and what benefits, to date, they have gained from participating.

2.3.1 Adults' reasons for participating

Those participating in the basic computing course had varied reasons for doing so. Some wanted to generally update their skills because they did not want to be left behind: 'Everything you do now needs computers and the Internet, you feel so ignorant... I have to ask the grandchildren for help with computers'. These learners were eager to show younger people that they too could cope with computers and technology: 'I want to keep up with kids, I can't help the grandkids to do anything, it's also to keep in touch with friends in Australia'.

Others had a more clearly vocational motivation: 'People can't get a job because they don't know about computers', and 'Job vacancies are on the Inverclyde Council website – it's good to know this and to be able to access the site'.

Most of those involved in the focus group who were doing the basic computing course were retired, but two participants were using the course as a means to gain employment in the longer term and to help improve their CVs. It was clear that most of those involved in the basic course valued education and had some experience of doing courses and training in the past.

Those adults doing the ECDL had similarly mixed reasons for participation. Like those doing the basic course, some were concerned that they were losing out to the younger generation because they had not grown up with this technology. Some wanted to fill in time because they were retired, others liked learning and/or computers and some wanted to obtain the ECDL qualification and certificate.

While vocational motivation was also limited in the ECDL group, one of the group stated that she had taken early retirement, but was keen to get back into the part-time workforce and believed that the qualification would enable her to do this. Another member who was retired was considering doing volunteer work at a local community centre, probably administration work, and thought that computing skills would be helpful.

Participants in the ECDL course, like those doing the basic course, also valued learning and most had previously participated in education and training courses related to personal and/or vocational interests. The educational history of participants and their qualifications varied. One woman who was retired stated that she had left school with only the leaving certificate while others had a range of qualifications and history of participating in learning opportunities.

All of those in both the basic and ECDL courses stated that they would be willing to participate in further courses and that their positive experiences during their current course and the supportive staff at the Centre played a large part in this view. However, those doing the basic course appeared to have more definite plans to participate in further courses at the Centre. Some of those doing the ECDL course, had found their course demanding and wanted to take a break before considering what courses to do next. One participant was eager to do a more advanced course, but others were content to complete the ECDL course and 'wait and see'. It was clear that participants doing both courses would feel a sense of achievement on completing their course with some again stressing that being able to demonstrate having computer skills to younger people was important: 'I feel more advanced than some of the younger ones'. This suggests that, for some older people, the possession of key skills concerning computing is important for their feeling of self-worth and status in their community.

2.3.2 Adult learners' views on course content, teaching approaches and learning environment

Those adults doing the basic computing course believed that it was well-taught and was set at the correct pace given participants' different levels of knowledge on the subject. Tutors were praised for being flexible and able to provide individual attention, and also good at teaching to the whole group.

A common theme to emerge from both the basic and ECDL groups was that while all of the content was interesting, some aspects of the material were easier than others. One of the ECDL group was surprised that the course covered a lot more than she had expected, having previously been on an IT course a few years ago. There was consensus among participants that the tutors were able to gear their teaching styles to address this, and to suit learners' needs and abilities. For most participants, working in a small groups, with tutor support where necessary, was the best way of learning.

Both groups stressed that the personalities, expertise and professional skills of the staff at the Centre were key factors in encouraging people to attend and persevere with their courses. Indeed, all members of both groups stressed that staff at the Centre possessed excellent inter-personal skills which helped participants to feel comfortable and 'not feel stupid'. The adult participants stated that the staff at the Centre also encouraged them to come in to the Centre outwith their courses and use the computers, and most of the adults had done this.

The only criticism of the learning and teaching at the Centre emerged from the ECDL group. There was criticism of their course book where four manuals had been condensed into one. One woman had identified seven mistakes in the word processing section, which would make the course very difficult to understand if the learner was doing the course at home with no tutor help.

Like pupils, adult participants also praised the décor and facilities at the Centre which were seen as engendering a relaxed atmosphere in which people wanted to learn. The adults believed that such high quality surroundings and facilities were important to attract learners. The adults across the two groups were quite happy to share the facilities with school pupils, and a small number felt 'guilty at using resources that pupils could be using'.

2.3.3 Adult learners' views on benefits of their participation

There was consensus across participants in the basic and ECDL courses that there had already been some positive outcomes from their participation. Those adults who had participated for vocational reasons were confident that their course would help them secure and undertake the type of work they hoped to get.

Those doing the basic course believed that they were finding out more about how to use their computer more effectively, and everyone believed that their self-confidence was improved every time they found they could complete a task without help from the tutor. One man in this group mentioned that by doing the

course he was keeping his brain active and thought it had made him more alert, which gave him a sense of satisfaction.

In the ECDL group, participants also believed that the main impact of the course to date was in promoting a sense of achievement and satisfaction. Some also thought that a positive impact was getting to meet people on the course with whom they have subsequently become close friends. New team working skills was another positive outcome for some; as one person stated, 'We all help each other out if the tutor is absent or busy with someone'.

2.3.4 Adult learners' views on the ability of the Centre to stimulate lifelong learning in the wider community

The majority of those doing the basic and ECDL computing courses believed that the Centre had the potential to help others, but they stressed that not enough people in the community knew about the Centre and its courses. Most of those doing the computing courses had found out about it through word of mouth and passed the information on to others. Some remembered seeing an advert in the Greenock Telegraph for the centre but that this had only been 'a tiny paragraph'. One of the group stated her 'total astonishment' when she first visited the centre, saying 'if they knew what was here, they would come'. Another participant agreed and added, 'Maybe they think that it costs a lot of money, but it's free. If you get them in once, they'll come back'.

Participants doing the basic computing course stressed that those in their 30s who were unemployed (a key target group) usually did not have the confidence to come on their own, so effort was required to attract them. It was suggested that these people could be encouraged to participate in peer groups, which might address issues of confidence and peer pressure. Most of the basic computing group agreed that there was a need to get people in the area to re-skill and give people confidence, because 'many local people don't think that they have a voice'. One person in the ECDL group stressed that engaging with disaffected members of the local community would be very difficult because 'they are not interested in computing or education', and that the Centre had already held open days to try to engage with such groups.

The basic computing group believed strongly that the Centre needed to reach out into the community and widen its appeal. Suggestions from both the basic and ECDL groups concerning promoting participation included:

- Using adverts or fliers placed in the local libraries.
- Using a larger (two page) advert in the local paper.
- Placing advertisements in the local job centre.
- Using short 'vox pops on TV similar to those used by the Scottish Executive after Scotland Today (eg Talking Scotland)'.
- Install a crèche or childcare facility, or allow parents to bring in their children during the holidays.
- Install a lift for those with disabilities because 'the stairs are steep and there is no direct lift'.

Finally, both groups believed that there was a good range of courses available at the centre (including ECDL, digital photography, desktop publishing and book keeping); however, those doing the ECDL course suggested that an intermediate course, between the basic and the ECDL courses would be helpful in getting more people into the Centre.

2.4 Summary

The evaluation findings relating to pupils who have participated in the *Virtual Work Experience* programme and adults doing courses at the Centre clearly indicate high levels of satisfaction with the courses, praise for presenters and staff at the Centre, and a belief that their participation will have positive outcomes concerning their skills, self-confidence and future opportunities.

The VWE course appears particularly well-designed to engage with disaffected pupils and those who struggled with traditional lessons, while at the same time being sufficiently challenging for more able pupils. All pupils saw the emphasis on practical and participatory approaches that involved team working as key to promoting enthusiastic participation. Pupils greatly valued the opportunity to work in a ‘business-like’ environment, and being treated like young adults with high levels of autonomy. Pupils were struck by the unique environment and contemporary surroundings within the Centre and the high quality of resources including extensive ICT facilities. Pupils saw this as facilitating access to learning approaches currently unavailable in many of their lessons. The high regard and value that local young people placed on the Centre was manifest in the absence of vandalism that was so common elsewhere in the locality.

Pupils generally concurred with the views of other stakeholders concerning the positive impact of the programme. Given these outcomes, pupils queried why their mainstream lessons could not be more like the VWE course.

Adult participants also praised the quality of the tuition, support and facilities available at the Centre. However, they emphasised the lack of awareness about the Centre among their peers in the local community and suggested that a more active strategy was required to target particular non-participant groups. Adult participants believed that a key barrier to the participation of target groups is their low self-confidence and general apathy as much as a lack of awareness about the Centre and its provision.

Adult participants reported an initial positive impact concerning their computing skills, self-confidence, ability to help others learn, and opportunities for further learning and employment. It must be stressed, however, that only a small proportion of those involved in the focus groups were participating for vocational reasons.

3: Evaluation findings: Parents' views of the Centre and the VWE course

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings from qualitative, semi-structured telephone interviews with parents of pupils who had participated in the VWE programme. As detailed in Chapter 1 of this report, it proved impossible to complete the intended 50 interviews with parents (25 from each school), and ultimately 23 interviews were completed. Nevertheless, the researchers believe that the regularity of themes emerging from parents, regardless of the school their child attended, suggests that further interviews would not have yielded much in the way of additional insights.

3.2 Parents' views on the Centre

Two key points, which are important to mention from the outset, emerged from the parental responses. Firstly, only a minority of parents had substantive knowledge of the VWE programme. Most recalled that their child had been on a course but found it difficult to remember any details of the activities they did or to comment on the impact of the VWE. A contributory factor in this is likely to be the time which elapsed between the delivery of the programme in the early part of 2005 and the timing of the interviews in early to mid-summer. A significant proportion claimed they knew nothing about the VWE; indeed, one parent did not even know her son had been on the programme.

Secondly, there is an issue about some of the parents' ability to answer some of the questions, even with prompting and some adjustment of the interview schedule: parents' appeared more able to discuss their views of the St Stephen's Centre than to discuss specific details of the VWE course.

3.2.1 Parents' awareness of the VWE

Some parents were able to identify some of VWE programme aims such as getting into the world of work and team working skills. But a more common response was, 'Don't know much about it at all', and overall the parents had little insight into what the VWE was about.

3.2.2 Knowledge of VWE activities

Some parents were able to describe some of the activities which were involved in the VWE sessions, such as doing graphics, preparing a PowerPoint presentation, computer work, designing a product and marketing. Only a few commented that there had been a presentation at the end of the four days, or that the pupils had worked in groups, and only a few mentioned that completed work had been presented in a folder.

However, when it came to parents' views on how much their child had enjoyed the course and how useful it was, the majority spoke favourably:

- 'His eyes got opened – totally positive.'

- 'We got evening bulletins.'
- 'Not usually talkative but talked for 10 minutes about it each day.'
- 'She was very excited and enjoyed the programme.'
- 'Felt like an adult.'

However, given parents' little in-depth knowledge of the VWE, such comments must be treated with caution.

There were some negative comments. One parent described how her son's week on the programme had been less enjoyable. It had been 'hyped up by his friends' who had done a project on Port Glasgow, but when her son did the programme the week's activity had been 'boring' and had not lived up to expectations. This reiterates the comments made by pupils during their focus groups, that stressed the importance of being able to select a project topic of interest. Another parent spoke of the programme having less of an ICT element, and that there had been a day of 'just talking'. This is likely to refer to the first preparatory day where pupils do paper-based and verbal tasks. There was an issue mentioned by another parent about working in a mixed group where the girls and her daughter in particular had been left to do most of the work.

There were suggestions of rivalry between the two schools, and one example of anxiety expressed by one child about going from Port Glasgow High School to St Stephen's High School. In this case, the child had been concerned about walking through the St Stephen's High School to get to the Centre, but in fact there had been a delayed start and they had used another entrance. Another parent made a similar reference to this, but cited a sense of intimidation when her child had walked along the corridor past the St Stephen's pupil classes to get to the Centre.

3.2.3 Information about the VWE given to parents

Overall, most parents acknowledged that basic information prior to the VWE beginning would have been given, although quite a few had no recollection of information coming from the school. There was a quite commonly held view that much more information should have been provided; some parents felt they could have engaged more with the day-to-day progress of the course and would have felt more equipped to find out about their child's progress on the course as each day passed. There was a general view that staff at the Centre and possibly the school should provide this. Some thought the information was sufficient, one parent feeling that it was their role to find out more from their own child.

3.2.4 Parents' attendance at VWE meetings

As noted above, it was quite clear from the first few interviews that in both schools, parents had not been present at any specific meeting for the VWE course. Some parents thought they had seen a project folder, and in one case a parent recalled that the programme had been discussed with teachers at a parents' evening.

3.2.5 The impact of the programme on participants

Again, this was a question topic that elicited little in the way of detailed response. Parents were happy to comment on their child's progress at school but for the most part could not identify any changes which could be attributed to the VWE programme. A common reaction was to note that their child was positive about school or a good pupil and that the VWE programme had not changed this. Some parents thought it had sparked interest in future careers, while others thought it had inspired confidence in some children and helped overcome shyness in meeting other young people. One parent noted in particular that being taught by staff other than teachers had been a great benefit.

3.2.6 Views on improving the VWE

Parents were given the opportunity to comment on how the VWE might be improved in any future development of the programme. Given their lack of knowledge, overall, of the VWE programme, suggestions were limited, but the following points were made:

- Provide a longer course.
- Provide more feedback to parents.
- Ensure the pupils who do the course really want to be on it and don't disrupt those who are keen to do the course.

3.2.7 Wider use of the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre

There was a mixed response from parents about the profile of the Centre in the local community. The most frequent comment from parents was that they knew very little about the Centre, but they went on to describe what they did know:

- Some knew nothing about the Centre.
- Some knew about the Centre through family or extended family who had used it, and two parents mentioned that their child still used the Centre after school.
- Some parents knew about the Centre because they had seen leaflets or local press coverage.
- Those who had done a course at another centre appeared more knowledgeable about what was on offer at the St Stephen's Centre.
- Only one parent had used the Centre.
- One or two parents had had a tour of the building before it opened.
- Some thought the Centre was part of the school and only for school children to use.
- Others thought it was for disadvantaged groups only.

Overall there was a strong impression from conversations with parents that there could be much more publicity about the Centre in the community. Some wanted to get clearer information about whether the classes were free, and if they were at a reduced rate the Centre should specify what the 'small fee' was.

While many parents thought that they might use the Centre if there was more information available, some other barriers were identified, the main one being the difficulty of accessing daytime classes if parents were working. Most parents lived relatively near the Centre, and could get there by either walking or a short drive, so that location was not an issue. It also appeared that those who had connections with ICT or worked in a similar environment or who had done an ICT course in another centre had more knowledge of the Centre and thought they might use it in the future.

3.3 Summary

While the numbers of parents interviewed was limited, the strength of the themes across the interviewees' comments highlights that parents' awareness of the *Virtual Work Experience* course and provision at the Centre is very limited. Parents are unclear about the aims and purposes of the Centre and VWE programme.

Those parents who were more aware of the VWE course believed it had benefited their child and stated that it had been enjoyable. Few parents remember having received information on the Centre or the VWE course but some were aware of the Centre via leaflets, local adverts and word of mouth. It is perhaps not surprising then, that few had visited the Centre or participated in courses there.

Some parents' comments indicate some tensions between pupils at the two schools. Two parents of pupils at Port Glasgow High School had some concerns about their child visiting St Stephen's High school. Given the small number of interviews and references to this issue, it is not possible to assess the scale of any inter-school pupil tensions. However, the very low level of Port Glasgow High School pupils accessing the Centre outwith the VWE suggests that this matter requires closer monitoring.

4: Evaluation findings: Evidence from professional stakeholders

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings to emerge from evaluation interviews and focus groups conducted with key professional stakeholders, including Centre staff, school management and teachers at the two High Schools, and representatives of partner organisations (Appendix 2 provides a summary of the main partner organisations consulted for the evaluation). As with the other findings chapters, the following sections relate to the main research questions and evaluation objectives pertinent to the above stakeholders.

4.2 St Stephen's Enterprise Centre management and providers

Interviews were conducted with the Centre manager (who until recently had also delivered the programme), the then newly appointed programme presenter, and two support staff who also contributed to the programme delivery during the evaluation period. The manager and course leader have backgrounds in careers, enterprise and training provision. The two support staff, who by the end of the evaluation had moved to new posts elsewhere, fulfilled a range of roles including: tutor, business and partner liaison, contributor to course design and administration. Both were graduates with experience of working with secondary school-aged young people (eg motivational events, and training programmes often provided in association with businesses). These people, hereafter referred to as 'the providers', operated as a close team to provide the *Virtual Work Experience* programme, and other courses and support available through the Centre.

4.2.1 Providers' views on the aims of the Centre

The providers noted that because the Centre was funded by a wider range of public and private funders than originally anticipated, the aims for the Centre had also expanded. Originally, it was intended that the project would focus only on providing programmes to the school population. However, as more funders became involved (particularly European Union funding), the focus of provision broadened to include providing courses for the wider Port Glasgow community. The aims of the Centre were now primarily seen as:

- To instil relevant skills in pupils to promote their life chances and employability, and to do this at an appropriate age most likely to have an impact.
- To promote positive attitudes towards learning, school attendance and work.
- To raise awareness of the world of work and business environment and ways of working.
- To provide an enterprise base for the two High Schools.

- To promote the skills of adults in the local community to improve their employment prospects concerning finding and maintaining work, but also to help them progress within their employment or to better posts.
- To promote positive attitudes towards lifelong learning within the community and to play a role in supporting such learners.

The management of the Centre highlighted that those goals and aims that focussed on promoting employability for adults, particularly helping people to get into work, have proven to be the most challenging. Such goals were seen as requiring sustained effort and resources, and it was believed that it would be some time before any impact on these goals was observed.

4.2.2 Views on the appropriateness of the programmes and curriculum offered by the Centre

The main content of programmes was seen as reflecting the aims of the Centre. For example, the VWE programme aims to promote skills and attitudes concerning learning and employability; therefore, the providers have designed content that addresses teamwork, problem solving, promoting responsibility, specific skills in ICT, and literacy and communication.

The providers also reported that the content and approach of programmes takes into account those participants who are seen as disaffected with school or learning and/or have difficulties with learning. This has meant there is less reliance on 'paper-based' tasks and more use of participative approaches and practical small group work.

The providers have drawn on their previous experience and the expertise of partner organisations to develop an appropriate content for courses such as the VWE programme. Other centres with similar aims were examined to obtain ideas delivering suitable programmes and the Steering Committee explored what skills were required in the community. The providers also liaised with the Senior Management Teams (SMT) in the two schools concerning the content of the VWE programme and this had established that the S2 pupils had different ICT experiences in the respective schools. Therefore, the content and support provided in the programme took into account this information.

The course content and approaches can also be 'fine-tuned' during delivery based on feedback from learners and the presenter's assessment of how well the course is proceeding. The Project Manager stressed that:

The expertise of staff quickly helps to establish those who need help...also we have to be able to adapt to every situation due to the nature of each group – their strengths and weaknesses...this seems to have worked well for pupils who have problems with learning or have problems with their behaviour.

Enterprise Centre Manager

The providers found that the VWE curriculum and approaches meant that those pupils usually seen by teachers as disaffected and less involved in lessons were particularly participative and eager to express themselves.

The design of courses for adult users also involved initial one-to-one meetings to establish the learner's abilities and needs. This was seen as essential otherwise:

...courses would not be pitched at their level and there would be high levels of drop-out, which would give off the wrong impression to others in the community.

Enterprise Centre Manager

The management and staff at the Centre reported that they placed an emphasis on creating a good first impression with adults who enquire about courses. They believed that adults' confidence was often limited with regard to their ability to return to learning and succeed. Enquirers were, therefore, encouraged to come and speak in person to staff who then discuss the most appropriate course with them.

4.2.3 Providers' views on the learning and teaching resources

From the planning stage, the providers and partners had wanted to ensure that the learning and teaching resources were different to what most pupils had been used to in school. There was also a desire to introduce young people to appropriate technology that would promote their learning and help prepare them for employment.

The ICT resources and facilities were seen as an important component in facilitating the type of programme providers wanted to deliver. Most pupils were seen to make use of the technology. Providers believed that pupils found the technology particularly stimulating, and this promoted their motivation to do the programme.

As important as the resources were, providers and partners hoped that the provision of a high quality, business-like environment would instil a positive attitude and a sense of commitment to the Centre. The providers believed that pupils worked very well within this businesslike environment. In addition, the total lack of vandalism, even petty damage, to the Centre and its resources, indicated that pupils valued the Centre. This contrasted with other parts of the school building where vandalism was apparent. Providers stated that feedback from pupils revealed that the high quality resources made them feel special and that this was reflected in their commitment to learn.

The facilities available at the Centre had been highlighted through word-of-mouth to those teachers and pupils who had not participated in the VWE. Providers noted that some teachers valued the resources and technology available at the Centre and used the facilities with small groups from classes for project work and research purposes. One provider commented that because the school did not have such resources, teachers at St Stephens's were eager to access them. As far as possible, the providers attempted to fit teachers' demands to access the Centre around the programme timetable. Senior pupils in S5 and S6 were said to have recognised the usefulness of the resources at the Centre and were frequent users.

To date, despite the relatively close proximity of the school to the Centre, none of the Port Glasgow High School teachers had used the Centre, either for their own purposes or with pupils. Providers hoped that they would soon begin to use the facilities and resources and suggested that the lack of involvement could be due to their school just recently becoming involved in the project (ie from January 2005). The providers believed that these teachers would be more likely to use the Centre as the VWE programme becomes embedded in Port Glasgow High School's curriculum.

Providers reported that relatively few Port Glasgow pupils had dropped in to use the Centre outwith the VWE course. Providers and pupils suggested that other socio-cultural factors and territorial/geographical issues could be inhibiting their participation. Local people were seen as very reticent about travelling beyond their immediate locales to access services and facilities. For example, people living in the Greenock area would rarely travel to Port Glasgow to access resources such as the Centre.

4.2.4 Views on the programme's impact on participating pupils and others

Overall, the providers believed that their programmes had made a positive impact on learners; this was particularly evident for pupils participating on the VWE programme. However, they stressed that, at this stage, it was not possible to state whether longer-term benefits had occurred. For example, outcomes such as improved access to work and training or other educational opportunities could only be assessed after pupils left school. The providers, however, believed that there were 'many soft indicators' of positive changes in participating pupils.

Impact of the Centre on pupils doing the VWE programme

Since the beginning of the VWE programme at the Centre, 608 pupils had participated in the VWE course. Table 4.1 Provides a breakdown of these figures.

Table 4.1: Pupil participation in the VWE course at the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre

Pilot year (2003)	20 pupils (St Stephen's only)
Year 1 2004	133 pupils (St Stephens only)
Year 2 2004-05	225 pupils (both schools)
Year 3 2005-06 (current)	230 pupils (St Stephens to take part in Jan 2006)
Totals	608 pupils (209 Port Glasgow HS and 399 St Stephen's HS)

Given their caveats concerning the longer-term impact of the VWE programme, the providers believed that the main short-term outcomes for pupils were:

- Improved behaviour and engagement of disaffected pupils while on the programme and fewer punishment exercises immediately following the programme. It was believed that the programme had 'transformed' some of those children who usually did not apply themselves to learning tasks. Providers were less sure about whether such behaviour would be maintained in the longer-term when these pupils returned to their normal

lessons. Providers reported that many participants were still enthusiastic about using the Centre to do aspects of their schoolwork many weeks after doing the programme.

Sometimes those pupils who were seen by teachers as disaffected had been appointed as team leaders by their peers. The Providers noted that these individuals then went on to lead their group to a successful presentation – often to the surprise of their teachers. The research observations highlighted these processes. In such cases, so-called disaffected pupils, both male and female would, by the end of the second day, become increasingly involved in the task of planning to meet their deadline, and organising and supervising peers.

Providers noted that working intensively all day with groups of young people, even over the short period of four days, also seemed to help to establish a rapport between pupils and course presenters. It was suggested that this facilitated a more productive learning and teaching environment, particularly for disaffected pupils. This environment also allowed presenters to address any peer pressure and other problematic group dynamics that emerged.

- Improved self-confidence. Examples were given of shy pupils taking an active part in presentations and being willing to repeat their experience, presenting to other groups.
- Improved communication skills. For example, making effective presentations, as well as discussing plans for their project with presenters and peers. Providers noted that pupils had gone on to use such skills in English and other lessons.
- Improved team working. Pupils who had no experience of working with one another were seen as successfully completing team tasks which required each member to work on delegated tasks, and then work as a group to incorporate their ideas into the overall presentation.
- Improved relationships between pupils, with some making and sustaining new friendships.
- Increasing the abilities of more able pupils by presenting them with particular challenges that they did not face in their normal lessons.
- Raising pupils' aspirations and awareness concerning opportunities available upon completing school. Associated with this, the Centre had also provided careers information and advice for pupils, in association with the local Careers Service.

Providers reported that following pupils' participation in the VWE, a limited number of St Stephen's High School pupils returned to use the Centre's facilities after school on a regular basis.

Impact of the Centre on the wider community

Providers thought that the programmes offered at the Centre were having a beneficial impact on adults in the local community. In the first operational year (2004/05) over 3,000 adults visited the Centre to enquire about programmes, although not all participated in classes. Nevertheless, targets set by the Scottish Executive for the number of participants for a three-year period have already been exceeded.

Table 1a (see Appendix 1) provides information on the age range, employment status and sex of registered learners who have participated in courses at the Centre between when it opened and November 2005. The data collected by the Centre on the types of participants reveals that from the start of operations, 229 adults have participated in courses. Of these registered learners, 79% were female, and this gender difference is constant in the 'employed' and 'post-compulsory education student' categories of participant. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the disabled participants were female.

By grouping together the age ranges into four main bands; '16–30', '31–45', '46–60' and '61 and over', the data on participants reveals that:

- The largest group of registered learners is the 31–45 age bracket, which represents 37% of the total number of those participating in courses at the Centre (85 individuals).
- The second largest group is the 46–60 range with 26% of the total (60 individuals).
- 25% of registered learners are between the ages of 16 and 30 (54 individuals). Those aged between 16 and 20 years made up 10% of all participants (23 individuals).
- 10% of the total number of course participants are over 61 years old (23 individuals).

The Centre's own data also shows that:

- 53% of registered learners were in employment.
- 9% of learners are students, mainly between the ages of 16 and 20.
- 7% of learners were disabled (15 individuals).
- 31% of learners were either retired or long-term unemployed (72 individuals). The Centre combines retired and unemployed participants into a single category, and there was no available gender or age breakdown for this category.

Many of the computer-based courses aimed at adults in the local community, such as the ECDL programme, were oversubscribed, and there was virtually no dropout from courses. One of the tutors at the Centre had visited other agencies and other community services to talk to adults to raise awareness of the Centre and courses. Word of mouth was seen as an effective way to promote interest in the Centre among local adults and it was clear that, for some adults, a lack of self-confidence was a potential barrier to returning to learning.

Positive outcomes for participating adults were seen as improving specific ICT skills relevant to work, and transferable skills, such as promoting confidence to learn, and communication skills. However, one provider stated that while some groups of adults appeared keen to participate in ICT courses, it was believed that a greater challenge was to attract others (for example, those aged 25 to 35 years) who had not worked or participated in learning or training for some time. Furthermore, they believed that more could be done to get participants to go on into employment. Impacting on the employability of groups in the community was seen as a longer-term goal that required more information on the factors influencing this process and appropriate strategies to promote participation and progression. Additionally, the providers believed that more outreach work and targeted marketing would help address this issue.

4.2.5 Views on partnership working

The providers reported that all partners involved in the setting up and operating of the Centre had worked very well together. This was seen as largely due to a history of partnership working in the community between the local council, education providers, community services and local businesses. Currently partners included:

- Local authority departments (education, social work, etc)
- Local businesses (including T-Mobile, National Semiconductor, IBM)
- Local community and adult education services
- Local FE college (James Watt College)
- Scottish Executive (FLaT initiative)
- Other funding partners (eg EU/URBAN II)

The providers reported that there had been no conflict of interest or tensions between the partner organisations. They believed that the Centre would have been implemented if many of the above providers had not been involved, but that it would have been a far more difficult process and less effective.

Some of the providers noted that there was an issue concerning the amount of partnership or levels of collaboration between the Centre and the two schools. There was some disappointment among the providers that relatively few teachers had chosen to use the facilities of the Centre. Some departments (English, Art, Modern Languages) in the St Stephen's High School appeared eager to utilise the services and resources of the Centre; however, most of the others had shown limited interest. The providers believed that the Centre would probably be used more by teachers and embedded in the curriculum of the two High Schools as *Determined to Succeed* became increasingly implemented. One provider stated that it could take between six to ten years before the culture of schools reflected the ideals and aims of the *Determined to Succeed* initiative. Providers also believed that the methods used in their programmes had much to offer teachers and were in line with the *Determined to Succeed* initiative. Such learning and teaching approaches were seen as more likely than 'normal' approaches to suit the needs of a wide range of pupils.

4.2.6 Providers' views on promoting and stimulating lifelong learning in the wider community

It was noted that any impact on the wider community concerning attitudes to employment and learning would have to take into account local culture, and particularly challenge the views held by some groups who saw no utility in, or lacked the confidence to participate in, learning, training and employment. Statements such as 'It's not cool to learn' or 'What do you want to work for' were said to typify the views of such groups. Such local factors meant that any impact on such a culture would take time and require sustained and appropriate provision. Providers suggested that stimulating lifelong learning in the community could be promoted if current pupil participants continued to have positive learning experiences at the Centre. It was hoped that this would inculcate a more positive view of education in the future adult generation of Port Glasgow.

Pupils' parents were also seen as potential participants and a Communications Strategy group is currently being established, as part of local *Determined to Succeed* initiative, which will target parents. Again, it was thought that the two High Schools could play a greater role in encouraging parents to use the Centre.

4.2.7 Providers' views on the future development of the Centre

Providers saw the main issues facing the future development of the Centre as being:

- The need to promote participation among certain groups. As stated previously, these included:
 - Those aged 25–35 years who traditionally did not participate in education and training and were unlikely to see employment as a priority. Currently an 'adult work experience' programme is being explored by local partner organisations and new partnership developments including *Remploy*, *Inverclyde Employability Project* and *WorkAble* (in association with the local Job Centre) have been implemented. These include 5–10 week programmes that are targeting adults who are difficult to encourage into learning and training opportunities.
 - Teachers at both schools. More work was needed to get teachers in both High Schools to use the Centre with their pupils. As one provider stated:

The programme is having a minimal effect on teachers – very few have taken the time to pop in during the four days as requested. Those who have been impressed and see the value of the VWE programme... You can't say to teachers 'you will come in, that is the role of the SMT...teachers are busy but they do have no-contact time.
 - Port Glasgow High School pupils, most of whom did not use the Centre after school. The providers were concerned that these pupils perceived the Centre as a resource for St Stephen's High School pupils only.

- Maintaining adequate staffing to meet potential demand. Providers believed that, to effectively run the Centre, another tutor and administrative assistant were required. Currently, there are 60 people on a waiting list for an ECDL course. Having the option of offering programmes later in the evening would help address such demand but would require more staff.

Overall, providers were optimistic that, despite such challenges, the main objectives of the Centre could be addressed. As one said:

There is a momentum...we've been busy but we believe we've just scratched the surface...There are thousands of people out there who we could engage with. It will require time and money but there is tremendous scope for the Centre to do this.

Another provider stated that stimulating participation in lifelong learning programmes was more likely to be effective if a number of partners combined their efforts and resources. Indeed, the local Job Centre and Careers Scotland services were increasingly working with the Centre to target particular groups to offer advice on accessing training, education and employment. These partners suggested setting aside part of one day per week as a drop-in time at the Centre for people to discuss returning to study or employment with relevant agencies.

4.3 School Management Teams (SMT)

Interviews were conducted with five members of the two Senior Management Teams, two from St. Stephen's High School, and three from Port Glasgow High School. Later in the evaluation, the respective Headteachers were invited, via email, to contribute further views on the Centre and the evaluation research questions.

4.3.1 Views on the aims of the Centre

There was general agreement amongst all five SMT members that the main aim of the Centre was to introduce pupils to the world of work and help to develop teamwork and problem-solving skills, and to raise the self-esteem and aspirations of the pupils and others who used the Centre. The two members of the St Stephen's High School SMT also stressed that the Centre was not simply a part of their school, but rather a community resource designed to redress some of the inadequacies of an area that has high levels of unemployment.

4.3.2 Views on the appropriateness of the programmes and curriculum offered by the Centre

The SMT members believed that the *Virtual Work Experience* (VWE) programme addressed most of the National Priorities for education and articulated well with curriculum areas. The curriculum and programmes offered were also seen as relating to government initiatives on citizenship and enterprise.

The use of ICT, such as using the Internet to research project work and preparing PowerPoint presentations, was seen by SMT members as particularly appropriate for those pupils who were easily frustrated by mainly paper-based work. School departments such as English and Science recognised that pupils enjoy a variety of learning and teaching approaches, especially those that involve participative and interactive methods, and have built on pupils' use of PowerPoint and whiteboards in regular lessons.

Overall, there was agreement that the needs of all pupils were catered for by the VWE programme, including those with attendance and discipline problems. Examples were given concerning pupils who were normally quiet in class who had thereafter developed their public speaking skills, and others with dyslexia who performed well during the presentations. The SMT also felt that the programme was sufficiently challenging for pupils of higher academic ability.

4.3.3 Learning and teaching resources

All of the SMT members commented that the environment in the Centre was excellent and 'enhances the whole programme'. The computing facilities were thought to be far superior to those in both schools, particularly the whiteboards, which have now been introduced in a number of classrooms in both schools. There was consensus that the pupils responded well to the business-style surroundings of the Centre and the freedom to use whatever facilities they needed at any given time.

Despite the move from the more formal school environment, very few discipline issues were reported during the programme, with the majority of pupils responding positively to the extra freedom they had been given. This was described by one of the SMT as 'self empowered learning'. The SMT members also highlighted that many teachers have also learned from their experience of working with the VWE programme. For example, one of the Headteachers mentioned that, as a direct result of the programme, there had been an increase in paired and group work in Maths classes. In addition, the use of whiteboards has impressed teachers. By the end of the Summer 2005 session, Port Glasgow High School was planning to have 19 whiteboards in classrooms. The interactive method of teaching and learning made possible by this new technology is regarded as both a 'fantastic opportunity' and a challenge by the management in the two schools.

4.3.4 Views on the programme's impact on participating pupils and others

There was a consensus amongst the SMT in both schools that the programme had a very positive impact on participating pupils, at least in the short-term. The SMT in both schools remarked that they were extremely impressed with the standard of the presentations given by the pupils at the end of the four-day VWE programme, and particularly with the input from pupils recognised as usually disaffected and problematic.

Skills such as teamwork, communication, competitiveness and tolerance were seen as being developed during the four days. Most pupils displayed greater confidence and maturity as a result of their involvement in the programme, which was also described as ‘a great morale booster for the pupils’. The behaviour of some of the more troublesome pupils was reported as having improved. There were only two instances where a pupil had to be removed from the VWE. In both cases the pupils were male and their poor behaviour had been disrupting others. The SMT stressed that these pupils had only been removed from the programme after a great deal of effort by the programme providers to work with them to resolve the situation.

There was some disagreement across the SMT in one school about the longer-term impact of the VWE on the pupils. One of the team felt that many pupils had been changed in a permanent way, particularly with regard to their attitude and motivation to learning. In addition, this teacher believed that there was ‘hard evidence concerning attendance rates’ of participants, which had improved dramatically both during and after the programme. However, another member of the team was more cautious about longer-term impacts stating that it was ‘too early yet to say what the outcomes will be’.

Some of the SMT members noted certain unexpected impacts and outcomes arising from the Programme. These were mainly in relation to ‘rascals’ being chosen as team leaders and the surprisingly positive way they had responded to their role. Such changes in the behaviour of pupils were seen as ‘a pleasant surprise’.

Staff in both schools were reported as using the Centre, even those who were seen as ‘refuseniks regarding ICT in the past’. Some teachers in St Stephen’s High School use the Centre with their pupils for projects in French, English and Art and this was seen as broadening out into other departments. However, this meant that the Centre was getting busier, and access to it was becoming more difficult. Nevertheless, it was felt that lifelong learning was ‘becoming slowly embedded in the culture of the school’.

4.3.5 Views on partnership working

The SMT in both schools thought that the partnerships with outside agencies such as Network Support, Paisley University and the business community had worked very well. Partnership between the two schools had also been productive. Staff in the two schools were thought to have liaised well in setting up time slots for pupil involvement in the programme.

The SMT believed that there had been some initial tension concerning the Science and particularly the Maths departments who had been the most affected by having pupils in their class participating on the VWE. While pupil groups attended for a period of four days, classes were disrupted over a six-week block while all pupils were rotated through the Programme. The SMT in both schools did not regard this as a major problem because teachers’ frustration had largely been alleviated by inviting them along to see the presentations and, therefore,

the benefits of the programme. At the time of the interview, only one maths teacher in one school still remained unconvinced about the value of the programme.

4.3.6 Views on promoting and stimulating lifelong learning in the wider community

The SMT were aware that increased numbers of people in the wider community were using the Centre. However, there was an issue about meeting demand for certain courses. The SMT in St Stephen's High School highlighted the importance of having the Community School based within their building (located immediately above the Centre). They stressed that effective links were being established between the Centre and the Community School. Parents of some of the pupils were using both centres. The proximity of both centres and collaboration between the staff was seen as an important factor in promoting adult participation in programmes at the Centre. The SMT believed that the Centre had 'great potential' to improve the skills base among the wider adult community.

4.3.7 Views on challenges and the future development of the Centre

While members of the SMT in both schools were impressed with the impact the VWE had on the self-esteem, confidence, motivation, behaviour, attendance and communication of many participants, they felt that this needed to be sustained beyond school and into employment. They believed that the programme should be developed over time with increased links with local employers and businesses. One suggestion was that a 'real' work experience course rather than a virtual work experience could be developed and provided via the Centre.

Most of the SMT regard the Centre as having considerable potential for pupils when they leave school to give them careers advice and help them 'upskill' into employment. In order to achieve this aim and sustain the Centre in the future, new funding needed to be found. One of the members commented that the involvement of the Centre's Manager had been a massive boost because he had been very successful in involving local businesses and partners and obtaining sponsorship and funding from them. The SMT, however, believed that the Centre could also be marketed more within the schools and the wider community, to let people know more about what is provided and how it could benefit them.

Some of the SMT members felt that pupils should be allowed to revisit the Centre when they reach S4 and also when in senior years. A suggestion was made that whole year groups should be involved over a six-year period so that parents would be more aware and there would be a wider dissemination of knowledge about the Centre throughout the community.

A further challenge included increasing the engagement of all school staff, and persuading them to release more pupils out of the classroom to take part in future programmes. This was seen very much as 'an ongoing process'.

4.4 Teachers' views on the Centre and programmes

The research team conducted interviews with six teachers from St Stephen's High School during February and March 2005. Five of these teachers had some level of involvement with either the *Virtual Work Experience* programme or the Centre and one had had no direct involvement. The interview themes reflected the research objectives set out in the specification.

The five teachers who had some involvement with the Centre included:

- Those whose contact consisted of releasing pupils for participation in the VWE, but who had also visited the Centre with pupils to use resources for project work. One teacher who had no involvement in the initial stages of Centre had recently taken part in one of the ICT 'Master class' projects in her own time. In addition, she has also started using the Centre with her pupils to help with their project work. Another teacher was a relatively new member of staff who had no prior involvement with the VWE programme but had used the Centre herself to hold meetings and to work with her pupils on course work and designing covers for a show.
- Two teachers involved with the design of the *Virtual Work Experience* programme; Department Heads or Principal Teachers.

Only one teacher, from the Mathematics Department had no contact with the Centre other than releasing students to participate on the course. He stated that his knowledge of the Centre was relatively limited. It should also be noted that this teacher, who retired towards the end of the evaluation, was the only teacher interviewed who held negative views on the Centre and the impact of the VWE. The Head of the Mathematics Department in the same school had commented on the potential disruption to the maths timetable caused by the VWE, but still held positive views on the course and the Centre.

4.4.1 Views on the aims of the Centre

There was agreement across the teachers that the main aims of the Centre and the VWE programme were to:

- Help prepare pupils for the world of work.
- To raise pupils' awareness of opportunities.
- To promote pupils' skills in teamwork, communication and leadership.
- To raise pupils' aspirations.
- To create an enterprising culture amongst the pupils.
- To make a positive impact on pupils' motivation to learn and behaviour.

All but one of the teachers saw the programme as particularly relevant for disaffected students, who they believed needed something, and 'to make them think that they are as capable as anyone else'. One teacher stressed that 'equipping people in the local area for the outside world' was vital because many pupils lacked confidence.

4.4.2 Views on the programme curriculum and learning and teaching resources

All but one of the teachers felt that, as far as they were aware, the VWE programme was designed to suit the needs of all pupils, with the less able pupils being 'pushed to the limit' and 'the high fliers fly as well'. Teachers generally commented on the excellent environment of the Centre and how much the pupils enjoyed using it. In particular the 'Pod Room', which contains twenty-four state of the art computers and multimedia presentation equipment, was regarded as a key resource. Here, pupils on the course are each able to use a computer to work on their group presentations at the end of the week. The computers were said to be far superior to those in either school and teachers had received very positive feedback about the ICT facilities from their pupils. One Art teacher thought that the ICT resources 'connected well with Art' in that pupils used the computers for research and producing images.

4.4.3 Impact on participating pupils

All but one of the teachers believed that the VWE programme had been a generally positive experience for pupils. However, some stressed that the longer-term impact of the programme on pupils was difficult to assess, especially for those of medium ability. Teachers were aware of 'anecdotal evidence' of improvements in pupils' self-confidence and communication skills. Overall, teachers believed that the main impact on the pupils was that 'they have learned how to learn'.

One teacher noted that for some pupils, the VWE programme had provided 'their first experience of success at school'. Such experiences were seen as important because they might promote a more positive perception of school. Another teacher stated that she could not think of a single pupil who had a negative experience or outcome as a result of the course. Others agreed, stating that some of the quieter pupils 'were very eloquent after the process' and that some of the more disaffected pupils 'have blossomed because of the course'. One teacher who had received positive feedback from participating pupils about the course believed that pupils were more motivated and energised when they came back from the course, which she felt had provided 'a spark instead of gloom'.

The Behaviour Support teacher who had been working with some of the participating pupils for over a year, trying to increase their confidence and motivation, felt that he was slowly making progress, but that the VWE course providers 'have managed to do it here in one week'. This success was mainly attributed to the manager of the Centre, the main presenter at the time. In particular, the Behaviour Support teacher highlighted this presenter's 'charisma, ability to talk to the pupils in their own language and the fact that he is not a teacher'. One teacher commented that some of the pupils would not normally accept praise and often 'threw it all back in your face. But they accepted it from [the presenter] due to the different environment and probably because he's not a teacher'.

Some of the skills gained by the pupils, most notably PowerPoint presentations and group work, were seen as transferring well into the subjects that utilise such methods. These skills had been incorporated into the work in English, Science and Art classes to support projects and individual talk presentations. Indeed, one teacher believed that the biggest impact of the programme had been on the pupils' PowerPoint presentation skills, which in some cases 'were better than some of the lecturers that I've seen'. Some of the pupils in her General/Foundation English class had returned to the Centre to do a quick revision of PowerPoint to use for their solo talks, which were seen as having improved during the year since participating in the course.

As previously noted, only the Maths teacher at one of the schools did not believe that the Centre and its programmes had a positive impact on pupils. This teacher had not visited the Centre to see the VWE programme in operation. Rather, he stressed the disruption to lessons in his department for the duration of the course. He believed that because the maths classes were streamed it was difficult for pupils to catch up when they came back to classes. This perspective was not borne out in other teachers' accounts. The maths teacher added, however, that if this disruption had been minimised then he would have been more in favour of the course. The possibility of the course being run after school or during the holidays had been discussed at departmental meetings as one way to avoid such disruption; however, teachers had thought this to be unfeasible.

One Art teacher reported that she did not have any issues about her pupils taking part in the course as she only missed pupils once a week. She believed that there was some negativity and 'possibly jealousy of the Centre especially amongst some of the older members of staff'. She thought that more interaction between teachers in the school and staff at the Centre would help to alleviate this situation.

Impact of the Centre on the teachers and others

All but one of the teachers interviewed believed that since the Centre opened, teachers had benefited from having quality resources and facilities close by. One teacher said this had led to 'an osmosis of the benefits from the Centre to the professional development of some teachers'. This was particularly seen as relevant to the use of technology in teaching. However, it was noted that many teachers wanted to take the European Computer Driving Licence course but did not have the time to do so. Despite this, the teachers said that some colleagues had improved their PowerPoint presentation skills because they used computer/whiteboard resources at the Centre with their pupils, because these facilities were not available in the classroom.

The Behaviour Support, Art and English teachers reported that they had learned new techniques in lessons. One of these teachers stated that he had also learned new ways of approaching certain 'difficult situations, from [the Manger/presenter at the Centre], such as adopting a more relaxed and informal demeanour with the pupils'.

4.4.4 Promoting and stimulating lifelong learning in the wider community

Teachers generally held positive views about the potential of the Centre as a community resource and believed that if the courses on offer were pitched at the right level there would be definite benefits for local people. Four of the six teachers agreed that the Centre was slowly beginning to stimulate lifelong learning in the local community. They cited the fact that more adults appeared to be using the Pod Room facility during the day for their own purposes and at night for the courses on offer. The English teacher commented that the Centre was usually full, particularly with women aged around 60 years old, one of whom used to be a cleaner in the school. Word of mouth in the community seemed to be having a noticeable effect on participation. All but one of the teachers were very positive about this development and wanted to see further developments to address the needs of the community. One specific example was given by a teacher whose 74 year-old mother had learned computer skills at the Centre and had recently enrolled in one of the evening courses with her friend.

4.4.5 Partnership working

Only one of the teachers involved in the evaluation was not really aware of, or involved in, partnership working, while the others had more active links with the Centre and partners. One teacher was involved in a vocational project with one of the staff from the centre called *CityVision*. In addition, she also had close links with the careers staff in the Centre and the Community School. Another teacher had worked with local employers on an enterprise event and a Business Awareness Day in the school supported by the Centre.

4.4.6 Views on the future of the Centre

Teachers identified three key challenges concerning the future development of the programme and work of the Centre. The first was the lack of time to work with the pupils to build on what they had learned due to an increasingly crowded curriculum. The second challenge was getting certain groups of participating adults and pupils into employment. Finally, the teachers highlighted the challenge of persuading a greater number of their colleagues about the benefits and value of the Centre and its courses. One teacher stated that 'It's almost a public relations exercise for us', and another added that the Centre also needed to raise its profile outwith the school, with the wider community, if it was to realise its potential of promoting lifelong learning and employability for a wider range of the local population. The Art Teacher hoped that the Centre would receive continued funding and be sustained so that pupils were able to use the facility for help with employment after they leave school.

4.5 Partner organisations' involvement and views

The researchers interviewed eleven representatives from a diverse range of partner companies, organisations and agencies. Appendix 2 provides a breakdown of the main partner organisations consulted by the evaluation. These partners provided advice and, in some cases, considerable funding. Many of them had been involved at the planning and inception stages of the Centre and

had representatives on the Steering Committee for the Project. The Committee was involved in recruitment decisions, helping to address the ethos and culture of the Centre, addressing grants/funding and planning for the Centre.

The level of partner involvement in the operation of the Centre varied depending on the nature of the organisation, and this was reflected in the level of information each could provide about the Centre and its initial impact.

4.5.1 Partners' views on the aims of the Centre

Overall, there was consensus across the partner organisations concerning the aims of the Centre. However, while education and training partners placed an emphasis on promoting participation in learning across the community, businesses stressed the importance of the Centre in promoting employability of local people and improving their skills to find work and progress within their employment. Employers also had an interest in raising the skills of the local population because a notable proportion of their workforce, and in some cases, most of their senior management team, were comprised of local people. Therefore, across, the partner organisations, the main aims for the Centre were seen as including:

- To improve employability for people in the Port Glasgow area. This involved promoting relevant skills, introducing pupils to business and work life, and providing commercial training for local adults.
- Helping to develop an enterprising school ethos among young people, and developing this into the local community. Part of this included promoting the involvement of the local partners, such as Scottish Enterprise, the local authority and businesses.

Partners believed that the main challenges facing the inception stage of the Project had been to obtain sufficient funding. European funding was seen as particularly helpful. There was a need for such a Centre in the Port Glasgow area given the local statistics concerning employment and learning. The already existing links between many partners were thought to be a factor in the efficient work of the Steering committee in locating funding and planning the Centre. However, partner representatives typically stressed that the Manager of the Centre was instrumental in moving the project forward and 'making it happen'. One partner stated that:

a major factor in the initial launch and operation of the Centre has been [the Centre Manager's] skills and commitment. Under his management the Centre has developed an identity of its own and has engaged the local community and businesses

4.5.2 Developing a flexible and tailored curriculum

Partners believed that the Centre is working well to target pupils in the two High Schools and people in the local community. Courses and advice are offered that are accessible and useful to these people. Learners were seen as being able to study at their own pace with appropriate support provided by skilled and enthusiastic personnel. These courses were generally seen as helping

to develop a 'can do attitude' among participants. There was also the possibility of progression to other, more advanced, courses.

Some partners stressed that the Centre offered a unique service compared to many other providers. Others believed that while this was true, the Centre was 'still trying to find it's niche' and was increasingly working with partners such as James Watt College, Community Education and other providers to develop a programme to suit the needs of learners and the community.

Those involved in formulating programmes at the Centre were seen as having experience of working with young people across a range of abilities, and having an awareness of issues pertinent to local employability and social inclusion.

Most of the partners thought that ICT was a key resource given the low level of personal computer ownership among the community. The high level of uptake of computer courses by local residents was seen as evidence of the relevance of such courses. Partners highlighted the support of IBM in resourcing and supporting much of the necessary technology for these courses.

However, one community education provider stressed caution concerning the possibility of placing an emphasis on ICT-based courses. This person believed that careful and periodic monitoring and needs analysis was required to ensure provision was meeting the needs of local people and employers.

The content of the VWE programme was seen as particularly useful and relevant to those local young people who were seen as 'less academic', and provided an 'alternative broader learning approach'. The programme, therefore, had the potential to engage with disaffected pupils because of its approach and content. This gave pupils a greater sense of ownership and, therefore, promoted motivation to participate.

Some partners believed that the Centre provided an accessible and 'safe' environment for local people who might not travel outwith their locality to attend courses elsewhere.

Local businesses stressed that they used the facilities at the Centre, particularly for 'off site' workshops, conferences and for brainstorming ideas. They saw the environment and services as of a quality unavailable anywhere locally. The good value for money offered by the Centre meant that some thought the Centre could be marketed more widely at other companies in order to increase funds.

4.5.3 Impact on participating pupils and others

The partners were interviewed near the beginning of the evaluation and noted that it was still 'early days' concerning the operation of the Centre. Most, therefore, suggested that the Centre would have to be monitored over the longer-term to assess outcomes and to see if it made a difference to the local community. Some business partners stressed that they possessed limited information and insights concerning the impact of the Centre and its programmes to date, particularly concerning any impact on pupils. They suggested that this implied that the Centre could be doing more to promote

itself and its impact. However, those partners who worked closely with the Centre and pupils reported that pupils doing the VWE programme had made striking developments in their confidence and motivation during the four-day course. This included those young people usually disaffected with school and learning. These partners observed that pupils were treated as ‘young adults and are allowed to operate as if in an employment environment’. Therefore, this environment and the participative learning approaches were seen as promoting the engagement of all pupils.

Other partners drew on indirect and general feedback from those involved closely with the Centre (for example, teachers and careers advisors) to conclude that the VWE programme had provided pupils with a greater appreciation of employment and business. This was enhanced by the Centre’s environment which was seen as less like school and more like a business. Some partners involved in the Steering Committee stressed that the ‘business-like’ environment and approach was a deliberate strategy to help encourage young people to behave in a responsible and adult way, and to promote the skills required in employment and life in general.

Partners often commented that local young people’s respect for the Centre and the programmes was demonstrated by the fact that, unlike many other local facilities, the Centre had suffered no vandalism.

Impact on other local stakeholders included increased partnership and synergy across organisations and businesses. This has led to the development of other education and enterprise initiatives (eg the *School to Work* programme involving Scottish Power). In addition, providers believed that, where local organisations had used the Centre’s facilities, this had helped to encourage local awareness of the Centre.

Impact on stimulating learning among the community

Partners believed that the Centre had been successful in attracting a considerable number of participants from the local community and that many courses were oversubscribed. This level of course take up by local adults was seen as an indicator of the Centre’s relevance to the community. The ECDL courses were seen as particularly popular. The Careers Scotland representative reported that the use of the Centre by younger people and adults during holiday time was one indicator that the Centre was beginning to make some inroads in stimulating learning among the community and addressing local adults’ attitude to work.

However, most partners believed that it was too soon to assess whether the Project had stimulated lifelong learning in the wider community. Community education and economic development partners in particular stressed that there were still key groups that needed to be encouraged to use the Centre. They reiterated the comments of the providers at the Centre, highlighting the need to increase participation from those who rarely accessed education and training and who lacked the confidence and/or motivation to seek employment.

4.5.4 Partnership working

The major partners were seen as working very well together in providing financial assistance, technical support (for example, computers provided and maintained by IBM) and assistance with initial infrastructure, planning and management. As one partner stated:

There are no tensions or egos – there's good, open discussion from all groups including teachers and businesses. Businesses now seem to be more aware of education issues and vice versa.

Representative of a local major telecommunications manufacturer

Following the closure of the Port Glasgow office, Careers Scotland now has a base in the Centre and this is seen as another facet of the close partnership working within the initiative.

Partners highlighted that a history of partnership working in the community had provided a good grounding for the development of the Centre and associated networks. However, some partners highlighted that, initially, there had been some issues concerning the different approaches of the local council and school compared to private businesses relating to how they dealt with certain operational issues. Two examples were given:

- One concerned commissioning work for the Centre's windows. Private businesses suggested that local firms could carry out such work quickly and effectively. This would, it was felt, both benefit the Centre and provide work for these local companies. However, the local council stressed that it had a specific procurement procedure to follow. One business partner believed that this illustrated the 'different ways of working' between businesses and local councils with the latter being more bureaucratic. Such procedures also meant that considerable savings were missed at this stage.
- One business partner highlighted that, at least initially, the school had been reticent about setting targets and outcome measures for the Centre. However, the business partners were eager for measures that would indicate some impact on the local community.

4.5.5 Partners' views on future developments and challenges

Partners generally believed that the model used in setting up the Centre seemed appropriate and could be transferable to other communities. A representative of Careers Scotland stated that other schools were eager to participate in programmes like the VWE. Nevertheless, partners identified a number of possible developments and challenges for the Centre.

Partners generally hoped that provision at the Centre would expand to further address the range of complex local needs. Partners saw this as an important challenge for the Centre's management, with the need to ensure the provision of appropriate content and approaches for the whole community.

Some partners thought that the Centre could be used more widely by St Stephen's and Port Glasgow schools with greater input of programme content across the curriculum. One partner suggested that a version of the VWE

programme could be introduced for S1 with content reinforced every one or two years. Another suggested introducing ‘School to Work’ programmes that involved more partner organisations. Some believed that the emergence of *Determined to Succeed* was likely to help promote such developments and support wider education and business partnerships and innovation in general.

Some partners believed that a greater involvement from schools would require addressing the issue of why certain teachers were still sceptical about the worth of programmes such as the VWE. Keeping teachers informed and aware of the value of these programmes was seen as an important issue to ensure their support. An important part of this process included explaining the rationale for programmes and providing evidence of outcomes.

One business partner speculated that some teachers saw the programme content ‘as too different to school and not academic enough’. However, he stressed that the programme was addressing generic skills that businesses were looking for, ie communication skills, ICT skills, problem solving abilities and team working. Such programmes were also seen as more likely to engage with disaffected pupils – one of the National Priorities.

Two partners stated that the Centre should ensure that it provides evidence of impact over the long-term (eg employability and promoting skills), both to promote further involvement of groups, and for accountability purposes (eg corporate, social, business responsibility). Some business partners saw further challenges in the need to increase the involvement of smaller local businesses and to increase the profile of the Centre to attract greater participation from target groups.

One business provider believed that the community should have an increased say in the focus of programmes and ‘drive the agenda and content’. This would, he felt, be beneficial because it would promote greater autonomy from those ‘local authority procedures that might stifle innovation and enterprise’. Some of the current structures were seen as inhibiting this. However, most partners stressed that, whatever the Centre developed into, it would still require robust financial accountability and evaluation of outcomes for funders.

4.6 Summary

The evaluation findings, arising from information gathered from the management and providers at the Project, school management and teachers, and the partner organisations suggest, a general consensus concerning the aims and purposes of the Centre and VWE programme. Most stakeholders saw the aims of the Centre as, attempting to develop relevant skills in participating pupils and adults to promote their life chances and employability, and to foster positive attitudes towards learning and work across the community. It was also noted that following the introduction of URBAN II as a partner, the scope of the project aims had broadened to include a greater focus on promoting learning in the local community.

Representatives of businesses were more likely to stress the need for the Centre to focus on promoting employment in the community while education partners emphasised those aims that concerned influencing local culture so that lifelong learning is seen as the norm. A strong theme to emerge was that these aims, particularly those concerning promoting employability and attitudes to learning and in the wider community, were ambitious and would require time and sustained effort to address.

Most stakeholders believed that, while the aims of the Centre should include stimulating lifelong learning and employability in the community, these had to be seen as long-term goals. Such a task would also require effort from all partners and not just the Centre. Nevertheless, they believed that the Centre could play a key role in promoting lifelong learning in the community.

Analysis of the Centre's participation data revealed that course take-up among adults (16 years and older) does include some representation from age groups seen as traditionally less likely to take part in education (ie 25–35 year olds) but older adults predominate. Of particular note is the fact that participants in courses at the Centre are largely female, with males only making up 21% of participants. Some interviewees believed that, while it was generally difficult to attract certain groups to participate in training and learning courses, the Centre provided an excellent opportunity to influence the views of young people and adults concerning the utility and value of education. Therefore, the Centre should help promote future participation in local learning opportunities.

There was consensus that to meet the aims of the Project, the Centre would require sustained resources to operate over a long period of time. There was agreement that the original aims of the Project should remain unchanged, given their salience to the local community, and to allow evaluation over time. Interviewees noted the need for some increase in tutors and administrative support to meet existing demand, particularly for adult classes.

Overall, the content of courses, and programmes offered by the Centre were seen as appropriate to meet the aims of the Project. Professional stakeholders stressed that the VWE programmes appeared particularly well-designed to engage with disaffected pupils and those who struggled with traditional lessons. All those interviewed stressed that the business-like environment and high quality of resources were valued by pupils and adult participants and contributed to the success of the courses.

Professional stakeholders highlighted the relevance of programmes for many adults, with reference to the high levels of participation in those courses offered. However, some interviewees suggested that the Centre should continue to monitor whether popular computer courses such as the ECDL were suitable for those people in the community who were traditionally difficult to attract.

The majority of professional stakeholders interviewed believed that the Project was having an impact, at least in the short-term, on all participants, including those pupils identified as disaffected. Teachers and others involved with the Centre highlighted that all participating pupils were highly motivated during

their VWE course and appeared to develop their communication and team working abilities as well as specific ICT skills. The VWE course was seen as very successful in engaging with those disaffected pupils who had problematic behaviours. However, some interviewees reported that often these pupils' poor behaviour patterns re-emerged soon after returning to their normal lessons.

Professional stakeholders believed that more destination information and details on what such learners were doing with their skills was required before clear conclusions could be made about the wider impact of the Centre on local adults.

There was consensus across professional stakeholders that the varied range of partners involved with the St Stephen's Project had worked well together from the inception and planning stage through to the on-going operation of the Centre. Some interviewees highlighted some minor differences in partners' procedures but stated that this had not impaired the work of the Centre. The well-established existing partnerships and networks involving public and private organisations and companies in the Port Glasgow area was seen as an important factor in the efficient functioning of the partnerships. Most of the representatives of these partners cited the work and commitment of the Centre's manager as pivotal in sustaining these partnerships, and in the creation and efficient running of the Centre.

The main issues seen as facing the future development of the Centre included:

- The need to promote participation among groups who do not usually see education, training and employment as priorities.
- The need to promote greater interest in the Centre from teachers, and to get more teachers in both High Schools to use the Centre with their pupils.
- The need to address the perceptions of some Port Glasgow High School pupils who see the Centre as a resource only for St Stephen's High School.

Finally, interviewees generally stressed that stimulating participation in lifelong learning programmes was more likely to be effective if a number of partners combined their efforts and resources. Indeed, the local Job Centre and Careers Scotland services were increasingly working with the Centre to target particular groups, to offer advice on accessing training, education and employment. These partners suggested setting aside part of one day per week as a drop-in time at the Centre for people to discuss returning to study or employment with relevant agencies.

5: Key findings and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter revisits the main aims of the evaluation and considers the corresponding findings to emerge from the study and how these relate to current policy initiatives in Scottish Education. The chapter concludes by highlighting some of the related issues and, where appropriate, makes recommendations.

5.2 Revisiting the aims of the study and key findings

The main findings to emerge from the study are presented below and are arranged using the main research objectives.

5.2.1 *A shared vision of aims and purposes*

- Stakeholders generally see the aims and purposes of the Centre and VWE programme as developing relevant core skills in participating pupils and adults, to promote their life chances and employability, and to foster positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and work across the community.
- A strong theme to emerge was that these aims, particularly those concerning promoting employability and attitudes to learning and in the wider community, were ambitious and would require time and sustained effort to address.

5.2.2 *Providing an appropriate and relevant curriculum*

- Overall, the content of programmes offered by the Centre was seen as appropriate to meet the aims of the Project. The VWE programme is seen as particularly well designed to engage with disaffected pupils and those who struggle with traditional lessons.
- Pupils greatly valued the opportunity to work in a ‘business-like’ environment, and the fact that they were treated like young adults with high levels of autonomy.
- The Centre is seen as a unique environment with contemporary surroundings and high quality ICT resources. This motivates pupils and facilitates their access to learning approaches currently unavailable in many of their lessons.
- Interviewees highlighted the relevance of programmes for many adults, with reference to the high levels of participation in those courses offered. However, some interviewees suggested that the Centre should continue to monitor whether popular computer courses such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) were suitable for those people in the community who were traditionally difficult to attract.

5.2.3 *The impact of the Project*

a) Impact of the Virtual Work Experience (VWE) course on pupils

- Since the beginning of the VWE programme at the Centre, 608 pupils have participated in the VWE course (209 from Port Glasgow High School and 399 from St Stephen's High School). This figure includes 20 St Stephens' pupils who participated in the pilot version of the VWE course in 2003.
- Overall, the VWE was seen as having a positive impact, at least in the short-term, on pupil participants, including those identified as disaffected with school.
- Initial positive outcomes for pupils were seen as increased communication skills, self-confidence, team working abilities and specific ICT skills.
- The majority of pupils who were seen as having problematic behaviours were more motivated to study and work on tasks. However, some interviewees reported that often these pupils' behaviour patterns re-emerged soon after returning to their normal lessons in school.

b) Impact of the courses on adult participants

- Initial analysis of the Centre's participation data reveals that between the start of operations at the Centre and November 2005, 229 adults have participated in courses. One hundred and eighty-one (181: 79%) of these registered learners were female.

Data available from the Centre on types of participant further reveals that:

- The largest group of registered learners (37%) is in the 31–45 age bracket; and the second largest group is the 46–60 age range, with 26% of the total. 10% of all course participants are aged over 61.
 - 25% of registered learners are aged 16–30, and within this group, those aged 16–20 represent 10% of all participants.
 - 53% of registered learners are in employment.
 - 9% of learners are students, mainly between the ages of 16 and 20.
 - 7% of learners are disabled.
 - The Centre combines retired and unemployed participants into a single category, and these made up 31% of learners. There was no available gender or age breakdown for this category.
- Adult participants reported an initial positive impact concerning their computing skills, self-confidence, ability to help others learn and opportunities for further learning and employment. It must be stressed, however, that only a small proportion of those involved in the focus groups were participating for vocational reasons.

5.2.4 Promoting lifelong learning and employability in the wider community

- There was consensus that because the Project has been operating for a relatively short time it was unrealistic at this stage to expect a notable impact on promoting lifelong learning and employability in the wider community. Nevertheless, there was consensus across stakeholders that the Centre was largely developing in line with its main objectives and had the potential to make a substantial and positive impact if longer-term support was available.

The above participation figures for adults indicate that the Centre faces a challenge in terms of attracting male participants to do courses. This is particularly so for the 16–30 age group, one of the target groups, where only 3% of participants were males. Such challenges were recognised by the management at the Centre, partner organisations and participating adults. There was consensus that the Centre was not fully engaging with local adults who could benefit most from the courses on offer, ie those who traditionally do not participate in learning and training such as disaffected males who were long-term unemployed with few or no qualifications.

- Qualitative information gathered from adult participants and partner organisations working in the community highlighted that, for adults in the target groups, a lack of self-confidence was an important barrier to returning to learning. Providers also highlighted “territorial/geographical issues” which meant people were reticent about travelling outwith their neighbourhoods to access services and facilities.
- Suggestions from stakeholders, including those adults who had participated in courses at the Centre, for promoting greater participation among target groups included the following:
 - Using more outreach work and targeted marketing would help encourage those who lacked confidence to participate or approach an education provider. Word of mouth was seen as one of the best ways to promote interest in the Centre among local adults. Interviewees believed that this was how most of the adult participants had become aware of the Centre and courses. Adults also suggested that encouraging whole peer groups to participate would address the self-confidence and peer pressure factors that often acted as barriers to participation.
 - Any impact on promoting positive attitudes to employment and learning among target groups would have to take into account local culture, including challenging the views of some who see no utility in education or lacked the confidence to participate in learning, training and employment. Again this process would take time and require sustained and appropriate provision.
 - Education, guidance and other relevant partners should continue to combine their efforts and resources to focus on particular groups to offer advice on accessing training/education and/or employment. (Examples were given of the local Job Centre and Careers Scotland services

increasingly working with the Centre to target particular groups and develop targeted programmes.)

- Setting aside part of one day per week as a drop-in time at the Centre for people to discuss returning to study or employment with relevant agencies.
- Some interviewees suggested that more marketing of the Centre was required. Adult participants and business partners, in particular, stressed that they had seen little active marketing and advertising of the Centre and courses.
- Providers suggested that greater use of the Centre by pupils outwith the *Virtual Work Experience* programme could be encouraged by teachers in the two High Schools.
- Parents of pupils at the two schools were also seen as potential participants and a Communications Strategy group was being established as part of local *Determined to Succeed* initiatives, with the aim of targeting parents. The two High Schools were seen as playing a key role in encouraging parents to use the Centre.

5.2.5 Developing a flexible and tailored curriculum

- Some interviewees from partner businesses stated that they had limited knowledge of the precise curriculum and methods adopted across the courses. Teachers, course providers and others from partner organisations were better placed to assess the curriculum and methods used in the courses. There was consensus across these stakeholders that the range and nature of the courses were appropriate for all learners. Importantly, participating pupils and adults also concurred, highlighting the varied and stimulating course content and methods of delivery.
- The Senior Management Team members at both High Schools believed that the VWE course addressed most of the National Priorities for Education and articulated well with curriculum areas. The course and other opportunities provided via the Centre were also seen as relating to initiatives on citizenship and enterprise. Teachers generally believed that the programme was designed to suit the needs of all pupils, commented on the excellent environment of the Centre, and stressed how much the pupils enjoyed using it.
- Most stakeholders, including participating adults, saw the courses offered by the Centre as relevant for many local adults and highlighted the high levels of participation in those courses offered. However, some interviewees, including providers at the Centre suggested that the Centre should continue to monitor whether popular computer courses such as the ECDL were suitable for those people in the community who were traditionally difficult to attract.

5.2.6 *Partnership working*

- There was consensus that the varied range of partners involved with the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project had worked well together from the inception and planning stage through to supporting the operation of the Centre.
- Some professional stakeholders reported that there was room for further development in terms of the amount of partnership and levels of collaboration between the Centre and the two High Schools. Teachers and providers reported that teachers and their pupils at the two High Schools could make greater use of the Centre. Some departments were said to make more use than others of the facilities and services at the Centre to enhance their lessons (ie English, Art, Modern Languages).
- The already well-established partnerships and networks involving public and private organisations in the Port Glasgow area were seen as an important factor in supporting the Centre.
- Most of the representatives of supporting partner organisations and businesses cited the work and commitment of the Centre's manager and his staff as being pivotal in sustaining these partnerships and in the efficient running of the Centre.

5.3 **Relevance of the evaluation findings to other research and policy**

The evaluation findings are salient, given wider policy and research concerning enterprise in education initiatives. For example, in 2003 the new Enterprise in Education strategy *Determined to Succeed* (Scottish Executive, 2003) was launched, setting out 20 Scottish Executive recommendations/priorities. Backed by £44 million, the strategy has been seen as one of the most significant in compulsory education in the last two decades. It is wide-ranging, innovative and has broad ranging objectives, including a vision that young people 'participate fully in enterprise activities, including those which are explicitly entrepreneurial in nature, and in which success is the result of "hands-on" participation'. Clearly, the evaluation evidence shows that the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre can be seen to provide such activities.

The Scottish Enterprise *Determined to Succeed* (DtS) website¹ states that:

Scotland's future depends on young people with positive attitudes and good core skills. Who understand about business and entrepreneurship. Who are eager to benefit from lifelong learning. It depends on young people who know how to take sensible risks in business...DtS starts in the classroom. Across Scotland, it is generating energy, enthusiasm and creativity in pupils and teachers...It also involves parents, business communities, local authorities and the Scottish Executive.

The evidence summarised in Chapters 2 to 4 indicates that the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre Project fits well with the vision and aims of *Determined to Succeed*. In common with the DtS objectives, the Centre can be seen to be

¹ <http://www.determinedtosucceed.co.uk/dts/>

adopting ‘enterprising learning and teaching approaches’. It also emphasises partnerships including business and education working together to change young people’s attitudes to work and to life.

The findings strongly suggest that many of the grand ideas underpinning DtS can be translated into practical and feasible programmes that can demonstrate initial benefits in line with the objectives of DtS. This includes engaging with all pupils and providing an educational experience that allows disaffected pupils to succeed, while stimulating ‘high achievers’ who might otherwise find their lessons boring. It is also evident, however, that to achieve anything but short-term impact on pupils and adults, the Centre and its partner organisations will require continued support to address the needs of the local community. Like DtS, the Centre also faces challenges in the form of attitudes among certain stakeholders and the wider community that are resistant to change or reflect a lack of confidence to become involved. Some of these challenges and issues are considered in the following and final section.

5.4 Issues and recommendations

The key findings presented in this chapter raise particular issues for innovative programmes and centres based in schools that address aims pertinent to the *Determined to Succeed* initiative, and, indeed, the wider *Curriculum for Excellence*. This section highlights these issues and, where appropriate, makes recommendations.

5.4.1 *Promoting greater participation among target groups in the wider community*

A number of themes arise from the research concerning promoting participation in the programmes or use of the resources at the Centre. These themes include stimulating the interest of groups in the wider community and increasing involvement from pupils and their teachers. The Centre’s own data indicates that certain computer-based courses are very popular with local adults and even oversubscribed. However, participation data also reveals that there are issues concerning attracting males of all ages to do courses. This was recognised by professional stakeholders who believed that the Centre had yet to fully engage with certain groups in the local community. A strong theme in the interviews with providers and adult participants was that a culture of apathy and/or low self-confidence exists across a ‘core’ of people in the community. This meant such people rarely sought out education and training, or even employment. Stakeholders suggested that more local research and monitoring was required to explore the processes involved in these groups’ non-participation, and to identify measures to promote their involvement. Those adults who had participated in courses stressed that the Centre needed a higher profile and more outreach work.

Recommendation

- Providers at the Centre and partners in local authority, support services and business should continue to explore measures that aim to promote the

participation of target groups in the local community. Recent developments in interagency partnership working have seen the implementation of collaborative projects that could impact on target groups. Careful monitoring of the impact of these projects, including highlighting effective practice would be extremely valuable (for example, what approaches and projects work best to encourage participation and effective outcomes for adults and why?), and should be incorporated into the design of the projects.

- Providers should take cognisance of the views of adults who currently participate and use these to inform measures to attract others. The evaluation found that adult learners at the Centre possessed useful insights concerning why their peers did not participate, and provided sophisticated suggestions concerning possible strategies to address non-participation.

5.4.2 Encouraging Port Glasgow pupils to use the Centre in their own time

In an attempt to promote participation by Port Glasgow High School pupils, staff at the school and the Centre have delivered presentations to pupils highlighting services at the Centre, as well as providing literature for senior pupils. However, despite these efforts, some Port Glasgow High School pupils see the Centre as a resource for St Stephen's High School only. Others believed pupils at their neighbouring school would not welcome them should they decide to drop in to use the facilities during lunchtime or after school. This theme also emerged in two of the parental interviews. Many of the Port Glasgow High School pupils were, therefore, reticent about using the Centre in their own time. It would seem, then, that considerable effort is needed to address pupil perceptions about the Centre as a resource for the whole community in order to overcome deeply entrenched cultural traditions and behaviours.

Recommendations

- Staff at the two High Schools and the Centre should look at ways to challenge the views of some pupils concerning the 'ownership' of the Centre. Attempting to alter pupils' perceptions and attitudes is difficult, particularly on such matters. It would appear, at least initially, that some form of organised access, perhaps facilitated by staff at the Centre or teachers might promote participation by those Port Glasgow pupils who wanted to use the Centre's facilities. Another strategy might involve using pupil facilitators or 'buddies' from St Stephen's High School to accompany peers from their neighbouring school while they attend the Centre. These individuals would have responsibility for ensuring visiting pupils were treated courteously. In time, it would be hoped that such strategies would not be needed and pupils from both High Schools would use the Centre without inhibition.

5.4.3 Meeting the long term objectives of the Centre

The majority of those involved with Centre believed that it was having a positive impact on those pupils who participated in the VWE programme and

on the adults who were attending courses. However, certain issues concerning sustaining positive outcomes and extending the impact of the Centre were highlighted by stakeholders. Those interviewed stated that to address the longer-term aims of the Centre, such as promoting employability and attitudes towards learning and work across the community, would require many years of sustained work.

Recommendations

- If the Centre is to meet those objectives that focus on promoting lifelong learning and employability among the local community, adequate long-term funding will be required to maintain appropriate programmes and necessary staffing. There is evidence that the Centre is continuing to develop partnerships with other providers and services and is playing a key role in developing programmes to target key groups in the community. The Centre will require systematic and appropriate monitoring of provision and impact, and continued partnership working, to make efficient use of resources, services and provider skills.
- Pupils should be allowed to participate in follow-up courses that reinforce the impact of the VWE course. Pupils, programme management and some teachers stated that variations of the VWE programme could be provided to pupils every two years to ensure that improvements to pupils' self-esteem, and team-working, communication and ICT skills were not lost. This would also promote parents' awareness of the Centre and its courses.
- Teachers could look at ways to use the Centre to enhance their lessons and curriculum and consider ways of promoting greater access to the Centre by pupils during school hours.

5.4.4 Maintaining positive outcomes for disaffected pupils

A strong theme to emerge from the findings was that those pupils seen by teachers as disaffected with school had largely engaged with the VWE programme, with reported improvements to their core skills, and, initially, their behaviour. In particular, teachers expressed surprise at how such pupils had performed during their end of programme presentation. These pupils had not participated well in 'normal' lessons or demonstrated skills in working with others or self-expression, but the contrary was the case during the VWE course. However, stakeholders were not sure how permanent such changes were.

For some partner organisations, the programme had demonstrated that all pupils were more likely to engage with learning when participative methods were deployed within a high quality and stimulating environment. They stressed that this was particularly the case for disaffected pupils who were often frustrated by 'traditional teaching approaches' and resources. This meant that any initial benefits for such pupils could be lost when they went back to lessons. These interviewees echoed the comments of most pupils who stressed that 'school should be like the Virtual Work Experience programme'.

Recommendations

- The comments of pupils and observations by teachers and Centre staff highlight the value of educational provision that engages with those young people who, for whatever reason, are disaffected with school. There are many pressures on teachers that limit the extent to which the curriculum can be made more flexible. However, given the impact of the approaches used at the Centre, it is suggested that teachers at the two High Schools could consider ways of incorporating aspects of those learning and teaching styles and resources that disaffected pupils have found particularly enjoyable and productive. Making school lessons more like the approaches used in the VWE presents certain challenges and might require greater resources, but all pupils, not just those disaffected with school, reported positive outcomes and high levels of engagement. Such goals are also in line with the aims of the *Determined to Succeed* initiative and the *Curriculum for Excellence*.

5.4.5 Promoting links between the VWE course and the schools' curriculum and methods

Senior management in both High Schools stated that, where appropriate, they were looking at how the school curriculum could relate more closely to the content of courses at the Centre. Some teachers agreed that it was important to articulate what was done on the VWE programme with the curriculum, to reinforce what pupils had learned during the programme, and to sustain positive outcomes. In some departments (for example, English and Art) teachers in St Stephen's High School were beginning to place a greater emphasis on resources such as ICT. Some partner organisations believed that innovative programmes like the VWE had an important place in the curriculum because opportunities for pupil work-experience and placements with businesses could be limited.

Recommendations

- More teachers should be encouraged and supported to become familiar with the pedagogical arrangements at the Centre. This could be facilitated through discussions between teachers and the Centre staff to ensure more continuity between Centre and school approaches to learning.
- Again, related to reinforcing positive outcomes from the VWE, teachers at the two High Schools and the staff at the Centre should, where appropriate, continue to explore ways to articulate the content of the VWE and any similar courses with the wider school curriculum.

5.4.6 The role of key personnel in the success of the Centre

Almost all of the partner organisations and school managers highlighted the role of the Manager and staff at the Centre in the efficient set up and running of the Centre. Furthermore, they stated that the initially positive outcomes observed for pupils such as increased motivation and communication skills were largely attributable to the learning and teaching styles and approaches of the Manager and his staff. Pupils believed that similar centres would require tutor/trainers

who treated students like young adults, were firm but fair, and possessed a sense of humour and good communication skills. This raises two issues: firstly, other centres and initiatives, particularly those that target disaffected pupils, might benefit from sharing practices, and ideas with the Centre. Secondly, these key personnel appear to be playing a very important role in the success of the Centre; therefore, a key question is, to what extent would the Centre be successful if these personnel moved on? Also, if a key factor in the success of the Centre is the particular mix of individual staff then to what extent is this type of centre transferable to other contexts?

Recommendations

- The historical factors and circumstances that have led to the setting up of the Centre and the mix of staff who have developed it to date may be unique. However, given its initial success, it seems likely that the St Stephen's Enterprise Centre provides a good model for wider adoption in similar social and economic contexts. It is recommended that similar centres be developed, with the caveat that sustained funding is required if the objective of such Centres is to work with others to promote employability and lifelong learning.

5.4.7 Addressing parents' awareness and involvement

The very low level of parents' awareness of the VWE course, demonstrated during the telephone survey of parents and in pupils' accounts, suggests that an opportunity was lost for promoting the image of the Centre and its value among the wider community. Parents' limited awareness also meant that any positive support parents might have given to pupils concerning the course was reduced.

Recommendations

- Staff at the two High Schools, the Centre and other partner organisations should work to raise parents' awareness of programmes provided by the Centre and other associated services. Not every parent will be able or willing to attend sessions to hear about a course or the work of the Centre; therefore, a range of publicity and dissemination should be considered, including information leaflets sent home with pupils, and making reference to the work of the Centre in general correspondence to parents. Open evenings/days or hosting celebration of achievement awards at the Centre might also be appropriate for some parents.

5.4.8 Maintaining greater interest and involvement by teachers

Some of the professional stakeholders suggested that greater teacher involvement with the Centre could further increase teachers' awareness of the programme and the facilities at the Centre. This could then help promote greater use of the Centre by teachers at both High Schools to enhance their provision and help them to build on the outcomes of the VWE course.

Recommendations

- Teachers are busy and have many demands on their time; however, pupils greatly appreciated the presence of their teachers at the end of course presentations. Pupils also saw teachers dropping into the course as evidence of their interest in what pupils were doing, and as an indicator of teachers' value of the course. It is recommended that teachers and staff at the Centre explore ways in which teachers could play a greater role in using the Centre and observing their pupils while they do the VWE. Perhaps the management at the two schools and the Centre could explore joint management team working to promote a more inclusive management strategy and closer links between the work of the Centre and the teaching in schools.

5.4.9 Long-term objectives require long-term evaluation

The majority of professional stakeholders and adult participants in courses stressed that the aims and objectives of the Centre that concerned promoting lifelong learning and employability among the local community would take years to demonstrate any significant impact. The scale of the challenge and the complex range of factors involved in such a task, therefore, meant that the current evaluation could not adequately measure the impact of the Centre in terms of these criteria.

Recommendations

- As stakeholders have stressed, any meaningful evaluation of the Centre's objectives that concern promoting lifelong learning and employability among the local community will require long-term evaluation. Such an evaluation should include on-going monitoring of data on the types of participants in courses at the Centre, and a sufficiently rigorous and in-depth exploration of the benefits for participants and 'distance travelled'. For example, any further research should be able to demonstrate whether those who participate in courses at the Centre benefit in terms of developing more positive attitudes towards lifelong learning, and have greater life chances and employment prospects. This would likely involve tracking participants for some time to assess whether their participation had been beneficial, in what ways it has helped them and what factors facilitated or inhibited their using what they had learned on their courses.

References

Scottish Executive (2003) *Determined to Succeed: Enterprise in Education Scottish Executive response*. The Scottish Executive. Edinburgh

Scottish Executive (2004) *Determined to Succeed. One year on*. The Scottish Executive. Edinburgh

Appendix 1: Profile of registered learners (aged 16+)

Table A1: Age, sex and employment status of registered learners (16 years and older)

Age Range	Registered Learners		Employed		Student		Disabled	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
16–20	4	19	1	5	4	14	0	0
21–25	2	11	1	9	0	1	1	0
26–30	2	16	2	9	0	1	0	0
31–35	6	22	5	11	0	0	0	1
36–40	6	21	5	12	0	0	0	2
41–45	8	22	3	12	0	0	0	2
46–50	0	15	0	11	0	0	0	0
51–55	7	19	3	14	0	0	1	3
56–60	4	15	2	7	0	0	1	1
61–65	2	8	1	4	0	0	0	0
66–70	2	5	0	0	0	0	1	1
70+	1	5	1	1	0	0	0	0
Age unknown	3	4	0	3	0	0	1	0
Sub totals	47	182	24	98	4	16	5	10
Totals	229		122		20		15	

Appendix 2: Main partner organisations consulted for the evaluation

Careers Scotland (Greenock)

Economic Development Service, Inverclyde Council

Education Services, Inverclyde Council

James Watt College

National Semiconductor (UK)

New Community School Coordinator (St Stephen's and Port Glasgow High School)

Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire

T-Mobile (Greenock)

Adult Literacies (Port Glasgow)

Community Education (Port Glasgow)