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In April 2004, Post-School Psychological Service (PSPS) Pathfinders were established for a 2-year period in 12 local authorities: Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow, Midlothian, Perth & Kinross, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Lothian. These represented an extension of the existing work of educational psychology services with the 0-19 age group. Provision was also made for 2 Strategic Officers (SOs) to support local services and to work strategically at national level. PSPS works collaboratively with key stakeholders and in particular with Scotland’s Colleges, Careers Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and local training providers. The results reported here are key findings from research carried out by Psychology Consultancy Services with key stakeholders between September 2004 and March 2006.

Main Findings

- Pathfinders were clearly differentiated from other services in the extent and range of post-school psychological services developed by them, and these differences increased throughout the period of the evaluation.
- Post-school psychological services provided to all stakeholders including young people and their parents and carers have been highly valued.
- The initiatives being carried out by Pathfinders have led to a vast number of demonstrable improvements in outcomes for young people.
- The extra resources provided to support Pathfinders has been the key factor in the development of an effective range of post-school services.
- The development of an effective working model of PSPS across Scotland at has been overwhelmingly the result of the work of the Strategic Officers.
- Key stakeholders in Scotland’s Colleges, in Careers Scotland and in other post-school agencies have received an extensive contribution from the SOs in enhancing their ability to promote improved outcomes for young people.
- A significant contribution has been made by the SOs at strategic level to national and organisation-wide policies, practices and documentation.
- Development of PSPS has far-reaching implications for educational psychology as a profession, but Pathfinders and non-Pathfinders alike have embraced these implications and are keen to develop effective post-school services.
- Significant developments have taken place at Dundee University (where 3 additional trainee placements were funded to support PSPS) and also at Strathclyde University in terms of curriculum development and promotion of post-school practice.
- PSPS in other services was very limited and in some cases almost non-existent.
Background

The Beattie Report, *Implementing Inclusiveness, Realising Potential,* (Scottish Executive, 1999) emphasised the need for a culture of inclusiveness in which all agencies would work together to plan provision for young people in the 16-24 years age group who required additional support to make a successful transition from school to further education, training or employment. In supporting these aims the Report anticipated a key role for educational psychology services.

In 2003 the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, approved 12 PSPS Pathfinders for the period April 2004 to March 2006 to provide post-school services at local, cluster and strategic levels.

About the study

The evaluation used a mixed research methodology in which different types of data, both qualitative and quantitative, were drawn from multiple sources. The design included a ‘quasi-experimental’ approach with an experimental group comprising the 12 Pathfinders and a control group comprising the 20 non-Pathfinder authorities.

The main methods used for the study were questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and examination of available documentation. Questionnaires provided a significant volume of quantitative and qualitative data, and these were supported by supplementary data from all other evidence sources. In addition to ongoing work undertaken throughout the study, there were two main evaluative exercises, the first relating to April 2005 and the second to March 2006.

Evidence was gathered from a very large number of sources including the Strategic Officers, Principal Educational Psychologists, other psychologists with a significant role in PSPS, the Programme Directors and trainees in the educational psychology training programmes at Dundee and Strathclyde Universities, key personnel throughout the post-school sector, other appropriate personnel in Scotland’s Colleges, Careers, Scottish Enterprise and a range of other post-school service providers, key personnel in local authorities and young people, as the direct users and beneficiaries of post-school services.

- **Questionnaires:** 248 returns (median response rate 53%) were received from psychological services, Scotland’s Colleges, Careers Scotland, other service providers, local authorities and educational psychologists in training.
- **Interviews:** 200 individual and small group interviews, most of them face to face, were conducted in all psychological services and with a range of key stakeholders.
- **Focus groups:** group meetings were held across two years with the psychologists in the Tayside cluster, and with staff and trainees at Dundee University.
- **Documentation:** an important evidence source was a wide range of documentation including the original bids and regular updates of the Pathfinders, materials developed for PSPS, training packages, audits of provision and need and local evaluations.
- **Other sources:** evidence of impact of PSPS on young people was gathered from a range of sources including views obtained by local psychological services.

Key findings of the research

Psychological services

Pathfinder services had developed a much wider range of post-school initiatives than other services, and they anticipated a higher level of future development. They also rated their own effectiveness significantly higher than others. In other services PSPS was very limited, and in several cases non-existent. The gradient of these differences between Pathfinders and others increased between April 2005 and March 2006.

Scotland’s Colleges

The self-ratings of psychological services regarding their PSPS delivery were fully validated in the ratings assigned to them by Scotland’s Colleges on the same questions. Colleges in Pathfinder areas indicated that they received significantly higher provision of PSPS. This provision was highly valued.

Careers Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and other providers

The results from this very diverse sector further supported the self-ratings of psychological services. Providers in Pathfinder areas were receiving higher levels of PSPS and again these services were highly valued.

Local authorities

Key personnel such as directors of education and of community services in Pathfinder authorities reported significantly higher levels of PSPS activity than those in other areas. They also anticipated a higher level of future PSPS development. They highlighted the crucial part played by additional resources, while non-Pathfinders viewed lack of resources as the major barrier to progress.

Strategic Officers

The Strategic Officers had provided high levels of essential support to all 12 Pathfinders, and they had also supported
several other authorities. In particular, they had developed an effective working model of PSPS, and had promulgated this nationally through the regular meetings of the PSPS Network. Key stakeholders in Scotland’s Colleges and other agencies also reported an extensive contribution from the SOs, and this had enhanced their ability to promote improved outcomes for young people. The SOs were essential for the development of a post-school service and had contributed significantly at strategic level to national and organisation-wide policies, practices and documentation.

University training programmes

At Dundee University, where 3 additional trainee placements had been funded to support PSPS, significant developments had taken place in terms of curriculum development and promotion of post-school practice. The other educational psychology training programme in Scotland, at the University of Strathclyde, had also taken active steps to incorporate PSPS into its curriculum and practice.

Young people

The evidence gathered from young people regarding their views and experiences, and other evidence relating to the impact of PSPS on young people, indicated that:

- PSPS was valued by young people and by their parents and carers and vast numbers of demonstrable improvements in outcomes for them had been achieved
- these improvements were achieved both through training and strategic work and through more traditional work in supporting vulnerable individuals.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The overall conclusion of this evaluation is that PSPS is achieving its key aims and objectives in developing effective services and in promoting enhanced outcomes for young people by:

- supporting the young person’s transition to post-school by enhancing continuity and progression
- complementing the assessment and advice of Scotland’s Colleges and other service providers
- improving the understanding, skills and effectiveness of service providers through consultation, training and action research
- contributing to strategic developments locally and nationally, including policy developments.

Recommendations

This evaluation has important implications in relation to the development of effective post-school psychological services in Scotland. These lead to a number of recommendations in relation to the maintenance of the Pathfinder initiatives in the 12 authorities, the further roll out of PSPS, the implications for university trainee places, the role of the Strategic Officers and the position of other branches of applied psychology. These may be summarised as follows:

- the progress made by Pathfinders in establishing a range of effective and highly valued post-school psychological services, and in gradually embedding these within a coherent framework of service delivery, points to the value of maintaining the resources that have supported this project in the 12 Pathfinders
- the progress in Pathfinders, combined with the general lack of progress elsewhere, the perceived need for post-school services, the readiness of psychological services to develop them and the clear barriers presented by lack of resources, point to the value of a further roll out of PSPS in other areas
- any further roll out of PSPS should take account of the number of trainee places required on the educational psychology training programmes at Dundee and Strathclyde Universities
- the crucial role played by the Strategic Officers in continuing to support Pathfinders at this stage in their development, the even more crucial need for their support for any further roll out of PSPS, and the strategic significance of their national role point to the value of utilising their key position so that the Strategic Officer posts should be maintained and extended
- the advantages of a longer-term national role for PSPS Strategic Officers, as in other areas of applied psychology in Scotland (occupational, clinical and forensic) should be explored
- the professional organisations for psychology in Scotland should be asked to explore the development of links between educational psychology and other branches of applied psychology, to ensure effective signposting for post-school service providers.
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If you wish a copy of “The Evaluation of Post School Psychological Services Pathfinders in Scotland (2004 – 2006)” the research report which is summarised in this research findings, please send a cheque for £z made payable to:

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