



**National Association of Teachers of Travellers
+Other Professionals**



BUILDING BRIDGES FOR TRAVELLER CHILDREN: USING ICT TO CREATE LINKS BACK INTO EDUCATION

**A progress report on the progress of the Wider Key
Skills Bridging Project, *Strand 'B' of E-LAMP: 2008-09***



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**department for
children, schools and families**

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Executive summary

One of the major challenges in work with Traveller families is to encourage and support take-up and achievement within secondary education, and a particular challenge is presented by Key Stage 4 (14+) when all too many young Travellers have become disengaged from school. This project has been supported by the DCSF and coordinated via NATT+ in order to explore the potential of an ICT-based learning approach as one way to re-engage young Travellers into learning and to build bridges for their educational and occupational futures. The intention has been to counter cultural dissonance by picking up on vocational and personal interests. These have been used within the project as a springboard for developing a range of skills which can, in turn, help the young participants to pursue post-16 and work-related opportunities. The programme has also been used to support KS4 learners who are still registered at school, often to reinforce attendance, and with young Travellers in alternative provision.

This report is mainly focused on progress during the 2008-09 school year. Twenty four Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) have been involved in providing tutorial support, with approximately 100 young learners using the programme at any one time. The learning framework has been designed to allow the young participants to achieve one or more of the 'Wider Key Skills' qualifications. They are expected to commit to a minimum of one day a week to complete a variety of 'challenges' in order to achieve these qualifications. They are also expected to work with their tutors to explore additional learning opportunities as well as links with Connexions staff, local colleges and other vocational providers, as part of the bridging process.

The first wave of youngsters started early in 2007 and 75% of these have gained at least one qualification and some all three. The second wave started early in 2008. Of these 20 of the 32 new participants had gained a qualification by the summer of, 2009 and up to seven others will submit their work in December, 2009. 61 new learners also made a start and remained active during the 2008-09 school year. 24 of these gained a qualification in July, 2009 and a further 29 are on target to obtain qualifications in December, 2009.

Reports for the two previous years are available on the NATT+ website¹. These reports explain the structure of the project and give details of the Nisai virtual learning environment (VLE) which is used by tutors and learners, as well as arrangements for ASDAN accreditation via 'Ormiston Education'; an educational trust.

The reports also discuss early experiences, drawing from the perspective of both tutors and learners. Taken together with feedback from 2008-09, they confirm the value of the approach and it is encouraging to note the progress made by most of the young learners.² As well as gaining qualifications there

¹ www.natt.org.uk

² The retention rate has been of the order of 80%.

is clear evidence of improvements in literacy and ICT skills, and in independent learning skills; particularly related to planning, reflection and handling advice. Just as important there are reported improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence as youngsters re-engage with learning, which they find both enjoyable and relevant. As noted in last year's report, being out of school, or even disaffected within school, has not been found to reflect a lack of desire to learn. The project has, rather, provided a new and positive focus centred on vocational interests.

It has also become increasingly evident that the ELAMP approach is at its best as 'blended learning'; a mixture of regular face-to-face activity and independent student work using the laptop as well as the internet access provided by the project. In addition it is clear that the approach works best when the face-to-face element draws the young participants together into a group setting; although this is not always possible with some of the dispersed learners supported by the project.

This year's report will give a brief introduction to the project (drawn largely from last year's report) and will then focus on an overview of learner progress for 2008-09. It will go on to look at models of good practice drawn from the experiences of tutors. It will conclude with discussion of some of the key issues identified in last year's report (including pressure on tutor time, connectivity problems, and providing a more solid base for FE entry) and outline progress in addressing these areas of concern. In addition the report will outline plans for next year when some of the existing partners will be involved in an initiative aimed at testing out a costed model with a paid-staffing element, which could be offered to all Local Authorities and schools as part of the framework of 'alternative provision' encouraged by the government's 'Back-on Track' initiative.

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Introducing the project *(NB this section is a slightly revised (updated) version of the introduction written for last year's report)*

The 'Building Bridges' initiative is part of a series of 'e-learning and mobility projects' (E-LAMP) aimed at reinforcing the education of Traveller children. These began with research supported by the Nuffield Foundation in 2003, followed by phased practical initiatives mainly funded by the DfES (now DCSF). The projects have been coordinated by the 'National Association of Teachers of Travellers and Other Professionals' (NATT+)³ and reports from earlier phases of the project are available on the associated website ; www.natt.org.uk. A report of the earlier Nuffield findings, entitled 'Traveller Education: changing times, changing technologies', is available from Trentham Books [ISBN 1 85856 351 8]

The prime focus of this particular part of the ELAMP initiative has been the challenge of Traveller pupils who become disengaged from schooling. Such disengagement has been a major challenge over the years as large numbers of families from the Gypsy, Irish and Scottish Traveller communities have remained defensive about the impact of schools and schooling on their children. Considerable progress has been made in the primary sector, often related to supportive work by local Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) staff. However, disengagement is still a major issue in the secondary sector, especially as youngsters approach Key Stage 4. Reasons include the parental fear of bullying, sometimes racist, and of negative influences which challenge traditional community values. There are also concerns that the secondary school curriculum is not relevant to community needs, and to lifestyles which include a strong informal apprenticeship model within extended families.⁴

The project has a re-engagement rationale and the original remit was to work with youngsters who had been out of school for a significant period of time. However, experiences to date are beginning to show that this ELAMP approach can also work well for those who are still on the fringes of schooling; with, for example, poor attendance or under threat of exclusion. There have also been a small number of learners who have been excluded from school and are being supported within alternative provision. Here the ELAMP approach has been used as a supplement to learner programmes.

For youngsters with little prospect of a return to school the objective of the project is to focus on vocational pathways and to encourage links with further education and with agencies like Connexions which can provide advice relating to college courses, jobs and career options. For those still tenuously

³ Formerly NATT

⁴ See in particular the study written by Derrington and Kendall (2004) 'Gypsy Traveller Students in Secondary Schools: culture, identity and achievement', available from Trentham Books

linked to school the aim is to combine the vocational focus with efforts to strengthen home-school relationships.

In order to meet these challenges the project has developed some key features

- Its starting point is the need to build on the real interests of youngsters and families, especially their vocational interests.
- It acknowledges the importance of using tutors who are drawn from local TESS staff, known and trusted by the young learners and their families.
- It offers a learning programme which is based on the wider key skills qualifications, as these are felt to be an essential underpinning for personal development and for further study
- It offers two levels of participation (corresponding to the wider key skills levels), with Level 1 materials designed for a reading age of 8 years to encourage access for those Traveller youngsters who are amongst the most educationally disadvantaged.
- It is centred on the use of a web-based virtual learning environment (VLE), but with a blended emphasis; i.e. a mixture of face-to-face sessions and independent learning via the VLE.
- The young learners are referred to as 'members' within the project and the VLE. Similarly tutors are called 'advisors'. This is to recognize the young adult status accorded to the 14+ age-group within Traveller communities as well as avoiding terminology associated with schooling.

The rationale for much of this approach built on successful face-to-face work which had already been developed by some TESS in partnership with the then Chrysalis Club 2000 (CC2000).⁵ The new dimension was to utilize ICT to encourage, motivate and support the learning process, and each Traveller youngster is supplied with a laptop and internet access. The use of a VLE also has the advantage of allowing the young learners to continue their tasks when their families are away from base; i.e. travelling. However, it is important to emphasize that the project is mainly aimed at families who are fairly static. Experience to date has confirmed that it would not be realistic to encourage fully-fledged distance learning for most of this young constituency; at least not in their first year of involvement with the project.

The VLE itself is a Nisai product and its features are fully described in the progress report for ELAMP₄ (2006-07). However it is probably helpful to give some feel for the member's area which is shown below, and also for the way in which the learning materials are structured.⁶

⁵ A charitable educational trust which has been active in exploring and providing approaches for youngsters who have been educationally disadvantaged. [CC2000 is now part of another trust 'Ormiston Education']

⁶ Tutors have a completely separate area where they can assign and mark work as well as giving feedback



Figure 1: The member's working area

Figure 1 shows the confidential (password protected) area for each individual member and facilities include:-

- A picture gallery for photos which members and advisors want to share
- News items for members (accessed via the Traveller's Times icon)
- 'Tools' and 'Useful Links' areas which contain hyperlinks to resources like Encarta, Wikipedia and the Google search engine
- A user 'Help' area
- A calendar which reminds learners about work deadlines
- A library area which contains some key project documents
- A closed and moderated chat room (for members only)
- An area containing work folders as assigned to each individual member
- Internal email facilities (accessed via the envelope icon on the laptop screen)

These functionalities allow for a flow of information, and for communication between project participants. The main member working area is then accessed via the 'My Folder' icon, and this is where the member finds the work which their tutor (advisor) has currently assigned to them. It also contains copies of their completed task sheets with appropriate tutor

feedback. In line with wider key skills requirements, the materials designed by CC2000 are intended to help the member plan, carry out and review a series of 'challenges' and the VLE also allows the member to upload various forms of 'evidence' to show how they carried through on challenge tasks. The spread of challenge topics has been designed to meet the criteria for all three current wider key skills:- 'Improving Own Learning and Performance', 'Problem Solving' and 'Working with Others'.

Crucially, they are also designed to capture the personal and vocational interests of young Travellers. Challenge topics include, for example, 'Learning How to care for an animal', 'Discovering my family history', 'Pricing a Job', 'Hair and Beauty Makeover' and 'Landscaping a garden'. There are also units focused on 'Becoming an ICT expert', 'What will I do when I am 16+' and 'College Application and Interview'. These are all titles designed for Level 1 (equivalent to GCSE D-G). Youngsters working at Level 2 (equivalent to GCSE A*-C) are expected to choose their own challenge topics and are expected to follow a self-directed learning approach, with only background support from their advisor.

In order to gain a qualification for one key skill area the young members have to complete two appropriate challenges. Their portfolio of work is then moderated by the awarding body ASDAN, and this qualification has equivalence with two thirds of a GCSE. If they complete all three wider key skills areas they therefore gain the equivalent of 2 GCSEs within the grade range corresponding to their level.

During the first year of the project (2006-07) 20 young learners were actively involved, supported by four TESS.⁷ Some of these carried on into the second year when 32 new learners joined and a total of 14 TESS teams became involved. In the spirit of a pilot, each team has set out to support a small number of youngsters and the whole enterprise has been coordinated on a day-to-day basis by Paul France⁸ with assistance from Dean Cope who is chair of the NATT+ ICT working group.

Section 1: Learner progress 2008-09

1.1 A brief summary from previous years

15 of the 20 original students gained at least one qualification, as have 20 of the 32 second year group. Up to seven other second year starters are continuing into next year and still hope to enter for qualifications in December, 2009.

Feedback from these young learners, confirmed by their tutors, also evidenced improvements in literacy and ICT skills, and in skills relating to planning, reflection and handling advice. Just as important there were

⁷ One of the original partners, St Helens, faced considerable delays and, in the end, effectively started from September, 2007 with the second round of participants.

⁸ Contact details are given at the beginning of this report.

reported improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence as youngsters re-engaged with learning, which they found both enjoyable and relevant. In addition the project had clearly enabled them to firm up their vocational thinking.

1.2 The 2008-09 cohort

104 learners have been involved with the project since September, 2008. 27 of these were existing learners, some of whom had already gained qualifications and others who were still working towards their first certification. The other 77 are new learners who joined the project during the autumn term (if being supported by existing partners) or from January, 2009 (if supported by new partners). This section is focused on the cohort of 77 new learners.

Having established the general efficacy of the approach, it was decided to profile the backgrounds and interests of new learners joining the programme in 2008-09 in order to establish an overview for future planning, as well as enabling the future tracking of outcomes and possible trends. It was also decided that it would be useful to continue to record reasons why learners dropped out prematurely, as well as looking at progress as reflected by achievements.

The profiles were collated from information supplied by TESS partners as each new learner registered for ELAMP. The other data was collected during visits to the 12 new partners and via telephone-based interviews with the other 10 active partners.

As indicated above, 77 new learners joined the Building Bridges project during the school year. 15 of these were from families of Irish Traveller Heritage, but the vast majority were from Gypsy families (with just a few from immigrant Roma families). 49 of the new learners were girls and 28 were boys; a similar pattern to previous years but slightly more weighted towards girls.

The following table gives a breakdown by year group cross-referenced with information about schooling/educational status. As the table reflects, youngsters can join the project part way through Y9 as well as during KS4, and this year four post-16 students were also enrolled. All four had had significant gaps in schooling and were keen to develop skills and explore college options.

	Y9	Y10	Y11	Other	Totals
School	7	3	5	---	15
Alternative provision	1	---	2	---	3
EHE	22	13	11	---	46
Non-EHE	1	4	4	---	9
Other	---	---	---	4*	4
Totals	31	20	22	4	77

*Post 16

Table 1

It is important to note that 46 of the 73 school age learners (63%) had been registered for Elective Home Education (EHE) by their parents, and that another 9 (12%) were not in school and not registered for EHE. These proportions are similar to those in evidence during the first two years of the project, and are both a significant cause for concern and a key part of the rationale of the project (See Section 3). It is also encouraging to see that some schools are beginning to use the programme (20% of the young participants were still registered at a school) and that there are useful localized developments with alternative providers (again see Section 3).

The profile/registration form used by the project also sought information about when pupils had left school and there were 43 responses from a possible 59. The most common pattern within the responses was for pupils to have left at the end of Y6 (approximately 50% of responses) or during Y7 (another 14%). The other 'bulge' was during Y9 when approximately 26% had left).

The form also asked about literacy and ICT skills. 25 of the young learners met the reading age requirement for the project but were felt to be likely to need significant literacy support. 23 were judged to be likely to be able to cope with project requirements with some background support. Another 28 were judged to have good literacy skills. (There was one non-response). 12 of the new learners had minimal or no ICT skills, 37 had some basic skills and 28 had good ICT skills. The proportionate spread of both literacy and ICT skills proved similar for both boys and girls.

The final sections of the form focused on targets and vocational interests and a significant number of the 77 young participants were reported to be hazy in terms of their vocational interests and plans. Indeed their tutors often commented that this was one of the reasons they had been keen to draw them into the project.

In terms of what they hoped to gain from the project just over half the girls and about half the boys made specific reference to improving literacy and ICT skills. About half the boys and one third of the girls were also reported to be keen to get qualifications; usually related to helping them to obtain jobs or a college place. 37 of the 49 girls and 22 of the 28 boys saw college as a possible or definite option.

Where plans were clearer, vocational interests were fairly diverse but very much in line with trends seen in earlier phases of the project, and other studies. Over half the girls mentioned an interest in 'Hair and Beauty', eight wanted to pursue aspects of art, fashion and design, whilst others listed a vast range of possibilities including law, reception work, child care, looking after animals, the music industry and football.

The majority of the boys mentioned a spread of work related to the construction industry [16 responses] or looking after a range of different animals [9 responses]. Boxing, carpet fitting and fishing also got a mention. It was also interesting to note that fourteen of the boys expected to go on into the family business; ten were definite about this and four saw it as an option.

In contrast just three of the girls felt that this was a definite choice which they wanted to pursue whilst two more listed it as a possibility.

1.3 Reasons for leaving prematurely

Each year a small number of potential participants and their families have agreed to join this ELAMP bridging initiative but then changed their minds before the programme started. They were normally replaced by other learners and such 'withdrawals' have not been recorded. Of the 77 who registered and actually made a start during 2008-09, 12 had subsequently dropped out before the summer and without completing a qualification. Three of the learners had moved permanently out of the area covered by the partner TESS, and one family had made a move which had led to transport problems (to get to face-to-face sessions) which couldn't be resolved. One learner had left when she became pregnant, another with health problems and in one instance parents had decided to withdraw two brothers without specifying a reason. On the positive side, one learner had made such good progress that she had transferred to a GCSE programme. On the negative side, three of the 12 learners had not proved sufficiently motivated to continue; although in at least one instance this was felt to be related to frustrations caused by lack of connectivity.

This proportion (15% of the cohort) is rather lower than the drop out rate for previous years (approximately 20%) but tutors have also noted potential concerns related to a further 8 learners who are still involved but may not complete a qualification⁹. This suggests that the final drop out rate for the cohort is likely to be closer to the 20% level.

It is also useful to compare the range of reasons for leaving with those collated for the previous year when four learners had to withdraw as families moved, three left because of changes in personal/family circumstances and no less than eight for motivational reasons; again some of these eight withdrawals had been reported to relate to poor connectivity.

These are important reminders of some of the issues which affect work with Traveller families, but also of the importance of minimizing the impact of potential technical problems.

1.4 Progress towards qualifications

Two of the new partner TESS, Essex and Harrow, seem to have faced a variety of significant problems during the year and are effectively making a fresh start for 2009-10. Allowing for learners supported by these two partners and for those who left early, there were 61 new participants who became actively and effectively involved with ELAMP during the year. 24 of these had already gained a qualification by July, 2009 and another 29 were on track to gain qualifications by December, 2009. As noted in the previous

⁹ Either because the family has been away travelling, or because attendance has been patchy, or because of loss of commitment/motivation

subsection there were concerns about the other 8 learners and partners were waiting to see if improvements could be made in the autumn term.

All 24 entries were at Level 1. 14 were from girls and 10 from boys. All the candidates had started with 'Improving Own Learning and Performance' (IOLP) and one had gone on to complete the 'Problem Solving' requirements as well. Within the IOLP entries it was not surprising to find that the most popular combination of challenges for girls was 'Becoming an ICT expert' and 'Hair and Beauty Makeover' (9 of the 14 candidates). Other topics chosen by the girls were animal care, making a college application and 'Looking after a baby'; the latter using the generic option. The most popular combination for boys was ICT together with animal care (5 candidates), closely followed by ICT combined with the college application challenge (4 candidates). One candidate used the generic option to explore an interest in block paving.

This is an encouraging snapshot in terms of the challenges being pursued by learners as well as qualification entries, and tutors continued to provide feedback confirming the importance of the project in increasing both literacy and ICT skills, and in improving self-esteem. Progress in terms of vocational outcomes will be discussed in Section 3.

Section 2: Models of good TESS practice.

As is evident from the previous section, the project undertakes regular and extensive evaluation to track pupil participation and TESS progress. Evaluation takes place through a variety of methods which include face to face visits, telephone interviews, group meetings and pupil profile forms which provide basic background information regarding individual students.

The purpose of evaluation is obviously to monitor progress but also to consider practice as each TESS has a slightly different approach. Elements of good practice have emerged as part of an ongoing discussion with tutors, and tutor feedback has also identified important issues. For example, although ELAMP was launched as an on-line learning facility it became increasingly clear that a 'blended learning' approach was more appropriate. This comprises of regular face-to-face meetings between tutor and learner as well as independent student work using the laptop and Internet access provided by the project. Many TESS have gone on to report the value of a hub, or group work, approach for the face-to-face contact due to the social advantages this holds.

For 2008-09 it was decided to visit three partners to explore their approaches in more detail, and the three case-study visits are set out below. The visits were to York, Northampton and Suffolk. They reflected a number of project strengths. In particular, the tutors' specialised knowledge and understanding of students and their lifestyles, likes and interests had proved very valuable for motivation and choosing the correct learning focus. The tutors also reported some very clear benefits to learners on the project and one tutor added the

reminder that their learners “would not be receiving any education if not for ELAMP”. The key advantages which they highlighted can be summarised as:

- Re-engagement in learning
- Providing experience of a relevant and rewarding learning process
- Improved focus and re-integration at post -16 level
- Improved self-confidence and self-esteem, which clearly enabled motivation towards post-16 options.

Meeting different tutors and students face to face in their learning contexts provided details that would not be covered by evaluation forms alone. Here the evidence from the visits reinforced the value of the group/hub approach but also a possible refinement of the approach which allows for flexibility. Within this model learners can meet regularly in a group as well as receiving some additional one to one support; similar to a tutorial structure to ensure learning progress. This is perhaps moving towards an ‘ideal’ model with the balance of individual and group meetings partly dependent on factors like the degree of geographical disbursement of the learners.

Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire has two ELAMP tutors and six female learners. They meet roughly once a month at a Multicultural Education Centre. Most parents bring learners in to the centre, some learners needed help with transport. Between meetings tutors go out and visit their students at home. This mixture of support is beneficial to learners as they get the opportunity to meet socially and work together but also have their individual learning needs addressed. All students were out of school and registered on EHE, although the oldest student was attending college part-time.

Here is a picture of the tutors with two of their learners at their learning centre.



Some learners were working at Level 2 on challenges involving 'Nutrition', 'Driver Theory' and 'Safety in the Home for Toddlers'. Other learners were working at Level 1 and completing 'ICT', 'Hair and Beauty' and 'Family History' challenges.

2008/09 was Northampton's second year on the ELAMP project. Last year they had supported learners individually but tutors felt a group model with additional outreach support had been a great advantage to learners and parents. There were clear vocational links to their work and tutors had a great deal of knowledge about post-16 opportunities, which has clearly benefitted the group. They had made use of the local Connexions service and found Personal Learning Plans (PLPs)* helpful in clarifying learners' vocational targets. Tutors felt that ELAMP had therefore improved learners' focus on their futures. In addition the project had increased their learners' self confidence, self esteem, literacy, ICT and independent learning skills. Obtaining recognized Wider Key Skills qualifications was also seen as a clear advantage.

** PLPs are described and discussed in Section 3*

York

York has one ELAMP tutor and five learners who made a start in March, 2008. The tutor initially worked with all learners individually on their ICT challenge. This proved to be very time consuming so she changed to a weekly group meeting focussing work on the three female learners as they were the most disengaged. The two remaining learners had completed their IOLP challenges individually and will continue their work in September 2009. All learners were in school as there are good secondary transition rates, yet disaffection in KS 4 was an issue for all these pupils.

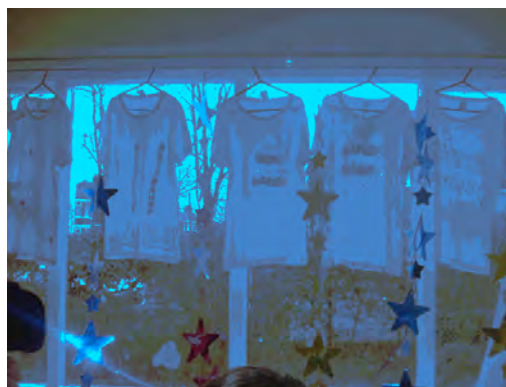
2008/09 was York's first full school year on the project. The tutor had chosen learners who were all ICT proficient and had good reading levels; this enabled them all to complete Level 2 work. It was clear that the tutor's knowledge of local families, her own ICT skills and previous experience with ASDAN had all aided the support she was able to offer her learners and the progress they were able to make.

York TES have their own Connexions Personal Advisor, this clearly aided the vocational dimension of students work. The tutor also used other external vocational agencies to provide additional support where necessary.

At the time of the visit the three female learners had completed their IOLP qualification (with the 'ICT' and 'Hair and Beauty' challenges). They were now working on:

- Problem Solving (PS) challenges: 'Customising Clothing' and 'Family History'
- Working with Others (WVO) challenges: 'Planning a Party', and 'What will I do when I am 16'.

Here is a window display with the T-Shirts the girls produced for their problem solving challenge.



The tutor liked the way materials were skills based and focused upon young Travellers interests and the main benefit to her learners were that they had ownership over their work, which promoted independent learning.

Suffolk

Suffolk Traveller Education Service has a unique ELAMP model; they fund a local tutor, who is a qualified teacher and Traveller himself to deliver the work. He works in partnership with a member of the Suffolk Traveller Education team who identifies students and moderates the work.

2008/09 was Suffolk's first year on the project and despite connectivity problems they have made a good start by using the off-line materials, which were provided on disk to all ELAMP tutors. One learner dropped out in the early stages but was swiftly replaced with another. All five learners started at Level 1 and had focussed on a range of challenges including 'Family History', 'College application and interview', 'Caring for an Animal', 'Marketing a product or service', 'Hair and Beauty' and 'ICT'.

The group meet together once a week and are given support in planning and reviewing their work and completing their challenge paperwork. Learners are expected to complete some independent work between meetings and this tends to be concentrated on their challenge tasks. This system ensures good progress and improves students' independent learning skills.

The tutor felt that a hub/group model had been valuable in terms of getting to know each other but that the best work was produced when he focused his efforts on a 1:1 basis. He is therefore planning to use both approaches next year with two hours as a hub and the other hour for 1:1 provision, on a rolling programme.

This group have made good use of external vocational links and invited a member of the Connexions team to visit the students. The students also made visits to West Suffolk College and the Mildenhall Learning Centre. All students have applied for college places.

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Section 3: Broader issues and the future

This section will focus on four key issues identified in the 2007-08 project evaluation report, and progress made to address those issues. The first of these was internet connectivity as it became clear that a significant proportion of young ELAMP learners were having problems caused by inadequate signal coverage and that this was affecting motivation and progress. The second relates to an identified need to strengthen literacy skills and to improve targeted planning to try to ensure that more youngsters had realistic chances of moving on to college places or other appropriate vocations options. The other two, inter-related, issues concern pressures on tutor time which were affecting the effectiveness of the tutorial role, and the need to look to the future with the provision of a costed service which would be open to any local authority faced with the challenge of disengaged Traveller pupils and those on the fringes of schooling.

3.1 The introduction of an off-line alternative

As noted in last year's report, it had been decided to revise some of the wording and flow of the challenge task sheets in the light of comments from tutors and learners in order to make them more user friendly. At the same time it was decided to take the opportunity to produce an off-line DVD version of the sheets for all the challenges so that learners could continue with tasks even if affected by problems with internet access. The DVD was designed with a menu based system which enabled learners to locate and complete Word versions of the task sheets quickly and easily and was introduced for February, 2009. It also contains the library of resources which is available within the VLE used for on-line working.

Views were sought from the 20 partners who were fully active this year and these show a very positive welcome for the alternative approach. 12 had used the materials with at least some of their learners and some had used it for all learners. The other eight had not felt the need to introduce the DVD as they hadn't faced problems with internet connectivity. Comments from partners who had switched to an off-line approach were very positive. Apart from the obvious benefit that youngsters could get on with their work whatever the connectivity situation, the off-line approach was felt by some tutors to be more manageable, and a better tool to promote independent learning with students. It should be noted that part of the rationale of the project is to improve the ICT skills of the young learners including the use of email and web-based resources. It has therefore remained important that learners are in situations where they can access the internet as part of their learning activity; for example during weekly group sessions, even where they have connectivity problems at home. The purpose of the DVD is as a back up to ensure that youngsters can always maintain a momentum in terms of pursuing tasks for their challenges.

3.2 The use of further supportive measures

One of the concerns shared by tutors is that gaining wider key skills qualifications, and reinforcing other skills as part of the process, has not

always been sufficient to enable participants to progress to take up vocational options related to their interests. Part of the concern has been that having chosen a relatively low base for entry, a reading age of eight years, it has been difficult to prepare youngsters for some of the options they would like to explore. Another issue has been that there seems to be some variation in realistic options for these young learners in different parts of the country. Some colleges, for example, seem to offer more supportive options than others. As a response the project has sought to encourage the use of learning materials aimed at literacy reinforcement and has developed a strong emphasis on encouraging tutors to establish and work at links with Connexions staff, local colleges and other providers in order to offer informed guidance and, where possible, to influence provision. The project also introduced personalized learning plans (PLPs) and separate 'vocational target' sheets in order to encourage learners to think about realistic outcomes from the outset and to plan accordingly.

For 2008-09 it was decided to make the 'Education City' package available to all the young learners, and to encourage the use of this package for literacy reinforcement. Seven partners made use of the package with some, or all, of their students. Here comments were very positive, with the software being used either for group sessions or for individual work at home; indeed one partner used part of group sessions and then set 'homework'. Another two hadn't as yet, but said they were likely to start to use Education City in the coming year. Ten partners had not introduced the software. Here there were a mixture of reasons given, including time pressures (not enough time to work at the challenges and to introduce the literacy reinforcement dimension) and a view that the materials and graphics would be regarded by learners as rather childish as the relevant level was designed for primary-age children. It was interesting to note that two partners had also been exploring, or using, links with local alternative education providers with a view to cooperating in the provision of supportive opportunities for literacy and indeed other basic skills. Literacy and basic skills reinforcement is an area which needs to be explored further for 2009-10, and in terms of the home-use of Education City connectivity remains a critical consideration as this is a web-based package.

Clearly literacy reinforcement is critical in improving these young Travellers career prospects, especially in gaining entry to popular college courses like 'Hair and Beauty'. PLPs and vocational target sheets were also introduced to try to ensure that they were also planning and setting themselves realistic targets; which could be reviewed over the year. The use of these tools was made optional for 2008-09 and ten of the 20 active partners made some use of them. From feedback received they clearly proved useful in helping the planning/review process with learners, although there were some comments about overlap with other project paperwork. They will be redesigned next year with this in mind. They will also be combined into a single 'plan', with sections for both learning targets and vocational targets, and may be couched in terms of a 'learning contract'.

Most partners had already been active in developing links with Connexions, colleges and other providers. Initiatives included work placements, college

visits, taster courses, college staff coming out to meet a group as well as individual referrals. Incorporating this dimension into the PLP is intended to reinforce this activity and to make sure that it is a systematic part of planning for each learner. Where appropriate, targets related to links with schools and alternative education providers will also be included.

3.3 Time-pressures and the future

As indicated in last year's report, the objective of this bridging project has always been to test out an approach and then, if successful, to work towards free-standing provision once DCSF funding is withdrawn. This provision would then be open to any local authority, school or alternative education provider.

In general terms the project has proved a success and key concerns identified through the evaluation process have been addressed. These included the negative impact of poor connectivity where a back-up DVD is now available and being put to good use. They also included the need to ensure that the project offered a realistic platform from which the young participants could successfully cross vocational bridges; whether this means being more effective in the family business, getting a job or undertaking further post-16 training.

The other major concern identified in previous reports has been pressure on TESS staff time which has meant variability in the quality of tutorial support. This is an issue which clearly also needs to be addressed if an effective approach is to be made available more widely. Some tutors have been allocated time for ELAMP within their working week, whilst for others it has been an addition to their existing workload. There have also been pressures over the last two years as more services have moved towards an advisory (rather than face-to-face teaching) emphasis as well as reorganizations which have diluted the amount of time which colleagues have been able to devote to supporting Traveller learners within the project. One partner has even had to withdraw from the project and two others may follow suit in the near future.

For the final funded year of the project it was therefore decided to introduce a paid-staffing element for the tutorial role, and to work towards developing a model which could be offered nationally within the spirit of the 'Back on Track' White Paper which was published in May 2008. The White Paper focused on improving services for those who were outwith¹⁰ school and not being home educated. Although the main focus is on re-integrating pupils into the school system the White Paper recognized the challenge of working with KS4 pupils; where a direct return to a school may not be in the best interests of the learner. It also recommended the proactive use of alternative education by schools to reinforce learning for those at risk of disengaging or being excluded. Subsequent responses to consultation following publication of the White Paper have gone on to emphasize the importance of flexible bridging

¹⁰ A useful term used in Scottish policy documents.

provision as a way of drawing disengaged youngsters back into the education system.

The ELAMP approach therefore clearly fits well within the ethos of Back on Track proposals, both in terms of bridging work and of support for those disaffected Traveller pupils on the fringes of schooling. The paid-staffing model which will be tested out during 2009-10 is therefore potentially even more significant. Its main objectives build on the features of the original project which were noted in the introductory section and can be summarized as follows:

- To draw youngsters back in to a positive learning experience, using relevant learning materials (the challenges) and the Wider Key Skills programme.
- To build from the close involvement of known and trusted TESS staff with dedicated time for the tutorial role.
- To help youngsters develop knowledge and skills for the world of work and promote links with Connexions, colleges and other vocational providers
- To explore links with schools and alternative education providers in order to enhance learning options. (there are already examples of this kind of exploration within the project¹¹)
- To develop and work within a structured learning plan (PLP) for each learner. This will include learning and vocational targets and will be reviewed at regular intervals

Approximately 12 of the existing partners will be involved with the new initiative from September, 2010 and between 50 and 60 learners will be supported. The new venture will mirror the original Bridge Building project by drawing youngsters back in to a one-day a week learning programme, as project experience to date suggests that this is a realistic first step. However there will be a much stronger emphasis on pursuing other learning options as well as vocational routes; i.e. making further steps in the bridging process. Funding will be provided for one day a week of tutor time within each participating TESS, and the impact of this change will be carefully monitored against learner progress.

Some work has already been undertaken in order to look at central coordination and estimate the financing necessary for a free-standing national scheme. Funding considerations focus on the cost for a local authority (or school) in providing this bridging experience for an individual learner with an initial aim of recruiting a minimum cohort of 100 students across English authorities for September 2010. Further planning will need to run alongside monitoring during the autumn and spring terms, but from January 2010 the project will also focus on dissemination, marketing and recruitment for the proposed free standing provision.

¹¹ Explorations with PRUs in Cambridgeshire and West Sussex. School reintegration efforts in Norfolk and the Devon Consortium area.

Evaluation from the original project also suggests that building a tutor training and support facility into a new, and possibly rolling, programme with different local authorities is another important planning consideration. Feedback from tutors suggests that the current training-support structure works well. However, it may need to be adapted into something more flexible. [Tutors have also suggested that on-going training should address the need for further exploration of the balance between the tasks involved with Wider Key Skills challenges, and the completion of the sheets which are intended to demonstrate the development of skills like planning and review. The danger identified here is that the 'doing' part of the challenges (which students enjoy and get stuck in to) can come to take precedence, to the detriment of presenting evidence related to planning and review.]

3.4 Traveller learners and EHE

As will be evident from the analysis of current project participants (see Table 1 above), a large proportion of the young Travellers who have become involved with this ELAMP bridging project are in families which have elected for home education. However, it is clear that most Traveller families who have chosen this option are reacting against the school system, or to negative experiences like racism and bullying, rather than seeing EHE as a positive alternative, and very few are in a position to offer a suitable and effective education as required by the 1996 Education Act. ELAMP has therefore sought to draw these youngsters back into the education system but within the strict confines of a time-limited project. Funding such provision for pupils who are registered for EHE is problematic in the longer term.

Within the model proposed for an open national scheme it is therefore proposed that parents who showed an interest in re-engagement via ELAMP would need to opt back in to the education system before their children could join the project, and the children would only be allowed to join if the officer responsible for alternative provision in their local authority confirmed that this was in their best interests. Similar considerations would apply to potential participants identified as CME (children missing education).

This is an important consideration in the Traveller context as there is a strong case that Traveller children are missing out in educational terms. At the same time the recent publication of the 'Review of Elective Home Education in England'¹² offers a series of recommendations which include giving local authorities better powers to assess learner progress, and the effectiveness of the educational support they are being given at home. It is also recommended that local authorities would have powers to issue School Attendance Orders and Education Supervision Orders where there are concerns. These recommendations are subject to consultation at the time of writing, but if adopted would add to the potential importance of the project in acting as a bridge back into education for KS4 learners whose home education is judged inadequate.

¹² Graham Badman, June 2009.

Appendix: A list of project partners active for 2008-09

Partners	Involvement in the phases
Cambridgeshire	Original E-LAMP ₄ partner (from 2006-07)
Gloucestershire	Original E-LAMP ₄ partner (from 2006-07)
St Helens	Original E-LAMP ₄ partner (from 2006-07)
WMCESTC ¹³	Original E-LAMP ₄ partner (from 2006-07)
ACTES ¹⁴	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
East Yorkshire	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
Hillingdon	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
Northants	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
North Yorkshire	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
Richmond on Thames	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
West Sussex	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
York	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₅ (from 2007-08)
Blackpool	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Croydon	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Derbyshire	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
DCTES ¹⁵	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Essex	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Hampshire	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Harrow	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Milton Keynes	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Norfolk	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Somerset	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Suffolk	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)
Wiltshire	Additional partner for E-LAMP ₆ (from 2008-09)

¹³ The West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Traveller Children covered 11 LAs during 2008-09

¹⁴ The Avon Consortium covers 4 LAs.

¹⁵ The Devon Consortium covers 3 LAs