Highland Children's Forum

"Not in Full Time Education"

Consultation Report 2018: Views from Professionals

CONTENT

About the Project

The aim of the Not in Full-time Education (NIFTE) consultation was to explore with young people, parent-carers and professionals the main issues facing young people's ability to access school full-time.

The consultation was in response to anecdotal evidence of an increasing number of young people in Highland with additional support needs who were not accessing their right to a full-time education.

Three separate, but linked, consultations were carried out with young people who are not in full-time education, with parent-carers and with professionals.

The wording of issues for discussion were varied for each group in recognition of the different relevant experience and understanding of each group. Each consultation sought examples of good practice, barriers/challenges, and suggestions for improved practice. Young people and parents were asked about the impact of school experience. Young people were asked about what helped them get back to school. Professionals were asked about the support available. While each report had particular emphasis, there were some clear cross-cutting themes emerging.

The order of questions presented in this report is varied from the order used in the consultation to make it easier to align the three reports for comparison. A common language was sought across the three reports in terms of category headings for the analysis of comments to enable responses to be compared and contrasted across the slightly different question sets.

This report details the finding of the professionals' consultation. The consultation focused on exploring key areas around: what worked; barriers and challenges; the current situation and improvements needed.

This analysis draws on information gathered between January – June 2017 from 24 professionals from across the Highlands in 5 focus groups, 7 one-to-one interviews and 2 questionnaires. Professionals from both statutory and 3rd sector providers took part.

What Worked: Examples of Good Practice

This question came at the end of the consultation session with professionals and only 9 professionals answered, providing 13 examples of good practice.

What Worked: Examples of Good Practice

Category	Value
Staff who are Person-centred	6
Good Partnership Working	6

Chart Indicating Areas of Good Practice as Identified by Professionals

Good Partnership Working

The professionals provided examples of good partnership working such as good communication between partners around the Child's Plan, including the parents. Good minutes of Child's Plan meetings were mentioned, but also just regular updates shared about how the young person was doing.

A particular example of good partnership working provided was *DIGIT* (Dornoch, Invergordon and Golspie Transition……. (Tain Royal Academy was an equql partner of this project also. Need to include if it still is)) project where budgets are pooled and schools work together to plan a programme of activity for young people with a range of additional support needs. A second example was a programme to broaden horizons and build life skills and confidence through activities planned with the young people.

"Careful minuting of meetings, clear communication in all settings and between agencies and parent/carers."

"Children's Service Worker that I work with consistently respond to my emails .. and shares appropriate information with me. This helps the young person at the end of the day."

"With one school I work in the teacher will always email me after a session, let me know how young person is. Asks me 'is there

anything I can be doing'. This is such a simple thing but you can see that they genuinely have that whole child as their priority. I was able to say to her about how shouting affects him and she totally took that on board."

Staff who are Person-centred

Professionals recognised the importance of staff who worked in a person-centred way. This was about seeing the young person as an individual, caring for the whole person and not just about attainment. Consistency was mentioned and the need for the young person to know that the professionals have not given up on them, but are there to support them.

"Teacher in question was young; person centred rather than attainment. Saw the young person as an individual, not labelled. Gave the young person the message they believed they could do things."

"if young people are given time and feel they are not been given up on and have key people helping them, maybe for a long time - they do get there but it needs time and compassion. Young people need a consistent person to be there."

"Everyone working together to support YP through transitions back to school or from school. One key person being a constant, coordinating resource, stages or providers however long it takes for young person to find their place in the world of work or FE."

Barriers and Challenges

Professionals were asked to identify barriers and challenges to and young people managing full-time education.

Key Barriers and Challenges

Barrier	Count
Lack of Staff Resources	20
Lack of Understanding of Young Person's Needs	18
School Environment	14
Attitudes of Staff	13
Lack of Flexibility	7
Peer and Social Interactions	5
Child's Plan Process	3

Chart Indicating the Key Barriers and Challenges, Identified by Professionals, facing Young People in Accessing a Full-Time Timetable

Lack of Staff Resources

The majority of professionals commented on issues that reflected a lack of resources either in terms of general resources (13 comments) or staff capacity (11 comments).

Comments suggested that there is currently an additional workload for teachers in terms of both increased and broadened demands made. This has led to teaching being more stressful and makes it difficult to find personal resources to work in a person-centred way.

There was also the view expressed that some recruitment, particularly for promoted posts such as Guidance Teacher, did not always look for the empathy required to work with additional support needs. Another comment suggested that it can be difficult to recruit staff to work with particularly challenging behaviour. Recruitment of specialist staff and supply staff or staff not being replaced could present difficulties.

"Expectations of staff from senior managers … unachievable outcomes most of the time."

"Conflict for a maths teacher having to address social and emotional difficulties. Not why he joined teaching but however this attitude is a barrier or can exacerbate the situation, never allowing relationship to build."

"English as a second language. Young person's friends were used to translate for her in meetings with teaching staff about her needs to return to school. Lack of understanding regarding using translators - not willing to employ services of a translating service."

"Sometimes people are recruited or attracted to posts because of the promotion opportunity. They are not necessarily the right people for the job in terms of compassion and empathy. Do interviews elicit people's emotional literacy?"

Lack of Understanding of Young People's Needs

Professionals commented about a lack of understanding of young people needs, including a lack of empathy or understanding of individuals' needs and lack of training about additional support needs.

"Lack of understanding of staff leads to escalation of issues/behaviour."

"Subject teachers/staff not trained enough in managing needs of children and young people with a range of additional needs."

"If guidance staff don't know of alternative resources for learning packages then they need to learn."

"When an individual member of staff 'gets it' it definitely makes planning easier"

School Environment

The 'school environment' included comments about the physical space but also the routine and structure of the day. The professionals spoke about the buildings themselves, managing unstructured time (such as break time) and transport.

Views were made about the school building, which may not be sufficiently physically accessible, or it may be that the space, colour schemes or other sensory aspects are problematic for some young people, while meeting the needs of others. There can be a lack of quiet or one to one space. The length of time any proposed changes to a building take was also raised as an issue.

"Building not suitable to meet physical needs with accessibility issues or it can partially meet need with being able to access certain parts of the building."

"Designers don't think of people with ASN when designing new school and colleges. Huge open spaces full of people causes huge anxiety and be enough to stop a young person accessing opportunities.

"Lunchtime can be a huge challenge for some young people in mainstream."

Attitudes of Staff

Over half the professionals felt that negative staff attitudes were a barrier. Sometimes this was about disapproval of the young person rather than in the behaviour exhibited. Sometimes the perceived negative attitude was towards off campus providers or parents.

Comments suggested that office staff, as the first point of contact for a young person arriving at school, may appear judgemental about the reason for the young person's lateness. Professionals felt this could undo some of the work they were doing to encourage the young person back into school.

"Attitude of subject teachers and at times senior managers, whole school community – [e.g.] 'Why should we provide work/offer reward if they don't make effort? [i.e.] tolerate their behaviour'."

"Some staff see [off campus provision] as a last resort. Some use it as a threat to young people."

"Attitudes of staff can be a barrier to forming relationships with young person and their family. Relationship and trust building is vital."

Lack of Flexibility

A few professionals commented on the lack of flexibility in the curriculum and that set attainment targets could get in the way of creative ways of supporting the learning and development of young people who are less academic. It was felt that this lack of suitable learning opportunity was also true post-school.

"Curriculum does not meet individual need - particularly non-academic."

"Attainment targets run the risk of stifling creativity or alternative curriculums."

"Young people not grasping subjects and in need of additional support."

"There is just not the variety of opportunities available for young people who have disengaged from school."

Peer and Social Interactions

It was recognised by some professionals that coming back into school after a long gap could be hugely challenging for young people. In particular, peers will have moved on socially and re-establishing that peer relationship may be difficult.

"Interrupted learning - difficult to return when absent for a long period - can be too much for child or young person."

"Young person's confidence is affected when they have been out of school and not having that social interaction with their peers. Sometimes it takes a long time for things to be put in place for them to begin to return back in to school."

Child's Plan Process

A minority commented on a lack of information sharing; a central tenet of the Child's Plan process. Another comment suggests that on-going review and plans to re-integrate young people back into mainstream provision are lacking.

"Information sharing within large secondary schools re individual young person's needs is poor."

"We provide a lot of information back to schools to subject teachers, guidance etc. but we get nothing back. It is as if schools have forgotten about the young person and don't want to know, not their problem anymore. We have a form of 'bed blocking' because there is no transition back into main stream: kids come here, stay here and therefore we have no room to take anyone else who needs the service."

Factors that Impacted on Young People's Ability to Access Full-time Education

Professionals were asked to consider what they believed were the factors involved in some young people not managing to be in full-time education.

There is a lot of overlap between the responses to this question and the responses to the barriers and challenges to young people being in full-time education. The responses can be divided approximately into the three sides of the My World Triangle: factors that are to do with the individual child's development; factors that are to do with the family and factors that are to do with the school community.
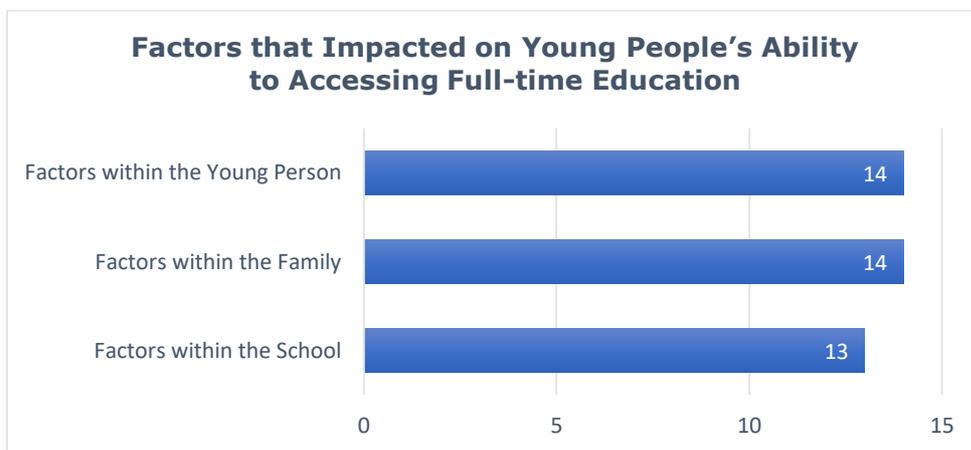

Chart indicating Factors that Impacted on Young People's Ability to Access Full-time Education

Factors within the Young Person

Most of the professionals commented about factors within the young person that made being in full-time education challenging. They highlighted issues around the young person's mental health issues and about the young person not feeling safe and supported in the school environment.

In terms of mental health, professionals recognised the pressures some young people were under and the difficulty presented if there was a delay in accessing Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Some young people did not feel listened to or understood meaning that they felt unsafe/unwelcome at school.

"We notice an increase in children and young people coming to our service carrying mental health concerns and they are waiting significant periods for help and support from specialist services. Looking at nearly a year from engagement to receiving a service."

"The pressure that some young people are living with - no wonder they can't sit down and focus on maths or French."

"Some young people don't feel safe at school. With some teachers even 'the look' can be a trigger to the child or young person."

Factors within the Family

14 Professionals mentioned a number of family factors that can contribute to young people not being in school fulltime. The relationship between the school and the parent can become a negative one. There may be mental health issues or other pressures in the family, which contribute to the difficulty for the young person accessing school.

"Mums feel responsible like it's their fault. They have to field the phone calls as to why child isn't in school and this negatively affects the relationship and the snowball effect of negativity continues."

"Family have probably not had a positive relationship with school staff. Schools don't have a good attitude towards some parents."

"Parents literacy issues, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health concerns - all these weigh down on a young person."

Factors within the School

Just over half spoke about factors within the school environment that contributed to young people not being able to manage in full-time education. These covered lack of resources, lack of specialism, unhelpful staff attitudes and the school routine.

"Schools are just managing with the budgets they are given."

"There is no 'middle ground' between main stream and 'special school'"

"Schools don't have the resources to meet need."

Professionals Reflection on Aspects of Practice

Professionals were asked about practice to meet the needs of young people who were not in full-time education. Questions were set around whether professionals felt supported in their role, if they received sufficient information and training.
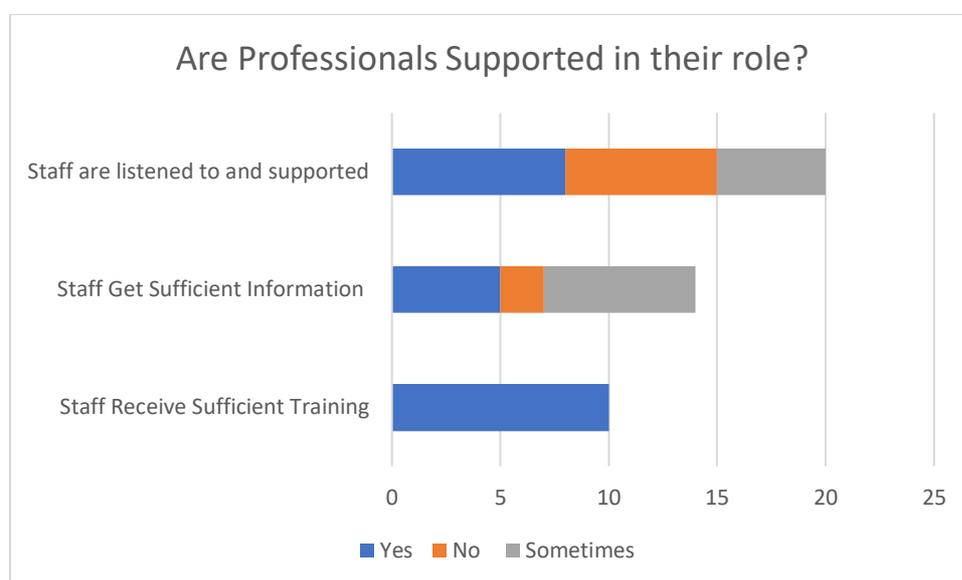
Are Professionals Supported in their role?

Chart indicating how well supported Professionals feel in their role.

Supported in Their Role

Third sector organisations did not always feel supported as full partners to the Child's Plan. Some of the professionals who reported they did feel listened to, qualified their comments saying that it did not lead to change or that not everyone listened.

Professionals who did not feel supported and listened to specifically reported not being considered as equal partners to the Child's Plan. Communication between mainstream school and third sector providers was not as good as it should be.

> *"[supported]…but nothing changes."* (two respondents)
>
> *"[supported] ..within my organisation but not by others."*
>
> *"Staff at 'coal face' not always consulted to contribute to assessment."*
>
> *"No, not by main stream staff."*
>
> *"You don't get invited to core group meetings but when it comes to reviews they want all the information and update I can give them [statutory sector]"*

Provided with the Information Needed

Professionals were asked if they had the information they needed to meet the needs of young people not in full-time education. The experience was varied. Information sharing between professionals was not consistent. Some professionals recognised that it was about listening to the young person.

> *"You have to know to ask the right questions."*
>
> *"The most useful information comes from the young person because there is a lot they won't share with other services."*
>
> *"I might not get sent Child's Plan in advance - sometimes I think we are an afterthought, but certainly once we are there and involved we get the information we need in order to decide if our service is an appropriate option for the young person."*

Provided with the Training Needed

Professionals were asked if they got the training they needed to meet the needs of children and young people. The Highland Practice Model training was seen as "excellent". More local availability of training was suggested.

> *"Suitability depends on who is providing it."*
>
> *"Highland Practice Model training is excellent."*
>
> *"Yes, but I have to initiate it."*
>
> *"Local availability would be better."*

Part-Time Timetables

Professionals were asked: "If a part-time timetable was considered, was consideration given to the remainder of the curriculum?"

Professional comments suggest that part-time timetables are challenging in terms of delivering learning. The support at home was variable and the follow up was poor. Part-time timetables can be appropriate for a period, but access to the curriculum is likely to be limited.

> **"Challenging depending on child need, family dynamic and their ability to support the learning and teaching at home."**

> **"Blended learning works best with a variety of opportunities to meet that YP needs and desires."**

> **"There is no follow up like it is just 'here's the work'. No-one phones to ask how it is going, are they stuck with anything, do they need help or more work? There is no follow up."**

Resources

Professionals were asked "Do resources meet needs as identified through assessment?". The comments suggest that part-time timetables are under-resourced. There was a feeling expressed that while these could be appropriate they were often poorly managed without follow up to ensure the child or young person is accessing enough of the curriculum. There is a lack of variety of options available and what is available is over-subscribed.

> **"[in off campus, 3rd sector provision] only take small numbers and in my experience, young people need to wait a long time to get a place."**

> **"Part-time is sometimes appropriate but they are often too part time in terms of how much actual curriculum the CYP is accessing."**

> **"Part time can be challenging depending on child need, family dynamic and their ability to support the learning and teaching at home."**

Involvement of young people and parents

Professionals were asked: "How do you involve young people and families in assessment and planning?" Some professionals noted that meetings might not be the best place to engage with the young person and family and professionals recognised that poor involvement of families presented a significant barrier to progress.

Some professionals mentioned the use of person-centred planning to involve children and young people and a smaller number mentioned making time to listen to families or visit them at home.
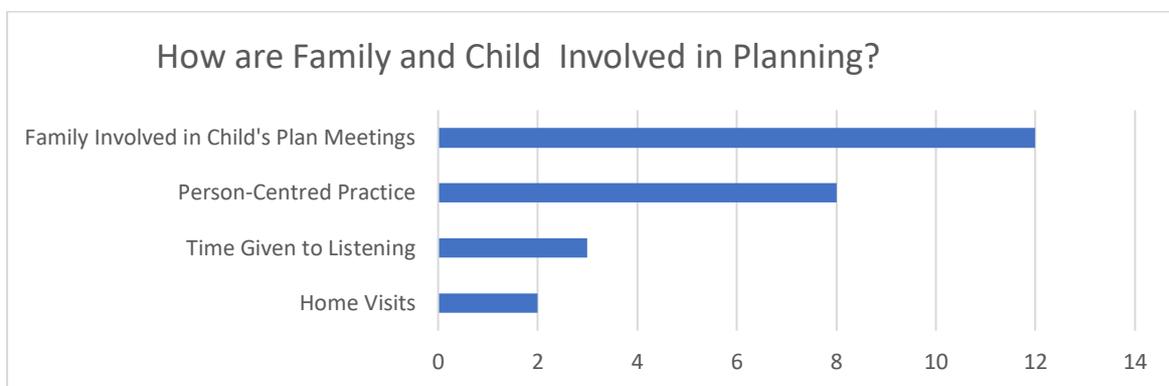

Chart indicating number of comments about how the family and child are involved in planning

"I'm not a fan of Child's Plan meetings from a young person's perspective. To see them sitting there, it's not nice for them. The experience is alien for them. It's hard enough for families but the bairn has to come in."

"[Child or young person] has a choice: where do they want to meet; when do they want to meet; how often do they want to meet? Their needs determine the support plan: what do they think they need? What do they think the issues are?"

Improvements

Professionals were asked for suggestions about how to improve practice.

Improvements

Category	Value
Improved Person-centre Practice	15
Improved Attitudes of Staff	14
Training for Staff	14
Improved School Environment	13
Improved Communication	11
More Resources	8
Validation of All Learning	7

Chart Indicating the Main Improvements Suggested by Professionals

Improved Person-centred Practice

The majority of professionals highlighted the need for staff to respond to individual learners in a person-centred way. Some of these comments were about providing earlier intervention both in terms of early in the life of the young person and early in the development of difficulties. Other comments were about working with the young person to work out plans to move forward. Responses indicated that putting the young person at the centre of planning from the beginning enabled better outcomes.

"Alternative curriculum is a regular option and not a specialist response."

"Schools need to see the child is struggling much earlier, understand what the young people are living with and make more appropriate plans earlier to avoid situations getting worse."

"In examples where young people have been honestly involved at every stage, outcomes have been better. They are more fulfilled and have ownership of their life."

> **"We need to be more solution focussed. We- including CYP …
> need to help them to think about alternative options, what can
> they/we do differently the next time. We need to set clear
> achievable goals/targets for young people - SMART planning."**

Improved Attitudes of Staff

Most professionals made a response about staff attitudes, divided into individuals developing empathy (12 comments) and about an improved ethos or culture of school (3 comments).

The importance of developing positive relationships with the young person and family was seen as crucial. An empathetic response to behavioural challenges was also seen as key.

> **"One where adults strive to develop positive relationships with
> young people."**
>
> **"Staff see the behaviour and they need to see where it has come
> from. Young people need to be listened to regardless of how old
> they are or their circumstances."**
>
> **"A culture and ethos that values everyone, works in partnership to
> meet the needs of every child. A culture that allows creativity."**

Improved Training for Staff

Professionals spoke about the need for training to be provided across the spectrum of people working with young people, including parents. In particular they spoke about training on emotional literacy and nurture.

> **"Everyone should be trained in emotional literacy, all of us singing
> from the same hymn book in a positive manner even if things are
> not positive."**
>
> **"They need to know that ASN is not just autism. It's children from
> broken homes, , grief, bullying, it could be anything. I really think
> staff should spend learning time in a specialist provision to gain
> experience in student placements."**
>
> **"Must include ASN and nurture training. Every school should be a
> nurturing school with the right philosophy."**

Improved School Environment

Responses suggested the need for flexible learning spaces, with more attention paid to the needs of different learners. Some simple suggestions were made such as eradicating the school bell and some more challenging suggestions such as smaller classes or small group work to enable those who struggle to feel included. Nurturing/timeout space was mentioned.

"More attention paid to classroom structure and planning."

"Smaller group work in a more informal setting is what some young people need in order to learn and achieve."

"After a session with us it would be great if there was child could go to settle before going back to class ... These young people are talking about really hard stuff and they are expected to just switch and go back to learning maths."

Improved Communication

Professionals suggested that communication could be improved across the board: with young people; their families; across school staff and between agencies. This would improve partnership working and develop more positive relationships with the young people.

"Better communication between school and child or young person in particular but also better communication between school and other agencies."

"Better all-round communication between the people around a young person. It would show a genuine interest about challenging children or young people. It would help us to work together and develop mutual understanding as professionals."

More Resources

Professionals felt that there were insufficient resources to meet the needs of young people with additional support needs. Teachers have to consider the needs of everyone in the class. To provide the flexible options needed, there would need to be more offsite provision. Currently this is not available.

> "Mainstream teachers are so stretched that they don't have the time some children and young people need. It is easier to extract one child from the class for the sake of the other 27 children."

> "Providing more choice within curriculum for vocational and practical learning off site. Providers are few and can only accept limited numbers of young people. Demand outstrips provision."

> "For inclusion to work for all it has to be resourced adequately."

Validation of All Learning

A few professionals commented on the importance of validation of non-academic skills. The current focus on attainment can leave young people believing that they are inadequate rather than believe there are worthwhile things that they can achieve.

> "Build on positive relationships and validate all learning. More flexibility in curriculum. More vocational opportunities in school."

> "Young people need… to believe that they can do things as opposed to the belief that they are bad and inadequate."

Conclusion

The responses from Professionals were very much around the Highland Practice Model. Professionals recognised the benefit of person-centered practice, partnership working, involvement of the family and the young person, early intervention, good information sharing and being creative in solution focused approaches.

Everything put forward as good practice or suggestions for improvements are already part of the policy and guidelines about which all staff receive training. It is of concern therefore to see that there are still barriers and challenges to meeting the needs of individual young people. Some of the challenges are about resources, both staff levels and general resources. The structure of school buildings and timetables is a barrier for some. The provision of quieter, smaller spaces within schools, and flexibility in the curriculum and timetables would benefit many young people with additional support needs.   . The perceived poor attitude of staff towards young people is still a significant issue. This is partly about improving understanding of additional support needs and also about a developing a school ethos and culture of inclusion.

Building positive relationships across partners to the Child's Plan, with young people and families and between schools and external providers is seen as being key. Recognition of the value of vocational skills as well as academic attainment, and the benefits of alternative curricula are also important. While tackling resource shortages in a time of austerity may be challenging, tackling attitudes is an area that can be worked on within current resources.