FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

on
HIGHER HORIZONS

EVALUATING AN ALTERNATIVE PROVISION
FOR DISAFFECTED STUDENTS
for
DURHAM & DARLINGTON LEAS

by
Mary Atkinson
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Higher Horizons

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The selection criteria

- About half of the headteachers and key contacts in **Durham** expressed a preference for the previous selection criteria, in which pupils with less than 70 per cent attendance were eligible for Higher Horizons. Only a few favoured the present criteria, in which pupils with more than 50 per cent unauthorised absence were eligible. Those in **Darlington** indicated that they were satisfied with the selection criteria in which pupils with less than 70 per cent attendance were eligible for the provision, although their comments suggested that the selection criteria might have been applied more flexibly in Darlington than in Durham.

- The most frequent comments made by headteachers regarding the selection criteria were that they were too restrictive and cut out too many pupils who might benefit from Higher Horizons and that the selection criteria meant that the pupils selected were 'too far beyond redemption'.

The nomination procedure

- Findings indicated that both headteachers and key contacts, whilst relatively satisfied with the initial nomination procedure and the multi-disciplinary panel process, were somewhat dissatisfied with the process of feeding back decisions about the selection of pupils.

- Lack of responses might suggest that a significant number of headteachers and some key contacts may have felt too remote and insufficiently involved in the nomination process.

Feedback and communication

- Three-quarters of the headteachers stated that they had received insufficient or no feedback from Higher Horizons once pupils were attending the provision, although a few, particularly those from **Darlington**, reported that the feedback they had received had been very good.

- The ratings of key contacts, who were more involved with the provision at an operational level, suggested that they held more mixed views about the amount of feedback received by schools.

- The majority of key contacts reported no or limited involvement of school staff once pupils were attending Higher Horizons and this was supported by comments from key personnel in core providers.

- Concerns were raised about the lack of clarity with regard to the responsibility for pupils once they were on Higher Horizons and what might happen if a pupil's placement broke down.

Impact on pupils

- The majority of headteachers reported positive effects on the pupils involved in Higher Horizons. Improved attendance, a positive effect on behaviour, improved motivation, increased confidence and self-esteem and an improved attitude were noted.

- When examined further, however, the impact on school attendance was reported to be variable by personnel from nominating agencies and core providers. They suggested that many of the pupils on Higher Horizons were reluctant to return to school, particularly where their problems were more directly related to the school environment. This was confirmed by some comments from headteachers and key contacts who stated that, in reality, attendance at school does not happen when pupils are expected to attend Higher Horizons part-time.

- A concern was expressed by a few headteachers that pupils who find it difficult to succeed on Higher Horizons might become further removed from the education system.

- Some **Darlington** headteachers identified pupils' academic achievement as a positive effect of Higher Horizons although two headteachers also expressed concern about pupils' lack of academic achievement.

Impact on the LEA, schools and other agencies

- Involvement in Higher Horizons was reported to have an impact on the LEA and the agencies and organisations involved, particularly in helping them to achieve their overall aims and further enhancing their work.

- The majority of headteachers were able to identify some positive impact on the school as a whole, particularly an improved learning environment and the creation of more pastoral time for other pupils. Involvement with Higher Horizons had encouraged one school to reflect on their own practice with disaffected students.

- A very few headteachers identified a negative impact on their staff (e.g. because of their *'disillusionment'* with Higher Horizons) and one key contact expressed concern about a possible negative influence on other pupils.

The effect of part-time attendance

- Just over half of the headteachers recognised that there was bound to be a negative effect on pupils' access to the school curriculum, but they felt that this was worth it because of the benefits to students, such as access to a wider range of subjects and making their school work seem more relevant.

- On the other hand, about a third of headteachers and the majority of key contacts thought that part-time attendance on Higher Horizons was both untenable and impractical because of the disruption caused to both students and the school and the difficulty for students in adapting between the two different environments.

- A few headteachers were more positively in favour of part-time attendance for some pupils, although they recognised that schools might need to be very flexible for this to succeed.

- Some headteachers suggested that the impact of part-time attendance on pupils' access to the curriculum might be reduced by protecting the National Curriculum core subjects, effective liaison between the school and Higher Horizons, the school taking a flexible approach and by part-time provision being planned in as early as possible.

The most and least successful aspects

- Although a wide range was identified, the most successful aspects of the Higher Horizons provision were thought to be the maintenance of pupils within the education system, the provision of an alternative to mainstream schooling and the improved self-esteem and confidence of pupils, although a wide range was identified.

- When considering the least successful aspects of Higher Horizons, headteachers in **Durham** focused on communication with schools and access to the provision, whilst those in **Darlington** focused on pupils' lack of academic achievement. Key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers focused particularly on funding and resourcing of the provision as the least successful aspects.

Aspects that might be incorporated into school practice

- Some headteachers and key contacts found it difficult to identify aspects of the Higher Horizons provision that might usefully be incorporated into school practice. They argued that resources were limited, that Higher Horizons was distinctive in that it provided a very different educational experience and that provision outside of the mainstream school environment was important.

- A number of different aspects of Higher Horizons that might usefully be incorporated into school practice, however, were identified by some, including provision of an alternative curriculum, extra support for individual pupils and approaches that might be utilised with disaffected pupils. The most frequently highlighted of these were links with local colleges, work-related learning and provision of a more relevant curriculum for disaffected pupils.

Alternative provision accessed by schools

- Key contacts in **Durham** identified a wide range of provision for disaffected students accessed by their schools, including school-based strategies, college provision, support from LEA services, outside agencies and independent organisations.

- Provision appeared, however, to be rather *ad hoc* and the LEA might need to consider how information might be shared and provision coordinated.

- It was also reported that the majority of schools in **Durham** accessed local colleges in order to provide some form of alternative, usually a work-related curriculum, for disaffected pupils.

- Limited access to training providers and independent organisations able to offer alternatives for disaffected pupils, however, was noted, particularly compared with provision reported to be accessed by nominating agencies.

Advantages of Higher Horizons and other forms of provision

- The most commonly cited advantages of Higher Horizons were that it provided an alternative to mainstream education, its full-time nature, the off-site location, its individual focus, the multi-agency approach and its work-related focus.

- The most often reported advantages of other forms of alternative provision were that they were more within schools' control and could therefore be integrated within school provision in a way that Higher Horizons could not be, and the communication between the school and the provider.

- Interestingly, key personnel in nominating agencies raised issues, not referred to by school staff, which related to monitoring and evaluation, long-term funding and target setting, as the advantages of other forms of alternative provision.

Distinctive features and areas for improvement

- The main distinctive features of Higher Horizons were thought to be the very different educational experience offered to pupils, provision away from the school environment and the motivation of pupils previously disaffected with mainstream schooling.

- The main areas for improvement and development identified centred around better communication with schools, availability to more pupils, the integration of the provision into mainstream school practice and the need to take factors other than attendance into account within the selection criteria.

Key factors contributing to headteachers' attitudes to Higher Horizons

- There was a correlation between a positive attitude to Higher Horizons and a positive impact on pupils and between a negative attitude to Higher Horizons and a lack of effective communication between Higher Horizons and the school.

- Where Higher Horizons was perceived as one aspect of a range of provision that might be accessed for disaffected students, and where removal from the school environment was seen as advantageous for pupils, a positive view also tended to be held.

- In addition, schools which already had a range of strategies and provision in place and were experienced in working with disaffected students appeared to see Higher Horizons as most appropriate for a very small group of pupils with extreme problems that could not be catered for within their existing resources. These schools also seemed to perceive Higher Horizons in a more positive light.

In the **concluding remarks** of the report, the following central aspects were raised:

- The evaluation highlighted the need for improved communication and clarification on the issue of responsibility for pupils on Higher Horizons and on the role of the key contact.

- Schools' polarised viewpoints on aspects of Higher Horizons might in part correlate with their attitudes to – and experience of – organising alternative provision for disaffected pupils. This may suggest that a particular role for programmes like Higher Horizons might be to support those pupils who are at the extremes of disaffection and alienation from mainstream school, after other attempts at alternative provision by the school have been unsuccessful. This in turn may have implications for selection criteria.

- The skills of Higher Horizons staff, and their individualised and diagnostic approaches with the young people, might still have much to offer mainstream schools in terms of successful practice with disaffected youngsters; while the LEA role might involve developing further information exchange and sharing of effective practice in this area.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Higher Horizons in Durham and Darlington was one of the 17 first-round projects funded by the DfEE within the New Start initiative to work with disaffected young people. Its aim was to raise the participation and achievement levels of 16–18-year-olds by motivating and re-engaging 14–17-year-olds who had dropped out of education and training or were at risk of doing so. An initial piece of research was conducted in 1997 which explored the issue of absenteeism in the LEAs and suggested ways in which policies to combat disaffection could be made more effective.[1] The main conclusions from this evaluation centred around the need for mainstreaming innovative curriculum work into schools, inter-professional dialogue and coordinated support for schools. An interim evaluation of Higher Horizons was undertaken in spring 1999.[2] This focused mainly on the operational-level working of the provision and, within this evaluation, the views of parents, guardians and carers, the young people and the staff responsible for delivery were garnered.

This present evaluation explores the Higher Horizons provision from a more strategic viewpoint. The overall aims of the study were:

- to obtain perspectives on the 'value-added' aspect of the Higher Horizons provision, of schools in particular, but also those of nominating agencies and core providers;

- to seek views on the accessibility of the Higher Horizons provision from a range of perspectives, including nominating agencies and core providers, but particularly those of schools; and

- to audit the range of alternative provision that schools currently access.

Commensurate with these overall aims, the evaluation examined views on:

- the processes involved in accessing and liaising with staff within the Higher Horizons provision;
- the impact and effects of the provision;
- successes and challenges;
- Higher Horizons in relation to other forms of alternative provision; and
- areas for improvement and development.

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[1]   WILLIAMSON, B. and CUMMINGS, R. (1998). *Higher Horizons: Absent from School.* County Durham and Darlington Partnership.

[2]   Higher Horizons: Interim Evaluation Report (1999).

This report is, therefore, divided into five sections and follows the structure outlined above. However, in the final section (the final overview), areas for improvement and development are considered, together with the distinctive features of Higher Horizons. Headteacher attitudes to the provision are also explored. Some of the more detailed findings from the headteacher and LEA personnel interviews are summarised in the form of research vignettes which are referred to throughout the report where relevant.

Durham and Darlington were reported by LEA personnel to be areas with significant levels of disaffection and high levels of unemployment. Within the LEA, therefore, there was a recognised need for a multi-agency approach to attendance and behaviour and to monitor and track effectively pupils with a range of needs. Higher Horizons was perceived by LEA personnel as one strategy for addressing these issues and it was hoped that all schools would have access to this provision.

Since implementing the initial Higher Horizons project, Durham and Darlington LEAs have split into two separate authorities. However, as the Higher Horizons provision was initially a joint venture, it was felt appropriate that the findings from Durham and Darlington were reported together and differences highlighted only where appropriate. Firstly, however, the methodology is outlined.

METHODOLOGY

Telephone interviews were conducted with all headteachers in the secondary schools in Durham and Darlington. Face-to-face interviews were then conducted with six headteachers, selected for their range of views on the Higher Horizons provision. Also as part of the evaluation from the schools' perspective, teaching staff with designated responsibility for overseeing the schools' involvement with Higher Horizons (the 'key contact') were asked to complete questionnaires. In addition, key personnel in other agencies able to nominate pupils for the provision and key personnel in organisations involved in delivery of the provision (the core providers) were sent questionnaires to complete. Nominating agencies and core provider organisations approached were:

Nominating agencies	Core providers
Education Welfare Service	New Careers/National Association for
Youth Justice Service	the Care and Resettlement of
Social Services	Offenders (NACRO)
Behaviour Support Service	RATHBONE
Child and Family Health Service	Bishop Auckland College
Youth Service	East Durham and Hougall College
Pupil Casework	Youth Service
Positive Intervention Enrichment	
Links (PIEL)/Looked After Children	
(LAC) Project	

Finally, face-to-face interviews were also conducted with four LEA personnel each with a strategic role in overseeing the initiative, i.e. those managing and those coordinating the project at LEA level.

Headteacher telephone interviews

The headteachers of all 47 Durham secondary schools were contacted. The headteacher of one school stated that it was now a primary school so the Higher Horizons provision was no longer relevant for them. The headteacher at a special school had not considered the provision relevant for their students early on as the skills involved were considered too difficult for them. These two headteachers therefore did not complete the interview. Interviews were conducted with the remaining 45 headteachers. The headteachers in all nine Darlington secondary schools were interviewed. Fifty-four telephone interviews in total were therefore conducted with headteachers.

Headteacher face-to-face interviews

Headteacher telephone interviews were categorised as either:

- very positive;
- positive;
- neither positive or negative;
- negative; or
- very negative.

This was done on the basis of the number and degree of favourable and unfavourable comments made with regard to Higher Horizons. Six headteachers (five from Durham and one from Darlington) were then selected for their range of views and asked to participate in face-to-face interviews.

Key contact questionnaires

Of the 45 key contacts within schools in Durham, 29 returned questionnaires. This was a response rate of 64 per cent. Of the nine key contacts within schools in Darlington, four returned the questionnaires. The total number of questionnaires returned was therefore 33, giving a total response rate of 61 per cent.

Nominating agency questionnaires

Nine out of the 19 questionnaires sent to key personnel in nominating agencies were returned (six from Durham and three from Darlington), representing in total six different agencies. Four of the nine questionnaires were from Education Welfare Service personnel, perhaps reflecting their greater involvement with the Higher Horizons provision than many of the other agencies.

Core provider questionnaires

Four out of the nine questionnaires sent to key personnel in the core providers were returned. These were all from the core providers now serving the Durham area, although in the first year of the project they offered provision for both the areas of Durham and Darlington.

LEA personnel interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with four LEA personnel. The Head of Education Services and the coordinator for the Higher Horizons project within the Durham area and the Assistant Director of Education and the coordinator of the Higher Horizons project in the Darlington area were interviewed.

PART ONE
HIGHER HORIZONS: PROCESSES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the report is divided into three parts and includes respondents' views on:

- the selection criteria;
- the nomination procedure; and
- feedback to schools about pupils' progress on Higher Horizons.

All LEA personnel, headteachers, key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were asked their views on the selection criteria and the nomination procedure. Headteachers and key contacts with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 were asked for their views on the feedback to schools about pupils' progress. It was felt that those who only had pupils on Higher Horizons in 1999–2000 might have limited experience of this process. Key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were also asked for their views on this aspect.

1.2 SELECTION CRITERIA

In order to place the responses relating to the selection criteria in context, Table 1.1 shows the number of schools in each year that had:

- not nominated pupils;
- nominated pupils and not had any selected;
- nominated pupils and had some selected; and
- nominated pupils and had all of them selected for the provision.

A final category of those schools for which the number of pupils nominated was unknown, but which had some pupils selected, was also included.

Table 1.1   The number of schools nominating pupils

Status	1998–99 No. of schools	1999–00 No. of schools
Not nominated any pupils	16	17
Nominated but none selected	5	14
Nominated and some selected	15	10
Nominated and all selected	11	6
Number of pupils nominated not known and some selected	7	7
Total	**54**	**54**

Source: Data provided by the Careers Service and verified by headteacher interviews and key contact questionnaires, 1999

It is significant to note that there were no schools in **Darlington** that had made nominations and not had any pupils selected.

Where schools had not nominated pupils in either year, headteachers and key contacts were asked the reason for this. Three of the schools that had not nominated pupils were special schools. The most common reason given for not nominating pupils was that there were no pupils that satisfied the selection criteria, noted by four headteachers and one key contact. Two headteachers, however, felt that they were unlikely to get pupils on the provision because their pupils were perceived to come from an 'advantaged' area. Other specific reasons of note were that one headteacher reported that they had been unaware of the provision, one reported that they had received the information too late so that the school failed to meet the deadline for nominations, and the key contact and the headteacher in one school stated that they had not been invited to nominate pupils. One headteacher expressed '*reservations*' about the provision and, later within the interview, stated that '*the ideal*' would be to place extra support in school, although at one point s/he acknowledged that provision away from the school environment might be advantageous for some pupils.

The selection criteria in **Durham** had changed from last year, when pupils with less than 70 per cent attendance were eligible for the provision, to this year, when pupils with more than 50 per cent unauthorised absence were eligible, and, because of this, respondents in Durham were asked their preference. The responses of both headteachers and key contacts are shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Headteacher and key contact preferences for the past or present selection criteria in Durham

Preference	No. of headteachers	No. of key contacts
Previous criteria	21	14
Present criteria	5	5
No preference	9	5
No comment	10	5
Total	**45**	**29**

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – headteacher interviews and key contact
    questionnaires, 1999

Twenty-one headteachers (about half of all the headteachers) expressed a preference for the previous criteria, where pupils with less than 70 per cent attendance were selected for the provision, as did also almost half of the key contacts. Specific comments by headteachers relating to a preference for the past criteria included that attendance rather than absence was a more positive criterion to work with and that pupils targeted by the present criteria were 'too far beyond redemption'. However, this viewpoint was also raised by some respondents in other contexts and this is discussed further later. Only five headteachers and five key contacts favoured the present criteria, where pupils with 50 per cent unauthorised absence were selected for the provision. Comments raised by headteachers who made this preference included that the provision had tried to cater for too wide a spectrum of pupils, that pupils with a range of needs were selected and that the target group was more in line with the work of other services dealing with attendance, e.g. the Education Welfare Service.

In contrast to the majority of those in schools, the majority of key personnel in nominating agencies (five out of the six) favoured the present selection criteria. Only one of these, however, further justified their choice by stating that: 'The present criteria enable those pupils with some commitment to opportunities offered to them to be supported and possibly access an alternative experience.' Two out of the four core providers, one of whom felt there ought to be more assessment of individual needs, expressed no preference, whilst one also favoured the present criteria, but added no further comment. LEA personnel in Durham were also in favour of the present criteria. Use of the present criteria over the previous ones was thought by one to ensure that the LEA was targeting pupils with the greatest level of unauthorised absence.

The headteachers and key contacts in **Darlington** were asked to rate the selection criteria, which had remained the same for both years, as pupils with less than 70 per cent attendance. Responses are shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Ratings of the selection criteria by headteachers and key contacts in Darlington

Rating given	No. of headteachers	No. of key contacts
Very good	3	1
Good	2	1
Fair	2	2
Poor	1	0
Very poor	0	0
No view	1	0
Total	**9**	**4**

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons — headteacher interviews and key contact questionnaires, 1999

There was a general view, shared by headteachers and key contacts within the Darlington schools, that the selection criteria were at least 'fair' or 'good', with only one headteacher rating them as 'poor' and three indicating a very positive opinion. The nominating agency personnel in Darlington, all three of whom rated the selection criteria as 'good' or 'very good', also shared this view. This might be related to the fact that no school within Darlington, having made nominations, had failed to get any pupils accepted for the provision. LEA personnel agreed that the criteria of 'less than 70 per cent attendance' was working well in Darlington, although one highlighted the tremendous pressure placed on the panel to subvert the criteria.

Overall, combining the comments made by headteachers and key contacts in Durham and Darlington (key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers added little further comment in their questionnaire returns), the most frequent comments about the selection criteria included that:

- **the criteria were too restrictive and cut out many pupils who might benefit**

This was the most frequent comment, noted by 14 out of the 54 headteachers (about a quarter), although not highlighted by key contacts. One headteacher gave an example of a pupil who had not fallen into the '50 per cent unauthorised absence' category but was now '*almost a non-attender*'. S/he felt that this pupil would have developed more on Higher Horizons than in school and that '*it would have turned him around*'. This view was supported by another headteacher, who stated that: '*Attendance does not have to drop that low for them to be disaffected.*' One held the view that Higher Horizons catered for '*the most visible and distinctive group*' and that '*those with less sharp problems get forgotten*'. A few headteachers expressed concern about the lack of alternatives for these pupils. On the other hand, another headteacher commented that: '*If you are targeting resources, it is best to be very clear because the demand is very high.*' This headteacher recognised the dilemma this created for schools as pupils may be on the border for eligibility and still causing difficulties. S/he suggested that schools should be more flexible than this and that 50 to 60 per cent attendance should not be an issue for Higher Horizons else it might '*lose its credibility*'.

- **the criteria meant that selected pupils were 'too far beyond redemption'**

The next most frequent comment, noted by eight headteachers, but only by one key contact, was that the pupils selected were '*too far lost*', and '*too resistant*'. One headteacher thought that pupils with below 50 per cent attendance '*have turned off*' and that they at least need to be in the habit of getting up in order to attend the provision. Another described this as '*the biggest mistake*' of Higher Horizons. In further emphasising this point, a headteacher stated that it had '*rubbed salt in the wounds*' that a pupil who did get on Higher Horizons did not attend and another, thought to be '*more deserving*', was unable to get on. The key contact who referred to this issue felt strongly that: '*Throwing money at last ditch chances is not appropriate.*'

- **the criteria should take into account factors other than attendance**

Six headteachers thought that factors other than attendance (e.g. social, emotional and behavioural problems) should be taken into account. This view was shared by six key contacts, who noted that some students often had very good attendance but created great difficulties in school, were not prepared to engage in education within school and were not achieving. They too referred to pupils with behavioural and social problems. One key contact felt that it was unfair that these pupils were not offered places in favour of non-attenders and a headteacher suggested that the criteria needed to cater for those '*who are reluctant to come in, but do, and then are disruptive*'. Another reported that: '*Some are severely disadvantaged and they are not benefiting from their education as much as they can. This is the type of pupils it was aimed at.*' It was evident, however, in discussion with LEA personnel, that whilst pupils were expected to meet the unauthorised absence criteria first, a range of other factors (based on research into the causes of disaffection) was taken into account. These included levels of attainment, offending behaviour and whether pupils were accommodated by the local authority, and, in fact, over 30 per cent of pupils accepted on the Higher Horizons provision displayed seven or more of these additional factors. This lack of information to schools may be an issue for the LEA to consider.

- **the criteria did not take account of authorised or 'hidden' absence**

Seven key contacts, although only three headteachers, referred to authorised or 'hidden' absences, including parentally condoned absence, post-registration or internal truancy, and exclusion, that might not be taken into account within the selection criteria. One of the LEA personnel in Darlington, however, commented that they had taken into account internal absence when considering pupils for the provision. S/he added that, in reality, pupils accepted often had 40 per cent rather than 70 per cent attendance.

- **the criteria meant it was against schools' interests to work on attendance**

Whilst not touched on by key contacts, the fact that the selection criteria meant that it was against schools' interests to work on pupils' attendance was raised by three headteachers. One headteacher described it as a '*contradiction*' in that his/her staff had worked hard with a particular group of pupils to improve their attendance and, because of this, they had become ineligible for the provision. He described this as '*frustrating*'. For another, this was reported to be the '*single biggest issue*' in relation to the provision.

Beyond these main comments, one key contact noted that s/he found it very difficult to accept the '*impartiality*' of the process and another, that it made no difference what the criteria were as '*some students that fitted the criteria were not accepted and some that did not were accepted*'.

Overall, it was noticeable that headteachers in **Darlington** offered proportionally more positive statements with regard to the selection criteria. Interestingly, whilst one headteacher in Durham felt that it was a good system because it '*targets those with extreme need*' and the selection criteria were '*applied consistently*', some in Darlington praised the flexible application of the criteria and the fairness of the process. This suggests that the selection criteria might have appeared to be applied more rigidly to schools in Durham than in Darlington, a point further alluded to in the next section on the nomination procedure. A very positive view was expressed by one headteacher: '*Once you start mixing the criteria they become unworkable for everyone. Its success is due to its criteria. They are very easy to work with.*' Another, who rated the criteria as 'very good', noted that the school was '*very careful about how they selected pupils*' and indicated that staff selected pupils who were able but failing because of their lack of attendance.

Key findings: selection criteria

- About half of headteachers and key contacts in **Durham** expressed a preference for the previous selection criteria, in which pupils with less than 70 per cent attendance were eligible for Higher Horizons, whereas only a few favoured the present criteria, in which pupils with more than 50 per cent unauthorised absence were eligible.

- The majority of key personnel in nominating agencies, on the other hand, expressed a preference for the present selection criteria, as did also the LEA personnel.

- The general view, shared by headteachers, key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies in **Darlington**, appeared to indicate that they were satisfied with the selection criteria in which pupils with less than 70 per cent attendance were eligible for Higher Horizons.

- The most frequent comments made by headteachers regarding the selection criteria included that they were too restrictive and cut out too many pupils who might benefit from Higher Horizons and that the selection criteria meant that the pupils selected were '*too far beyond redemption*'.

- Some headteachers and key contacts shared the view that factors other than attendance should be taken into account within the selection criteria. A few headteachers noted that, with the emphasis on criteria concerning attendance, this meant that, as a school, it was against their interests to work with pupils on improving their attendance.

- It was noticeable that headteachers in **Darlington** offered proportionally more positive comments about the selection criteria than headteachers in Durham. They referred to the flexible application of the criteria and the fairness of the process. Comments from headteachers suggested that the selection criteria might appear to have been applied more rigidly in Durham than in Darlington.

1.3 NOMINATION PROCEDURE

Headteachers and key contacts were asked for any experience and comments they may have with regard to the nomination procedure for the Higher Horizons provision. In addition, key contacts were asked to rate the different aspects of the nomination procedure:

- the initial nomination and application forms;
- the functioning of the multi-disciplinary panel; and
- the decisions and feedback given to schools about the selections made.

The ratings given for the different aspects of the nomination procedure and the views of key contacts and nominating agency and core provider personnel are discussed first. More detailed comments from headteachers then go on to shed further light about their perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of this process.

Key contacts in schools and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers in **Durham** were asked to rate different aspects of the nomination procedure in both the first and second year of the provision as the procedures had changed. Table 1.4 shows the ratings given by key contacts in Durham to the initial nominations and application forms in both years.

Table 1.4   Initial nominations and application forms: ratings given by key contacts in Durham

Rating given	No. of key contacts 1998–99	No. of key contacts 1999–00
Very good	1	0
Good	6	9
Fair	12	8
Poor	2	3
Very poor	0	0
No comment	8	9
Totals	**29**	**29**

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

In both years, very few key contacts rated the procedure as 'poor' or 'very poor'. Whilst the most common rating for the initial procedure was 'fair' in the first year, the most common rating in the second year was 'good', suggesting a perception of an improvement in this process. This view was supported by the ratings of key personnel in nominating agencies, who rated the initial nominations and application forms as 'poor' or 'fair' in the first year, but 'fair' or 'good' in the second year. One of the key personnel in a nominating agency reported that the application forms, however, had been poorly completed by schools and that some pupils nominated had previously attended similar provision, suggesting that there might be little chance of success therefore with Higher Horizons. Three out of the four key personnel in core providers indicated that they had no involvement in the initial nomination procedure, whilst the other rated all aspects of the process as 'fair'.

Table 1.5 summarises the ratings given by key contacts in Durham for the multi-disciplinary selection panel process in both years.

Table 1.5   Multi-disciplinary selection panel: ratings by key contacts in Durham

Rating given	No. of key contacts 1998–99	No. of key contacts 1999–00
Very good	1	1
Good	2	5
Fair	9	6
Poor	4	6
Very poor	0	0
No comment	13	11
Totals	**29**	**29**

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

It is perhaps worth noting initially that nearly half of the key contacts declined to rate this aspect, perhaps suggesting a lack of awareness or involvement in this process. The most common rating in the first year for the multi-disciplinary panel process (not including those that declined to rate this aspect) was 'fair', whilst in the second year the most common ratings were 'fair' and 'poor' equally. However, whilst there was a slight increase in the number of respondents rating the process as 'poor' in the second year, equally there was also an increase in the number rating the process as 'good'. Key personnel in nominating agencies rated the panel process more highly than key contacts in the first year, rating it either as 'fair' or 'good', and one also rated it as 'very good' in the second year. Overall, this again suggests some sense of improvement in the process in the second year of the provision.

Table 1.6 summarises the ratings given by key contacts in Durham for the decisions made and the process of feeding them back to schools.

Table 1.6 Decisions and feeding back: ratings by key contacts in Durham

Rating given	No. of key contacts 1998–99	No. of key contacts 1999–00
Very good	0	1
Good	3	5
Fair	7	6
Poor	3	2
Very poor	6	6
No comment	10	9
Totals	**29**	**29**

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

Overall, the most common ratings for the decisions and feeding back to schools made by key contacts were 'fair' and 'very poor', suggesting some considerable dissatisfaction with this process and supporting some of the views held by headteachers which are discussed later. However, in the second year, the number of key contacts who rated the process as 'poor' or 'very poor' went down by one and those rating the process as 'good' or 'very good' went up by three, suggesting (although the numbers are small) a perceived improvement in the process in the second year and an increasing polarisation of viewpoints. There were also mixed views from personnel in nominating agencies, who either rated this aspect of the process as 'poor'/'very poor' (three) or 'good' (two) in the first year, whilst, in the second year, three rated the process as 'fair' or 'good'.

Only nine key contacts added further comments about the nomination procedure. The majority of comments were negative and referred to lost applications, concern about confidentiality, decisions taking a long time to reach schools, responses to requests for information as 'vague' and 'considerations from school' not having been taken into account. Positive comments, on the other hand, were that the panel took individual needs into account and that the application forms were considered appropriate.

The key contacts in **Darlington** were also asked to rate the different aspects of the nomination procedure (although not in different years). Whilst the initial applications and nomination forms and the multi-disciplinary selection panel were considered by three out of the four key contacts as 'fair' and by one key contact as 'very good', the feeding back of decisions made by the panel was viewed less favourably, with two key contacts rating this process as 'poor'. This therefore supported the views of key contacts in Durham. The three key personnel in nominating agencies rated the initial nominations and application forms and the panel process in a similar way to key contacts (as either 'fair' or 'good'). However, their views about the feeding back of decisions contrasted with those of school staff, as they rated this process as either 'good' or 'very good'. None of the key contacts clarified their rating with further comment, although two key personnel in nominating agencies emphasised the importance of the multi-disciplinary nature of the panel, in particular in ensuring that the selection criteria were met.

Overall, therefore, key contacts in both Durham and Darlington, whilst reasonably satisfied with the initial applications and the multi-disciplinary panel process, were often noted to be dissatisfied with the process of feeding back decisions about the selection of pupils to schools. A significant number also felt unable to rate certain aspects, suggesting perhaps a sense of remoteness from the procedure.

Ten out of the 54 headteachers indicated that they felt they had insufficient experience to comment on the nomination procedure, suggesting again, for them, a certain remoteness from this process. Of the remaining 44, views on the nomination procedure were mixed. Seventeen headteachers were generally positive or thought that the nomination process worked satisfactorily, whilst 18 held a more negative view. The other nine either made little comment or identified both positive and negative aspects of the process.

The positive points raised included:

• **the multi-disciplinary nature of the panel**
The most common positive aspect identified, noted by five headteachers, was the benefit of the multi-disciplinary nature of the panel, a view shared by some of the key personnel in nominating agencies, as noted previously. The multi-disciplinary aspect was described as being '*entirely appropriate*', because '*different people have different angles*' and because it enabled '*the tensions about the perceptions of individuals to be solved*'. One headteacher commented that: '*The linking of educational decisions to other agencies is welcomed.*' Two LEA personnel also shared the view that the application of the criteria through the multi-disciplinary panel was important, particularly in ensuring that the process was fair.

Other positive points raised included that the nomination procedure was conducted by those who knew the pupils (leading to '*quality judgements*'), and that it had improved from last year (it was described as '*closer to the ground*'), a point suggested also by the key contact ratings. Positive comments from **Darlington** headteachers about the nomination procedure again suggested that there might have been some flexibility applied to the process (as raised earlier in relation to the selection criteria): '*Some things they were strict about they ignored when you phoned.*' Individual headteachers in Darlington also reported that the process was fair: '*Reasons given were concrete and fair and* [the panel] *tried to be very positive.*' These views, however, contrasted with the views of others who perceived the process as unfair (see the negative points raised next). One headteacher reported also that the nomination procedure was necessarily thorough: '*It is important that it is a detailed and lengthy process.*'

In contrast, more specific negative points raised by headteachers included:

• **the lack of feedback about why pupils did not get on the provision**
Lack of feedback was reported by six headteachers. Some shared the view of one headteacher who stated that: '*You go through the process in school and then do not really hear anything. You're not involved enough and this leads to frustration. The only feedback that you get is that* [pupils] *do not meet the criteria and that they are heavily oversubscribed.*' Another headteacher stated that he received a letter to say that the pupils would be considered for January, and then heard nothing more. S/he reported that: '*This made us look silly.*'

- **unclear/insufficient information**

Insufficient or unclear information was reported by four headteachers. They referred to confusion about whether pupils had been selected, as well as practicalities about the procedure. One headteacher reported being told there was not a place for a pupil, then that there was and another noted that information was '*not sufficient to determine who and why* [pupils] *had not got on*'. Reference was also made to confusion about the information to be placed on forms: '*We filled in the forms in outline as we were told to do and, when they were not accepted, we were told there was not sufficient detail.*' In addition, confusion about the expected start date of the programme was reported to have been '*upsetting*' for one pupil.

Other issues raised included the need for more openness and communication about the procedure generally, the remoteness of the multi-disciplinary panel, the slowness with which decisions filtered back to schools and the need for an appeals procedure.

Darlington headteachers raised particular concerns with regard to:

- **the fairness of the procedure**

One headteacher noted that: '*Some individuals* [were] *brought in from outside of the school system, not on an equitable basis.*' Another felt that the fact that the school was located in a '*favourable area*' (although a fifth of the pupils were reported not to come from this area) went against pupils. Thus, whilst some of the headteachers clearly felt that flexibility within the process was a positive thing, as noted earlier, others perceived this as leading to an unfair advantage for some pupils.

- **the restriction on the number of places for each school**

The restriction on the number of places for each school was a particular issue as some schools had not taken up all their places, and these were then offered to other schools: '*I had to go back to the children and give them a different message.*' This headteacher felt that it was '*hard to say why we selected one pupil over another*'.

- **nominations from other agencies**

Nominations from other agencies caused problems when the school did not nominate the same children: '*It should be a joint nomination and should be discussed with the school.*'

LEA personnel indicated that some aspects of procedure, such as the application forms and agency nominations, had been adapted to address some of these issues in the provision's second year of operation.

Key findings: nomination procedure

- A significant number of headteachers and some key contacts felt unable to comment on or rate certain aspects of the nomination procedure, perhaps suggesting that they felt too remote and insufficiently involved to comment on this process.
- Ratings of the different aspects of the nomination procedure by key contacts in schools and key personnel in nominating agencies indicated that, whilst they were relatively satisfied with the initial applications and the multi-disciplinary selection panel, they were somewhat dissatisfied with the process of feeding back decisions about the selection of pupils.
- Responses of key contacts suggested a sense of improvement in all aspects of the nomination procedure in **Durham** when changes in the procedure had been made from the first to the second year.
- Headteachers' views on the nomination procedure were mixed and both positive and negative aspects of the process were highlighted. The most common positive aspect highlighted was the multi-disciplinary nature of the panel, a view shared by key personnel in nominating agencies, who rated the multi-disciplinary panel process more highly than key contacts in schools. They emphasised the importance of the multi-disciplinary nature of the panel process in ensuring that the selection criteria were met. The main negative points raised by headteachers were the lack of feedback and insufficient or unclear information passed to schools about decisions made.
- Specific concerns in **Darlington** centred around the fairness of the procedure, the restriction on the number of places for each school and the difficulties caused by other agencies nominating pupils as well as schools.

1.4 FEEDBACK TO SCHOOLS AND NOMINATING AGENCIES ON PUPIL PROGRESS

Headteachers and key contacts with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were asked their views on feedback on pupils' progress once they were attending the provision. Thirty-three (26 in Durham and seven in Darlington) out of the 54 headteachers and 23 (19 in Durham and four in Darlington) out of the 33 key contacts had direct experience of the operation of the provision with pupils on the first year. It is important to note, however, as many headteachers themselves noted, they were often speaking from limited experience as all had only a small number of pupils on Higher Horizons. The majority had only one, two or three pupils on the provision, whilst the maximum number of pupils from one school was six. The views of key contacts are presented first and then the more detailed comments from headteachers are discussed.

Key contacts in schools and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were asked which feedback mechanisms they had experienced and which they felt was the most useful. The most common forms of feedback were through letters, telephone contact and written reports. Out of the 19 key contacts in **Durham**, seven had received information by letter, telephone and through a written report, whilst nine had received some form of written feedback only. Only three reported that they had been involved in face-to-face contact, i.e. through meetings or case discussions with Higher Horizons' staff. However, in **Darlington**, all four key contact respondents reported receiving feedback via letter, telephone, written report and through

face-to-face meetings with Higher Horizons' staff. Telephone and letter contact were reported to be the most common form of receiving information by personnel in the nominating agencies, although, in individual cases, reports, meetings and case discussions were also noted. In contrast, the most common form of feedback reported to be experienced by the key personnel in core providers was meetings, although telephone contact and case discussion were also evident.

There were mixed views about the most useful form that feedback might take. When offered the options of a written report, telephone contact, a letter, a meeting with Higher Horizons' staff or a case discussion, seven key contacts chose a written report as the most useful form of communication, whilst three felt that telephone contact was the most useful. Two, on the other hand, indicated that meetings and case discussions, i.e. face-to-face contact, were the most helpful. The remaining seven either selected more than one or did not indicate their favoured mechanism. The most useful form of feedback noted by key personnel in nominating agencies, however, was through face-to-face meetings with Higher Horizons' staff, whilst for key personnel in core providers, although they also held mixed views, telephone contact was the most preferred mechanism. One key contact also reported that an open evening to see students' work had also been useful.

Key contacts in schools and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were also asked to rate the amount of feedback provided. The ratings given by key contacts are shown in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7   Key contact ratings of the amount of feedback provided to schools on pupils' progress once on Higher Horizons

Rating given	No. of key contacts
Very poor	5
Poor	4
Fair	8
Good	4
Very good	2
Total	**23**

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

There were mixed views about the amount of feedback received. Nine key contacts (just over a third) rated the amount of feedback as 'poor' or 'very poor' and about 14 (just under two-thirds) rated the amount of feedback as 'fair' to 'very good'. However, barely a quarter rated the amount of feedback as 'good' or 'very good'. It was notable that the four key contact respondents in **Darlington** rated the amount of feedback as either 'fair' (three) or 'very good' (one). Where one key contact rated the amount of feedback as 'very good', s/he stated that they had worked in close liaison with Higher Horizons' staff with the aim of supporting pupils to undertake GCSEs. Further comments included that there should be regular review meetings with Higher Horizons' staff, that discussions were useful to avoid conflict and failure and that

feedback had been difficult where pupils found it difficult to engage with the provision.

In addition, key contacts and key personnel in core providers were asked the degree of involvement that school staff had once pupils were on Higher Horizons. Seventeen out of the 23 key contacts with pupils involved in 1998–99 (about three-quarters) stated that they had no or limited involvement once pupils were accessing the provision. This view was shared by key personnel in core providers, who reported that, in most cases, school involvement had been 'very poor'. Whilst one of the core provider staff stated that there was '*no arrangement for it to happen*', another reported that: '*The school's lack of interest and response has generally dampened enthusiasm to continue making them aware. Schools have shown no interest in the project.*' In contrast, one key contact reported that they had '*regular meetings with pastoral staff to discuss attendance strategies*'. Importantly, one key contact suggested that the lack of contact with school might be what pupils needed.

The telephone interviews with headteachers provided more detailed information about the feedback received from Higher Horizons once pupils were on the provision. Of the 33 headteachers with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99, six headteachers felt they had insufficient immediate experience to comment on this aspect, suggesting that, within their school, they felt distanced from this process. Out of the 27 remaining headteachers, 21 (just over two-thirds) stated that they had received insufficient or no feedback about pupils' progress once they were on the Higher Horizons provision. One headteacher stated that it was almost like '*the pupil disappeared from the school roll*'. S/he further added that this would pose a particularly difficult problem if placement on the course broke down as the school would find it difficult to pick the case up again. This view was supported by another headteacher who reported a scenario where a pupil had withdrawn from the provision and that, but for contact with the parent, the school might not have been aware of these difficulties. The danger that pupils might be lost to the education system altogether if they failed on Higher Horizons was also raised as one of the least successful aspects of the provision which are discussed later. Another headteacher reported that feedback was unavailable, even when requested. Even where feedback had been received, it was reported to be '*vague and general*'. One headteacher described a Higher Horizons' event that had been arranged so that teachers could see pupils' work. S/he described this as '*wishy washy*' and '*a fun and talk event rather than a business like event*'. S/he added that: '*This does not do the project or the children on it any favours. I could not get at what I wanted to know – the link between targets and GCSEs, and I realised too late.*' For one pupil, who it was thought might have benefited from support from the school whilst still attending Higher Horizons, a written account received at the end of the course was reported to be '*after the horse had bolted*'. The lack of immediacy of information and its lack of focus, necessary in order to make links with the National Curriculum in school and check the appropriateness of courses for individual pupils, were also noted.

In contrast, however, six headteachers did respond positively about feedback on pupils' progress. Three of the six were from **Darlington**. Thus, a greater proportion of the headteachers in Darlington seemed to be satisfied with the feedback they received. Feedback was reported to be '*very good, high-quality*', and one headteacher reported that s/he was '*very impressed*'. Regular feedback on pupils' progress,

including details about attendance, behaviour and performance were noted. One headteacher reported that they were '*always aware of what was happening for each individual, although it was different for each*', whilst another commented that: '*I cannot see how much else they could have done as they have to spend time with the pupils.*' One headteacher thought that his/her school was unusual in that they '*keep a tight rein on pupils and still see them as at school, although they were educated elsewhere*'. They had designated a link person who had weekly contact with the staff and pupils on the Higher Horizons provision. According to him/her, this resulted in very good GCSE results for pupils on the programme.

Importantly, one headteacher highlighted a lack of clarity about where responsibilities for pupils lay. S/he was uncertain whether, because pupils were being educated off-site, they '*could be forgotten about*' or '*should we have more contact and be jointly involved?*' In conjunction with this, one of the LEA personnel highlighted the two-way nature of the feedback process and schools' responsibility for pupils on Higher Horizons and stated that: '[Feedback] *depends on whether schools engage with the programme.*' On the other hand, another referred to the need to take further the key worker role within Higher Horizons and for them to be more proactive in getting schools involved and '*bang on schools' doors*'. The issue of communication between schools and Higher Horizons and the role of the key contact were taken up further within the face-to-face interviews with headteachers and LEA personnel, the findings from which are presented in the research vignette on page 21. Whilst recognising that the ideal might be weekly feedback to schools and daily verbal communication where there was a particular problem, one of the LEA personnel felt that the process of giving feedback to schools had been improved in the second year of the provision.

Key findings: feedback and communication

- The most common forms of mechanism used for feedback to schools reported by key contacts in **Durham** were letters, telephone and written reports, whilst key contacts in **Darlington** and the key personnel in core providers reported face-to-face contact, in the form of meetings or case discussions, as common.

- There were mixed views about the most useful form of feedback received by schools and nominating agencies once pupils were on Higher Horizons. The majority of key contacts, however, favoured telephone contact (also favoured by core provider staff) and written reports, whilst key personnel in nominating agencies preferred face-to-face contact.

- Key contacts also held mixed views about the amount of feedback received by schools once pupils were on Higher Horizons, although it was noted that this was rated more highly by key contacts in **Darlington** than in **Durham**. In addition, about three-quarters of the headteachers who commented on the feedback received on pupils' progress on Higher Horizons reported that they had received insufficient or no feedback, although six, including three from Darlington, were positive about the feedback they had received.

- The majority of key contacts reported no or limited involvement of school staff once pupils were attending the Higher Horizons provision and this was supported by comments from key personnel in core providers. Individual core provider staff indicated that this might be because no arrangement had been set in place for ongoing contact or, equally, this might be due to a lack of interest in the provision by schools.

- A concern was raised that, if a pupil's placement on Higher Horizons broke down, lack of feedback might mean that schools were unaware of this development and would therefore be unable to support pupils, although retaining responsibility for them.

- A concern was also raised by one headteacher about the lack of clarity with regard to where the responsibility for pupils on Higher Horizons lay, whilst LEA personnel highlighted the two-way nature of the process of feeding back pupils' progress to schools.

Research vignette: Communication and the role of the key contact

Communication was recognised as a key issue arising from both the telephone interviews with headteachers and the key contact questionnaires and, for this reason, headteachers and LEA personnel were asked to expand on this issue within the face-to-face interviews. They were asked what they saw as the responsibilities of the schools and the providers, what they thought the role of the key contact within schools might be, the skills and qualities required for this position and suggestions for improvements.

All interviewees recognised that, at one level, as pupils remained on the roll of the school whilst they attended Higher Horizons, they remained the responsibility of the school. However, the extent to which they expected schools' responsibility to be put into practice varied. LEA personnel, for example, suggested that schools might be involved in direct contact and provision of work for pupils whilst they were on Higher Horizons and that they retained responsibility for '*monitoring, recording, reporting, assessing and attendance issues*'. On the other hand, one headteacher implied that simply being informed about pupils' progress might fulfil their responsibility. Two headteachers identified the need for clarification on '*who does what and where decisions are made*'. One described this as a '*grey area*' and stated that they had '*assumed that Higher Horizons had taken over responsibility for pupils*'.

When headteachers were asked for suggestions for improving communication, they called for more formalised contact, including a named contact within Higher Horizons, personal contact, regular review meetings, weekly progress reports with more and better quality information and time for both Higher Horizons and school staff to liaise. Three LEA personnel agreed and indicated that they might facilitate this process with a clear agreement or contract with schools and other agencies involved ('*It comes down to initial agreements*'), and better induction for schools. One, however, felt that they had tried hard to engage schools and could not do much more than they had already done without affecting the provision for pupils.

The role of the key contact was variously described. One headteacher felt it was presently '*a nominal title*' with the person having responsibility for correspondence and answering queries from staff about the provision, and that this role needed to be developed. However, another felt that it was already very well developed in their school, with the key contact maintaining contact with the pupils and providing work for them. In addition, s/he felt that it was important, in the pupils' eyes, that someone from school was seen to be involved. The need for clarity again surfaced. One headteacher indicated that, if pupils were to remain on the school roll, the key contact might retain a pastoral care role, negotiate the programme and monitor pupils' progress, whilst '*currently they are simply logging reports and passing information to other staff*'. One of the LEA personnel felt that it was the school's responsibility to make their own arrangements for the key contact and that the LEA '*cannot write a script*'. Concern was expressed by another of the LEA personnel that pupils often have many agencies involved with them and the key contact needs to be aware of this and keep them all informed. The role of the key contact was described as '*a fine balancing act*' and it was clear that interviewees felt that certain skills and qualities were therefore required to fulfil this role. The qualities referred to, in rank order, were:

Skills	**Qualities**
• organisational	• pastoral care experience
• communication	• authority
• negotiation	• patience
• broker and entrepreneur	• determination
• interpersonal	• understanding of poor social backgrounds
• liaison	• sense of humour
• a small-steps approach	• know the pupils well
• planning	• caring
• pastoral skills	• knowledge of FE
• conciliation	• pupil-centred
• advocacy	• time
	• realistic expectations
	• not arrogant
	• involved in other multi-agency work
	• open and outgoing

PART TWO
IMPACT AND EFFECTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section, the impact and effects of Higher Horizons are examined. Respondents were asked to give views on the impact of Higher Horizons on the pupils attending the provision and schools as a whole. The impact on the LEA and the agencies and organisations involved in nomination and provision are also considered and the effect of part-time attendance on Higher Horizons on pupils' access to the school curriculum is explored. The sections therefore covered within this part of the report are:

- impact on pupils;
- impact on the LEA, schools and other agencies; and
- the effect of part-time attendance.

2.2 IMPACT ON PUPILS

Headteachers and key contacts with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were asked what they felt had been the main effects of the Higher Horizons provision on the pupils involved.

Of the 33 headteachers with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99, eight felt they had insufficient experience to comment on the impact on pupils, either because they had no personal experience of those involved or because the lack of formal links with the provision made this difficult for them to assess. Five headteachers felt there had been no impact on the pupils involved, because they had not attended the provision, but two of these were more optimistic that, with the right selection of pupils this year, they would have better success. One referred, for example, to '*a very damaged boy*' who did not complete the course. The remaining 20 headteachers, however, were able to report positive effects on the pupils involved, although impact inevitably varied from one individual to another. Key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers often supported these views, although, at times their views differed and, where relevant, this is noted within the text. It is significant to note that all the seven headteachers in Darlington with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 were able to report a range of positive effects on the pupils involved. Overall, the positive effects identified included, in rank order:

- **improved attendance**

Improved attendance was reported by 12 headteachers (including five of the seven within Darlington), and by four key contacts. At times, attendance was reported to have improved '*dramatically*', even though pupils had often previously had very limited attendance at school. An improvement from 50 to 100 per cent, for example, was reported in one case. However, this was further enlightened by the responses of

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key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers, who suggested that success with school attendance was variable. One of the core provider staff, for example, indicated that young people were unwilling to consider any return to school and one of the personnel from nominating agencies stated that: *'Whilst they enjoy and participate in courses, they fail to engage with school.'* It was suggested by one of the key personnel in a nominating agency that: *'Where there are non-school issues, attendance improves. Where there are school issues, attendance improves, as long as conditions in school change.'* Therefore, whilst attendance on Higher Horizons might have improved considerably, attendance at school was a different issue. Although headteachers gave a few examples of pupils who had reaccessed the school curriculum, more supported the view that when pupils are on Higher Horizons part-time, they do not attend school. This is further discussed in the section on the effect of part-time attendance on Higher Horizons and raised again by some headteachers and key contacts as one of the least successful aspects of the provision.

- **a positive effect on behaviour**

A positive effect on pupils' behaviour was reported by nine headteachers (including four out of the seven from Darlington), by six key contacts and two of the four core provider staff. A headteacher, referring to one pupil, stated that: *'From reports, you would think it was a different boy.'* Others referred to a *'calming'* or *'mellowing'* of behaviour. Core provider staff supported this view and reported a marked improvement in behaviour in most cases. A few headteachers indicated that the relaxed atmosphere and the flexibility of the provision might be responsible for this change.

- **improved motivation**

Improved motivation was noted by seven headteachers, one of whom felt that Higher Horizons had provided one youngster with *'something to get his teeth into'*. Pupils who were reported previously to *'see no value in formal schooling'* were said to have *'got a lot out of* [Higher Horizons] *and enjoyed it'* and to have *'found* [Higher Horizons] *different and exciting'*. One of the key personnel from a core provider noted the knock-on effect of increased motivation for pupils' futures: *'Their eyes are widened to other possibilities in life in terms of their future education.'*

- **improved confidence and self-esteem/self-awareness**

Improved confidence and self-esteem were highlighted by six headteachers, two key contacts, three of the nine key personnel in nominating agencies and one of the four core provider staff. Although a small number in total, a greater proportion of personnel in agencies/organisations focused on this aspect of pupil improvement, therefore, than did staff in schools. One headteacher described a boy, involved previously in the drug culture, who gained self-respect and whose *'whole persona changed'*. He noted that the pupil himself put it down to being involved in Higher Horizons. The implications of improving the confidence and self-esteem of pupils were noted by some headteachers:

[Higher Horizons] *totally changed the self-esteem of pupils, gave them the confidence to do exams, mix with the year group, where there were problems before. It gave them what they needed to progress.*

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[Higher Horizons] *boosted his confidence and he was able to cope in a different setting, had the opportunity to develop skills and work with different groups. He benefited to a considerable extent.*

- **improved attitude and maturation**

An improved attitude was reported by five headteachers, but by no key contacts. One headteacher reported that s/he had '*seen them grow from insular and unable to communicate socially to responsible adults*'. Another referred to a '*tremendous improvement in attitude*'. One of the key personnel in core providers referred to the improved attitude of pupils as the main effect of the provision '*because it allowed them to make reasoned decisions and adults will listen to them*'.

- **academic achievement**

Academic achievement as an effect of Higher Horizons was noted by three headteachers, all from Darlington. One headteacher felt that pupils had achieved academically because the programme had '*provided them with the safety and security to get back into the system*'. However, this also included one scenario where two pupils had been returned to school from the provision because of their inappropriate behaviour, who, because they were '*determined to make it work*' then went on to complete their GCSE courses. In contrast, two headteachers also expressed concern that pupils had not achieved GCSE results, although they had been expected to do so, and might have done if they had been attending school.

Other positive effects on pupils reported were:

- the prevention of permanent exclusion;
- new skills learnt;
- outside interests gained;
- access to courses not available in schools;
- improved communication skills;
- the development of team skills;
- increased independence; and
- an improved personal presentation.

Suggestions were made that positive effects were due to the small-group setting, the individualised programme, the relaxed atmosphere, the flexibility of the provision and the opportunity for pupils to have a fresh start.

Two headteachers, on the other hand, perceived a negative impact, with some pupils becoming more socially excluded if the provision did not work out for them.

Key findings: impact on pupils

- The majority of headteachers reported positive effects on the pupils involved in Higher Horizons. The most common, in rank order, included improved attendance, a positive effect on behaviour, improved motivation, increased confidence and self-esteem and an improved attitude. These were often supported by comments from key contacts, and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers.
- When examined further, however, the impact on school attendance was reported to be variable by personnel from nominating agencies and core providers. They suggested that many of the pupils on Higher Horizons were reluctant to return to school, particularly where their problems were more directly related to the school environment. This was further supported by headteacher comments.
- Key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers focused particularly on the impact on pupils in terms of their self-esteem and confidence, a factor highlighted by proportionally much fewer school staff.
- Only a few headteachers reported no impact on pupils involved in the Higher Horizons provision, mainly where pupils had not attended. A concern was expressed, however, by two headteachers with regard to a negative impact on pupils when they were unable to succeed on the provision, with them becoming further removed from the education system.
- It is significant to note that all the **Darlington** headteachers with pupils on the first year of Higher Horizons were able to identify a number of positive effects on pupils and that they focused on academic achievement, as well as the effects noted by those in Durham. However, two headteachers also expressed concern about pupils' lack of academic achievement.

2.3 IMPACT ON THE LEA, SCHOOLS AND OTHER AGENCIES

The direct impact on pupils having been discussed, the wider, more strategic impact on the LEA, other agencies and schools will now be considered. LEA personnel were asked what they thought had been the impact of the implementation of the Higher Horizons provision on **the LEA** as a whole. The effects highlighted could be considered to further the overall aims of the LEA, as well as enhance other areas of their work. They identified six key areas of impact:

- the learning experience of contracting with schools and other partner agencies;
- the opportunity to address school culture issues;
- the use of trained tutors and youth workers to deliver basic skills;
- a fresh approach to attendance and behaviour problems;
- improved networking;
- the opportunity to garner pupils' views;
- the sharing of good practice; and
- improved provision for long-term truants.

Headteachers and key contacts were asked what had been the main effects of being involved in the Higher Horizons provision on their **schools**. Of the 33 headteachers with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99, four felt they had insufficient experience to comment on the impact on the school or that it was difficult to assess. Five felt there was no significant impact to report, one stating that this was because the pupils

were poor attenders to begin with. Twenty-one headteachers and ten key contacts, however, were able to report some positive impact on the school, whilst two headteachers and two key contacts identified a negative impact. Whilst one headteacher felt that impact was very limited because of the small number of pupils they had on Higher Horizons, another emphasised that, although this was the case, the pupils were those who *'bang against the school system'*, so their absence from school could have a marked impact. Positive effects reported were:

- ### an improved learning environment
An improved learning environment and lack of disruption for other pupils and staff in school were reported by 12 headteachers and four key contacts. One headteacher reported that the quality of education for other pupils was *'immeasurably'* better. Another, referring to pupils on Higher Horizons, reported that: *'Their removal had a significant positive impact on the performance and ethos and a greater chance of success for pupils.'* Another noted that: *'Others were heavily influenced by them and they can proceed with their studies with less of a threat.'*

- ### the creation of more pastoral time for other pupils
An increase in staff pastoral time for other pupils was reported by seven headteachers and two key contacts. One headteacher reported that: *'There was a lot of time and effort spent in encouraging these pupils to come to school.'* Another noted that teachers had *'more time for raising the attendance and the value of education for others'*.

- ### improved attendance figures
An improvement in the school's attendance figures was reported by six headteachers and three key contacts. In one case, access to the provision was thought to have *'improved the attendance figures tremendously and reduced the group not attending'*.

- ### an alternative strategy for schools to utilise
Another reported effect of Higher Horizons on the school was having an additional strategy to use with pupils. This was reported by five of the key contacts, although, surprisingly, given their whole-school focus, not by headteachers. One key contact referred to access to the provision as a *'proactive way of addressing attendance and behaviour in key stage 4'*.

Other positive effects on schools as a whole were noted. In one case, a headteacher reported that the school was encouraged to reflect on its own practice. Another noted that there was a staff feeling of *'recognition that some children are problems over and above what they can deal with'*, although the latter headteacher also felt that the Higher Horizons provision was *'too little, too late'*. Other effects reported by key contacts included that the teachers within the school were relieved of the problem of coping with difficult pupils, that attendance and behaviour ceased to be an issue for the school and the avoidance of permanent exclusion. These suggest, however, a focus on relieving the school of a problem rather more than solving the youngsters' behavioural difficulties.

In contrast, two headteachers and one key contact identified a negative impact on their staff. One headteacher described this as *'disillusionment'* because of their disappointment with Higher Horizons, whilst the other commented that *'it would be*

tempting for staff to opt out, but we have stuck with it'. One key contact, whilst not having pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99, was concerned about a negative impact on other pupils within the school. S/he noted that pupils involved in the provision *'are keen to tell people that smoking and drugs are allowed'*.

Key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers were asked their perception of the impact of Higher Horizons on their own **organisations/agencies**. All reported that their organisation/agency had benefited from their involvement. It appeared that involvement in Higher Horizons had promoted the broader aims of other agencies and organisations. Responses from key personnel in nominating agencies, for example, included:

- an involvement in a shared responsibility and coordinated response to pupils' needs;
- the encouragement of greater networking;
- a clearer focus for some of their work;
- a demonstrated involvement in alternative provision; and
- the fulfilment of lifelong learning objectives.

Responses from key personnel in the core provider organisations included:

- having unsegregated provision for students;
- being able to put into practice a range of accredited courses and widening access to curriculum areas; and
- achieving wider participation by young people in the organisation.

On the other hand, one of the key personnel in the core providers reported a negative effect of disruption to the centre whilst the pupils settled down on Higher Horizons.

Key findings: Impact on the LEA, schools and other agencies

- The implementation of Higher Horizons was reported to have had an impact at LEA level in a number of ways, including the learning experience gained in the area of contracting with schools and other partner agencies. This appeared to be consistent with the broad aims of the LEA and contributed to enhancing other areas of their work.
- The majority of headteachers were able to identify some positive impact on the school as a whole. The most common effects, in rank order, were the improved learning environment for other pupils and teaching staff, the creation of more pastoral time for other pupils and improved attendance figures, each supported by the views of some of the key contacts. In addition, key contacts referred to the alternative strategy that Higher Horizons enabled schools to offer pupils, a factor, surprisingly, not raised by headteachers.
- In one case, involvement with Higher Horizons had encouraged the school to reflect on their own practice with disaffected students.
- Whilst one headteacher felt that the impact on the school was limited by the small number of pupils involved in the provision, another felt that it could have substantial impact because of the type of pupils involved.
- A few headteachers and a key contact identified a negative impact on their staff and one key contact expressed concern about a possible negative influence on other pupils.
- Involvement in Higher Horizons had an impact on other agencies and organisations in that it helped them achieve their overall aims, for example, the fulfilment of lifelong learning objectives in the case of one nominating agency and widening access to curriculum areas in the case of one of the core providers.

2.4 THE EFFECT OF PART-TIME ATTENDANCE

Headteachers and key contacts with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 were asked in what ways they felt that part-time attendance might affect pupils' access to the school curriculum.

Of the 33 headteachers with pupils on the 1998–99 programme, four headteachers felt that they had insufficient experience to comment or that this was difficult to assess. One of these commented that, because they had no control over the management of the provision, this aspect was not theirs to manage. The other 29 headteachers had mixed views.

Sixteen headteachers (just over half of those that offered comments) recognised that there was bound to be some negative effect on pupils' access to the school curriculum, but felt that this was worth it for the benefits pupils might gain from Higher Horizons or did not consider it to be a major problem, as pupils were probably not accessing the National Curriculum in the first place. As one stated: '*Anything is better than nothing.*' This view, however, was not shared by the majority of key contacts involved more with the day-to-day operation of the programme, although one felt that pupils would be able to access subjects not available on Higher Horizons through part-time attendance. Headteachers in this 'positive' group perceived that part-time attendance may:

- have '*great benefits in the rest of the curriculum, if the right pupils were selected*';
- '*allow negotiated learning rather than 100 per cent compulsory education*';
- help pupils '*see school work as more relevant*';
- be '*a good motivator for pupils just starting with behaviour problems*'; and
- be '*an ideal situation*' and '*beneficial*' for pupils whose attendance drops off in Year 11.

A few of these headteachers suggested ways in which the impact of part-time attendance on access to the school curriculum might be reduced. One stated that part-time attendance on the programme '*emphasised the need for effective liaison and the need for pupils to be successful on the Higher Horizons part*'. The need for better links between the provider and the school to promote continuity was also highlighted because of the '*danger that* [pupils] *do not attend the school element*'. It was also suggested that National Curriculum core subjects might be '*protected*', that part-time provision would need to be planned in as early as possible and that the school would need to be flexible. One headteacher reported that the school could manage part-time attendance for '*one or two pupils*'. Another in this group, however, was also concerned that, '*if* [pupils] *were struggling to cope in one institution, they will struggle more in two*'.

Two headteachers were more positively in favour of part-time provision for some pupils, although they recognised the need to be very flexible and to make sure that the rest of the pupil's time was effectively used. One in Darlington considered it to be '*a very valuable option*' and one that s/he might favour for some students.

In contrast, 11 headteachers (just over a third of those that commented) felt that the negative effect of part-time attendance on access to the curriculum was considerable and they felt strongly that part-time provision was untenable. Part-time attendance was reported by some headteachers to be '*a major worry*', ' *a non-starter*'; '*very problematic*' and to '*create significant problems*'. It was perceived by these headteachers to be both inappropriate and impossible to deliver because of logistical problems. It was thought to:

- have '*a major dislocating and disrupting effect on pupils' education*';
- mean that '*pupils lose the threads of what they are doing*';
- be '*very intrusive*' on the school timetable;
- have '*exaggerated effects in hierarchical subjects like maths*'; and
- result in '*continuity in coursework being lost*'.

Headteachers also referred to the danger that pupils may not attend the school element of the programme: '*Where they are in a different environment on the other days, it is difficult to integrate in a school environment. It would not work. I feel very strongly that you should not combine the two.*'

Nine key contacts supported this view, whilst six of these also reported that, in reality, pupils did not attend school when they were expected to be on Higher Horizons part-time. Key contacts referred to the '*possibility of greater disruption*' and the '*problems marrying time at Higher Horizons with time in school and the travel*'

between the two centres' and stated that *'it would solve one problem, but create others'*. The distinction between the ideal and the reality was highlighted: *'Ideally the school should operate a timetable compatible with Higher Horizons. This depends on staffing and funding, and not many schools are in this position.'*

LEA personnel thought that the model of part-time attendance had not been very effective, that it fragmented the curriculum and further increased pupils' disengagement. They agreed that the logistics were difficult for schools to implement effectively, that a considerable commitment from them was required to make it work and also that *'pupils have to have a stake in the curriculum'*. One highlighted also that it might be difficult for Higher Horizons to accommodate pupils with individualised programmes and part-time attendance at school. The contrasting elements of Higher Horizons and school, such as the difference in the environment and the compulsory nature of schooling compared to the voluntary nature of Higher Horizons, were also noted and reported to make dual attendance problematic. Overall, therefore, it was felt that more might be achieved with full-time provision.

Key findings: the effect of part-time attendance

- Just over half of the headteachers recognised that there was bound to be a negative effect on pupils' access to the school curriculum, but they felt that this was worth it because of the benefits to students attending Higher Horizons. It was thought to enable pupils to access a wider range of subjects and to see school work as more relevant and to be beneficial because their attendance was poor in the first place.
- Some headteachers suggested ways in which the impact of part-time attendance on pupils' access to the curriculum might be reduced. They felt that this might be achieved by protecting the National Curriculum core subjects, through effective liaison between the school and the provider, through the school being flexible and by part-time provision being planned in as early as possible.
- On the other hand, about a third of headteachers and the majority of key contacts thought that part-time attendance on Higher Horizons was both untenable and impractical because of the disruption caused to both students and the school, as well as the difficulty for students in adapting between the two different environments. In fact, some key contacts reported that, when pupils were expected to attend the school for part of the time and Higher Horizons for part of the time, the reality was that they did not attend school. LEA personnel also favoured full-time provision for these reasons.
- Only a few headteachers were more positively in favour of part-time attendance. They recognised that it was important that the school aspect worked effectively and the need for schools to be very flexible to make this succeed.

PART THREE
SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

3.1   INTRODUCTION

In this section, perceptions of headteachers, key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers and LEA personnel about the most and least successful aspects of the Higher Horizons provision are examined. The views of headteachers and key contacts on the aspects of the provision that might usefully be incorporated into school practice are also explored. The format of this part of the report is therefore as follows:

- the most successful aspects;
- the least successful aspects; and
- aspects that might usefully be incorporated into school practice.

3.2   THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ASPECTS OF THE PROVISION

Headteachers, key contacts, personnel from nominating agencies and core providers, and LEA personnel were asked what they thought were the most successful aspects of the Higher Horizons provision. They highlighted a wide range of aspects that they considered to be particularly successful. In addition, headteachers were asked what they thought the key factors in successfully accessing alternative provision generally for disaffected students were. The findings from this particular enquiry are presented separately in the research vignette on page 36.

Whilst headteachers often referred to the most successful aspects of the Higher Horizons provision as the more strategic aspects, such as keeping pupils within the education system, key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers tended to focus mainly on direct outcomes for students, such as improved self-esteem and a chance to succeed, or operational aspects of the provision, such as its work-related focus. Seven out of the 33 headteachers felt they had insufficient experience to comment on the most successful aspect of the provision and one was not prepared to generalise from the small number of pupils involved from their school. The most common successful aspects identified by headteachers are presented, in rank order, below. Where these successes were also reported by key contacts or key personnel from nominating agencies or core providers, this is reported in the text.

- **keeping pupils within the education system**

Keeping pupils within education was highlighted as one of the most successful aspects of Higher Horizons by eight headteachers and by two key personnel in nominating agencies, although highlighted by only two key contacts. For some headteachers the implications of this were that pupils *'will probably now go on to FE and get qualifications'* and *'remain in touch with education in key stage 4, gain*

qualifications ... and go on to work or college'. One emphasised the importance of *'keeping pupils in focus long enough to give them the chance to see the value of learning'.* Another referred to keeping pupils in touch with the education system as *'the single most important aspect'* of Higher Horizons.

- **improved self-esteem and confidence of pupils**

The improved self-esteem or confidence of pupils was noted by seven headteachers, by two of the key contacts and by five of the key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers. According to one headteacher, Higher Horizons gave pupils *'the confidence to do exams and mix with the year group'.* For key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers, success appeared to focus mainly on the building of young people's self-esteem and confidence (noted by five) and the opportunity for pupils to develop trusting relationships (noted by three). This contrasted to some extent with the views of school staff, who, not surprisingly, placed a greater emphasis on more educational aspects and, significantly, rarely mentioned this latter aspect.

- **providing an alternative to mainstream education**

Five headteachers felt that the fact that Higher Horizons provided an alternative to mainstream education was a successful aspect. This was also referred to by one key contact and by two key personnel in nominating agencies. Headteachers referred to *'some means of provision, other than permanent exclusion, for disturbed or disruptive pupils'* and *'a totally different setting'* required because *'the problem they have is school itself'.*

A wide range of other successful aspects was noted by headteachers, key contacts, and key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers. In total, these can be grouped into aspects about **the provision** itself and **the benefits for pupils.** These are presented below. The benefits for pupils cited included greater access to opportunities, widening their perspectives and a greater sense of achievement.

Benefits for pupils:	The provision:
• improved motivation	• skills-based
• access/transition to work	• work-related/vocational
• broadening pupils' horizons	• small-group work
• a normal existence from 16 onwards	• individualised
• a fresh start (venue, content and staff)	• the staff
• a chance to succeed and a sense of direction	• its clarity, identity and integrity
• regular attendance by pupils at risk	• a positive feel
• a positive educational experience	• a structured programme
• examination results/qualifications	• a relevant curriculum
• development of skills	• a more adult situation
• a range of new experiences and challenges	• a high adult:student ratio
• access to a range of curriculum activities	• a flexible programme
• access to college courses	• liaison with parents
• access to career opportunities	• a variety of activities
• reduced confrontation with adults	• access to post-16 education and work
• enjoyment	• easy access to facilities
• appropriate provision	• funding
• a sense of achievement	
• employment and training opportunities	
• access to a work experience placement	
• the opportunity to develop trusting relationships	
• individual support	
• practical avenues	

A few key contacts also referred to school-based factors, such as less disruption in school, improved school attendance and achievement outcomes, as well as the improved attitude of pupils towards teachers.

Key findings: the most successful aspects

- A wide range of successful aspects of the Higher Horizons provision was identified. The most common aspects highlighted were the maintenance of pupils within the education system, provision of an alternative to mainstream schooling and the improved self-esteem and confidence of pupils.

- Headteachers tended to focus on strategic aspects of the provision, whilst key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers tended to focus on direct outcomes for pupils, such as improved self-esteem and a chance to succeed, and the operational aspects of Higher Horizons, such as its work-related focus.

- Key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers noted particularly the improvement in pupils' self-esteem and confidence and the opportunity which pupils had to develop trusting relationships with adults whilst on Higher Horizons, in contrast to school staff, who focused on more educational aspects.

Research vignette: Key factors in successfully accessing alternative provision

Within the telephone interviews, headteachers were asked what they considered to be the key factors involved in successfully accessing alternative provision for disaffected students. This question elicited a wide range of responses, which were grouped into the following categories:

- the curriculum content;
- the environment and ambience of provision;
- pastoral support;
- communication and links with mainstream schools;
- appropriate targeting of pupils;
- resources; and
- principles underpinning the provision.

The complete table of responses is shown in the Appendix.   Where more than one headteacher identified a particular aspect, this is noted in brackets.

Adequate funding and resources were a key strategic feature, and overall the most frequently referred to factor. A large number of headteachers focused on links with mainstream school provision and, overwhelmingly, the factor most often highlighted in this area was effective communication with schools. The need for communication to be '*two-way in all aspects – planning operating, evaluation and review*' was emphasised by one. In addition, a shared understanding of aims, knowledge of the provision available, integration into mainstream provision and being within schools' control were also highlighted by more than one headteacher.

The most frequently identified area overall was the curriculum content and what this entailed. The most commonly identified factors relating to the curriculum were the need for an individualised approach, a skills-based curriculum, and the need for it to be both motivating and to provide pupils with the opportunity for progression. Motivation was felt to be the key for some. One headteacher felt that the important thing was '*to get them through the door in the first place*', whilst another felt that '*it is no good selling them something that does not appeal*'. If pupils' renewed motivation '*rubs off in school*', this was reported to be '*a great plus*'. Flexibility, relevance and a work-related curriculum were also identified by more than one headteacher.

The need for disaffected pupils to have additional social and emotional support and for there to be a focus on raising self-esteem was also raised. As one headteacher put it: '*Everything stems from this.*' Another stressed that self-esteem comes '*through success rather than failure*' and s/he also emphasised the importance of not rejecting the pupils. The requirement for the environment within which alternative provision operated to be different from school was stressed by some. One headteacher described the school environment as having become '*hostile*' for some pupils and another stated that: '*Pupils need to be freed from the rigid learning atmosphere and discipline in school so they can have a well-structured learning environment in a free environment.*'

In terms of the target group of pupils, the need for wide availability, early intervention and for the provision to be correctly matched to the target group were all factors considered important and raised by more than one headteacher. With regard to early intervention, one headteacher stated that: '*They start to go wrong at 12/13 years. By 15, a lot of damage has been done.*'

Other aspects highlighted were grouped under the heading of the overall principles which the provision adopted. The emphasis here was on the multi-agency nature of provision and the need for all partners involved in provision to work together, as well as for the benefits for pupils to be evident. One headteacher described '*a three-way partnership*' in which parental support was vital for success, and another stated that multi-agency working was required in order to '*address all the issues*' and '*plan for the whole child*'.

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3.3   THE LEAST SUCCESSFUL ASPECTS OF THE PROVISION

Headteachers and key contacts with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99, key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers and LEA personnel were also asked what they considered to be the least successful aspects of the provision. Of the 33 headteachers with pupils on the first year of Higher Horizons, five headteachers felt unable to comment, because they felt they had insufficient direct experience of the provision and two felt there were no unsuccessful aspects.   The remaining 28 headteachers identified a range of factors.   Headteachers in Durham focused mainly on lack of communication and access to the provision, whilst those in Darlington focused on the lack of academic success.   Again, where factors were also reported by key contacts and key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers, this is noted in the text.   In rank order, the least successful aspects highlighted by headteachers in **Durham** were:

* **communication**

Nine headteachers, not surprisingly, given the views about feedback discussed previously, raised the issue of communication as one of the least successful aspects of the provision, as did six key contacts and two of the nine key personnel from the nominating agencies.   One headteacher described a situation in which the providers '*kept school at arm's length*', although s/he felt that it would have been beneficial for the pupil, who was having difficulties on the programme, if they had liaised closely with school staff.   Another raised a concern that, legally, headteachers should be aware of what pupils are doing as they are responsible for the pupils in their care. This issue was further explored within the face-to-face headteacher interviews, a summary of which is presented in the research vignette on page 21.

* **the selection criteria and the nomination procedure**

Issues about the selection criteria and the nomination process were raised by five headteachers as the least successful aspects of Higher Horizons, and by three key contacts and one of the key personnel from the nominating agencies.   These mainly reflected comments made earlier with regard to the selection criteria and the nomination procedure.   One headteacher referred to the lack of '*a clear impression of the criteria and the selection procedure*' and another reported the need for '*greater clarification*' of the procedure for nomination and identification of pupils.   The fact that the selection criteria meant that pupils were '*too far beyond redemption*' was again raised.   One of the key personnel from the nominating agencies referred to '*attempts to engage pupils who have not attended school or have already attended an alternative to mainstream provision unsuccessfully*' as one of the least successful aspects of the provision.   Another headteacher also referred to the '*catch-22*', in that '*those that fit the criteria do not attend and those that will cannot get on*', as one of the least successful aspects.

* **the lack of places on the provision**

Another commonly cited issue, raised by five Durham headteachers, one key contact and two of the key personnel from nominating agencies, was the lack of sufficient places for pupils on Higher Horizons.   One headteacher emphasised the '*disappointment*' when '*ideal*' candidates were not accepted and referred to the '*paucity of provision*'.   The perception that places were given '*according to quota*' was also expressed by one key contact.

- **pupils' lack of attendance at school**

Pupils' lack of attendance at school when they were expected to attend the Higher Horizons provision part of the time and school part of the time was raised as one of the most unsuccessful aspects by more key contacts (four) than headteachers (three). One headteacher stated that: *'Their education in school does not happen.'* This fact was also noted by one of the key personnel in the nominating agencies.

- **a danger that pupils are lost to the system altogether**

Three headteachers and one key contact expressed a concern about what happened to pupils that were expected to, but did not attend, Higher Horizons. According to one headteacher, this might result in *'a real chance they slip through the net, because they become beyond both structures'* and, according to another: *'One lad was totally lost to the system because he refused to go.'*

In contrast to headteachers in Durham, on the other hand, the least successful aspect of the Higher Horizons provision expressed by **Darlington** headteachers centred around:

- **pupils' lack of academic success**

Interestingly, this was noted by three of the seven headteachers from **Darlington** with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 and supported by three of their key contacts, but not mentioned by those in Durham. One headteacher felt that academic success was *'important, having had 11 years in education'* and s/he also felt that there was no reason this could not have been achieved with some of the pupils attending the Higher Horizons provision.

Other significant issues raised as the least successful aspects of the provision by both headteachers and key contacts were:

• its part-time nature	• the lack of initial support for pupil attendance
• the logistics of travelling between centres	• pupils' rejection from the provision
• pupils' lack of social contact with peers	• the labelling of pupils
• the lack of a challenge or achievement for pupils	• meeting the needs of EBD pupils
• the lack of breadth of the curriculum	• having all disaffected pupils in one establishment
• the lack of clear aims for the programme	

Key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers tended to identify different aspects of the provision that they considered the least successful. These are therefore presented separately below:

Nominating agencies	Core providers
• monitoring of the provision	• lack of funding available at the outset
• lack of effective support for pupils	• too short in length
• inconsistent/lack of funding	• pupils' bad experience of education previously
• pupils' erratic school attendance	• lack of focus on literacy and numeracy skills
• lack of resources, e.g. staff	
• spasmodic follow-up of pupils	
• target group of pupils beyond redemption	

In addition to some of the factors already highlighted, therefore, key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers tended to focus on lack of funding and resources for the provision, the lack of support for pupils, as well as some specific educational aspects, such as pupils' attendance at school and a lack of focus on literacy and numeracy skills.

Key findings: the least successful aspects

- When considering the least successful aspects of the provision, headteachers in **Durham** focused on communication with schools and access to the provision, whilst those in **Darlington** focused on pupils' lack of academic achievement. These aspects were also highlighted by the key contacts, although in Durham they also highlighted pupils' lack of attendance at school whilst on Higher Horizons as an unsuccessful aspect.
- Key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers focused particularly on funding and resourcing of the provision as the least successful aspects, as well as the lack of support for pupils (not highlighted by school staff) and some educational aspects.

3.4 ASPECTS THAT COULD BE INCORPORATED INTO SCHOOL PRACTICE

Headteachers and key contacts within schools that had pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 were asked what aspects of the provision they thought might usefully be incorporated into school practice. Of the 33 headteachers with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99, 15 (almost half) found it difficult to identify aspects that might be incorporated into school practice. All except one of the headteachers from Darlington fell into this group. Five of these headteachers argued that Higher Horizons provided something distinctive and would therefore be difficult to set up within school, at least within existing provision. A few headteachers also highlighted the difficulty of funding any alternative provision for a few pupils. In a similar manner, only nine out of the 23 key contacts with pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998–99 commented on this aspect.

Nine of the remaining 18 headteachers indicated that they had already started to implement some of the principles of Higher Horizons in their normal school practice and two suggested that this was a direct result of links with the programme. Aspects of the provision that might usefully be incorporated into school practice that headteachers identified included:

- **liaison with FE colleges**

Ten headteachers identified liaison with FE colleges as an aspect that could usefully be incorporated into school practice, as did two key contacts. One headteacher reported that college links had been developed as '*a direct result of Higher Horizons*'. Two of these headteachers, however, noted that to access college courses on an individual basis was much more expensive for the school and one described it as '*unaffordable*'.

- **work-related learning/vocational training**

Work-related learning or vocational training was nominated by eight headteachers and four key contacts. One headteacher reported that: '*For pupils who are failing we are beginning to do a combination of education, work experience and vocational training.*' Another reported that work-related learning was '*very successful*' and had '*enabled them to maintain an element of stability*' for some pupils. They reported '*real success*', with two pupils being kept on in permanent jobs.

- **a more relevant curriculum**

The fact that pupils might be provided with a curriculum that was more relevant to their needs was noted by four headteachers, as well as two key contacts, who also thought this might be an element they could implement in school.

Headteachers and key contacts identified further aspects of the Higher Horizons provision that might usefully be incorporated into school practice, which included:

• providing a more adult environment	• the use of short-term targets
• the development of key skills	• multi-agency working
• practical relaxation of the National Curriculum	• work experience combined with GCSEs
	• a high teacher:pupil ratio
• small-group work	• a practically based curriculum
• counselling	• the style of support offered to pupils
• closer access to Education Welfare Service Support	• alternative accreditation
	• flexibility of the curriculum
• effective careers advice and guidance	• an understanding of emotional and behavioural difficulties
• the use of the community	
• the use of detached youth workers to relate to pupils	• liaison with parents
	• funding
• pupils having one teacher	
• social inclusion	

A wide variety of factors was therefore identified, ranging from aspects concerning the curriculum, additional support for individual pupils and approaches that might be adopted with disaffected pupils in school.

Key findings: aspects that might be incorporated into school practice
- Some headteachers and key contacts found it difficult to identify aspects of the Higher Horizons provision that might usefully be incorporated into school practice. They argued that resources were limited, that Higher Horizons was distinctive and that provision outside the mainstream school environment was important.
- A number of different aspects of Higher Horizons that might usefully be incorporated into school practice, however, were identified by some. This included aspects concerning the curriculum, extra support for individual pupils and approaches that might be used with disaffected pupils. The most frequently highlighted of these were links with local colleges, work-related learning and provision of a more relevant curriculum for disaffected pupils.

PART FOUR
HIGHER HORIZONS AND OTHER PROVISION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the report focuses on Higher Horizons in relation to other forms of alternative provision for disaffected students available to schools. Both the advantages of Higher Horizons over alternative forms of provision and the advantages of other forms of provision over Higher Horizons are examined. In addition, within the face-to-face interviews with headteachers and LEA personnel, they were asked about their 'vision' for overall LEA provision for disaffected students in the future. Headteachers were also asked, more specifically, what the LEA might offer to help them implement their 'vision' of strategies to address disaffection within their school. A summary of this latter information is presented in the research vignette on page 50. This part of the report therefore includes:

- other forms of alternative provision;
- the advantages of Higher Horizons; and
- the advantages of other forms of provision.

4.2 OTHER FORMS OF ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies in **Durham** were asked to identify other forms of provision their school or agency accessed for disaffected pupils. They were asked to specify those located both in and out of school. Twenty-three out of the 29 key contacts that returned the questionnaires and five out of the six key personnel from nominating agencies in Durham completed this section of the questionnaire. This information is discussed first and is presented according to the services, agencies and organisations responsible for delivering the provision, which included:

- schools;
- LEA services;
- colleges;
- outside agencies; and
- independent organisations.

The tables presented below summarise the alternative provision identified by key contacts as taking place within schools and those located out of school. It should be noted, however, that key contacts' interpretation of 'within school' and 'out of school' may differ. Thus, some might have interpreted this as where the provision was actually located, whilst others might have interpreted this as where the responsibility for provision lies. Five key contacts, for example, identified the same provision as both in- and out-of-school provision. The agencies/organisations have been placed in

rank order according to the number of key contacts who identified them. In addition, within each table, the form that provision took, the number of pupils accessing the provision and their age or year group, where these were given, are included. The information provided can only give a broad and rather limited picture of provision accessed by schools.

Some key contacts referred to alternative arrangements **schools** themselves made for disaffected pupils and these are presented in Table 4.1, along with other forms of provision where other agency or organisation involvement was not noted.

Table 4.1   School provision for disaffected students, as identified by key contacts

Provision	No. of key contacts	No. of pupils	Age of pupils/year
PROVISION LOCATED WITHIN SCHOOL			
Pastoral system	4	all	all
Modified curriculum	2	20	Year 10
Part-time attendance/curriculum	2	no data	no data
Certificate of Achievement	2	up to 40	Years 10 and 11
Small class groups	1	no data	no data
Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programme	1	30	Years 10 and 11
GNVQ foundation	1	40	Years 10 and 11
Non-GCSE courses, e.g. ASDAN	1	20 per year	15–16
Extended work experience	1	no data	no data
Link courses/work experience	1	24	14–16

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons — key contact questionnaires, 1999

The use of the schools' pastoral system to support individual pupils was particularly noted as within-school provision. Other forms of alternative provision for disaffected pupils offered by schools, noted by more than one key contact, included providing a modified curriculum, part-time attendance and the use of Certificates of Achievement.

Examining the broad picture, key contact respondents identified a number of different **LEA services** offering support for disaffected pupils, both within and out of school and these are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2   LEA services offering support for disaffected students, as identified by key contacts

LEA service	Provision	No. of key contacts	No. of pupils	Age of pupils/year
PROVISION LOCATED WITHIN SCHOOL				
Education Welfare Service	Strategies to encourage attendance Home–school links Reintegration programmes GNVQ and NVQ Special timetable	8	varies 11	all pupils 14–15
Behaviour Support Service (BSS)	Off-site education, e.g. key skills Staged reintegration Withdrawal for one-to-one Flexible timetable	4	15 20 5	14–16 11–16 14–16
Hospital and Home Tuition Service	Medical or fear of school	3	no data	Years 9 and 10
Special Educational Needs Support Service (SENSS)	Individual tuition	2	1	15
Multi-agency provision	Meetings about individual pupils Pastoral liaison group	2	varies	varies
Educational Psychology Service	Behaviour modification programmes	1	as needed	all pupils
Positive Intervention Enrichment Links (PIEL) project	Day release at college Small-group counselling	1	1 7	15–16 15–16
PROVISION LOCATED OUT OF SCHOOL				
Education Welfare Service	PIEL project (pending) Combined studies course Small group on special timetable	3	no data	no data
Positive Intervention Enrichment Links (PIEL) project	Agricultural college College Copelaw Part-time college placements	3	7 30 6 10	Years 10–11 Years 10–11 Year 11 14–16
Behaviour Support Service (BSS)	Unit Withdrawal for one-to-one Flexible timetable Small group on special timetable Key skills training	3	no data 20 5 11 4	no data 11–16 14–16 14–15 16
Hospital and Home Tuition Service	Partnership with tertiary college	3	2–7	15–16
Looked After Children (LAC) project	College work	2	1	15
Special Educational Needs Support Service (SENSS)	Individual tuition	1	1	15

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

The Education Welfare Service (EWS), the Behaviour Support Service (BSS), the Hospital and Home Tuition Service and the Positive Intervention Enrichment Links (PIEL) project were particularly noted. The EWS was by far the most frequently

reported LEA service offering in-school support for disaffected students, including home–school liaison and reintegration programmes. The Educational Psychology Service was evident as a service providing in-school support rather than any involvement in out-of-school alternatives. Two multi-agency support groups/ meetings were also noted as within-school provision. The BSS appeared to provide a role both in within-school and out-of-school provision, whilst the PIEL project appeared to be more responsible for out-of-school links with colleges, although it was also noted as within-school provision.

Colleges accessed by schools for disaffected students were frequently noted and this information is presented in Table 4.3. In total, 17 out of the 23 key contacts reported that their school accessed local colleges in order to provide some form of alternative curriculum or work-related learning for disaffected pupils out of school. The number of pupils ranged from one to 30 and this provision was mainly focused on the 14–16 age group. College provision, however, was also noted as within-school provision in many cases, perhaps suggesting that the locus of control for such provision remains with the school. Colleges appeared to be involved in offering schools a range of work-related options which can be accessed for disaffected pupils, including link courses, day release, GNVQs and NVQs and work experience.

Table 4.3 Colleges offering support for disaffected students, as identified by key contacts

College	Provision	No. of key contacts	No. of pupils	Age of pupils/year
PROVISION LOCATED WITHIN SCHOOL				
Houghall College	College one day a week	4	1	15
	Work-related curriculum		17	14–15
	Day release		30	no data
New College	Work-related curriculum	2	15	Year 10
	(college and work experience)		30	no data
Bishop Auckland College	GNVQ foundation	1	no data	no data
Darlington College	Day release	1	30	no data
College (sic)	Work-related curriculum	1	10–12	14–16
Further Education (sic)	Link, two days	1	1	15–16
PROVISION LOCATED OUT OF SCHOOL				
Local college	Link courses	10	1–30	Years 10–11
	College work		no data	no data
	Work-related learning		15	Year 10
	Extended work experience		1	15–16
	Day release		1	15–16
	Courses		7	15
	NVQ courses		15	15–16
Houghall College	Skills provision	4	1–8	15–19
	Work-related curriculum		17	14–15
	Day release		30	no data
Derwentside College	Half- and one-day courses	2	8–12	14–19
New College	Work-related learning	2	13–15	14–15
Bishop Auckland College	Link courses	2	14	15
	Small-group visits		30	no data
	GNVQ foundation		no data	no data
Darlington College	Day release	1	30	no data
Peterlee College	Work-related curriculum	1	17	14–15
Agricultural College	no data	1	7	Years 10–11
FE	FE link (two days)	1	1	15–16

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

The involvement of **outside agencies** in alternative provision for disaffected students reported by key contacts is outlined in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4   Outside agencies offering support for disaffected students, as identified by key contacts

Outside agency	Provision	No. of key contacts	No. of pupils	Age of pupils/year
PROVISION LOCATED WITHIN SCHOOL				
Careers Service	Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN)	5	40	14–16
	Careers action plan		no data	no data
	GNVQ and NVQ		no data	no data
	Work-related curriculum		13	14–15
	Special timetable		11	14–15
Social Services	Access to in-house social worker	1	no data	no data
	Group run by a social worker		no data	no data
Police	Prince's Trust	1	no data	no data
Health Service	GNVQ and NVQ	1	no data	no data
PROVISION LOCATED OUT OF SCHOOL				
Careers Service	Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN)	6	40	14–16
	Link courses/small-group visits		14	15
	Work-related curriculum		13	14–15
	Small group on special timetable		11	14–15
	Combined studies course		30	14–16
Social Services	College	1	1	15

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

Of the outside agencies involved in alternative provision for disaffected students, the Careers Service, which was by far the most frequently identified, was involved in a variety of activities, such as the ASDAN award scheme, provision of a work-related curriculum and careers action planning. It was notable that one school had access to an in-school social worker to support students with difficulties and that, in one case, it appeared that Social Services had been involved in accessing college provision for one pupil. Whilst the police and health professionals were reported to be involved in provision for disaffected students within school (albeit by only one key contact), they were not mentioned in provision located out of school.

A number of other **independent organisations** providing an alternative curriculum for pupils were noted by individual key contacts, and these findings are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5   Independent organisations offering support for disaffected students, as identified by key contacts

Independent organisation	Provision	No. of key contacts	No. of pupils	Age of pupils/year
PROVISION LOCATED WITHIN SCHOOL				
Durham Business and Employment Executive (DBEE)	Alternative curriculum	2	2–3	15–16
Local employers	Work experience/placements	2	16	Year 11
Prince's Trust	Prince's Trust	1		
Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN)	ASDAN awards	1	10–12	14–16
Acorn Trust		1	no data	no data
Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)		1	no data	no data
PROVISION LOCATED OUT OF SCHOOL				
Durham Business and Employment Executive (DBEE)	Certificate of Achievement/ Outward Bound Alternative curriculum Work-related learning	3	2–3 no data no data	15–16 no data no data
Local training providers	Training	2	2	15
Copelaw Centre	no data	2	1–6	Year 11
Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN)	Certificate of Achievement/ Outward Bound	2	no data	no data
Local employers	Work placements	1	2	no data
Prince's Trust	XI network/youth worker	1	16	14–16
Army	Day/week visits	1	20/varies	15–16

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – key contact questionnaires, 1999

Independent organisations reported by more than one key contact included the DBEE, local employers, training providers, the Copelaw Centre and ASDAN. DBEE appeared to be involved in a range of provision, including Certificates of Achievement and Outward Bound activities, as well as an alternative curriculum. The limited reference to training providers and local employers in providing training and work experience for pupils (only reported to be used by two schools each) was notable.

Overall, this information provides both a limited and complex picture. In summary, key contacts identified a range of alternatives schools might access for disaffected students. The majority of these, however, were only mentioned by a small number of key contacts, suggesting that different types of provision are often only accessed by a limited number of schools. This indicates that arrangements may be rather *ad hoc* and the LEA might consider the need to coordinate provision of this type and provide more information to all schools about the alternatives they may be able to access to support their work with disaffected pupils.

Alternative provision reported to be accessed by nominating agencies presented, perhaps not surprisingly, a different picture of support for disaffected youngsters. The

range of provision identified by key personnel from nominating agencies is outlined in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6   Different types of alternative provision for disaffected students, as identified by key personnel in nominating agencies

Agency/organisation	Provision	No. of pupils	Age of pupils/year
LEA SERVICES			
Positive Intervention Enrichment Links (PIEL) project	no data	2	School age
Looked After Children (LAC) project	no data	2	School age
COLLEGES			
College (over 40 other agencies involved)	Link courses Alternative to permanent exclusion	160+	14–17
OUTSIDE AGENCIES/SERVICES			
Careers Service	Counselling and support	Individual referral	14–25
Health Service	Counselling and support	Individual referral	14–25
INDEPENDENT ORGANISATIONS			
Training agencies (16 identified) Northern Training	Training Training	Varies 20+	14+ 14+
Independent organisations, e.g. Copelaw, YMCA, Springboard	Training	20 per programme	14–25
Youth in Action	Constructive leisure and outdoor pursuits	20 per programme	14–25
Addiction Service	Counselling and support	Individual referral	14–25

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – questionnaires returned from key personnel in nominating agencies

Within the provision identified by key personnel in nominating agencies, the focus on independent organisations that offered training provision was notable compared with the limited amount of training provision reported by key contacts to be accessed by schools. In one response, for example, a large number of individual training providers were reported to be accessed. The 'constructive leisure' and Outward Bound activities offered by Youth in Action were also a notable addition, not mentioned by school staff, as were also the counselling and support accessed by individual pupil referral to the Health Authority, the Careers Service and the Addiction Service.

Key findings: other forms of alternative provision

- Key contacts in **Durham** identified a range of alternative provision used by schools to support disaffected pupils, including those provided by schools, LEA services, colleges, outside agencies and independent organisations.
- A range of LEA services was identified, particularly for in-school support with disaffected students. The Education Welfare Service featured particularly highly.
- It was also reported that the majority of schools in **Durham** accessed local colleges in order to provide some form of alternative, usually a work-related curriculum, for disaffected pupils.
- Limited access to training providers and independent organisations able to offer alternatives for pupils, however, was noted, particularly compared with provision reported to be accessed by other agencies also nominating young people for the Higher Horizons provision.
- A complex and limited picture of provision was presented. Access to provision appeared rather *ad hoc* and the LEA might need to consider the coordination of such provision, further raising awareness of the range of provision available to schools and facilitation of its access.

Research vignette: Overall school and LEA provision

Within the face-to-face interviews, headteachers and LEA personnel were asked about their 'vision' for overall LEA provision for disaffected students in the future. Headteachers were asked more specifically what the LEA might offer to help them implement their 'vision' of strategies to address disaffection within their school.

Provision within schools

The six headteachers identified greater curriculum flexibility and more individualised approaches as their vision for the future. Some felt strongly that a relevant curriculum for disaffected pupils was vital: *'There has to be a recognition that trying to force all kids through the same curriculum is not good'*; *'I cannot see the point of making them do something that is not relevant.'* The need for *'parity of esteem'* between academic and vocational curricula was called for by one. In order to achieve this the need for alternative means of accreditation, more liaison with outside providers, links with colleges and the availability of more work experience were noted. Different and more imaginative approaches within mainstream and the need to open up the curriculum more were also highlighted by one of the LEA personnel.

The need for trained staff was also recognised. One headteacher suggested that Higher Horizons' staff might usefully be employed as consultants, thus sharing their expertise in dealing with disaffected pupils. S/he stated that s/he *'would love to have an in-school unit with staff dedicated and trained to deal with emotional and behaviour difficulties'*.

Provision within the LEA

Two headteachers were positive about the provision already offered by the LEA, although four felt that there was a gap in provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems within the authority. This was supported by two of the LEA personnel, one of whom described the gap as *'massive'*. One headteacher described the whole area of SEN and behaviour support as *'underfunded compared to the need'* and *'a big issue'* because *'not enough attention is paid to the scale of the problem'*. It was suggested that this might involve special units or resource bases in schools. The need for more in-school support for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems and staff experienced in behaviour support and counselling was also noted by two of the headteachers. One felt that this might make access to provision like Higher Horizons more effective: *'We would then fit in better to Higher Horizons. There would be better links before it was accessed.'*

Three headteachers identified earlier intervention as an area for development within the LEA. For example, headteachers commented: *'I do worry what to do to stop pupils getting to this stage in the first place. We see the signs before'*; *'We can identify in Year 7 that school is not appropriate. Key stage 4 is too late. The chances of success are a lot lower. In order to solve the problem we have got to work with young people and families much earlier on.'* One saw a possible expanding role for Higher Horizons within this provision.

One headteacher and three LEA personnel identified the need for the authority to provide a range of provision for disaffected students and their individual needs, because, as one LEA representative stated, *'disaffection has a number of facets'*. Another referred to the need to use diagnostic tools to establish pupils' difficulties before matching them to the most appropriate provision. Within one authority, consultation was already in progress in this respect. The requirement for both *'proactive and preventative'* strategies was referred to by one and a *'menu'* approach was advocated by two LEA staff. The need for college provision and a greater range of training opportunities was reported by the headteacher.

Whilst one headteacher wanted more needs-driven and locally based provision, two wanted greater equality of provision across the different areas of the authority. One of the latter expressed concern that, where they have been successful, they might lose support, such as from the Education Welfare Service. S/he described this as *'a vicious circle'*. The need for more funding, finance devolved to schools, reduced bureaucracy and quality provision (*'the right degree of skills and expertise'*) were also reported by headteachers. In addition, a multi-agency approach was emphasised by two of the LEA personnel and a more coordinated approach, more full-time provision and the need to plan long-term were also highlighted.

4.3 THE ADVANTAGES OF HIGHER HORIZONS

All headteachers, key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were asked what they thought the advantages of Higher Horizons over other forms of alternative provision for disaffected youngsters were. Six of the 54 headteachers and 12 key contacts felt unable to comment on this aspect, either because they felt they had insufficient information about Higher Horizons or because they felt they had no access to other forms of provision and therefore had nothing to compare with. A few others also referred to the paucity of provision for disaffected students with which to compare. Seven of the 54 headteachers and two key contacts felt that there were no advantages of Higher Horizons over other forms of alternative provision. One headteacher stated that this was because it was 'bolt-on' rather than integrated into the school and another said that it offered nothing that could not be offered in school (whilst at the same time acknowledging that pupils were learning in a different environment). Another headteacher thought that link courses were just as good as Higher Horizons.

On the other hand, the advantages identified by the remaining 41 headteachers were wide-ranging and variable. These are identified below and, where these were also reported by key contacts and key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers, this is noted within the text.

- **providing an alternative to school**

Higher Horizons as an alternative to school was cited by eight of the 41 headteachers (about a fifth), and also recognised by three key contacts and one of the key personnel from nominating agencies as an advantage over other forms of alternative provision. Higher Horizons was described as '*a serious and credible alternative to the key stage 4 drudgery for many pupils*' and '*something different to offer key stage 4 pupils who do not have confidence*'. One headteacher compared it directly with PRU provision and described it as '*a better first stage than the PRU and a better prevention step than to have to remedy afterwards*'.

- **full-time provision**

The possibility of full-time provision was reported to be an advantage by eight of the 41 headteachers (about a fifth), and also noted by one key contact and one of the key personnel in nominating agencies, the latter of whom emphasised that pupils can still pursue parts of the school curriculum and thereby obtain '*a full-time educational experience*'. It was acknowledged that a full-time alternative programme was difficult to achieve in school and that other forms of alternative provision often only offered pupils a small amount of time. Full-time provision, however, was thought to be '*essential for some pupils*' as it took them '*away from ordinary classroom provision*'.

- **off-site/away from the school environment**

The fact that the provision was off-site and away from the school environment was considered an advantage by seven headteachers and one key contact. One headteacher noted that it '*breaks bonds*' with the peer group, which was described as '*a major difficulty*' for some pupils, and another described the fact that it takes them away from the school situation as '*the greatest advantage*' because they often '*do not value school*'. '*A different educational learning context*' was also noted by one headteacher to be '*a big plus*'.

- **individualised support**

The individualised nature of the provision was considered an advantage over other alternative provision by six headteachers and this was recognised as something which schools might have difficulty providing. It was therefore seen as a particular strength. It was felt to be important to have '*an approach to suit the individual*'. One headteacher described it as a '*coherent approach to the individual*' and another stated that: '*Individuals are at the heart of the programme and their needs are accommodated.*' In one case, this was linked to the ability of the provision to address a range of problems for individual pupils. This was also noted by two of the key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers, one of whom described the '*whole programme*' as '*individually organised*' and '*person-centred*'.

- **the multi-agency aspect**

The opportunity for multi-agency approaches offered by Higher Horizons was considered a key advantage over other forms of provision by five of the headteachers, although not reported by others. This was perceived by some headteachers as an important strength of provision for disaffected youngsters. One headteacher described the Higher Horizons provision as having '*a multi-agency and professional basis*' and another felt that the multi-agency aspect, combined with knowledge of pupils' backgrounds, was a vital factor. Careers Service involvement was particularly highlighted.

- **the work/vocational focus**

The work-related focus of Higher Horizons was considered an advantage by five headteachers and one key contact. One headteacher reported that the provision '*removes the difference between the school and the work environment*', whereas when pupils do two days work experience and three days at school there is '*a potential difference and pupils may not be able to marry the two together*'.

Further advantages of Higher Horizons over other forms of alternative provision, reported by more than three headteachers, were the pastoral approach, the ability of the provision to motivate pupils, the opportunity for pupils to progress to other forms of education or training and the stability and identity of the Higher Horizons provision within the authority. In relation to the latter, one headteacher stated that: '*It is funded and there are people working on it. Others are* ad hoc, *underfunded and given low time allocation by personnel.*' It was also reported that '*locally* [projects] *do not last once a key person has gone*' and that Higher Horizons was '*not just down to one individual within the authority*' and '*it has identity, shape and form*'. Thus the status of the provision was considered an advantage. Further advantages of Higher Horizons over other forms of alternative provision raised by headteachers, key contacts and key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers are presented below. Aspects related to the curriculum, the pastoral support for pupils and more global aspects, such as adequate resourcing and funding, were identified.

Curriculum	Pastoral
• practically based/skills focus	• the teacher:pupil ratio
• variety of activities	• support with decision making
• individualised	• the level of individual support
• small-steps approach	• addresses the route causes of behaviour
• relevant	• flexibility in approach
• access to qualifications/GCSEs	• a positive experience
• different styles of teaching	• a relaxed/freer environment
• flexibility	• more intensive work with pupils
• a wide range of expertise	• acknowledgement of problems
• well organised	• pupils' choice
• well structured	• home links
• coordinated	• coping skills
• a comprehensive package	• emphasis on 'belonging'
• not classroom based	• the development of open/honest relationships
	• a chance to succeed

Other aspects
- part-time
- off-site
- not focusing on those that have failed
- able to claim better resources
- pupils see the relevance of education
- promotion of regular attendance
- pupils able to take their place in society
- appropriate selection criteria
- fresh and new

- school not involved in organising placements
- cost-effective/funding
- not perceived as a reward
- concentrated on motivated pupils
- a proactive response to entrenched problems

Key findings: the advantages of Higher Horizons over other forms of provision

- The advantages of Higher Horizons over other forms of provision, as identified by headteachers, included aspects concerning the curriculum, the environment and the individual support offered to pupils. However, the advantage of Higher Horizons over other forms of provision most commonly cited by headteachers was that it was an alternative to mainstream education.
- Other advantages included, in rank order, the fact that it was full-time (as this is difficult to provide in school and other alternatives are usually part-time or short-term), located off the school site, individually focused, multi-agency and had a vocational/work-related focus.

4.4   THE ADVANTAGES OF OTHER FORMS OF ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Headteachers, key contacts and key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers were asked what they considered to be the advantages of other forms of alternative provision for disaffected students over Higher Horizons. Responses to this question were more limited than when respondents were asked the advantages of Higher Horizons over other provision. Of the 54 headteachers asked this question, 12 headteachers felt unable to comment because of limited access to alternative provision. One noted that the question was difficult to answer because it depended on what suited the individual. Four headteachers felt that other forms of provision they were aware of, school-based in particular, had no advantages, because disaffected students needed something different. One of the latter referred to Higher Horizons as '*a model the LEA will have to look at*'. Another stated that other forms of provision

they had tried '*have not worked*'. Of the 33 key contacts who returned questionnaires, 12 made no comment, whilst three felt there were no advantages or nothing to compare Higher Horizons with.

The overwhelming advantage over Higher Horizons, raised by 16 of the remaining 35 headteachers (almost half), was that other forms of alternative provision were in schools' control and therefore integrated in a way that Higher Horizons could not be. One headteacher reported that '*to take pupils out and suddenly think they will like school is unrealistic*' and that '*with the right curriculum, funding and support most can gain a lot in school*'. For most of the headteachers offering this as an advantage, this made sense because the teachers in the school know the pupils and their families and it enabled them to provide a flexible curriculum and access to GCSEs and the National Curriculum in a way that Higher Horizons could not. By combining the curriculum with work-related learning it was thought, by one headteacher, that '*respect for learning and respect for the school grows*'. Others referred to the advantage of the '*lack of external influence*' with school-based provision: '*I am responsible for their education and it is difficult to exercise or influence very much off-site provision.*' In conjunction with this, three headteachers expressed a direct preference for the money to be channelled into schools so they were able to address their own pupils' needs. The more specific advantages of alternative provision being within schools' control cited by headteachers included:

- earlier intervention;
- matching pupils to the most appropriate provision;
- the ability to adapt and change the programme;
- work being carried on throughout the school;
- retention of the responsibility for pupils' achievements;
- the ability to prioritise for the benefit of pupils;
- promotion of raising achievement;
- the ability to make access dependent on attendance;
- pupil access to the school curriculum and GCSEs;
- retention of the responsibility for pastoral care;
- the ability to give clear guidance and support to pupils; and
- social continuity.

For a few headteachers, it was important to retain control over pupils' achievements as this might then affect the schools' targets: '*In school we are able to suit the needs of the school and the pupils and have control over their achievement when we have targets to reach. It's an integrated package.*' Another, also referring to the academic achievement of pupils, reported that: '*I have taken it very badly that they have left with no qualifications.*' Some of the factors raised by headteachers were also individually raised by key contacts. For example, it was reported that, when provision was school-based, this enabled students to '*keep in touch with mainstream education and their peers*'. In contrast, however, the main factor raised by key contacts was effective communication between the provider and the school, whilst this was only noted by one headteacher. In addition, the ability to involve more students when provision was school-based, raised by only one headteacher, was noted by three key contacts. Thus key contacts tended to focus more on operational aspects of the

provision, whereas headteachers emphasised more the strategic advantages of alternative provision.

Other points raised by headteachers and key contacts with regard to the advantages of alternative forms of provision are presented below:

• geographical convenience	• improved motivation and attendance of pupils
• links with FE	• decisions based on need
• a reduced danger that pupils were labelled	• the ability to encompass more children
• linking training with career aspirations	• the opportunity for a multi-agency focus
• less expensive	• greater flexibility
• the breadth of curriculum	• stability/consistent funding
• closer liaison with parents and pupils	• not perceived as 'special' provision
• better organisation	• more successful

The advantages of other forms of alternative provision over Higher Horizons raised by key personnel in nominating agencies (those in core providers did not identify any), although sometimes similar to those previously identified by school staff, tended to have a different focus and these are shown separately below:

• clearer referral criteria	• closer links with schools
• effective use of statistical data	• monitoring
• more coordinated	• evaluation
• secure, long-term funding	• long-term targets
• full-time	• named contacts
• able to respond more flexibly	• more client-centred
• liaison with parents/carers	

Interesting notable additions include an emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, raised by three personnel, and not mentioned by school staff, and the issues of long-term targets and funding, also not mentioned by school staff.

Despite the advantages of both the Higher Horizons provision and other forms of alternative provision suggested, seven headteachers emphasised the importance of having a range of provision and being able to access what is most appropriate for individual pupils. This view was reflected in the face-to-face interviews with headteachers and LEA personnel, whose views are expanded in the research vignette on page 50. One view expressed was that what might be successful for one pupil may not be successful for another. The following comments were indicative of this view: '*It depends on the student. Some have advantages and others do not*'; '*Each pupil is different and you have to apply the best fit for the individual child*'; '*What works for one pupil does not work for another.*'

One headteacher, whilst arguing the case for school-based provision, also recognised the need for a '*continuum of provision*' and '*a full range of opportunities*' for pupils and the value in being able to '*pick and mix*'.

Key findings: advantages of other forms of provision over Higher Horizons

- The most common factor identified by headteachers was that other forms of alternative provision were more within schools' control and could therefore be integrated within school provision in a way that Higher Horizons could not. Advantages of this approach were highlighted, such as the pastoral support for pupils, better targeting of resources and pupils' academic achievements.
- On the other hand, key contacts, whilst noting some factors in common with headteachers, felt that communication with schools was one of the main advantages of other forms of provision.
- Interestingly, key personnel in nominating agencies raised issues relating to monitoring and evaluation, and long-term funding and target setting, not raised by school staff, as the advantages of other forms of alternative provision.
- Some headteachers emphasised the importance of having a range of provision to match pupils' needs as they recognised that disaffection may take many forms and have many different causes.

PART FIVE
A FINAL OVERVIEW

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Within this section, global features of the Higher Horizons provision and suggestions for improvement and development are discussed. The aspects covered in this section therefore include:

- the distinctive features of the Higher Horizons provision;
- recommendations for improvements and developments; and
- key factors contributing to headteachers' perceptions of Higher Horizons.

5.2 THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF HIGHER HORIZONS

Within the telephone interviews, headteachers were asked what they saw as the distinctive features of Higher Horizons as a form of alternative provision for disaffected students. Five of the 54 headteachers felt they had insufficient experience to comment on Higher Horizons' distinctive features. Two interviewees reported that they felt there was nothing distinctive about the provision, with one stating that they thought a lot could be learnt from those within SEN provision. From the remaining 47 headteachers, responses to this question included the provision's ability to:

- **provide pupils with a very different educational experience**

Fifteen out of the 40 headteachers (over a third) chose to highlight that Higher Horizons offered pupils a very different educational experience. References were made to different styles of teaching and the format being away from the traditional class format. For one headteacher, the provision '*marks a distinctive change between what had gone before and what is offered*'. Headteachers referred to the ability of the Higher Horizons provision to offer something different to children who were '*bored with the curriculum, or who kick against it for some reason*', '*not able to be catered for by orthodox methods*' and '*rejecting school*'. One noted the importance of Higher Horizons being '*a new concept*' because pupils' perceptions of school were negative and they were therefore '*more amenable to commit to it*'.

- **offer provision away from the school environment**

Offering provision away from the school environment was highlighted as a distinctive feature by 12 headteachers (nearly a quarter), one of whom stated that many pupils have '*outgrown school*'. In contrast, however, one headteacher noted that this feature made the provision difficult to manage from the school's point of view, referring to it as '*hard to manage*' and '*not user-friendly*'.

- **motivate pupils**

Nine headteachers (including four from Darlington) chose to highlight that Higher Horizons offered pupils an attractive alternative and therefore motivated pupils: '*Pupils can see positive benefits. It is not seen as a way of getting out of school.*'

When considering its distinctive features, five headteachers referred to the new start that Higher Horizons offered pupils and the small-group setting, whilst four cited the relaxed setting, the range of activities/approaches adopted and the fact that the provision was individualised. Other factors highlighted were wide-ranging and, again, included aspects relating to the curriculum and the pastoral approach previously referred to within the advantages of Higher Horizons over alternative provision. In addition, some headteachers felt that the target group of pupils and some of the general benefits to students were distinctive. These are all outlined briefly below:

Curriculum	Target pupils
• flexibility in delivery	• those lost to the system
• skills-based/practical	• pupils starting to have a negative attitude
• relevant/work-related	• availability to more children
• coherent and structured	• pupils not attending
• full-time	
• focused	**Benefits for pupils**
• a different style of teaching	• improved self-image
• the opportunity for progression	• maintenance in education
• a strength of identity	• a broader outlook
• a new approach	• a sense of achievement
• Careers Service involvement	• reaccessing the curriculum and GCSEs
• work- and school-related	• remotivation
Pastoral approach	**Other**
• an adult environment	• respite for parents
• negotiation with pupils	
• support for social and emotional needs	
• a safe and secure environment	
• time with peers	

Key findings: the distinctive features of Higher Horizons
- The main distinctive features of Higher Horizons were thought to be its ability to provide a very different educational experience, to offer provision away from the school environment and to motivate pupils previously disaffected with mainstream schooling.
- Other distinctive features identified included a range of aspects concerning the curriculum, the pastoral approach, the particular target group of pupils and the benefits to be gained by pupils accessing the provision.

5.3 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Headteachers, key contacts and key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers were asked if they could suggest any areas for developing or improving the Higher Horizons provision. Areas for improvement and development highlighted by

key personnel from nominating agencies and core providers are presented separately at the end of this section as, although there was some overlap with suggestions from school staff, they tended to focus on different areas. Eleven headteachers and eight key contacts were unable to offer any suggestions for improvements because they felt they had insufficient experience of the provision. Improvements and areas for development suggested by the remaining 43 headteachers and 25 key contacts included:

- ## communication with schools

The need for improvement in communication with schools was a major issue, raised by 17 headteachers (over half of those that made suggestions) and further supported by nine key contacts. The need for '*more personal contact between schools and providers*' was emphasised. This included raising staff awareness of the provision offered to pupils and better feedback about pupils' progress when they attended Higher Horizons. The need for more openness about the selection procedure was also raised. One headteacher suggested that there should be more discussion with schools about pupils' individual needs so that packages could be tailored better and that this should involve '*talk face-to-face*'. Lack of knowledge about the provision was also thought to result in pupils being given mixed messages. One headteacher held the view that it was important for disaffected pupils to get positive reinforcement from their school; therefore, it was important not to '*wipe the past out*' and retain links with schools for this reason. Suggestions included the need for outreach work within schools alongside the provision and the appointment of an area coordinator who might act as a link person with a smaller group of schools. One key contact, whilst also raising the need for better communication with schools, emphasised, however, that they would not want this to be '*to the detriment of time away from the programme*'. Further exploration of the issue of communication and the role of the key contact in schools was undertaken in the face-to-face headteacher and LEA personnel interviews, and these findings are presented in the research vignette on page 21.

- ## availability to more pupils

The need for Higher Horizons to be made available to more pupils was suggested by 12 headteachers (a third of respondents) and again this was supported by key contacts, six of whom raised this issue. This was, however, expressed in a variety of ways. Five headteachers suggested that the selection criteria should be widened in scope so that more pupils were able to access the provision. The following comments, for example, suggested such a view: '[Higher Horizons] *should reach all, rather than a proportion of students that might benefit*' and '*The limit of the attendance threshold is too low.*' On the other hand, seven headteachers were in favour of expansion so that the number of places for pupils who fit the selection criteria was increased, rather than opening the provision up to a wider range of pupils.

- ## integration of the programme into mainstream school practice

Nine headteachers (a quarter of respondents) were in favour of integrating Higher Horizons much more into mainstream school practice, and, in some cases, delegating the funding to schools. For these headteachers, school control over alternative provision appeared to be a vital issue, highlighted previously as the major factor in favour of other forms of alternative provision schools might access. The view indicated by the following comment was supported by other headteachers: '*Delegate money to schools and ring-fence it so it has to be used for work-related learning.*'

Whilst one headteacher felt strongly that the money should be delegated and the provision negotiated from school, s/he recognised a considerable increase in funding would be needed to achieve this. S/he felt that this would be worthwhile as some pupils might then attend the provision rather than waste their placement.

- **more than just attendance taken into account within the selection criteria**

The use of a wider range of selection criteria, rather than just attendance, was also an area suggested for improvement, highlighted particularly by key contacts (five), although also by four headteachers. Their views were exemplified by one headteacher who felt that it was important *'to examine the needs of individual students that make an effort with attendance. This could be their only strength. If they want to get on, you almost have to tell them not to come to school.'* There was some indication however, as stated previously, that other factors were considered and perhaps schools might be made aware of this.

- **greater contact between pupils and their schools**

Three headteachers and one of the key contacts in **Darlington** highlighted pupils' links with schools as an area for development: *'Students should be more part of their family school, as much as possible. They have individual programmes, but do not gain from school. They are cut off and detached, and that is a pity.'* Visits by students to their school were suggested.

When considering areas for improvement and development, headteachers and key contacts highlighted a range of other factors, including issues concerning the selection of pupils for Higher Horizons, the curriculum and other aspects which could be separated into those that might be considered to be more 'strategic' and those which might be seen as more operational-level issues. These are outlined below:

Selection of pupils	Curriculum
• earlier intervention	• more flexibility
• improve the selection process	• a focus on key skills
• a more open and justifiable selection process	• individual action planning
• speed up the selection process	• a more rigorous curriculum
• pupils in Years 9 and 10 considered	• rethink the curriculum
• avoidance of over simplistic criteria	• access to GCSEs
• review the selection criteria	
• SEN representation on the panel	**Operational**
	• Celebration of achievements
Strategic	• Follow-up support for pupils in schools
• awareness of pupils' needs within management	• schools not abandoning pupils
• joint planning	• parental liaison
• a separate centre	• closer working with schools on subject areas
• satellite programmes	• participation of siblings
• funding	• clear aims and guiding principles
• pupils placed on a central register	• short-term placements
• full-time	• get going quicker
• part-time option	
• pupils retained on the programme	
• a better model of working	
• more vocational schemes	

Again, it was notable that the focus in **Darlington,** compared to Durham, was on the academic achievement of pupils. Headteachers therefore suggested related aspects for development, such as pupil links with schools and access to GCSE courses. One headteacher felt strongly that the LEA should be looking to establish a range of provision and that Higher Horizons would have to clarify and more firmly establish where it fits within the range. S/he felt that other services could learn from the experiences of Higher Horizons.

Areas for improvement and development raised by key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers could also be divided into strategic and operational aspects:

Strategic	Operational
• permanent funding	• promotion of the programme
• the development of similar projects	• personal contact with families
• accessibility by other year groups	• a structured induction day
• long-term projects (five years)	• additional pupil support
• matching of pupils to provision	• networking with other agencies
• monitoring and evaluation	• clarification of roles and expectations
• full-time provision	• pre-programme input with the family
• integrated into current school practice	• systematic communication
• effective programme management	

Whilst key personnel in nominating agencies and core providers had some common concerns with staff within schools, above all, the need for improved communication and integration into mainstream school practice, they also focused on other areas. The need for permanent funding for the project was highlighted by more than one: '*There is nothing worse than seeing dedicated staff being told that there is no more funding for the scheme to continue.*' From a strategic viewpoint, the need to plan long-term and the development of similar projects were highlighted. The importance of monitoring and evaluation was again raised. At a more operational level, one argued the need for additional support for pupils because '*these children are anxious, have low self-esteem and no confidence*', whilst another felt that more personal contact with families was required.

Key findings: areas for improvement and development
- The main areas for improvement and development of Higher Horizons suggested by headteachers centred around better communication with schools, availability to more pupils, the integration of the provision into mainstream school practice and the need to take factors other than attendance into account within the selection criteria.
- A range of other factors were, however, raised, some relating to the selection of pupils for the provision, the curriculum and the operational aspects of the provision, as well as developments with a more strategic focus.

5.4 KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HEADTEACHERS' ATTITUDES

In an attempt to tease out the factors that contributed to headteachers' attitudes towards the provision, both headteacher interviews and key contact questionnaires were classified as either:

- very positive;
- positive;
- neither positive or negative;
- negative; or
- very negative.

This was done by estimating the number and degree of unfavourable and favourable comments they offered. Those which were categorised as 'neither' (the majority) either made both positive and negative comments about the process or had limited experience from which to judge and therefore made few comments. The numbers of headteacher interviews and key contacts questionnaires classified in this way are shown below in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Classification of headteacher interviews and key contact questionnaires

Classification	No. of headteacher interviews	No. of key contact questionnaires
Very positive	4	1
Positive	10	11
Neither	23	13
Negative	14	5
Very negative	3	3
Total	**54**	**33**

Source: The NFER Evaluation of Higher Horizons – headteacher interviews and key contact questionnaires

Twenty-three out of the 54 headteacher interviews and 13 out of the 33 key contact questionnaires were classified as 'neither' positive or negative, perhaps reflecting to some extent that Higher Horizons was considered by some respondents to still be in the early stages of development. Overall, slightly more headteacher interviews were 'negative' than 'positive' and slightly more key contact questionnaires were 'positive' rather than 'negative'. Proportionally, however, more key contact questionnaires were rated as 'positive' than headteacher interviews and more headteacher interviews were rated as 'negative' than key contact questionnaires. This is possibly related to key contacts' direct links with Higher Horizons and greater knowledge of the operation of the provision. It was notable that all the four key contact questionnaires within **Darlington** were rated as 'very positive' and that only one headteacher interview within Darlington was rated as 'negative'. Overall, within those interviews that were categorised as 'negative' or 'very negative', it was significant that headteachers referred to lack of communication with the school, either with regard to selection of pupils or once pupils were on Higher Horizons. On the other hand, within

those classified as 'positive', headteachers were able to identify some positive impact on the pupils who had attended the provision or the school as a whole.

The headteacher interviews were then examined in more detail for identification of the factors that contributed to these attitudes. The illustrations below present some of these findings in the form of a short summary of the headteacher interviews falling within each of the categories. A summary of the factors contributing to headteachers' overall attitudes to Higher Horizons is then presented.

Very positive

- Three pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998, five in 1999.
- Evidence of a positive impact on the pupils: '*One or two pupils back in school more school-friendly.*'
- Evidence of good liaison between the provider and the school: '*High-quality feedback, very impressed.*'
- A move away from the school environment seen as important for some pupils and '*the greatest advantage*' of Higher Horizons.
- Reported limited access to alternative provision for disaffected students.

Very positive

- No pupils nominated in 1998, two pupils on Higher Horizons in 1999.
- Evidence of a positive impact on pupils: '*Much better personal presentation, better able to deal with adults and teachers and a positive effect on their confidence and self-esteem.*'
- Reported lack of access to alternative provision for disaffected pupils.
- A perception that the provision is recognised by the LEA and has a positive ethos: '*The director mentions* [Higher Horizons] *in the LEA. It has a strength of identity and a positive feel.*'

Positive

- Two pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998, two in 1999.
- Evidence of a positive impact on the pupils: '*Sometimes a phenomenal success. It suddenly turns them on, so* [their attendance] *goes up. On balance, more success than failure. Staggeringly successful for some.*'
- Part-time attendance considered a problem: '*Very problematic. The problem is exaggerated in hierarchical subjects like maths.*'
- View that a range of provision is important: '*It is important to have a continuum of provision so you can "pick and mix".*'

Neither

- Two pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998, three in 1999.
- Selection criteria rated as 'fair': '[The panel] *were flexible on that.*'
- Limited feedback: '*The only real feedback was at the end of the course.*'
- Evidence of an impact on pupils' attendance, and Higher Horizons was described as '*a positive experience for pupils*' but the headteacher was disappointed that '*neither* [pupils] *got GCSE passes at any level*'.
- Identified a negative impact on the peer group, some of whom were reported to '*not attend to try to get on* [Higher Horizons]'.

Negative

- Two pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998, none selected in 1999.
- View that the selection criteria were too restrictive and therefore limited access for pupils: '*Some pupils do not qualify to get on although they cause difficulties in school.*'
- No feedback about why pupils did not get on the programme: '*We found it disheartening.*'
- Evidence of a positive impact on pupils when on Higher Horizons, but pupils did not attend school: '*All would have been permanently excluded if they had not been on the programme, but the pupils were not seen again in school.*'
- No perceived advantage over other forms of alternative provision.
- In favour of school-based provision because you can '*manage it internally, track the pupils and see the impact daily*'.

Very negative

- Pupils nominated, but no pupils accepted for Higher Horizons.
- No reasons given why pupils did not get on the programme: '*We were told there were not enough places.*'
- A view that the provision targeted a discrete group of pupils that might then be labelled: '*There is a danger for Higher Horizons' pupils that they are labelled by other kids.*'
- A perception that there is a general lack of knowledge about the provision: '*No one knows a great deal about it. The majority says "What is it?"*'
- In favour of school-based provision, and reported difficulty managing Higher Horizons because of '*external influences*'.

Very negative

- Two pupils on Higher Horizons in 1998, none nominated in 1999
- Evidence of a negative impact on one pupil: '*He was 100 per cent worse. He came to a meeting at the end and he was rude and ill mannered. They had lost him and he did not respect them. If he had stayed at school, he would have more respect for school staff.*'
- No liaison with school staff: '*Higher Horizons' staff did not know how to deal with him and they should have involved the teachers in school.*'
- In favour of school-based provision: '*We are more in control. The money should be delegated to schools and ring-fenced so that it has to be used for a work-related curriculum.*'

Detailed examination confirmed, not surprisingly, that a 'positive' headteacher interview was correlated with an identified positive impact on pupils and/or the school. In addition, within the 'positive' headteacher interviews, there appeared to be a recognition that some pupils required support over and above what the school could offer, that a range of provision to address pupils' individual needs was important and, in some cases, a recognition of the status of Higher Horizons as a specialist provision.

A 'negative' interview, on the other hand, was related to evidence of a perceived lack of communication between Higher Horizons and the school, a negative impact on pupils and a leaning in favour of school-based provision for all pupils.

Factors contributing to headteachers' perceptions of the Higher Horizons provision were explored further within the face-to-face interviews. These findings confirmed those of the telephone interviews. In addition, however, headteachers were asked about their within-school provision for disaffected pupils and these findings are presented in the research vignette on page 66. In summary, schools in which access to Higher Horizons appeared to be perceived positively tended to have a wide range of resources available to cater for the needs of most disaffected students. They perceived Higher Horizons provision therefore as addressing the needs of a small minority of pupils whose difficulties were so extreme that anything the school might be able to offer was seen as inappropriate. Higher Horizons, on the other hand, was able to provide the flexibility required to offer these pupils an individualised approach to address their complex personal needs.

Key findings: key factors contributing towards headteachers' attitudes

- A positive attitude towards Higher Horizons was correlated with a positive impact on the pupils involved, and a negative attitude was correlated with a lack of effective communication between Higher Horizons and the school.
- In addition, where Higher Horizons was perceived as one aspect of a range of provision that might be accessed for disaffected students and where a complete break away from the school environment was viewed as valuable for disaffected students, a more positive attitude tended to prevail.
- In addition, schools with a range of resources to address the needs of disaffected students, already experienced in handling their difficulties and in working with outside agencies towards this aim, tended to use Higher Horizons for pupils with more extreme difficulties, whose needs it was thought could not be met in the mainstream school setting. They also tended to view the provision in a more positive light.

Research vignette: Strategies to address disaffection within mainstream schools

Within the face-to-face interviews, headteachers were asked about the policies and strategies currently in place within their schools to address the issue of disaffection. This was then related to the previous categorisation of headteacher telephone interviews to see if there was any relationship between what might already be offered within schools and how they perceived access to Higher Horizons.

Interestingly, all those headteachers whose interviews had been classified as 'positive' reported having an effective pastoral framework within their schools. They referred, for example, to the '*significant caring role of the tutor*', the fact that they '*know the pupils well*' and have an '*understanding of their backgrounds*'. Other common features were an emphasis on multi-agency approaches and a range of vocational options for pupils. They appeared, therefore, to already have in place a range of different strategies for addressing the difficulties of disaffected pupils. One headteacher commented that '*our strategies are huge*' and another that OFSTED had highlighted that, as a school, they '*do a lot for* [disaffected] *pupils*'. In addition, Higher Horizons was perceived by these headteachers as most appropriate for those pupils for whom all other strategies had failed, i.e. those with extreme disaffection. They stated, for example, that Higher Horizons might be involved where '*we have tried everything and students have not responded*' and '*when all our best efforts have failed*'. Two headteachers also reported that they were '*reluctant to exclude pupils*' and one that they '*preferred to deal with problems internally*'.

On the other hand, whilst those whose interviews were classified as either 'negative' or 'neither' did state that they operated a modified curriculum for some pupils, they indicated that the extent of its flexibility might be limited. They tended, too, to refer to the discipline procedures and reward systems in place within the school rather than to the application of the pastoral system, although one did note that, through their pastoral system, they tried to '*integrate pupils from the start*'. There also appeared to be less emphasis on multi-agency working within these schools, although some mentioned links with colleges and the Education Welfare Service. These headteachers also seemed to suggest that Higher Horizons was most appropriate for a different target group. One headteacher indicated that, in contrast to those with telephone interviews categorised as 'positive', they viewed Higher Horizons as provision for '*pupils disinclined to work on the National Curriculum*' rather than those with extreme disaffection. It was noted, for example, that as pupils had not been accepted for the Higher Horizons provision, they had set up their own alternative curriculum. Another reported that '*we could do this in-house*', given the resources, and that Higher Horizons is '*too small to cater for the demand*', suggesting that the provision was thought to be appropriate for a wider range of pupils.

In summary, schools in which access to Higher Horizons appeared to be perceived positively tended to have a wide range of provision already available and could therefore cater for the needs of most disaffected students. They perceived Higher Horizons provision as addressing the needs of a small minority of pupils whose difficulties were so extreme that anything the school might be able to offer was therefore seen as inappropriate. Higher Horizons, on the other hand, was able to provide the flexibility required to offer these pupils an individualised approach in a completely different ambience to school to address their complex personal needs.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The findings of this evaluation confirm that Higher Horizons is perceived to have made a distinctive contribution in providing alternative opportunities and an environment in which some pupils alienated from school can develop successfully. In this way, it can be considered to provide pupils, schools, the LEA and other agencies with a model of educational provision which is a viable alternative to mainstream schooling, in terms of both learning context and curriculum content.

The evaluation, however, has particularly highlighted a number of polarised views with regard to aspects of the Higher Horizons provision, with widely varied, and even conflicting, opinions surfacing. This clearly raises a number of issues for the LEA to consider.

One of these polarisations of opinion was evident in relation to **the target group of pupils**. Higher Horizons was perceived by some to be especially appropriate for a very small minority of pupils experiencing extreme alienation and difficulties within their school. In contrast, others felt that a wider group of pupils might benefit from such provision and that it was fruitless targeting pupils whose disaffection was so extreme that they were considered 'beyond redemption'. There were also polarised views about the amount and quality of the **feedback received on pupils' progress**, and the value or viability of **part-time attendance**. To some extent these issues might be addressed by improving communication between Higher Horizons and schools, and, indeed, within this evaluation, the issue of communication and ongoing contact between providers and schools has certainly surfaced.

One important finding was that a sense of a lack of communication was, perhaps inevitably, correlated with schools' negative attitudes towards Higher Horizons and, where communication was felt to be good, it was invariably linked with a positive perception of the provision. It is clearly important, therefore, that schools have a comprehensive understanding of the selection criteria, the procedures involved and the aims and principles of such provision if they are to access it effectively for their pupils. In addition, some schools may need advice on how best to maintain satisfactory links with their pupils' provision. There has clearly been a valuable learning experience in this respect and Higher Horizons' staff have already recognised the need to ensure closer links with schools, including more induction and ongoing involvement for school staff. In conjunction with improved communication, the issue of responsibility for pupils on Higher Horizons and the developing role of the key contact in schools may also become clearer.

Effective communication, however, whilst addressing some of these issues, may not resolve them all. It is clearly important that Higher Horizons should be considered in the context of other provision presently accessed by schools to support disaffected students. Is there a correlation, for example, as some findings from this evaluation might suggest, between the most consistently held positive viewpoints towards Higher

Horizons and those already experienced in supporting disaffected pupils within their schools? Is it perhaps possible that, schools which already have a range of existing resources to address the needs of this group of pupils and those already working closely with outside agencies towards this aim are more likely to appreciate the particular contribution Higher Horizons offers? Proffering advice and support and encouraging a sharing of expertise about within-school alternative provision may thus be an important LEA role to develop, as much as any such provision itself.

In this way, the implications of the present evaluation confirm many of the issues raised within the initial research conducted by Williamson and Cummings (1998)[1]. They suggested that the Higher Horizons Partnership might consider, at strategic level, the importance of working with schools to promote whole-school approaches to disaffection, supporting the creation of additional curriculum opportunities, encouraging inter-agency and inter-school collaboration and informing schools of the range of provision available to them to support disaffected students. Within this study, a range of both within-school and out-of-school provision already accessed by schools was also identified. This, however, presented a limited and complex picture and, it appeared that, at present, other forms of alternative provision for disaffected students are accessed inconsistently by schools and in a rather *ad hoc* manner. The LEAs might therefore again consider how best to support schools in accessing and utilising effectively the range of provision available.

In addition, it may be that the Higher Horizons model, and its experienced staff, have much to offer mainstream schools in terms of their way of working, philosophy and expertise. The increasing use of a rigorous diagnosis of causes of disaffection, the assessment of pupils' difficulties and the individualised approach to planning appropriate provision adopted within Higher Horizons might often not seem possible within the present constraints of mainstream schooling. However, the individual support given as a necessary prerequisite to learning for some pupils may be an important issue for mainstream schools to take on board, and, again, one recognised by those with positive views of Higher Horizons.

Despite the fact that a range of opposing views was expressed about a number of aspects, Higher Horizons has been seen as a valuable learning experience for all those involved. It may be that one key to the issues raised by this evaluation for the LEAs can be considered within the context of both schools' and the authorities' overall provision for disaffected students. The selection criteria for Higher Horizons, for example, might take into account previous interventions with pupils and there may need to be a more detailed examination of what more might be achieved within schools prior to accessing this type of provision. Clarification of its specific position and the target group may also raise the status of Higher Horizons such that it might be more often recognised as a specialist provision for pupils who have become almost irretrievably alienated from the mainstream school setting. However, it may also be important that the skills and contacts developed by Higher Horizons are fully utilised by schools in the authorities.

[1]   WILLIAMSON, B. and CUMMINGS, R. (1998). *Higher Horizons: Absent from School.*
       County Durham and Darlington Partnership.

APPENDIX

Key factors in successfully accessing alternative provision for disaffected students, as identified by headteachers

Curriculum/programme	Links with schools
Individualised (7)	Effective communication (10)
Skills-based (7)	Shared understanding of aims (5)
Motivating (6)	Knowledge of available provision (4)
Progression (6)	Integrated into school provision (3)
Flexible (5)	In schools' control (2)
Relevant (5)	School follow-up
Work-related (2)	Minimum disruption
Accessible	Staff time available
Structured	Strategies in place
Small-steps approach	Networking
Quality	Practically manageable
Specialist input	Willingness
Educational targets	Trust
Appropriate qualifications	
GCSEs	**Target pupils**
A variety of teaching styles	Wide availability (4)
Full-time	Early intervention (4)
Part-time option	Pupils matched to provision (3)
	Selection criteria strictly applied
Pastoral support	Numbers flexible
Social and emotional support (3)	
Careers advice (2)	**Resources**
Social skills	Funded properly (11)
Decision-making skills	Value for money (2)
Self-esteem/confidence	
Self-awareness	**Principles**
Learning skills	Multi-agency (4)
SEN pupils involved	Cooperation between partners (3)
Attendance improved	Parental involvement (2)
	Benefits to pupils evident (2)
Environment	Negotiated with pupils
Quality staff (3)	A quick response time
More adult (2)	Conditional on attendance
Outside school (2)	A positive approach
Different from school (2)	Addresses spedial educational needs
Effective relationships	A recognition that problems are complex
Relaxed	Clear systems and procedures
A fresh start	A recognition that schools are unable to address all needs
Insurance covered	

Numbers in brackets indicate where more than one headteacher identified these key factors

Further Perspectives on Higher Horizons:
Evaluating an Alternative Provision for Disaffected Students

This report details the findings of the NFER evaluation of Higher Horizons, an alternative form of provision for disaffected students in Durham and Darlington LEAs and one of the 17 first-round projects funded by the DfEE under the New Start initiative. It focuses on a strategic perspective and relays the views of schools, but also those of other agencies and organisations involved, and LEA personnel chiefly responsible for overseeing and coordinating the provision. In addition to being relevant to the participating LEAs, local schools, agencies and organisations, the report may also be of interest to LEAs and schools involved in, or planning, similar provision for disaffected students.