
Regional Tertiary Pathfinders Programme

Project Overview: NE Enhancing the Senior Phase

The tables below provide insights into projects delivered through the Regional Tertiary Pathfinders Programme, which aimed to strengthen collaboration between colleges, universities, employers, and local authorities.

Each project includes two tables:

1. **Collaboration & Impact** – covering the history of partnerships, project focus, geographic reach, and target beneficiaries.
2. **Delivery & Leadership** – outlining governance structures, project characteristics, stakeholder involvement, and key aims.

These tables highlight the context in which projects tested new ways of working, enhanced learner pathways, and improved regional skills planning. For further details, please refer to the System-Level Report.

Definitions of Project Characteristics

History of Working Together

- **None** – individuals and teams had not worked together previously.
- **Emergent** – individuals and or teams and organisations had previously done some work together. Relationships existed which could be built on and developed.
- **Previous positive experience** – individuals, teams and organisations had a history of successfully working together, in some cases over many years. These existing relationships were an accepted part of ‘how work was done’ and could be built on and further developed and strengthened.

Project Focus

- **Tight** – the project was tightly focussed on delivering specific products/pathways/outcomes.
- **Broad** – the project explored a broad range of topics or areas for improvement and developed associated products/pathways/approaches to deliver outcomes.
- **Multi-theme** – the project explores multiple themes which may be distinct or may intersect and overlap with each other, delivering products/pathways/outcomes related to the themes.

Target Beneficiaries

- **Providers** – colleges, universities and schools, benefit from the work done through the project e.g. increase student numbers, develop complementary provision which reduces competition etc.
- **Learners** – new products, pathways and provision are developed which improve the opportunities, experience and outcomes of learners.
- **Employers** – employers establish positive working relationships with the colleges and universities and become involved in the design of products/provision to meet their needs. Learners acquire the qualifications and skills needed by employers.

Geographic Reach

- **Regional** – for the Pathfinder programme this means aligning to the boundaries of the Regional Economic Partnership (REP).
- **Sectoral** – aligned to the needs of a particular sector e.g. Health, Energy.
- **Local Authority/Community Planning Partnership/Local Employability Partnership** – working within a particular LA Boundary rather than across the REP.

Starting Emphasis

- **Efficiencies** – cost saving as a result producing the desired outcome with little waste of time or resources.
- **Pre-considered improvement** – changes and improvements which had already been identified as needing to be made but which this programme gave the opportunity to catalyse and deliver with renewed focus and pace.
- **Innovation** – the development and delivery of a new method, idea or product to achieve desired outcomes.

Leadership and Sponsorship

- **Diffused** – responsibilities are spread between organisations and groups.
- **Central individual** – a leader/coordinator acts as the main driver for change and delivery.
- **Small group** – a small number of people champion and lead the work acting as a guiding coalition.

Who Was Involved at the Outset

- **Project beneficiaries** – learners, employers and organisations which would benefit from the outputs/outcomes from the project were involved from the outset.

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- **Frontline staff** – staff who would be developing/delivering products/courses were involved at the outset.
 - **Senior decision makers** – senior staff able to provide authorisation and create the conditions for project success were involved at the outset.

Character of Project

- **Pragmatic** – projects were identified and developed based on practical considerations and a realistic view of what could be achieved.
- **Adaptive** – projects evolved to take account of changing contexts or as a result of gaining more understanding/information about what was needed/possible.
- **Radical** – project affecting fundamental/far-reaching change.

Table 1

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History of working together	None	Emergent	Previous positive experience
		<p>There has been existing partnerships with University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University. The partnership with RGU is strong, but for both institutions the partnerships has very much existed in the realm of articulation/progression, with little focus on schools outside the promotion of those pathways.</p>	<p>Prior to the Pathfinder project, NESCol had a history of working closely with each of the two local authorities in the region - Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City. However, each had different priorities and expectations of their partnership. There previously was not a forum where both Local Authorities and the college met to solely discuss senior phase provision.</p> <p>All three were represented on the NE Regional Delivery Board and jointly agreed, along with the two universities, that the focus for one of the pilots should be on senior phase and to</p>

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			<p>develop a joint approach to the identified tests of change.</p> <p>The establishment of the Strategic Working Group (SWG) provided a vehicle to progress this joint working across the region.</p>
Project focus	Tight	Broad	Multi-theme
	<p>In terms of delivery, the project focused on two specific tests of change: the development of a Winter Leaver Programme and enhanced HNC provision for S6 pupils. Both aims fed into improving the provision of senior phase education.</p>		<p>The ability to learn from each other and to share and replicate developments across Local Authority areas is emerging through the remit of the strategic working group (SWG).</p> <p>The partners represented are testing out how they can address key issues/themes identified within the region through deeper collaboration in future.</p>

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			An example of the college working to address issues across the region is the work undertaken to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children/Young People. An existing programme was underway at the College's Fraserburgh Campus (Aberdeenshire), which was highlighted to the SWG and led to the programme being replicated in Aberdeen City, with changes made to suit the needs of that local authority.
Geographic reach	Regional	Sectoral	Local Authority/CPP
	The project, led by NESCoI, included the two local authorities in the NE Region - Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen		Working across the two Local Authorities.

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	City Council - and three of the regions further/higher education institution.		
Target beneficiaries	Employers	Learners	Providers
	Employers in the region should benefit longer term as more young people are supported and kept on a pathway through education to employment within the region.	The project aimed to enhance senior phase pathways for learners. It increased the number of HNC pathways available to school pupils while also providing options for winter leavers to prevent young people falling out of the system.	Schools, colleges and universities benefit by having a more coherent approach in the region.

Table 2

Project: NE Enhancing the Senior Phase			
Leadership sponsorship	Diffused	Central individual	Small group
	Strategic Working Groups / Schools-College Partnership Team.	Senior leaders from NESCol shaped the proposal that went to the RDB and had support from the two universities and the reps from the two LAs who sat on the NE RDB to ensure buy-in. The Project Lead based at NESCOL led the implementation of the project.	
Who was involved at the outset	Senior decision-makers	Frontline staff	Project beneficiaries
	Representatives from NESCol, RGU and Aberdeen University and Local Authority Leads sit on the Strategic Working Group – all contributed to agreeing the	Staff from NESCol. The Project Lead and the Project Coordinator had an operational role to deliver the project.	Pilot work was already underway with school pupils to test out potential. A student survey was sent out to gather feedback and progression routes on completion of the course.

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	aims and objectives of this pilot.	Teaching staff at NESCol were key as were Local Authority education staff. SDS and DYWNE were important as critical friends in the development of the tests of change.	
Character of project	Radical	Adaptive	Pragmatic
	Deliverables of the project were innovative, such as the Winter Leavers programme. This new programme sought to improve outcomes for exceptional entrants.	The enhancement and expansion of HNC pathways for S6 pupils built on previous collaboration in this area. As part of the project, small pilots for the HNC pathways were tested, adapted and scaled.	
Starting emphasis	Innovation	Pre-considered improvement	Efficiencies
	The project sought to introduce new strategic partnership in the form of the Strategic Working	Two tests of change - expansion of HNC provision for S6 pupils and renewed approaches to	Learner pathways made more efficient as learners were assured of a coherent pathway

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	Group. This group was responsible for joint decision making on senior phase provision - such as the Winter Leavers programme, and new HNC pilots for S6 pupils. Each test of change had a designated working group.	create options and opportunities for Winter Leaver students.	between the senior phase and university/college via HNC/HNDs. Clear routes for Winter Leavers established.
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