



Nacro response to the Education Committee's inquiry on Alternative Provision

October 2017

About Nacro

We are a national social justice charity with more than 50 years' experience of changing lives, building stronger communities and reducing crime. We house, we educate, we support, we advise and we speak out for and with disadvantaged young people and adults. We are passionate about changing lives. We never give up. In 2016/17 we supported more than 38,000 disadvantaged young people and adults who face challenges with education, housing, health or who have a history of offending. We aspire for our work to be consistently high quality, innovative and based on evidence. We work in partnership with more than a hundred organisations: public, private and charities. We use our knowledge of what works to help inform policy and shape practice.

Nacro is an approved education provider by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Introduction

Nacro:

- Provides vocational and technical education in 18 education and skills centres across England, through individualised Study Programmes for 16 – 19 year olds.
- Works with schools to provide a portion of education to 14 -16 year olds.
- Delivers education in secure settings in the youth custodial estate, including Medway Secure Training Centre, aged 12 upwards.
- Provides education to the NHS Bluebird and the Wells Forensic Units for young people with complex mental health problems, aged 12 upwards.
- Took on Totton College in late 2015 at request of DfE, an FE institution providing technical education and Apprenticeships, aged 14 upwards in one of the top 30 most deprived wards.

The points made to the Committee are based on our extensive knowledge and experience of working with young people who are the furthest away from employment or academic careers. Many young people who come to our Education and Skills Centres have had poor experiences of school or have not been able to complete their school career or not been engaged in mainstream schooling.

Making Alternative Provision (AP) work is critical; it should support the individual to meet their potential but also to progress to the next stage. We welcome the government's commitment to reforming AP in the [Educational Excellence Everywhere](#) White Paper in March 2016 and look forward to informing the review.

Summary

Nacro would like to see high quality, smaller bridging AP units to take young people from aged 14 or 16 through to the world of work, academic careers or further education/apprenticeships. The emphasis of these units would be to manage barriers to learning so that young people can

quickly catch up and progress, and to enable them to re-engage through having exposure to a more vocational environment and a range of careers-based experiences, such as a supported work-placement or technical provision.

Too often young people are placed without choice in AP that is of poor quality and that does not support progression to the next stage. At 16, many young people who have experienced such provision are no better off than they were at 14 and have no clear pathway ahead.

Key points

- Young people should have a stake in making a decision about the AP they attend.
- Local authorities need improved strategies to ensure that there is choice of quality providers.
- Most AP stops at 16 - there should be continued funding at the same levels to 18 to enable providers such as Nacro to ensure the young person has caught up and is on a progression pathway.
- Local authority strategies need to address quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for students. Outcome criteria and targets should reflect the level and stage of learners and not be subject to mainstream templates.
- There is a need for smaller AP “bridging” units at aged 16 to take young people from school age education to the world of work or academic careers.
- Softer outcomes should be defined for personal development, behaviour and welfare and these should count towards educational success criteria.
- There is a need for a tailored CEIG approach including practical support for work placements.
- A safeguarding code could be developed for practitioners to use when working with vulnerable learners and include preventative measures.
- An AP standards framework could be created to suit the outcomes they achieve.

We would be happy to assist the Committee with further information on our response. Please contact Caroline Drummond, Policy and Public Affairs Manager caroline.drummond@nacro.org.uk or 0207 902 5442.

1. Routes into Alternative Provision

By the time young people reach AP, they have often experienced long periods of disengagement with mainstream school, including truancy and exclusion. We know that for many young people, especially those with learning or behavioural issues, engaging in education, often in a new place with new peers and staff can be intellectually and emotionally challenging. AP should be a setting in which young people can feel able to learn and to ultimately progress, as well as receive support for underlying issues which have previously prevented them from engaging in learning. Personal Coaching can be one method by which barriers to learning can be explored to prevent

distraction from the learning itself. It can often be a lifeline for young people who have not only disengaged from mainstream education, but may have a complex set of needs.

It is often not the choice of the young person to enter AP; often this is in the hands of the school. Decisions made by schools can be dependent on a number of other factors, including school budgets, how well the Local Authority is managing centralised budgets to support schools in preventing exclusions, availability of suitable places and how many other students have been excluded at the school or are already placed on AP. There are often no set or consistent criteria for how a young person is referred to AP and no clarity over how and who makes these decisions in schools. We believe young people should have a stake in making a decision about where they attend and local authorities need improved strategies to ensure there is a choice of quality providers.

Nacro works with young people who come to us at age 14 or 16 having experienced disjointed mainstream education, or have had poor experiences of AP providers. Often, they are left 'playing catch up'¹ and we have a limited amount of time to get them to a stage where they can progress to further training or employment, particularly in English and maths qualifications. Very often the AP or school they have attended has not provided them with a clear sense of a pathway or progression. It is important that progression pathways are embedded into all AP, providing the young person with a clear trajectory.

Most AP stops for young people at age 16 and where these young people have had bad experiences, FE colleges or other providers must pick up the pieces. We would argue that there should be continued funding at the same levels to 18, where providers such as Nacro can ensure that young person can catch up and is firmly on a progression pathway.

2. The quality of teaching in Alternative Provision (including pupil referral units)

Schools should take responsibility for ensuring that the AP they use is of a high enough quality and standard. However, a survey carried out by Ofsted in 2016² showed that many schools fail to carry out appropriate monitoring of the standard of the provision. There is often an out of sight, out of mind mentality, where AP units are not held to account by schools, including where multiple schools are using it and there is no clarity over who is responsible for checking quality. This means that many young people are subject to poor quality settings with no regulation, damaging their outcomes and ultimate destinations. It is important for local authority strategies to address the quality of teaching and assessment and set standards unique to AP settings and not to a mainstream template.

AP settings outside of schools and small, specialised units can offer excellent environments to re-motivate young people that have not previously engaged. There have also been a few examples of FE colleges providing solutions to this, teaching key stage 4 students through a vocationally geared curriculum, with personal support and coaching offered alongside embedded English and maths. This type of environment means young people are submersed into a setting where they are more responsible and more akin to the workplace. With the right support around them, students can engage in this atmosphere which can prove extremely successful, putting

¹ Please see our policy paper, 'Playing catch-up' <https://3bx16p38bchl32s0e12di03h-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Playing-catch-up-report.pdf>.

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500918/Alternative_provision_findings_from_ofsted_s_three_year_survey_of_schools_use_of_off-site_alternative_provision.pdf

young people on to a path of a successful future. Establishing and maintaining partnerships with employers is also a very important consideration, done very effectively by some FE colleges. These settings are, however few and far between as this is not financially viable for many colleges and there is a limit as to how many 14-16 year olds they can take. Further, FE colleges will not always be the right fit for many young people, where a large environment can be intimidating and not personal enough to engage that young person in learning.

Nacro centres provide more dedicated, smaller units where they act as a bridge for a young person at age 16 between AP and their next stage, for example a higher level programme at an FE college or an apprenticeship. As we know, through our experience working with young people who have come from a range of educational and personal backgrounds, a personalised approach to learning is often the difference between engagement and progression, or otherwise. Our centres provide these bridging units that take young people from school age education and successfully moves them on to work, university and further education. (Please see appendix 1 for case studies of young people who have attended Nacro centres, received personalised support for progression and have moved on to employment or further education).

3. Educational outcomes and destinations of students

As detailed above, many of our learners come to us having attended AP in a variety of settings. Often, this has been poor quality and they are not at a level they should be compared to their peers. All too often we see AP settings that have warehoused young people and have delivered the bare minimum; the poor educational outcomes for young people in AP are well documented.

Often young people in AP require intensive support to help them progress into further education, training or employment as well as personal coaching alongside support to help them reach educational outcomes. The individual reasons that young person is in AP need to be addressed, for example behavioural issues due to complex family circumstances or mental health conditions. We know that by doing so, this will support progression in educational outcomes.

As referenced above, local authority strategies should address the quality of teaching, assessment and outcomes for students and, further, include outcome criteria and targets that reflect the level and stage of the learners, not in line with mainstream templates. The current outcomes framework should include softer outcomes as well as academic ones to ensure these are captured and take account of the work that provider has done to progress that individual. These softer outcomes should be defined for personal development, behaviour and welfare and count towards educational success criteria. Educational outcomes also need to be flexible enough to keep stretching and challenging each young person at their own level.

High quality Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CIEG) should be integrated into all AP, as highlighted in the recent review *Alternative Provision: Effective practice and Post 16 Transition*.³ This can be the difference to effective transitioning or otherwise, particularly where young people have not got the social capital around them; support to guide their progression and access to networks and opportunities. This CIEG should be personalised to the young person and guide informed decisions about their next steps after leaving AP. Young people who have attended AP are often the furthest from the workplace and need added support before they should have to attend work placements; progression routes should factor this in.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/585550/Alternative_provision_effective_practice_and_post-16_transition.pdf

Our experiences at Nacro have shown us that a tailored CEIG approach, including practical support for work placements, aged 14 upwards, can be more successful on engaging young people in discussions about their career, rather than generic advice or guidance.

4. Safety, accommodation and provision of resources for students

It is critical that young people in AP are learning in a safe and positive environment. However, the Ofsted inspection report of 2016 highlighted the fact that a lot of AP staff had not had child protection training or received guidance from school on particular safeguarding issues.⁴ Lack of resources for staff to monitor students off-site has also been raised as an issue and needs to be prioritised to ensure schools are consistently reviewing the AP they use.

As prescribed in the Educational Excellence Everywhere paper, the pupils' mainstream school will still hold accountability for their educational outcomes, meaning that schools should be regularly monitoring and reviewing the provision that their pupils are attending. As stated above, there is often an out of sight, out of mind mentality where schools will not always make regular checks with regard to quality and standards of AP settings. It is of paramount importance that all young people can access safe, high quality AP to equip them with the skills and qualifications they need to progress.

Nacro would support the development of a safeguarding code for practitioners to use when working with vulnerable learners. This could use evidence of issues and incidents to provide preventative measures rather than a reactive set of measures. This could incorporate examples and learning from the custodial estate and mental health settings.

5. In-school alternatives to external alternative provision

In-school alternatives to external AP are now becoming more attractive as schools budgets are squeezed: it is a cost effective alternative to sending out students to other providers and they can be kept in separate part of the estate. Nacro argues this is not always the best solution for the young person. The provision should have staff who have had appropriate training to work with young people who have not previously engaged with education, as well as offering a layer of dedicated personal support, alongside high quality teaching. It is critical that young people are not warehoused by schools in low quality facilities but instead are referred to AP appropriate for them.

We know from our experiences working with 16-19 year olds that identifying a pathway together with that young person is absolutely key to helping them engage, keep engaged and progress, and this should be a critical component of all AP where it does not already exist. It is critical that in-school alternatives are subject to the same high standards that other AP settings should be, including quality of teaching, curriculum and support around progression and pathways.

4

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500918/Alternative_provision_findings_from_Ofsted's_threeyear_survey_of_schools_use_of_off-site_alternative_provision.pdf

6. Regulation of independent providers

All children and young people deserve high quality teaching and support where needed, whether this is delivered through mainstream school or an independent provider .To ensure that the quality of teaching is consistent, we believe that all independent providers should be subject to regulation that is flexible enough to suit the outcomes they achieve with a framework that is relevant and helpful. This could be self or voluntary regulation provided there was a strong enough framework in place to be held to account by funders/commissioners. This needs to look different to the current Ofsted framework which relies on interpretation by individual inspectors and must consider the unique nature of AP.

Appendix 1: Case studies

Joseph

Joseph joined our study programme at Nacro in Walsall in October 2016. He had a passion to work in a Care Home environment with the elderly and was referred to Nacro so that we could work on his communication, confidence and working with others skills. He was referred by The Impact Team in Walsall, who identified some of Joseph's barriers and identified Nacro in Walsall as the most suitable provider to work with him to help him to overcome his barriers.

Nacro provided CEIG in the induction stage and together we identified that Joseph would need to attend a suitable supportive work placement within the Care industry if he were to overcome his barriers. Joseph started attending a Care home two days per week and received excellent feedback from the residents at the Care home and also staff and management. His barriers were communicated to the placement host and they have worked well with Nacro to help to build his confidence and self esteem.

At Nacro, Joseph continued to receive extra support for his communication and working with others skills. His tutors encouraged him to engage with others at every opportunity and he was often paired with other students to help with his communication skills.

Joseph had a 98% attendance record at Nacro and his timekeeping was perfect. He won the Learner of the Month for December 2016 and he is on course to achieve all of his goals and to progress into his chosen destination.

Liam

Prior to starting Nacro in August 2015, Liam struggled to manage his behaviour at school and was diagnosed with ADHD. He found it difficult to get on with many of his peers and unsurprisingly he also had a lot of absences and was often late. This reached a head in Year 10 when he was excluded, moving to AP until he left at the end of Year 11 achieving very few qualifications, mainly at Entry Level.

Upon leaving school he joined Nacro and started a Study Programme in Animal Care working towards his Level One Qualifications in Animal Care, Maths and English. During this time, however, his behaviour both in and out of Nacro gave cause for concern and staff were worried that he could have been travelling down a path of antisocial behaviour. Staff spoke to Liam and came to an agreement that he would focus on achieving his qualifications if they helped him to find a placement with his beloved birds of prey.

This worked and in October 2015 he started a placement at Riverside Falconry. While he was very keen, it was initially difficult to see how he would cope in this environment as the falconry business is often as much about interacting with the public as it is about caring for the birds. He was also still painfully shy, rarely initiating a conversation and having very little self confidence.

However, he was soon taking part in all aspects of the business and with guidance, began to slowly interact with the public and started to enjoy the way he could teach others about the birds. Being around the birds and understanding how to handle and care for them gave him confidence in his own ability and a real focus. Since then he has gone from strength to strength. His commitment and motivation cannot be questioned and he has travelled to various exhibitions and events around the region. This has helped him develop his independence skills and he can now travel independently by all modes of public transport.