

Vulnerable Children's Access to Examinations at Key Stage 4

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National Foundation for Educational Research

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Examinations at Key Stage 4*

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Executive Summary

The research documented in this report examined barriers to vulnerable children accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4 and identified strategies employed to overcome them. Key groups of vulnerable children identified by the DfES included: looked after children, pupils unable to attend school because of their medical needs, Gypsy/Traveller pupils, asylum seekers, young carers, school refusers, teenage parents, young offenders, pupils with special educational needs (SEN), excluded pupils, minority ethnic pupils and children whose parents choose to educate them at home.

The research was conducted between June 2004 and February 2005 (i.e. before the publication of the White Paper, '14-19 Education and Skills', some proposals in which are relevant to the findings of this report – see Appendix 6). Phase One provided an overview of existing research evidence in this area. A number of organisations working with vulnerable children were also contacted to explore their insights into supporting vulnerable young people to access examinations. Phase Two explored the issues surrounding vulnerable children's access in greater detail via a telephone survey with LEA staff and key stakeholders from 40 LEAs, along with representatives from awarding bodies and other key organisations.

The following themes were identified as presenting possible barriers and challenges:

- 1 Characteristics of the examination system
- 2 Characteristics of the curriculum
- 3 Difficulties/needs of the vulnerable young people themselves
- 4 Issues of staff training, knowledge and resources
- 5 Legal powers, duties and responsibilities

Within each thematic area, the key barriers and challenges and associated solutions/recommendations are presented.

1. Characteristics of the examination system: key barriers and challenges

- There was a perceived inflexibility regarding *when* and *where* pupils are able to access examinations (e.g. difficulties accessing an examination centre for those out of school; examinations take place at a fixed point in time; the predominance of two-year courses).
- The lack of a dedicated examinations officer in smaller PRUs (Pupil Referral Units) and EOTAS (education other than at school) providers can mean a heavy workload for members of staff carrying out this function alongside several other duties. Transferred candidate arrangements or alternative venue arrangements can present an administrative burden to centres dealing with pupils from a number of different schools.

- The prerequisite of an educational psychologist or specialist teacher assessment for certain access arrangements was seen as a key barrier for some examination centres, where access to such personnel may be limited.
- PRUs and EOTAS services have an ongoing and fluctuating intake, causing difficulties for the accurate estimation of candidate entries. This can result in such providers incurring sizeable ‘late entry’ fees.
- Many vulnerable students, particularly youngsters who experience mobility in their lives and those who experience gaps in their education, have difficulties complying with coursework requirements for GCSE specifications. Coursework deadlines and thresholds can be missed by many vulnerable children as a result of extended periods of absence from school.
- Many GCSE specifications which include a large coursework component are not available to private candidates. Home-educated pupils were said to be limited in both the number and range of subjects they were able to take at key stage 4.
- Pupils’ access to examinations is restricted if they are not on the roll of a registered examination centre. This may affect vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers and Gypsy/Travellers without a school place, and young offenders leaving custody, and is a key barrier for home-educated young people entering as private candidates.

Characteristics of the examination system: key solutions/ recommendations

At a national/policy level:

- The need for more flexible approaches to accreditation at the end of key stage 4, in particular greater flexibility in the time taken to complete accreditation was noted. The issues facing vulnerable children may mean that they are not in a position to complete courses at a given point in time. Opportunities for young people to be able to return to examination work when ready would be helpful. For this approach to be successful there is a need to ensure that schools and other educational providers are not penalised for adopting flexible approaches. There is a need to acknowledge ‘value added’ in terms of vulnerable pupils’ attainment.
- Increased flexibility regarding timetable deviations and opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year (or over a modified period of time) were suggested.
- The provision of opportunities for greater flexibility about location, i.e. *where* students are able to access examinations, improving the ease with which mobile pupils, those out of school and home educated youngsters can access an examination centre is also recommended.
- A need to provide alternative accommodation arrangements for pupils who may have difficulties physically accessing an examination centre (e.g. for pupils with

medical needs or those studying away from their ‘usual’ school) was identified. An increase in the number of ‘open centres’ where candidates can enter independently without affiliation to a school or college may be one way forward.

- Opportunities for students to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation (from Entry Level to Levels 1 and 2), which are portable between providers, allowing students who experience gaps in their education to return to learning when they are able was highlighted.
- The development of portable learning packages, ensuring young people are accredited for the work they have completed, rather than penalised for the work they have not, and giving them opportunities to build on that in a different place, or at a later date would prove beneficial.
- The remission of late entry fees for PRUs and EOTAS providers would be beneficial in terms of encouraging these providers to enter students for GCSEs.
- An extension of opportunities for staff within educational settings to acquire qualifications to carry out assessments for access arrangements would be advantageous. Strengthening the relationship between EOTAS providers and educational psychologists or ensuring that a member of permanent staff holds a recognised specialist qualification to make assessments would be beneficial. Alternatively, establishing local networks of educational psychologists/specialist teachers who can carry out assessments of pupils across an LEA may be another way forward.
- A reduction in the coursework burden and/or the provision of alternative specifications with smaller coursework components may help some vulnerable pupils access GCSEs.

At a school/education provider level:

- Educational providers need to seek clarification of who is responsible for entering pupils for examinations, particularly for those who are out of mainstream school but remain on a school roll.
- The need for greater coordination and funding of catch-up support for pupils who have experienced gaps in their learning, along with more rigorous monitoring and tracking of the coursework completed by students, particularly those out of school, was noted.
- Greater flexibility in the assessment methodologies to ensure that they are adapted to suit the needs of individual students was suggested: some vulnerable students, may find examinations particularly stressful, whilst others may find coursework challenging because of their mobility/gaps in education. Schools should look to diversify the specifications used.

2 Characteristics of the curriculum: key barriers and challenges

- The perceived irrelevance and inaccessibility of the curriculum for many vulnerable pupils was seen as a barrier. However, the cultural capital associated with GCSEs means that alternative and vocational qualifications do not share the same parity of esteem.
- Access to examinations may be restricted for those young people attending EOTAS provision due to the nature of the provision and/or students' needs.
- Lack of continuity in the specifications and subjects offered by different educational providers constitutes a key barrier to vulnerable children accessing examinations (particularly those who are mobile).

Characteristics of the curriculum: key solutions/ recommendations

At a national/policy level:

- The need for further/additional opportunities to access GCSE-equivalent accreditation i.e. increasing access to vocational and alternative educational opportunities with GCSE equivalence was noted.
- Interviewees highlighted a need to change perceptions of vocational and alternative qualifications. Unless the value attached to GCSE-equivalent accreditation is on a par with GCSEs, difficulties in viewing them as having equivalence or 'parity of esteem' will remain. The importance of these forms of accreditation for vulnerable young people was highlighted throughout the report.

At a school/education provider level:

- Providers need to link together to expand the range of educational opportunities available, for example EOTAS providers linking with mainstream schools and colleges, to increase students' access to GCSEs. Similarly, the research provided examples of schools joining together to offer a wider range of GCSEs in community languages.
- The continued development of independent/individual learning opportunities, both within and out of school, was recommended. For example, via the establishment of 'banks of learning' and distance and virtual/e-learning opportunities allowing students to catch up or to continue to access the curriculum whilst out of school. The development of virtual and e-learning opportunities may allow students attending EOTAS provision to access a wider range of subjects/examinations.

- Schools need to continue to review their curriculum offer to ensure it is relevant for all students and to analyse data and performance to maintain awareness of under-achieving groups.
- The provision of a flexible curriculum (e.g. providing a flexible timetable, reducing the number of GCSEs studied, fast-tracking students in danger of dropping out), is likely to increase accessibility for vulnerable students. The need to provide additional alternative and vocational opportunities with GCSE-equivalence was also highlighted.
- For students arriving part way through key stage 4, the willingness of school staff to provide support, allowing or facilitating students to continue with existing specifications, or adapt work already completed to fit new specifications, was crucial in ensuring their access to examinations. Some formal commitment to providing such support for pupils who move schools/educational providers during key stage 4 (particularly during the later stages) may prove beneficial, as might the development of transferable specifications.

3 Difficulties/needs of the vulnerable young people themselves¹: key barriers and challenges

- Mobility was seen as a key barrier for many vulnerable children but particularly for looked after children, Gypsy/Travellers and asylum seekers. Their mobility can mean that they may not be entered for examinations, or may be entered but are not at school when examinations take place. Their mobility will also mean that they are likely to be starting courses and then moving on to other schools that may be using a different awarding body, specification, style of teaching, and/or different options. Issues were raised concerning lost coursework and a lack of educational information transfer between providers.
- All vulnerable pupils may experience gaps in their education, for example due to their medical needs, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, family commitments or time spent in custody.
- Accessing a school place was seen as a particular barrier for asylum seekers, refugees and other new arrivals arriving part way through key stage 4. Concerns were raised about the placing of these young people in alternative educational provision and the detrimental impact this may have on their ability to access examinations.
- Language issues were a barrier for asylum seekers, refugees and other EAL students. Whilst students might acquire ‘surface’ fluency in language skills relatively quickly, they did not acquire the academic literacy skills necessary for written work, thus impacting on their ability to access examinations.
- The non-identification of young carers (and their consequent needs) may be a key barrier to this vulnerable group accessing examinations.

¹ Appendix 1 provides details of barriers and solutions identified for each group individually

- For those young people in vulnerable accommodation (i.e. temporary and often inadequate accommodation e.g. in hostels, refuges, bed and breakfast accommodation or Gypsy/Travellers living on the roadside, all of whom may be subject to frequent moves), inadequate levels of communication between the key agencies involved (housing, social services and education) could result in schools/LEAs receiving little prior notification of a young person leaving or arriving. This could inevitably impact on schools' and other educational providers' ability to access information relating to examination entry and coursework completed. The development of children's and young people's services, with closer working and integration of services, seeks to address this issue.

Difficulties/needs of the vulnerable young people themselves: key solutions/recommendations

At a national/policy level:

- The need for a national framework for accessing and/or transferring coursework and any information relating to progress towards examinations was highlighted.
- Opportunities to access alternative education opportunities need to be widened and to be available earlier.
- An extension of the two-year cut off point for the use of bilingual dictionaries should also be considered, given the evidence that it may take up to five years for a learner to reach the same level of 'academic' language competence as a native speaker. It was also suggested that the use of electronic dictionaries, currently not permitted by JCQ regulations, would be a significant improvement.

At a school/education provider level:

- Schools need to ensure that records regarding educational information and data are transferred when young people move, as required by regulation.
- Many vulnerable pupils are operating at pre-GCSE levels, thus increased opportunities for students to access accreditation at Entry Level and Level 1 to allow young people to achieve and, if appropriate, begin working towards GCSE would be appropriate. The provision of transferable forms of accreditation for students moving between educational providers may assist this process.
- The provision of further opportunities for examinations in community languages, and expanding the range of GCSEs available in community languages, e.g. Somali, would be beneficial for EAL students. Evidence suggests that the development of first language skills also assists students in learning a second language. Allowing students to be entered for examinations as early as possible was also felt to be useful.

- There is a need to ensure that key stage 4 new arrivals, where they are able, are given opportunities to access GCSEs.
- Increased attention to linguistic and cultural factors in the writing of GCSE examinations, alongside focused examination support for EAL students to learn the ‘language of examinations’, would improve access and performance.
- There is a need to improve the academic literacy of EAL students and ensure there are sufficient resources to support this work.
- There is a need for improved methods for identifying young carers, whilst remaining sensitive to their situation.
- The appointment of specific ‘examinations mentors’ for vulnerable pupils e.g. Gypsy/Travellers, may assist their retention in school, as well as improving access to examinations.

4 Issues of training, knowledge, and resources: key barriers and challenges

- There may be a lack of awareness of access arrangements available for students with particular needs amongst some staff working with vulnerable pupils.
- A lack of parental support and awareness of the examinations system was identified as a particular barrier for children whose parents had little experience of secondary school or education in the UK.
- The appointment of dedicated examinations officers for EOTAS providers would be useful, although it was acknowledged that this was unlikely given budgetary constraints.

Issues of training, knowledge, and resources: key solutions/ recommendations

At a national/policy level:

- There is a need to simplify/streamline examination entry procedures. The National Assessment Agency’s examinations modernisation programme should assist this process, whereby the major awarding bodies will begin to use universal forms and documentation for key aspects of the examination process. However, full use of these improvements will rely on centres having access to adequate ICT facilities.
- There is a need to provide examinations officers in out-of-school provision, who may be relatively isolated, with information/training about what they can do to support students. Such information needs to be available in an accessible format.

At a school/education provider level:

- Generally, there was felt to be a need for greater awareness of the JCQ regulations and guidance around access arrangements and special consideration. The need for this information to be widely accessible to teachers, support staff, specialist services and parents, as well as SENCOs and examinations officers, was stressed.
- The importance of regular whole-staff training on access arrangements and special consideration was highlighted. Specific training for staff working with vulnerable pupils was also called for, both in terms of the procedures for making access arrangements, and on how to manage them in practice. In addition, tailored training and guidance for those education providers moderating the work of less able students also emerges as a recommendation from the study.
- There is a need to ensure that communication and information exchange is effective between staff within organisations (e.g. between SENCOs and examinations officers about the needs of vulnerable young people requiring access arrangements), as well as with young people and parents. The importance of early planning and ongoing communication was emphasised.
- Staff with specialisms regarding vulnerable children and those with specialisms in relation to the examination process need to come together to share expertise.
- There is a need to ensure that strategies for informing parents about examination procedures and processes are as accessible as possible, for example by ensuring that they are available in a wide range of community languages.
- More effective communication links and information exchange still need to be established to inform agencies of a young person's impending arrival/departure.

5 Legal powers, duties and responsibilities: key barriers and challenges

- A lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities can mean that vulnerable young people become 'lost' from the system because no one is taking responsibility for them. A lack of communication between providers can lead pupils who have been out of their mainstream school for some time to be 'overlooked' at the time of examination entry.
- Schools may be reluctant to enter some vulnerable pupils for examinations because of the perceived negative impact they will have on the school's performance.
- It should be noted that GCSEs are not compulsory examinations² although schools have a duty to enter young people for any examination they have been prepared for³.

² GCSEs FAQs. On-line available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/qualifications/faq.cfm?sID=1>

³ ACE Bulletin 123 January 2005 p.18

Legal powers, duties and responsibilities: key solutions/ recommendations

At a national/policy level:

- There is a need to clarify staff roles and responsibilities (in relation to examinations i.e. who is responsible for providing work, for examination entry etc.) with regard to excluded pupils and those in alternative provision.

At a school/education provider level:

- There is a need for targets/benchmarks regarding examination attainment for all vulnerable children similar to those in place for looked after children. A lack of benchmarks for other vulnerable groups means that educational providers may not be as focused at addressing examination attainment for these groups as they are with looked after children.
- It was clear that where there was commitment from senior managers within school for vulnerable children to access examinations, this happened. Senior managers need to take responsibility for the performance of vulnerable children within schools, signalling to the whole school their ownership of these young people. The attainment of vulnerable children should be viewed as a school inclusion issue.
- Schools need to maintain responsibility for those pupils who remain on roll but may not be attending school, either by providing work or providing other educational providers with details of work to be completed.
- Educational providers need to be aware of their responsibilities and need to ensure that they transfer information (educational records, data, coursework) when a young person leaves them. Greater accountability is required in relation to the transfer of information. More effective communication links/liaison between educational providers should ensure that educational information is transferred when pupils move schools/providers

Conclusions

The report has highlighted many barriers that exist that prevent or increase the difficulties surrounding vulnerable young people's access to examinations, focusing on difficulties at a number of levels i.e. policy, curriculum, education provider and young people. The report also demonstrated that, where vulnerable children have successfully participated within the examinations system, the key to their success lay in the flexible approaches adopted by support staff and schools and effective communication between providers. Key elements to improve vulnerable children's access to examinations thus include:

- Opportunities for vulnerable children to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation

- Opportunities for vulnerable children to access GCSE-equivalent accreditation or qualifications at a lower level appropriate to their ability at that time
- The development of portable learning packages
- Flexibility in the time taken to complete accreditation
- Greater flexibility regarding the location of examination centres
- Ensuring that educational providers transfer educational information, data and coursework when young people move
- More effective communication between providers, including the clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Increasing parental awareness of the examinations system
- Training in moderation and assessment for access arrangements for staff working with key stage 4 vulnerable children.

Part One

Background

1.1 Introduction

The educational engagement and attainment of vulnerable children are issues identified by the Government as an area of concern. The Vulnerable Children Grant, introduced in April 2003, aimed to support LEAs in raising the attainment of vulnerable groups, including looked-after children, children unable to attend school due to medical needs, Gypsy/Traveller children, asylum seekers, young carers, school refusers, teenage parents and young offenders. In addition, pupils with special educational needs (SEN), excluded pupils, minority ethnic pupils and children whose parents choose to educate them at home may also experience difficulties accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4.

Entry to public examinations may be seen as particularly problematic for vulnerable pupils. Some barriers will be common to a number of the vulnerable groups, namely reduced school attendance, lengthy periods out of school or disengagement from education. While the reasons for absence from school may be various ('voluntary' or phobic non-attendance, care duties for a parent or child, time spent in custody, periods in hospital or family mobility), the outcomes will be similar. Irregular school attendance during key stage 4 will result in interruption to coursework and syllabus coverage, and is likely to be a key barrier to participation in GCSE examinations. Reviewing evidence and perspectives on this issue is therefore an important dimension of understanding pupil vulnerability.

It should be noted that the majority of this research project took place prior to the publication of the Tomlinson Report (Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004)⁴, and outside of the proposals set out in the subsequent White Paper (Great Britain, 2005)⁵. The perspectives and experiences of practitioners relayed in this report should be taken within this context. Appendix 6 gives an overview of the proposals of the 14-19 White Paper that relate to the issues discussed in the present report.

1.2 Methodology

The research documented in this report set out to examine the barriers to vulnerable children accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4, as well as identifying strategies used to overcome such barriers. The research was conducted between June 2004 and February 2005.

The aims of the research were to:

⁴ published 18th October 2004

⁵ published 23rd February 2005

- establish a fuller picture of the way in which the current arrangements for access to examinations impact on vulnerable pupils
- identify barriers and obstacles that prevent access to examinations
- identify good practice and possible solutions, as perceived by key stakeholders.

The study was divided into two complementary phases:

1. **Phase one: the developmental phase** provided an initial overview of existing research evidence (and other documentation) in this area. A small number of organisations/individuals working with vulnerable children were also contacted to explore their insights into supporting vulnerable young people's access to examinations at key stage 4. They were asked to highlight what they saw as the main barriers to vulnerable children accessing examinations, as well as to identify strategies for supporting young people's access. Relevant websites were also explored, including those of the unitary awarding bodies, QCA and organisations who might be working with these groups of vulnerable young people.
2. **Phase two: key stakeholder survey.** In order to explore the issues surrounding vulnerable children's access to examinations in greater detail a telephone survey was conducted with key stakeholders from 40 LEAs, including LEA staff, specialist services and teaching staff. Key stakeholders included representatives from Traveller education services (TES), schools, pupil referral units (PRUs), hospital and home tuition services, young offenders' institutions (YOIs), teenage parents units, young carers' organisations, LEA officers, home education organisations and looked-after children's services. In addition, interviews were also conducted with representatives from the unitary awarding bodies, QCA, the National Assessment Agency (NAA), the Exam Officers' Association, ASDAN and the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ).

During Phase Two of the research, a total of 94 interviews were conducted with a range of providers representing all the vulnerable groups identified. Interviewees were asked to identify barriers and obstacles that prevent access to examinations, as well as highlighting good practice and possible solutions.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the interviews conducted for each group. It should be noted that some interviewees were providing insights for more than one vulnerable group, (for example in the looked after children group, the head of alternative educational provision and the alternative education provider were working with a wide range of young people out of school). The research aimed to achieve a minimum of six interviews per vulnerable group. However, in some instances interviewees suggested that researchers contact other colleagues to provide further insights into this area and thus the totals for some groups exceeded that number.

Table 1 List of interviewees

Vulnerable group	Number of interviews	Title of interviewee
Looked after children	9	LEA looked after children coordinator/manager (5) Assistant headteacher and nominated teacher for looked after children (1) Examinations officer in a school with a large number of looked after children (1) Head of alternative educational provision (1) Alternative education provider (1)
Young Offenders	7	Young offenders' institution education manager (5) Youth offending team teacher (2)
Teenage parents	8	School examination officers (2) PRU/teenage parent unit examination officers (2) Head of teenage parent unit (1) Teenage pregnancy reintegration officer (1) Head of EOTAS (1) School SENCO (1)
School refusers	6	Head of PRU (2) Head /team manager of home and hospital support service (2) Head of school refusers/teenage pregnancy unit (1) PRU examination officer (1)
Ethnic minority pupils/asylum seekers ⁶	14	Head of ethnic minority achievement service (4) Coordinator/team leader refugee asylum seeker support (2) Ethnic minority achievement/refugee and asylum seeker consultants (3) School EAL/EMAG coordinators (3) Teacher in charge refugee support project (1) Headteacher secondary school with large number of minority ethnic pupils (1)
Gypsy/Travellers	8	TES coordinators (3) TES advisory teachers (2) Gypsy/Traveller consultant (1) Head of Learning Support and Specialist Teacher for Traveller Pupils (1) Examinations officer in secondary school with a large number of Gypsy/Traveller pupils (1)
Medical needs	6	Examinations officer hospital school (2) Headteacher hospital school (1) Head of home and hospital tuition service (1) Medical needs education advisor (1) Teacher in charge medical PRU (1)
Young Carers	6	Representative from a young carers organisation (2) LEA representative with remit for young carers (2) Headteacher of secondary school where young carers' projects based (1) Children's society representative (1)
Excluded pupils	9	PRU headteacher (5) Head of EOTAS/Student support coordinator (2) Examinations officer PRU (1) Chair of national PRU network (1)

(Continued on next page)

⁶ ethnic minority pupils and asylum seekers were combined as many of the interviewees overlapped

SEN	7	SENCO (special/mainstream schools) (2) Headteacher special school (1) Representative from National Association for Special Educational Needs (1) Teaching team manager for pupils with specific learning difficulties (1) Examinations officer mainstream school (1) Pupil support manager (1)
Home educators	6	Representative from home education organisations (3) Home educating parent (1) Teacher mediator (1) Representative from unitary awarding body private candidates department (1)
Other organisations	8	Representatives from: The unitary awarding bodies (3), ASDAN (1), NAA (1), Exam Officers Association (1), JCC (1), and QCA (1)

Source: NFER 2005

This report presents research findings within the following structure:

Part One: Background

Following this introduction, the section concludes with a brief outline of the types of qualification which young people may be working towards at key stage 4.

Part Two: Access to examinations: barriers and challenges

This section is divided into the following areas:

- The examination process
- Assessment methodology
- Curriculum barriers
- Wider issues

Within each area, the barriers identified by interviewees are explored, along with strategies described by interviewees that seek to overcome these barriers and challenges.

Part Three: Towards solutions

This section provides an overview of interviewees' suggestions for improving vulnerable children's access to examinations. It includes a summary table of the main suggestions made and concludes with key recommendations for further development.

Appendices

The Appendices consist of:

Appendix 1 provides an overview of the key barriers/challenges raised by interviewees regarding specific vulnerable groups, along with ways in which these may be overcome and suggestions for improvement.

Appendix 2 gives an overview of key contacts and useful documents in the area of examinations and/or support for vulnerable children. Contact details and a brief outline of activities (where applicable) are given.

Appendix 3 provides an overview of the access arrangements available for pupils with particular requirements taking GCSEs.

Appendix 4 details the stages of the exam cycle as identified by the National Assessment Agency.

Appendix 5 presents the findings from a small-scale survey of teachers and support staff working with pupils with special educational needs.

Appendix 6 provides a postscript to this research by highlighting the links between the study and the 14–19 White Paper which was published after the writing of the report.

1.3 Qualifications at key stage 4

To provide some context to subsequent chapters, this section gives a brief outline of the types of qualification which young people are likely to be working towards at key stage 4.

Most young people at key stage 4 will be studying at Levels 1 or 2 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF is a structured system of classifying all qualifications accredited by the three regulatory authorities of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (QCA, ACCAC and CCEA). The NQF includes three categories of external qualification: General (including GCSEs); Vocational (including GNVQs and vocational GCSEs); and Occupational (including National Vocational Qualifications). The NQF has been recently revised with effect from September 2004. The table below gives an overview of the nine levels of the NQF and examples of qualifications at each level (alongside equivalent qualifications in the Framework for Higher Education).

	National Qualifications Framework	Framework for Higher Education
Level 8	Vocational diplomas	Doctoral
Level 7	Vocational certificates and diplomas; NVQ 5	Masters
Level 6	Vocational certificates and diplomas;	Honours
Level 5	Vocational certificates and diplomas; NVQ 4; Key skills	Intermediate
Level 4	Vocational certificates and diplomas	Certificate
Level 3	Vocational certificates and diplomas; NVQ 3; Key skills; A levels	
Level 2	GCSE Grades A*–C ; Vocational certificates and diplomas; NVQ 2; Key skills	
Level 1	GCSE Grades D–G ; Vocational certificates and diplomas; NVQ 1; Key skills	
Entry Level	Basic skills; Entry level certificates (Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3)	

Source: Adapted from <http://www.qca.org.uk/493.html>

Studies at Levels 1 and 2 typically comprise the **General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)** in up to 12 subjects, and may also include vocational qualifications or key skills. GCSEs were introduced in 1986 with the first awards made in 1988. The most recent revisions to GCSEs were made in 2001. GCSEs generally take two years to complete and are available in over 50 subjects. Assessment usually includes both coursework and ‘closed’ external examinations, although examination-only specifications are available in some subjects. While a minority of GCSEs include modular assessment, most are assessed at the end of the two-year course, when students are in Year 11. **GCSE short courses** are also available in a smaller number of subjects, taking one year to complete and being equivalent to half a GCSE (but of an equal standard). GCSEs are graded A* to G, with an ‘ungraded’ U category. Several subjects are available at two ‘tiers’: higher and foundation. At foundation level, the highest grade it is possible to achieve is grade C.

General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were introduced in 1994, and were designed to give young people experience in broad areas of work, for example, leisure and tourism or business studies. At key stage 4, students would typically work towards GNVQ Part One, at Foundation or Intermediate level, this being equivalent to two GCSEs. GNVQ Part One is in the process of being withdrawn over the next three years, to be replaced by Vocational GCSEs. **Vocational GCSEs** were introduced in 2002 (with the first awards made in summer 2004) and are currently available in eight subjects, focusing on practical skills and applied knowledge and understanding. They take two years to complete, are equivalent to two GCSEs and possible grades range from A*A*-GG. Assessment is through a combination of internally assessed (and externally moderated) portfolio and external examination. Vocational GCSEs may also involve a work placement. **National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)** are primarily designed to accredit adults in the workplace, in specific aspects of their job. However, young people undertaking a regular work placement during key stage 4 may be able to work towards an NVQ at Level 1 or 2.

Key skills qualifications are available at Levels 1 to 4 in the following areas: communication; application of number; information and communication technology; improving own learning and performance; problem solving; and working with others. The first three of these are assessed by an external test and an internally assessed portfolio, while the latter three – the ‘wider key skills’ – are assessed by portfolio only. (A single unit in personal skills development is available at Level 5, though this is not currently accredited as a qualification.)

Some young people at key stage 4 will be working at a standard below Level 1 of the NQF. In these cases, students may work towards **Entry Level** qualifications, which are available at three tiers: Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3. These are roughly equivalent to levels 1, 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum. Entry Level qualifications are offered by several awarding bodies (including all of the unitary awarding bodies) and are available in a wide range of National Curriculum and vocational subjects, as well as basic and life skills. Many Entry Level qualifications are made up of separately assessed ‘unit awards’ which can be accumulated over time and combined into a ‘certificate’ qualification. There is no fixed time-limit within which an Entry Level certificate must be completed. Online information from QCA (2004a) notes that:

There are no rules about which units, or how many, must be included in a certificate. This means awarding bodies can create certificates that meet the diverse needs of learners at this level. The units can also be at one or more of the Entry sublevels.

Assessment at Entry Level is through a combination of external and internal assessment. External assessment may include practical, written or oral tests and assignments, while the internal element typically comprises a portfolio of evidence in various forms (e.g. witness statements, video, photographs).

For pupils studying in mainstream schools, there are a number of compulsory subjects to be studied at key stage 4. Following changes to the key stage 4 curriculum, which took effect in September 2004, the compulsory subjects are English, maths, science, and information and communications technology (ICT). All students will also continue to be taught citizenship, PE, religious education, careers education and sex education. Schools are no longer required to teach modern foreign languages and design and technology to all pupils. Instead there is a new category of 'entitlement areas', including arts, design and technology, humanities and modern foreign languages. Students within key stage 4 are able to follow a course of study in a subject within each of the entitlement areas if they wish to do so. There is also a new requirement for work-related learning.

The introduction of the entitlement areas for design and technology and modern foreign languages means that there will no longer be a need for key stage 4 'disapplication' arrangements relating to these subjects. As set out by the DfES (2003a) disapplication could be authorised in order for a student to take part in an extended work experience programme or where it was felt to be otherwise in their educational interests. These arrangements ceased to have effect in September 2004. A new reduced programme of study for science is planned for introduction in 2006; until then, there will be a need to retain those parts of the disapplication arrangements relating to science. Therefore, the key stage 4 disapplication regulations will be amended, with effect from September 2004, so that it will still be possible to modify or disapply science to allow a student to participate in extended work-related learning. Once the new science programme of study is introduced in 2006, the amended KS4 disapplication regulations will be withdrawn.

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) providing education for young people out of school due to exclusion or other reasons are not obliged to deliver the full National Curriculum. However, DfES guidance (DfES, 2004a) requires that there is coverage of English, maths, science, ICT and careers education and guidance (post-13). The number of subjects studied at GCSE by pupils attending PRUs is likely to be fewer than that of their mainstream peers. The range of qualifications offered may also differ from mainstream schools, to include more key skills and/or Entry Level accreditation.

Towards the end of this research project, the report of the Tomlinson Working Group was published (Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004), setting out proposed reforms to the 14-19 curriculum. A key element of the proposed structure was the replacement of the current system of GCSEs and A-levels with a Diploma framework at four levels (Entry; Foundation; Intermediate; and Advanced), which would equate to the current

Entry to Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework, but would be more flexible, allowing learners to progress through the levels at their own pace. It was suggested that the diploma would comprise core learning (English, mathematics and ICT) and main learning (specialist interests), alongside training in wider personal, social and vocational skills. Up to age 16, the current National Curriculum would still be covered in all programmes of study.

The proposals of the Tomlinson Working Group were positively received by the Government⁷, who responded with the White Paper '*14-19 Education and Skills*' (Great Britain, 2005) in February 2005. The 14-19 White Paper (ibid) acknowledges the important work of the Tomlinson Working Group and adopts many of its key recommendations. Although the central proposal of the Tomlinson Report – to replace the current system of GCSEs and A-level with a four-tier Diploma structure – was not fully embraced, the White Paper introduces the system of **general and specialist Diplomas** at level 1 (foundation), level 2 (GCSE) and 3 (advanced). A general Diploma at Level 2 will comprise five GCSEs to include maths and English as compulsory. This will become the measure of attainment for Achievement and Attainment Tables ('league tables') by 2008. Fourteen specialist Diplomas, which will include both academic and vocational material, are to be introduced in a range of subjects covering '*each occupational sector of the economy*'. The first four specialist Diplomas (in ICT, engineering, health and social care, and creative and media) will be in place by 2008. Eight 'lines' will be available by 2010 and all 14 will be available as a national entitlement by 2015.

⁷ The Secretary of State's Statement of response to the Tomlinson Report can be found online at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=10&pid=132&ctype=TEXT&ptype=Single>

Part Two

Access to examinations: barriers and challenges

2.1 Introduction

Part Two focuses on the barriers and challenges identified by interviewees during the telephone survey. It also presents interviewees' solutions/strategies for overcoming these barriers. Where appropriate, examples of strategies identified as overcoming barriers are presented in shaded boxes.

The discussion covers four distinct aspects of examination access:

- Firstly, how the various stages of the **examination process** may present barriers to vulnerable children accessing examinations, for example in relation to accessing an examination centre, or obtaining access arrangements for candidates with special requirements.
- Secondly, how the **assessment methodology** itself (examinations and coursework) can pose challenges or barriers to particular vulnerable groups.
- Thirdly, **barriers to accessing the curriculum**, such as mobility, which might impact on vulnerable children's ability to take examinations at the end of key stage 4.
- Finally, a discussion of some of the **wider issues**, such as social concerns and low expectations, which may prevent vulnerable children accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4.

It should be noted that some of the issues raised, such as personal and social factors, lack of access to a school place and mobility, arise as recurring themes throughout these four aspects (**the examination process, assessment methodology, curriculum barriers, and wider issues**).

2.2 The examination process

This section considers the various stages or elements of the examination process, which might potentially pose challenges or barriers to vulnerable groups and/or those providing their education. The NAA identifies five key stages of the 'exam cycle': communications with candidates, entries, exam preparation, exam time, and results (NAA, 2004). Within these five, there are a number of sub-stages, which are outlined in Appendix 4. A number of these stages, plus others, have been highlighted by participants in the present study as posing potential barriers or challenges to vulnerable groups or those assisting them through the examinations process. The stages which could impact on vulnerable children's access to examinations have been identified as follows:

- **Access to an examination centre**
- **Entering candidates**
- **Access arrangements and special consideration**
- **Authentication, marking and moderation**

In the discussion below, each of the above aspects is outlined, along with consideration of the issues which might affect different vulnerable groups and ways in which these might be overcome. Data is drawn from the interviews carried out as part of the LEA survey and illustrative cameos are included as relevant. Reference is also made to key documents or organisations, further details of which can be found in Appendix 2.

2.2.1 The examination process: access to an examination centre

Issues identified with regard to vulnerable children's access to an examination centre can be grouped into two main areas:

- barriers of 'affiliation' to an examination centre
- physical/logistical barriers to examination centre access.

Access to an examination centre: barriers of 'affiliation'

In order to conduct examinations, schools, colleges and other educational establishments (e.g. Pupil Referral Units) must be registered as an examination centre with the relevant awarding bodies. There are certain criteria which must be adhered to in order to conduct examinations including, for example, adequate secure storage facilities and the layout of the examination hall. Centres are subject to inspection by awarding bodies. All mainstream secondary schools and many Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are registered with one or more of the major awarding bodies. PRU-based interviewees in the LEA survey reported few problems in gaining examination centre status, although one headteacher explained that s/he had limited to two the number of awarding bodies the centre had registered with, due to the amount of associated paperwork and inspections. However, smaller non-mainstream providers and those located in less 'traditional' premises may face more difficulties in meeting the criteria for examination centre status. For example, one interviewee operating an Education Other than at School (EOTAS) service out of an open-plan office described the challenges encountered in satisfying the awarding bodies that the security of examination papers could be guaranteed. Through the NAA's Examinations Office Upgrade scheme, which currently runs from December 2004 until February 2005, 'capital equipment grants' have been made available to examinations officers in registered centres, in order to improve ICT, storage and security facilities in examinations offices. However, there has been no specific action to date to fund equipment for non-registered establishments that wish to become examination centres.

With the exception of those entering as private candidates (see below), any pupil wishing to take a GCSE examination must be on the roll of a registered examination centre. While all mainstream schools will be registered centres, for some vulnerable children, a fundamental barrier to accessing an examination centre will be the lack of any school place: *'If they're out of school and out of provision they're not going to be entering anything'* (Team Leader for Refugees and Asylum Seekers). This issue was

raised by interviewees in relation to **asylum seekers** and **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils and could also be problematic for **school refusers**, **looked after children** (including unaccompanied asylum seekers) and other ‘hard to place’ or ‘mobile’ pupils. Particularly at key stage 4, challenges may be faced in terms of a shortage of mainstream school places for **asylum seekers**, in some cases compounded by schools’ reluctance to admit these pupils.

Access to an examination centre for asylum seeker pupils

In one LEA, challenges for asylum seeker pupils had been overcome to some extent through collaboration with a local FE college. College places within the ESOL department had been made available to asylum seekers arriving at key stage 4, which provided young people with the required 25 hours provision per week, addressed their language needs and offered ESOL accreditation in the areas of literacy, numeracy and ICT. However, it was also recognised that pupils did not have access to the full range of GCSEs, and that their skills in subjects such as science, arts and technology may not be cultivated and accredited. Another option in place in this LEA was the provision of individual tuition for asylum seekers, and an agreement from a mainstream school to enter these young people for examinations, even though they were not on the school’s roll. It was noted that the effectiveness of this arrangement was possible due largely to the cooperation and ‘goodwill’ of the schools involved.

Gypsy/Traveller pupils at key stage 4 may also be without a school place, due to high mobility, cultural beliefs, or where the family has opted to home educate. Where a family is in contact with a Traveller Education Service (TES), attempts may be made to enter a young person as a private candidate. However, this process (described below) may be difficult for parents with low literacy levels, and schools’ reluctance to take on private candidates may also prove a barrier.

Interviewees in **young offenders’** institutions (YOIs) generally reported no problems regarding access to an examination centre, in that the institutions were all registered with the necessary awarding bodies. More problematic, for one interviewee, was accessing an examination centre for boys leaving his institution close to an examination. Delayed contact with youth offending teams (YOTs) and the stigma of disaffection and offending meant that it could be difficult to locate a willing examination centre, though this issue was in the process of being addressed:

We sometimes have difficulty in getting the sort of contact with the youth offending teams, and they then have difficulty in getting a centre who will let the kid sit the exam on the outside. ... A lot of our lads have either not been in school very much, or when they departed, the school was not sorry to see them go and doesn’t want them back again (Education Manager, YOI).

Regarding **excluded pupils** and **teenage parents**, the majority of PRUs and specialist units contacted in the LEA survey were again registered with one or more awarding bodies. Thus, few problems were reported regarding access to an examination centre for their pupils, although the paperwork involved in transferring candidates was occasionally cited as burdensome (see Section 2.2.2). One interviewee highlighted the crucial importance of examination centre status for alternative providers, not only in overcoming logistical barriers (see below), but also in linking into the information network around the whole examination process:

Since becoming an exam centre we have definitely overcome the barriers. The key is that you've got to be an exam centre really, because when you are an exam centre you start to realise what is available for these people (Teaching Team Manager for Anxious School Refusers).

In a small number of authorities, however, EOTAS providers were not registered as examination centres. In such cases, one solution was for pupils to remain on the roll of their mainstream school and to be entered via this centre, as described in the cameo below regarding **teenage parents**. It was noted by one interviewee that **excluded pupils** attending the LEA's alternative programmes were often working at a level below GCSE standard and, as such, access to an examination centre was largely not an issue. In the exceptional cases where a young person had been studying at Level 1 or 2, they were generally able to return to their mainstream school to sit examinations. Additionally, in some LEAs, arrangements were described whereby a provider registered with awarding bodies (e.g. the PRU) would accept candidate entries from other smaller LEA services which were not registered in their own right (e.g. home tuition services for pupils with **medical needs**, anxious **school refusers'** groups), either by private candidate arrangements or entering pupils as their own:

It's not really worth them being an examination centre, so we're administering any exams they want to do, as well as our own ... We are removing that barrier from some other students who would otherwise not have access (Headteacher, PRU).

Access to an examination centre for teenage parents

In the case of one unit for teenage parents, a policy decision had been made not to become an examination centre: the LEA's ethos being to encourage girls' reintegration after the birth of the baby:

I'm reluctant to go down that route because once we register as a centre, then I think the working relationship that we have with the schools [will be affected] ... I think once we're registered as a centre, there's the temptation to say 'Well you can just do it through EOTAS' (Head of EOTAS Service).

In this LEA, girls could return to school to sit their exams (under separate or small group invigilation if necessary) or an alternative accommodation arrangement⁸ could be made, whereby the girls could take the examinations at the specialist unit.

A group who face particular barriers in accessing an examination centre are **home educated** young people who, if not on a school roll but wish to take GCSEs, will most commonly enter as a private candidate. This means that access to a centre (registered with the appropriate awarding bodies) will need to be negotiated on an individual basis by the family. The centre would then complete the necessary paperwork, indicating private candidate status where relevant. On request, AQA and Edexcel will provide a list of examination centres that have indicated a willingness to accept private candidates, although inclusion on this list does not mean they are obliged to do so; acceptance of private candidates remains at the discretion of the centre. Awarding bodies themselves are also under no obligation to secure

⁸ See Section 2.2.3 for details of such arrangements.

examination centre access for private candidates, and deal only with entries coming directly from a registered examination centre.

While interviewees who had home educated their own children reported differing experiences in terms of the ease of this process, overall it emerged as a key barrier for this group. In many cases, mainstream schools were found to be reluctant to accept private candidates, particularly where practical or oral examinations were involved. As one parent noted: *'I've only ever gone to a centre and asked for written exams. I don't even try asking for practical exams because it's just not reasonable for a centre to put themselves out that much for a child that isn't theirs'*. It was also suggested that schools may have concerns about an 'unknown quantity' affecting their league tables. However, given that private candidates do not have to be included on these records, this would seem something of a non-sequitur, attributable to a lack of information (notwithstanding the fact that home educated pupils generally achieve very highly). Representatives of the Home Education Advisory Service (HEAS) and Education Otherwise acknowledged that schools have a sizeable workload in dealing with their own candidates and that private candidates could be *'on the whole, a bit of a nuisance'*, but felt that perhaps a clearer understanding of what private candidate entry entailed may reduce some of their apprehension:

Lack of understanding [is a problem] and also lack of time to get to grips with it. They have enough trouble organising their own exam administration without fiddling about with private candidates (Representative of HEAS).

A home educating parent stressed the need for families to contact examination centres early, as finding a willing centre could be a lengthy process. As noted by a representative of HEAS, however, this could prove difficult in cases where a young person had come out of school during Year 11 as a result of emotional or behavioural difficulties. In such instances, there may be little time to make arrangements, or entry deadlines may have been missed (see Section 2.2.2). As one parent noted, the only option may be to *'throw in the towel for that year'* and retake GCSE courses in Year 12.

Changes to awarding bodies' services have also impacted on this group. Until recently, AQA ran an 'open centre' in London, which would accept entries for any of the specifications available to private candidates. However, this centre closed following the summer 2004 examination session, for reasons of financial and practical viability. Edexcel's London open centre is also no longer in operation. One home educating parent described how the upcoming closure of the AQA centre had led her to enter her 13-year-old son for science GCSE earlier than she felt was appropriate: *'I had to say to him "Look, you've got to do these science GCSEs, because it might be the last chance" ... I was pressurised into putting my child in too early for those exams'*.

One way of overcoming these barriers may be to enter for the International GCSEs (IGCSEs) currently offered by London Examinations (via Edexcel International). All of these specifications include a non-coursework option and thus are more accessible for home educated young people. From summer 2005, Edexcel IGCSEs will be available in a wide range of National Curriculum and other subjects. Edexcel have stated that any independent school or FE college that is already a registered Edexcel

examination centre can become a host centre for IGCSEs, although there are currently just three centres nationally which host these examinations (based in Southampton, London and Cambridge). From May 2005, the company Exams Together Ltd plans to provide three additional open centres for the Edexcel IGCSE, based in London, Manchester and Birmingham.

Representatives of HEAS and Education Otherwise were able to cite a small number of school- or college-based examination centres across the country with a reputation for positive attitudes towards private candidates (and can provide details to families on request). Given the scarcity of centres accepting private candidates, however, families may need to travel some distance to access a centre, sometimes on repeated occasions. This may incur costs for transport, overnight stays and possibly childcare arrangements for other members of the family. These financial costs come in addition to the examination fee and any surcharge made by the examination centre.

Overall, there was a sense that tenacity on the part of home-educating parents was a key factor in overcoming barriers of access to examination centres, though the scope for this depended very much on the extent to which parents felt confident or empowered to make requests of schools. Some families had found local schools supportive and come to successful arrangements for entering their children, although it was acknowledged that such accommodation was not ‘the norm’. As one parent noted, referring to the list of centres supplied by the awarding bodies: *‘When you get that list, it looks very hopeful, you think “Oh look! There’s 20 schools in [my area]”. But the reality is that when you start ringing round, they’re not interested’*. An alternative option might be to join a GCSE class at an adult education centre or college, thus becoming a candidate of that centre. However, the feasibility of this would depend on several factors, including: the ‘philosophy’ of the home-educating family; the appropriateness of the adult learning environment for the young person (e.g. where emotional or psychological problems contributed to the withdrawal from school); the admissions policy of the college or adult education centre; and funding regulations.

Access to an examination centre for home educated young people

A home educating family whose son was keen to take music GCSE had arranged for him to join the music class of the local school on a regular basis. The parents were still required to pay the examination entry fee, but the school agreed to enter the young person for music GCSE as one of its own pupils (the music specification not being open to private candidates). The boy was also taking sociology and economics by correspondence course. The school agreed to also enter him for these examinations, even though they were not subjects taught by the school to its own pupils. The family acknowledged how fortunate they had been in having such a supportive school: *‘A lot of schools take the line that they’re not prepared to have private candidates on their books, and families really struggle to find exam centres that they can access’*.

Notably, no barriers of the examination centre ‘affiliation’ type were highlighted by interviewees specifically in relation to pupils with **special educational needs**.

Access to an examination centre: physical/logistical barriers

Under the provision of access arrangements (see Section 2.2.3) a candidate may be permitted to sit GCSEs in alternative accommodation to the examination centre. This is subject to the approval of awarding bodies, and would be appropriate where the candidate is *‘physically or mentally so impaired that they cannot take the paper in the Centre but are considered medically fit to take it elsewhere’* (JCQ, 2004a). In such an arrangement (also referred to by interviewees as *‘transfer of site’* and *‘alternative venue’*) papers are sent to the examination centre, but are then transported under secure supervision to the pupil’s location. The examination is then supervised by an approved person. Examination centres may also apply to the awarding body for permission to open packs of papers up to one hour before the official start time of the examination, for the purposes of transportation. Following the examination, the papers then have to be returned to the examination centre (again under secure supervision) for despatch to markers with the rest of the centre’s scripts.

Interviewees described occasions where this arrangement had been applied in order to overcome barriers of pupils’ physical or logistical access to an examination centre. For example, pupils with **medical needs** (e.g. confined to a wheelchair) or **teenage parents** close before or immediately following delivery would be enabled to sit examinations in their home or in hospital if it was felt to be appropriate. One LEA had organised for serious **young offenders**, under supervision in the community, to sit examinations in the premises of the local YOT offices. Elsewhere, examples were given of young people leaving police custody temporarily to sit an examination, and in one case, an examination being invigilated in a police cell:

We did a first this year ... one of ours went shoplifting on the way into his exam, was held in the cells, and as it was a science exam and he’d already done two bits of it, we went down and invigilated it in the cells. So we will just do whatever we have to do to get these exams done (Headteacher, PRU).

The alternative venue arrangement was also used on a more ‘permanent’ basis in some authorities. In one LEA a ‘virtual PRU’ model was in operation, whereby **excluded pupils** attended one of a range of educational programmes at various venues across the authority. Elsewhere, in a large county LEA, a ‘study centre’ model with a hub centre and other local study venues was in place. Representatives of EOTAS services in these LEAs described a ‘satellite’ or ‘roving’ centre arrangement, whereby the central LEA venue was a registered examination centre, but pupils could sit their GCSEs at their normal place of study or a more local mainstream school, subject to the approval of awarding bodies. In contrast, a transfer of site arrangement could also be a ‘last minute’ option, for example, where a pupil was excluded shortly before an examination and was not permitted to return to the school premises.

Alternative accommodation arrangements clearly overcame the barriers of ‘physical’ access to an examination centre for many vulnerable pupils. Furthermore, it was not described as being particularly problematic administratively: *‘That one’s fairly straightforward, in the sense that all I’ve got to do is explain why, and get the status of the teacher that I’m going to use ratified by the board beforehand’* (Headteacher, PRU). However, the logistics of organising delivery of papers – potentially collecting from several schools and/or despatching to several alternative venues within a limited time – was cited as challenging by several interviewees. A number recounted early

mornings and frantic car journeys around the authority to deliver papers to candidates taking examinations at home or at various dispersed study centres:

If the pupils we have are still on the roll of their mainstream school and if the actual school does a different board we can still administer those exams as long as the school okay it with the board. But it generally tends to involve our tutors rushing round the city on the morning of the exam picking up papers and rushing back again (Teacher in Charge, Medical Needs PRU).

While some providers had found ways to minimise these problems (see cameo below), it was nonetheless felt to be impractical and there were calls for more flexibility on the part of awarding bodies in terms of early opening of papers or despatch directly to alternative venues.

Overcoming logistical challenges of alternative venues

A pupil referral unit which catered for pupils at risk of exclusion and acted as host centre for several schools in the area, had appointed 'runners' from within the staff to be ready and waiting at schools to collect examination papers as soon as packs were opened. The PRU also arranged to begin examinations half an hour later than mainstream schools, to maximise the time available to transport papers. In another LEA, the Education Social Worker attached to each pupil would take responsibility for collecting their examination papers and returning them to the school afterwards.

It was noted that where examination papers were despatched to centres in a number of smaller sealed packs (e.g. five papers per pack), these sealed packages could be distributed to 'satellite' centres further in advance, without violating rules about early opening. This arrangement had been used successfully by some PRUs in the survey, where sealed packs of papers could be delivered the day before the examination and stored securely overnight. However, from discussion with an awarding body, it was not clear whether schools could make *specific* requests for these smaller packs. It was only stated that the 'apportioning' of the papers would depend on the total number of candidates the 'main' centre was entering.

At a more 'local' level, under the provisions of access arrangements (described in Section 2.2.3), centres may organise for pupils to sit an examination in another part of the school, away from the main examination hall, where this is felt to be more conducive to the candidate's performance and physical/mental wellbeing. Examples of this given by interviewees included: a **Gypsy/Traveller** pupil who suffered from claustrophobia and was able to sit in a separate room near to a window; and one-to-one invigilation for anxious **school refusers**, where there were concerns about being placed with a large group of children. This issue of 'coping' with the examination setting is discussed further in Section 2.3.

For **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils, family mobility may present challenges in terms of access to an examination centre if the pupil finds themselves a long way from their usual school at the time of examinations. Pupils would have to return to their mainstream school in order to sit an examination and in many cases, the family may simply decide not to make the journey. Absence on the day of an examination may also be an issue for other vulnerable groups, for example, those with **medical needs** or **teenage parents**. In exceptional circumstances, awarding bodies will allow for a candidate to take an examination the day following that on which it has been

scheduled. However, this requires the candidate to have overnight supervision and to remain isolated from his or her peers, and it was noted that the process could be very stressful for the pupils and those supervising them.

Summary of key issues: access to an examination centre

- Examination centre status is essential in order for an educational establishment to offer external examinations. Non-mainstream providers operating out of smaller or less ‘traditional’ premises may find the stipulations for examination centre status (e.g. space, security) more difficult to meet.
- Pupils’ access to examinations is restricted if they are not on the roll of a registered examination centre. This may affect vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers and Gypsy/Travellers without a school place, young offenders leaving custody, and is a key barrier for home educated young people entering as private candidates. For this latter group, the onus is firmly on the candidate to make arrangements for access to an examination centre and options are limited.
- Physical barriers to an examination centre (e.g. for pupils with medical needs or those studying away from their ‘usual’ school) may be overcome through alternative venue arrangements. However, restrictions on early opening and transportation of papers present logistical challenges to providers holding examinations at venues across an authority. There are also vulnerable children who may not be able to access an examination centre at all at the specified time, e.g. Gypsy/Travellers, teenage parents and those with medical needs.

2.2.2 The examination process: entering candidates

In terms of potential challenges for vulnerable groups and their education providers, five main issues emerged regarding entering candidates for GCSE examinations:

- estimated and final entries
- late entry fees
- school reluctance
- transferred candidate arrangements
- administrative issues.

Entering candidates: estimated and final entries

Examination centres are required to provide awarding bodies with estimated candidate entry figures some months before the examination dates. For example, for GCSE examinations taking place in June, estimated entries will be required in the previous October/November, with final entries to be submitted by February. These estimates let awarding bodies know which specifications each centre will be entering, help them to allocate sufficient resources (i.e. examiners and moderators) and enable them to despatch advance materials (e.g. English literature anthologies) to centres.

A key challenge identified by almost all PRU and EOTAS providers was that they simply did not know what their candidate numbers might be at the deadline for either estimated or final entries. With **exclusions** and **teenage pregnancies** occurring throughout the year, pupil numbers were constantly fluctuating, making estimated entries somewhat meaningless:

They want to know how many candidates I will have in 2005 and 2006, and they would like an indication for 2007. Well, I haven't got a crystal ball, so I just think of a number and put it down ... They couldn't reasonably expect me to know this (Headteacher, Teenage Parents' Unit).

It was also noted that, where pupils were disaffected or anxious about education, they sometimes changed their minds about whether they wanted to enter for GCSE examinations – either withdrawing late in the day or deciding at the last minute that they would like to attempt examinations.

One PRU examinations officer mentioned that further difficulties could be encountered in terms of having to register for entire specifications at a late stage. Where staffing resources as well as student numbers were subject to fluctuations, it was sometimes unknown what subjects the unit would be in a position to offer from one examination series to the next. Furthermore, late registration for specifications brought implications in terms of staff training. Staff wishing to teach a particular specification would be required to attend awarding bodies' training events, but where registration was late, these sessions had sometimes been missed, meaning that awarding bodies may not permit centres to offer the specification.

To a great extent, providers 'overcame' the challenge of uncertain numbers through a pragmatic approach and ongoing dialogue with awarding bodies regarding amendments to entry figures. Awarding bodies acknowledge in their guidance that centres will not be able to provide completely accurate estimates and, while the occasional '*stropmy letter*' was received from awarding bodies, interviewees from PRU or EOTAS provisions described a generally sympathetic response.

Entering candidates: late entry fees

Given the ongoing intake of many PRUs and EOTAS services, providers often found themselves subject to the 'late entry fees' imposed by awarding bodies for entries made after the final entry deadline. Entries can be made at any time up to the examination, but surcharges range from around £11 per single examination for a 'late entry', to over £40 for a 'very late entry' in a double award subject.

Late entries were also raised as an issue with regard to vulnerable groups in mainstream school, including: **asylum seekers** arriving late in key stage 4; **Gypsy/Travellers** who were not in school during the spring term and were therefore not entered with the rest of the year group; **looked after children** arriving new to an area; **young offenders** returning from custody; and **school refusers** who had not attended for some time.

Overcoming the challenge of late entry fees seemed largely dependent on the attitudes and willingness of schools and alternative providers to meet these costs. Interviewees representing PRUs and specialist units overwhelmingly showed a very ‘generous’ approach to late entry fees. Rather than viewing the charges as a barrier, most saw late entries as an inevitable feature of their circumstances, and were willing to pay for any pupil wishing to attempt the examinations:

It doesn't stop us doing it ... I just have to be aware of what's going on and I'm ready to do late entries. It's just a hassle but I can't see any other way of doing it really, because it's not the exam bodies' fault that this is happening (Examinations Officer, Teenage Parents' Unit).

However, the scale and exponentially increasing structure of late entry fees was noted as placing financial pressure on centres, particularly smaller units operating on tight budgets. In contrast to the prevailing trend, one interviewee stated that with regard to **school refusers** who declared a late wish to enter, the service would ask parents to pay the late entry fee, if it was felt that they were in a position to do so.

Overcoming challenges of estimated entries and late entry fees
In one LEA, all secondary headteachers had agreed not to permanently exclude pupils from key stage 4 after the autumn term of Year 11. This meant that the PRU's Year 11 intake remained stable throughout the examination series and late entry fees were avoided. All pupils were entered as candidates of the PRU, thus there were also no additional charges due to transferred candidate arrangements. Besides GCSEs, this PRU offered accreditation through AQA Entry Level unit awards in adult literacy and numeracy. These examinations are available ‘on request’ throughout the year, with examination sessions held every month. Using these qualifications for students in the lower ability range was felt to be another way of overcoming the challenge of entry deadlines.

A related issue, specific to **home educators**, was that for young people entering as private candidates, examination entry fees must be met by the family, in addition to any charge the entering centre wishes to make. This may be a ‘per paper’ charge of as much as £50, with some specifications including up to four papers. Thus, costs may be prohibitive for some home educating families.

Entering candidates: school reluctance

In terms of mainstream schools’ attitudes to making late entries, differing experiences were reported. School-based interviewees in the survey showed a positive approach to late arrivals (e.g. **Gypsy/Travellers** and **asylum seekers**):

If the exam were tomorrow and they arrived today from a different area we can put someone in for an exam and do the administration later. That's not a problem for us or the boards. Our policy is that everybody goes in for everything they can (EAL Coordinator, re asylum seeker pupils).

In some cases, however, it was felt that schools’ willingness to accommodate late entries might depend on the ‘calibre’ of the candidate. As noted earlier, some schools were felt to be reluctant to enter candidates who might have a detrimental effect on league tables or who had completed so little coursework that it was felt there was no

chance of making up the shortfall in the time available. As noted by an Ethnic Minority Achievement Consultant: *'Schools generally need to be convinced that there's a good chance of a high grade for them to go ahead with it'*. An interviewee working with **young offenders** reported that in her LEA, schools sometimes refused to make late entries. She noted the negative impact that non-entry could have on a disengaged young person's motivation to reengage with education: *'By that stage, end of January, beginning of February, [pupils] already know if they're not going to be entered for the exams, so they don't see any point in carrying on'* (Education Coordinator, YOT).

Overcoming schools' reluctance to enter candidates

An interviewee working in an anxious school refusers group described local schools' unwillingness to enter the pupils s/he was supporting. Although pupils remained on their mainstream school's roll, the fact that they were often lower achievers or had missed substantial amounts of coursework meant that schools could be reluctant to enter them for examinations. The interviewee explained that unless there were *'extremely legitimate reasons'*, they would insist that pupils were entered for English and maths. However, if the pupil's own school was not forthcoming, the unit would enter pupils as external candidates through another local school that had an on-site unit for school refusers. This centre could also enter candidates up to Year 12, increasing the opportunity for young people to achieve at GCSE level.

Non-entry due to a candidate being 'overlooked' was also highlighted as a potential barrier. One interviewee noted the danger of an *'out-of-sight, out-of-mind'* attitude on the part of schools whereby, for example, if an anxious **school refuser** had been attending alternative provision for some time or a **Gypsy/Traveller** pupil was away travelling, the school may simply forget to enter them or presume that they were not able to take examinations. Another interviewee felt that for **excluded pupils**, one of the key barriers to accessing examinations was *'schools washing their hands of them'*. Anecdotal evidence was also given of schools unwilling to meet the costs of entering **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils when it was doubted that the pupil would be present for the examination. The importance of communication between providers at this stage was stressed. For example, in the case of pupils with long-term **medical needs** it may not be clear to home and hospital teaching providers whether a mainstream school had previously entered a pupil for examinations:

There is a problem with not knowing if the school is entering or not. There is a financial implication for entering candidates, so hospital schools need to have this information more readily available (Examinations Officer, Hospital School).

Funding for examination entries is allocated to schools according to Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data. Thus, the funding will go to the provider on whose roll the young person is in January of a given year. This was noted to have financial implications for EOTAS providers where a pupil remained on the roll of their mainstream school, but the school decided not to enter the young person for examinations. In such cases, EOTAS providers may have to find the funds to enter pupils who wish to take GCSEs from within their own resources.

Entering candidates: transferred candidate arrangements

There may be some circumstances where it is necessary to make a ‘transferred candidate’ arrangement for a vulnerable pupil. This involves a candidate who has been entered by his/her ‘usual’ school (the Entering Centre) taking an examination at another registered centre (the Host Centre) for example, where **medical needs**, **teenage pregnancy** or **exclusion** prevents the pupil from taking the examination at their mainstream school. YOIs may also act as host centres, entering **young offenders** as transferred candidates when a young person is sentenced close to an examination time or is moved from one YOI to another.

Requests for transferred candidate arrangements must usually be made at least four weeks in advance of an examination. The Entering Centre will fill in a request form, which is then forwarded to the Host Centre for completion and final submission to the awarding body. Examination papers for the transferred candidate(s) are despatched to the Host Centre and then sent on directly to markers, unlike alternative site arrangements (described in Section 2.2.1), where papers must be transported from and returned to the Entering Centre on the same day. Results are sent to the Entering Centre, who will be required to include these in their league table figures. Alternatively, a pupil moving to another centre during Year 11 who has been entered for GCSEs may be removed from their previous school roll and entered as a candidate of the new provider. Deciding which of the two options is more appropriate may depend on factors such as: the extent to which the new provider can carry on with the specifications pupils have already begun; the amount of coursework completed; and also on the attitude of the previous school, for example, whether or not they want the pupils’ grades to appear on their own league tables (encounters with both positions were described by interviewees). As noted by one PRU headteacher, centres may agree on a combination of both, whereby a candidate enters some subjects via the mainstream school as a transferred candidate and is also entered for others ‘directly’ by the PRU or EOTAS provider.

Among interviewees, opinion varied regarding the extent to which transferred candidate arrangements constituted a help or a hindrance. In some cases, interviewees felt that, late in Year 11, transferred candidate arrangements were the most suitable and convenient option, meaning that pupils could complete specifications begun in mainstream with minimum disruption. However, in other LEAs, it was deemed more appropriate and/or administratively ‘easier’ for all pupils entering a PRU to be removed from their mainstream school roll and entered as the PRU’s own candidates. The examinations officer of a PRU which catered for both permanently excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion (from a number of schools across the authority) stated that transferred candidate arrangements constituted a particular barrier for his centre. It was felt that, while schools were happy to have disaffected students attend and take their examinations at the PRU site, they still wanted to be credited with the students’ examination results:

That’s the easy way out for them, rather than it being any better for us ... They don’t want them to sit the exam at school, because they’ve caused that many problems ... but [they] still want to say ‘Well we’ve paid for the support, so therefore, we still want whatever you’ve managed to get out of them for our results’ (Examinations Officer, PRU).

In this case, the examinations officer felt that an arrangement whereby all candidates were entered directly via the PRU would make his job much simpler, reducing the administrative load of entering pupils from up to 15 different centres. Indeed, a number of interviewees noted that the administration involved in transferred candidate arrangements could be a burden when a centre was ‘hosting’ candidates from several different schools. However, awarding bodies were reported to be supportive in this process, and for some it was felt to be very straightforward:

Sometimes we do a transfer candidate, and I become the host centre, sometimes the school simply cancels her entry and I enter her. It just depends. But I’ve not found any problems with doing that. [The process] is very straightforward (Headteacher, Teenage Parents Unit).

A potential ‘flaw’ in the transferred candidate process, noted by a Student Support Coordinator for **excluded pupils**, is where the Host Centre is not registered with the required awarding body. Where this issue had arisen, the interviewee described the ‘nightmare’ of trying to persuade the excluding school to enter the pupil with an alternative site arrangement (described in Section 2.2.1). Had this been unsuccessful, the pupil would not have been able to sit the examination at all. Given the minimum four-week notice period usually required for a transferred candidate arrangements, a transfer of site arrangement may also be more appropriate where, for example, a pupil is excluded or falls ill at short notice or in the short term.

Entering candidates: administrative issues

Administrative issues were noted with regard to examination entries for pupils from certain vulnerable groups. An interviewee working with **asylum seekers** noted that confusion could arise where pupils were known by a different name than that which appeared on formal documentation. An examinations officer at a unit for **teenage parents** noted that gathering details of pupils’ Unique Candidate Identifiers (UCIs) from their previous schools could be a lengthy process. Furthermore, where pupils were mobile (e.g. **Gypsy/Travellers** and **looked after children**) and arrived with incomplete educational records, there may be difficulties in establishing the appropriate ‘tier’ at which they should be entered. The examinations officer training courses run by the NAA stress this issue of the need for communication and for examinations officers to ‘know their candidates’. In order to avoid the misunderstandings and information gaps described above, the NAA advise that – particularly for new/late arrivals to the school – examinations officers collect information on candidates’: preferred and ‘full’ name; educational history; UCIs assigned at previous school(s); language needs; and any special educational needs requiring access arrangements (see Section 2.2.3).

More generally, some interviewees felt that the examination entry process overall could be an administrative burden, particularly for smaller PRUs and EOTAS services operating without a ‘dedicated’ or ‘non-teaching’ examinations officer. The sheer volume of documentation and paperwork entailed in estimated, final, late entries and transfer candidates, in addition to access arrangements, presented a heavy workload for members of staff who were often carrying out the examinations officer role alongside several other duties:

I've worked in learning support units on the edge of big schools, and they've got a full-time appointment of a retired teacher who looks after exams for them ... [PRUs] don't have the luxury of a spare non-teaching person who's an examinations officer. It'll be someone like me who's a teacher who, somewhere in the list of jobs, has 'Oh by the way, will you look after the examinations stuff' (Examinations Officer, PRU).

With the intention of reducing the administrative burden on examinations offices, the NAA is currently working on a programme of 'convergence', whereby the major awarding bodies will begin to use universal forms and documentation for key aspects of the examination process. Furthermore, online systems are in development for examination entries and access arrangements (see Section 2.2.3). This should be a significant improvement for the majority of examination centres. However, it was noted by interviewees from YOIs that, for reasons of security, electronic transfer of information was restricted and thus, they may not be able to take advantage of these developments: *'We can't do online entries ... We're supposed to be having a totally secure internet set up, and I've been here three months now and I'm still waiting'* (Education Manager, YOI). Interviewees in smaller PRUs and EOTAS services also felt that limited ICT facilities meant they would not fully benefit from these improvements. However, the capital equipment grants described in Section 2.2.1 may go some way towards addressing this.

Summary of key issues: entering candidates

- PRUs and EOTAS services have an ongoing and fluctuating intake, meaning that it is difficult to estimate candidate entries with any degree of accuracy. This ongoing intake results in PRUs and EOTAS services incurring sizeable 'late entry' and 'very late entry' fees.
- For various reasons, vulnerable groups in mainstream schools may also present as late entries, incurring costs to the school, which in some cases they may be disinclined to meet.
- Where there is a lack of communication between providers, pupils who have been out of their mainstream school for some time may be 'overlooked' at the time of examination entry.
- Transferred candidate arrangements can present an administrative burden to centres dealing with pupils from a number of different schools. There may also be 'political' issues in terms of whether or not schools want candidates' results to appear on their own league table figures.
- Lack of information and/or communication regarding candidates' personal and educational details may cause administrative difficulties for examinations officers making entries.
- The lack of a dedicated examinations officer in smaller units can mean a heavy workload for the member of staff carrying out this function. There are developments underway to streamline and modernise the administration process. However, full use of these improvements will rely on centres having access to adequate ICT facilities.

2.2.3 The examination process: access arrangements and special consideration

Young people who have an established history of **special educational need** or are disabled may be entitled to one or more ‘access arrangements’ during their GCSE examinations. As defined by the JCQ: ‘*Access arrangements are approved before an examination or assessment and are intended to allow attainment to be demonstrated*’ (JCQ, 2004a). The JCQ regulations and guidance document recognises four main categories of special educational need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; sensory and physical needs; and behavioural, emotional and social needs.

Various access arrangements are available, according to the needs of the candidate. For example, a candidate with learning difficulties may benefit from extra time in an examination, while a visually impaired candidate may need their papers to be enlarged or converted to Braille. Candidates with behavioural, emotional or social needs may benefit from rest breaks or prompting, while those with communication difficulties may be assisted by the use of a word processor or a scribe. Appendix 3 gives a full list of the possible access arrangements (see JCQ, 2004a for full details).

Access arrangements may be divided into two types: those which can be implemented at the discretion of the centre and those which require advance application to the awarding body. Where the permission of the awarding body is required, access arrangements must be applied for in advance of the examination session. The table below shows the deadlines for application for access arrangements for the 2004-05 examination series.

Month of examination	Access Arrangement	Deadline
Nov/Dec/Jan 2004–05	Modified papers	30 September 2004
Nov/Dec/Jan 2004–05	All other arrangements (not modified papers)	31 October 2004
Feb/Mar/Apr 2005	All arrangements (including modified papers)	30 November 2004
May/June 2005	Modified papers	31 January 2005
May/June 2005	All other arrangements (not modified papers)	21 February 2005

Source: adapted from JCQ, 2004a

In both cases, examination centres are required to assemble and retain evidence of a candidate’s special educational need and that the adjustments made in examinations reflect their ‘*normal way of working*’. Where a candidate has needs falling into the category of cognition and learning – requiring, for example, a scribe or reader – he or she must also be assessed by a qualified Educational Psychologist (EP) or a specialist teacher holding a JCQ approved qualification. These approved qualifications (listed as an appendix to the JCQ regulations and guidance) are at post-graduate level, equivalent to one-third of a Masters degree. The EP/specialist teachers’ assessment includes measurements of a candidate’s reading accuracy, speed and comprehension, writing accuracy and legibility. On the basis of these scores, it will be established whether a candidate meets the minimum level of eligibility for access arrangements.

Access arrangements are also available for candidates taking Key Skills and Entry Level qualifications. While the same principles of integrity and validity of the test apply, to some extent the regulations in these cases are less stringent than for GCSEs. For example, many more access arrangements for Entry Level are of the centre delegated type, and candidates with learning difficulties need not be individually assessed, on the assumption that many candidates working at Entry Level will require some level of support. Notably, modified papers are not available for Key Skills tests given the ongoing nature of assessment and frequency of examination sessions. Braille and enlarged papers are available, however.

The JCQ regulations and guidance on access arrangements (JCQ, 2004a) were revised quite considerably for the 2004-05 examination series, with the intention of becoming more ‘user-friendly’. Rather than being a ‘deficit model’ arranged according to the special educational need of the candidate, the guidance is now organised according to the types of support that can be provided: *‘It’s not because they’re blind or their first language is not English or they’re dyslexic. It’s because there’s a need for them to have a reader to access the exam’* (Representative of an awarding body). In this way, the onus has been moved onto the centre to consider the specific needs of an individual candidate and what type of arrangements might be appropriate, rather than addressing the ‘label’ of a particular special educational need:

The focus in previous years was always on impairment. What kind of impairments did candidates have, and how do we mitigate those impairments. The focus now has switched dramatically to: ‘What does the candidate need?’ And if you can verbalise what those candidates need, you can then prepare that candidate for an exam (Representative of the NAA).

This change of focus also has the potential to broaden the spectrum of needs which can be addressed by the access arrangements, where a candidate has not been ‘diagnosed’ as having a particular learning or behavioural difficulty, but nonetheless exhibits a need for support in certain areas of education. Additionally, an increased number of access arrangements are now ‘centre delegated’, not requiring advance application to awarding bodies.

In terms of more short-term difficulties that may impact on candidates’ ability to perform to their full potential, students facing exceptional circumstances at the time of their examinations, may be eligible for special consideration. As defined by the JCQ (2004a): *‘Special consideration ... may be given following an examination or assessment to ensure that a candidate with a temporary illness, injury or disposition at the time the assessment is conducted is given some recognition of the difficulty they have faced’*. ‘Dispositions’ include such things as death of a family member, serious domestic crisis, or prolonged disturbance in an examination room. Depending on the extent or ‘severity’ of the circumstances, special consideration may result in candidates being awarded an increase of up to five per cent on their examination mark.

The JCQ and QCA are currently working in partnership on a ‘three year programme’ for access arrangements and special consideration. They are in the process of carrying out statistical analysis on the frequency with which each arrangement is applied for

and will be able to disaggregate this data according to such variables as awarding body and centre type. They also plan to investigate the extent to which the arrangements are, in fact, effective in improving assessment outcomes. A representative of QCA noted that the access arrangements offered currently are based on ‘*cultural assumptions*’ of what is helpful in examinations and that investigation into the actual experiences of candidates with special educational needs was necessary.

Thus, awarding bodies and the JCQ recognise that certain candidates may face barriers in accessing GCSE examinations and have put in place measures attempting to minimise any disadvantage. However, interviewees consulted in the LEA survey raised concerns of two types, regarding challenges around access arrangements and special consideration:

- **barriers to full use** of access arrangements: factors restricting examination centres from fully exploiting the concessions available, e.g. the need for specialist assessment, lack of communication and awareness, and resource issues
- **insufficiencies in access arrangements**: vulnerable groups whose needs are not addressed, or not adequately addressed, by the access arrangements.

Access arrangements and special consideration: barriers to full use

A key challenge faced by a number of interviewees stemmed from the requirement for specialist assessment by an EP or specialist teacher, for candidates with learning difficulties. It was widely acknowledged that for most LEAs, EP time is at a premium and that assessments for examination access arrangements may be a low priority. As noted by one interviewee, when it came to a decision between assessments for access arrangements or a statement of special educational needs, ‘*sometimes we have to go with a statement because it could be a child’s future in a placed school*’ (Deputy Headteacher). For non-mainstream providers, access to EP support was felt to be even more difficult, with one PRU examinations officer stating that s/he did not even know who their link EP was. The costs of EP time could also be prohibitive: ‘*It takes two or three hours to do a proper assessment, and that’s not cheap to a school. Sometimes they haven’t got the funds, or the perception is they haven’t got the funds to do that*’ (SENCO).

In terms of overcoming such barriers, one PRU headteacher felt that strengthening the unit’s relationship with the EP had led to improved access to assessments. Such difficulties of access to an EP were also eased in schools where a member of permanent staff held a recognised specialist qualification, as described in the cameo below.

Access to an EP or specialist teacher

An assistant headteacher in a mainstream school described how much easier the process of assessment had become since their Inclusion Coordinator had gained a recognised specialist qualification. Far more pupils were identified as having dyslexia than would have been possible in the time available from the EP, and as a result more pupils received extra time in their examinations.

As an alternative solution, a representative of the JCQ explained how they encouraged schools to network locally to access EPs and specialist teachers. An example was given of an LEA which had established a team of qualified SENCOs who would carry out assessments for pupils in schools across the authority.

Given the often lengthy periods spent out of education, it was noted that many **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils have low reading ages and would thus benefit from additional support in examinations. However, family mobility meant that, even where EP time was secured, pupils were often absent at the time arranged for assessment. It was also felt that for pupils with English as an additional language (e.g. **asylum seekers** and some **ethnic minorities**), establishing a learning disability in the candidates *first* language, beyond the evident language barrier, could be particularly challenging. Furthermore, interviewees also highlighted the stress which could be caused to pupils undergoing these assessments. As one PRU examinations officer explained, it could be very demoralising for a pupil aged 16 to have to spend half a day with an EP *'proving that they can't read very well'*. However, in association with the JCQ, PATOSS⁹ have recently published guidance on assessing pupils with special educational needs, which is available via their website. This includes information on 'sensitive' approaches to the assessment process.

Overcoming the need for specialist assessment

The combination of difficulty in accessing an EP/specialist teacher and the stress these assessments caused to students had led one key stage 4 PRU to abandon GCSEs altogether. The less stringent regulations around access arrangements for lower level qualifications contributed to a decision to focus the curriculum entirely on Entry Level accreditation. Around 30 per cent of students at the PRU had special educational needs. The time and costs involved in arranging EP assessments were ultimately felt to outweigh the small benefits to the minority of pupils who were capable of obtaining a 'good' GCSE pass: *'We're talking kids who, with the best will in the world, are only going to get relatively low grade qualifications, and if you add on the cost of the exam anyway, it's becoming a very expensive G-grade'* (Examinations Officer). Working within Entry Level qualifications, staff from the PRU were able to give pupils the same level of support they received in the classroom within the examination setting, without recourse to a lengthy application and assessment process.

A further barrier to full use of access arrangements was a **lack of communication and awareness**. It was felt that some pupils were at risk of missing out on the full range of support available due to a lack of 'proactivity' on the part of their schools. In some cases, this was attributed to a lack of awareness of access arrangements, although it was also noted that some schools may be reluctant to enter into what was perceived to be a further administrative burden.

⁹ The Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties.

My advice line gets very busy with people where the exam tutors either don't understand the full range of concessions or they don't want to pay for extra staff to act as individual invigilators ... The number of times parents come back and say 'I've been told I can't move the time of the exam' or 'We can't have it at home', which just isn't true. We battle with that quite a lot (Representative of the Association of Young People with ME).

As stressed by a number of interviewees – both school-based and those representing national bodies – communication, information and awareness were key to the effective utilisation of access arrangements. Interviewees emphasised that successful management of access arrangements must be a centre-wide undertaking and could not be done by the SENCO or examinations officer in isolation. All members of staff – from headteachers to subject teachers to learning support assistants – needed to be familiar with the range of access arrangements available, and to be constantly alert to pupils' needs, passing on information to SENCOs and examinations officers as necessary. However, as noted by one interviewee:

Most of the time the communication between the SENCO and the exams officer is not very good, so you find out that the SENCO starts to panic at the last minute but the exams officer hasn't made the application to us (Representative from a Unitary Awarding Body).

A representative of the JCQ highlighted the particular need to maintain communications in light of the teacher workload agreement, whereby more schools would be employing 'non-teaching' examinations officers. There was felt to be a risk that a non-teaching officer (possibly working part-time) would have less 'natural' opportunity to liaise with SENCOs and teaching staff: *'We have to be careful that the SENCOs and [non-teaching examinations officers] continue to work together because the relationship is different'*. More generally, one interviewee noted that it was helpful for staff to be aware of the nature of various learning disabilities, and what strategies could help these pupils' learning more broadly. Furthermore, representatives of the NAA and the JCQ stressed the need for examinations officers to meet with candidates in person, to discuss their needs, review previous provision and make any necessary changes.

In the case of pupils with **medical needs**, it was felt that staff in mainstream schools were often not fully aware of the complexities of a child's condition, and hence were not proactive in making access arrangements. Interviewees working in hospital and home teaching services stressed the need to plan early and discuss arrangements with parents, the school, medical professionals and the candidate. Where all parties were in close communication, arrangements such as timetable deviations could be put in place, so as to avoid times when a pupil was likely to be very unwell: *'If I knew that they were having dialysis in the morning and that they would feel great in the afternoon, if the exam was in the morning I'd ask for the exam to be taken in the afternoon'* (Examinations Officer, Mainstream School).

A number of interviewees advised planning for the 'worst case scenario'. For example, an application for an alternative venue could be made in the case of anxious **school refusers** or for pupils with **medical needs** whose condition was unpredictable

and liable to ‘flare up’ with little warning. As noted by an interviewee in relation to **teenage parents**:

We encourage schools to plan for all contingencies and find a way round every possibility, so that if she is physically able, and mentally willing when the time comes, whatever flexibility is needed can be provided (Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer).

The importance of informing parents of their child’s entitlements (in whatever language necessary) was also highlighted. This was not without complications, however. It was noted that difficulties could sometimes occur when more ‘*socially advantaged*’ parents arranged private EP assessments for their children and then demanded the school make access arrangements, even where the school did not feel this was appropriate: ‘*We do have an enormous number of people here who I think play the system and get these reports written privately*’ (Examinations Officer).

Also noted as a barrier to full use of access arrangements were various **administrative challenges**. While necessary in view of examination scheduling, the application deadlines for access arrangements may present difficulties for PRU/EOTAS providers where, for example, **excluded pupils** with special educational needs may arrive and need to be entered for examinations after a deadline has passed. Similarly, **school refusers** who have been out of the education system for some time may be picked up by services close to examination time and require support for **special educational needs**. Interviewees reported that in many cases, awarding bodies would be lenient and allow late applications (a representative of the JCQ noted that over 40 per cent of applications are late). However, for modifications to examination papers, deadlines cannot normally be extended, due to the specialist nature of the task. It was noted that this year, the updated JCQ regulations and guidance documentation was despatched to centres after some of the earlier deadlines had passed. However, it was not clear whether this was an annual frustration or possibly just an exceptional occurrence, in view of the significant revisions to the document in 2004.

For staff working in PRUs or EOTAS services, it was often the case that a significant proportion of pupils would have some form of **special educational need**. As such, there was a sizeable administrative task in making applications for access arrangements, sometimes for the majority of candidates. Interviewees also highlighted the administrative workload of making separate applications for access arrangements to each of the relevant awarding bodies. On occasion, conflicting decisions had been received from different awarding bodies, causing further frustration. However the convergence programme of the NAA is seeking to address such challenges, as outlined in the cameo below.

Streamlining of the access arrangements process

Working with awarding bodies, the NAA is developing universal application forms for access arrangements and special consideration, which will be used to make a single submission to all awarding bodies. By spring 2006 it is hoped that there will be one ‘streamlined’ system for applications, provision of evidence and decision-making, much of which can be managed online. One application should result in one decision, which will be applicable to examinations under all awarding bodies.

Furthermore, the JCQ has recently made all application forms for access arrangements and special consideration available electronically through their website, with the aim of reducing the administrative burden on examinations officers. Templates for each candidate can now be stored on schools' computer systems and amended as necessary for different awarding bodies or examination subjects. This was felt to have been a great help to centres: '*A number of people have told us that that's made a big difference to them and it's such a little administrative thing that you can do for people*' (Representative of JCQ). A form is also being developed which will be used to inform centres of an awarding body's reasons in cases where an access arrangement has been declined.

The availability of sufficient **resources** to implement access arrangements was a barrier for some centres. Most commonly mentioned were issues of human resources and associated financial costs, where a number of candidates had **special educational needs** requiring assistance from readers or scribes and thus separate invigilation. Similarly, sufficient rooms to accommodate all candidates sitting their examinations in isolation could prove challenging, particularly in smaller units where space was already at a premium.

Access arrangements and separate invigilation in a mainstream school

A SENCO from a school with a 95 per cent population of Muslim children, and a strong reputation for settling new arrivals, explained the management of access arrangements in the school. During examinations, the SEN team and the school's bilingual support staff were brought in to help with invigilation, forming a sizeable and flexible team. All members of the support team were given guidance about the roles of readers and scribes. Attempts were made to ensure continuity of support. For example, a child with a visual impairment would have the same assistant with them for all their exams, as far as possible. A separate space within the school '*away from the general hurly burly*' was arranged for pupils accessing one-to-one support. This was a large room, sufficiently spacious that readers were not overheard. An 'extra' invigilator was also present, to supervise the whole room and make sure examination regulations were adhered to.

More generally, the amount of time required to manage the process overall was highlighted (e.g. gathering evidence, completing forms, carrying out assessments). Challenges were faced where SENCOs worked part-time or where the school's management did not recognise the scale of the task and so did not allocate sufficient time to the staff member assigned this duty.

A number of interviewees noted that, over and above the provision or otherwise of access arrangements, there were issues of **pupils' ability to access support** that was put in place. The point was raised that an access arrangement was only advantageous to the extent that it was used or useful to the candidate. For example, extra time in an examination was not going to help a pupil whose actual knowledge of a subject was so limited that they had little to write about. Furthermore, pupils such as **school refusers** or those with behavioural difficulties were reported to often leave examination rooms at the first opportunity. As one interviewee noted, regarding **teenage parents**:

There's no point having extra time unless you can use it. And my guess would be that often their schooling has been disrupted so they probably actually

haven't got all that much to say in the exam. So whether extra time will be of any use to them, I'm not sure (LEA-based SENCO).

In the worst case scenario, this same interviewee recalled how candidates given too much extra time to ponder their answers could sometimes begin to 'undo' correct work.

For **EAL students**, the extent to which a bilingual dictionary was useful depended on a candidate's familiarity or 'facility' with such a tool; it was noted that use of a dictionary could be time consuming and, as such, counterproductive:

Okay, if you're educated and literate and you arrived in school already knowing some English and the format for exams etc. But for students who joined the school in Year 9 with very limited previous education they often can't even use a dictionary, so that provision is of no use to them (Head of EMA and EAL, Mainstream School).

Where support was to be given by another individual (e.g. a scribe), the need for both parties to have sufficient training and practice was highlighted. Interviewees acknowledged that working with an assistant was not easy and presented additional challenges in itself. Though regulations require that access arrangements be the candidate's normal way of working (and thus some familiarity with such methods could be assumed), assistants must not be the candidate's usual teacher. Therefore, especially where a candidate may be anxious, it was felt that time to practise and become used to the situation was important.

In some cases, providers had been faced with pupils who did not want to accept the support offered, noting the effect that 'special treatment' could have on pupils' self-esteem: *'Some of them don't want to have the reader. It is seen as a bit of a stigma that you go into another room'* (Examinations Officer, Mainstream School). In one interviewee's experience, however, persuading students to take a mock examination with similar support in place could help in convincing them of its value. It was also noted that where candidates chose not to take advantage of an access arrangement (e.g. leaving an examination centre early when extra time had been allowed or declining a reader) there could be repercussions for centres, from parents who believed arrangements had not been provided. A representative of the JCQ explained that guidance on these issues was in development and that candidates might be required to sign a form either accepting or declining their access arrangements in advance.

Access arrangements and special consideration: insufficiencies

Access arrangements aim to ensure a 'level playing field', giving the candidate the necessary support to access the examination without leading to an unfair advantage. Crucially, the validity and integrity of the assessment must not be undermined. The JCQ notes: *'Where assessment criteria would be affected by any adjustment made to take account of the impairment, the assessment criteria will take precedence and will not be waived'* (JCQ, 2004a). An issue of some contention is the removal, from 2004, of the option of 'exemption' from an element of an examination. In the past, for example, if an English or modern languages examination contained a 25 per cent oral

component, a candidate whose disability prevented them from expressing themselves verbally would be exempted from this section. It would be marked on the candidate's certificate that this element had been omitted, but an aggregate grade would be awarded based on the scores from other components, meaning the candidate could still achieve an A* grade. From 2004, however, this option has been withdrawn; candidates who cannot *demonstrate* a skill cannot be awarded a mark for it, meaning that in the example given above, the maximum the candidate could potentially attain would be 75 per cent. As explained by a representative of an awarding body:

A deaf candidate couldn't gain 100 per cent in their language exam and it will affect the grade that they get, but it does mean that the grade that they get will realistically reflect what it is that they've actually been able to do (Representative from a Unitary Awarding Body).

The revised regulations and guidance from JCQ encourage centres to consider from the outset of key stage 4 whether it will be appropriate for a candidate to be entered for certain specifications, in view of the demands of the assessment. Unsurprisingly, however, changes to regulations around exemptions are an issue of some concern for providers supporting candidates with physical and sensory disabilities.

Candidates for whom English is an additional language (e.g. **asylum seekers** and some **ethnic minority** pupils) may be permitted to use a bilingual dictionary in examinations¹⁰. If a dictionary is being used, the candidate may also have up to 25 per cent additional time in the examination. Except for in the case of modern language examinations, these arrangements may be permitted by the centre, without advance application to the awarding body (as from 2004). However, candidates are only eligible for this type of language support if they have been in the country for less than two years. Interviewees working with **asylum seeker** pupils felt that this cut-off point was restrictive, two of whom cited research evidence that it takes up to five years for a learner to become fluent in a new language. Other challenges faced included the difficulty of obtaining suitable dictionaries in some languages: '*Yes you can have a dictionary, but try and find a good Pashtu/English dictionary that costs less than £20 and you can carry!*' (Head of EMA and EAL, Mainstream School).

It was also noted that, whilst a bilingual dictionary could help with understanding of 'context' words, technical terminology such as that used in science or mathematics examinations might be more difficult to translate – particularly if the candidate had never been familiar with that term in their first language. (See Section 2.3 for further discussion of access to 'examination language'.) Some interviewees noted the disparity between the level of language support available at GCSE and that permitted in key stage 3 National Curriculum tests, where teachers could give some assistance in the explanation or translation of certain key words. It was also felt by one interviewee that there was some inequality between the extent of access arrangements available to EAL students and the wider range provided for students with other special educational needs.

¹⁰ Excluding English, Welsh and Irish (Gaelige) language examinations, and modern foreign language examinations testing one of the languages of the dictionary.

While readers and scribes are permitted for most subjects, pupils cannot access this type of support in English examinations. This was felt by some to be a barrier to the demonstration of ability for candidates who had a good intellectual understanding of the subject area but, for example, could not read quickly enough to assimilate the information and give a detailed response: *‘Sometimes it’s not because they can’t read, but sometimes the passage is really long and to sustain that amount of concentration for that intense amount of engagement is impossible’* (Examinations Officer, PRU). There was some feeling that the needs of candidates with **social, emotional and behavioural difficulties** were covered less fully by the access arrangements than other groups. However, given the change of focus of the regulations this year, whereby the ‘need’ rather than the ‘condition’ is addressed, there may be scope for improvement. For example, if it can be evidenced that it is the candidate’s normal way of working, a pupil who has difficulty maintaining concentration (e.g. ADHD) may be permitted to have prompting.

Although the recent changes to JCQ documentation have moved the focus of access arrangements onto the needs of the individual, fundamentally it is still the case that regulations are in place to ensure parity of decision-making on individual cases; examination centres have to *‘stick to the script’* to ensure the validity of the examination. Thus, some interviewees voiced frustrations that there were cases where they, as teachers, knew that a candidate would benefit from support in examinations, but as they did not quite reach the minimum criteria for access arrangements, there was little they could do. A representative of an awarding body also acknowledged this tension between wanting to make examinations as accessible as possible to candidates whilst ensuring that qualifications *‘remain credible’*:

There is a perception on the part of a lot of people working within special needs that all qualifications ought to be equally accessible to all candidates and that is not a realistic expectation ... Where difficulties arise between ourselves and centres it tends to be coming out of that (Representative from a Unitary Awarding Body).

Furthermore, it was noted that allowances for the candidate’s ‘normal way of working’ could become immaterial in cases where the regulations did not allow for the support which a young person was used to, for example, verbal prompting: *‘The trouble is they put their hands up and ask you questions. “What do I do now?” It’s ever so difficult when that’s what they have been doing for the last ten years’* (Teacher, Special School).

In considering the wide range of ‘vulnerabilities’ addressed by this research – from medical/physical problems through to social disadvantage – it is notable that the JCQ regulations and guidance give a much lesser focus on the latter type of need. Indeed, a representative of QCA noted that the focus of access arrangements on physical and learning disabilities may well have diverted attention from the needs of those young people facing more social type challenges in their access to examinations:

Because of that particular concentration, we’ve lost track, perhaps, of those kids who wouldn’t need a special arrangement but find it difficult being entered for an examination e.g. because they’re mobile or because they’re excluded from school.

Regarding **young offenders**, the JCQ regulations and guidance state clearly that special consideration cannot be given in cases where preparation for an examination has been affected by *'the consequences of committing a crime'* (JCQ, 2004a). **Teenage parents** are not automatically eligible for access arrangements or special consideration for this reason in itself (though access arrangements would apply according to any additional special educational need). However, most interviewees working with teenage parents did not voice objections to this, some feeling that a concession simply due to being pregnant or a parent may underplay their achievement:

Technically, I suppose I could ask for special consideration for all of them ... but I think that would devalue what they do. I think it's much better for them to get a good grade at GCSE and have done it without me having had to ask for special consideration. It's worth much more' (Headteacher, Teenage Parents' Unit).

In certain circumstances, however, special consideration would be a possibility, for example, where the student had been particularly ill during pregnancy or had taken examinations very close to the time of giving birth. Additionally, it was noted that centres were able to make 'local' arrangements in order to facilitate a pregnant candidate's access to examinations, as described in the cameo below.

Access arrangements for teenage parents

The mainstream schools that were consulted regarding teenage parents showed very flexible approaches to meeting the needs of girls who had stayed on roll and continued to attend throughout their pregnancy. In one case it was explained that for girls who did not feel comfortable coming onto the premises in the very late stages of pregnancy, an arrangement could be made for them to sit their examinations in a smaller group at the LEA's alternative education centre. In other cases, the school would provide an invigilator and the girl could take her examinations under supervision at home. In other LEAs, positive practice included: consulting girls about their physical needs prior to the exam; giving them additional cushions or beanbags; allowing rest breaks; and invigilation in a separate room if they wished.

The needs of **young carers** are also not explicitly covered by access arrangements. However, interviewees felt that for these pupils, the real challenges concerned the broader issues of access to education more generally: *'It's more an issue of how can we give them proper schooling, in order then that they would be in a position to sit the exam'* (SENCO). It was acknowledged that in maintaining the validity and integrity of an examination, candidates whose difficult home life had prevented them from fully accessing education throughout key stage 4 could not be given special consideration simply because they had *'had a raw deal'*. However, in some circumstances, it was felt that there could be grounds for alternative venue arrangements, with a candidate taking their examination under supervision at home, or for special consideration when a particularly distressing situation occurred close to an examination. Without recourse to 'formal' arrangements, interviewees also noted that a supportive approach from schools and social services could enable young carers to better access examinations. For example, it was suggested that a member of staff could make a telephone call home at regular intervals during an examination to check that no problems had arisen, or that social services could arrange for respite care during examination times.

Summary of key issues: access arrangements and special consideration

- The prerequisite of an EP or specialist teacher assessment for certain access arrangements is a key barrier for some examination centres. There are often difficulties in accessing EP time and many centres do not have a member of staff holding a JCQ-recognised specialist qualification. Where an assessment cannot be made within the timescale, access arrangements for candidates with learning difficulties will not be permitted.
- It was felt that some centres did not make full use of access arrangements due to a lack of awareness or a lack of ‘proactivity’ in view of the perceived administrative burden. Thus, there was concern that candidates with special educational needs may be missing out on support for which they are eligible. The importance of early planning and ongoing communication between all parties (including SENCOs, examinations officers, teachers, support staff, pupils and parents) was stressed.
- Application deadlines posed some problems for centres working with a fluctuating student population. The level of paperwork involved for centres supporting several pupils with special educational needs was also highlighted as challenging. However, this administrative burden for examinations officers is currently being addressed by the JCQ and the NAA.
- Where several candidates in a centre had learning difficulties requiring a scribe or a reader, resource implications could prove a barrier, in terms of the space required for individual invigilation, human resources and the associated costs.
- Issues of the extent to which access arrangements were used and useful were raised. In some cases, pupils were reluctant to take full advantage of access arrangements provided. It was also noted that working with assistance (e.g. from a reader or scribe) was not an easy exercise and could present challenges in itself. This may require practised preparation of candidates.
- There was some feeling that the JCQ regulations did not go far enough to enable full equity of access for all vulnerable groups (e.g. pupils with EAL and those with sensory impairments). Less focus on ‘social’ vulnerabilities (e.g. young carers, teenage parents) was also noted. However, there was a view that the types of support these candidates would benefit from most could be provided through attention to their needs more broadly. Such ‘holistic’ support would then enable them to access examinations when the time came.

2.2.4 The examination process: authentication, marking and moderation

For certain vulnerable groups, potential difficulties were faced around the areas of authentication, marking and moderation of coursework. For all candidates, GCSE coursework must be authenticated as the student’s own work and marked internally

(or occasionally externally). A proportion of a centre's coursework submissions will also be moderated externally by the awarding body, to ensure consistency of standards.

As has been described above, **home educated** young people will generally study independently and enter GCSE examinations as private candidates. Notwithstanding the fact that many coursework specifications are proscribed to private candidates, where they are available, the candidate will have to identify a suitable person to authenticate their coursework. Coursework must be authenticated by a person '*of integrity*' and this person must be approved by the awarding body. They must not be related to the candidate, but need not necessarily have teaching qualifications (although this would usually be the case). Awarding bodies may agree to authenticate coursework through an interview with the candidate, who will have to travel (at their own expense) to the awarding body's offices. Private candidates will also need to secure the agreement of a centre to mark their coursework. Some families are able to make arrangements with local schools to have coursework marked. Alternatively, some awarding bodies will mark coursework, at a charge to the candidate. While these procedures were not cited as being especially problematic by interviewees (perhaps due to the limited number of coursework specifications taken), they were nonetheless noted as further areas of potential time and financial cost to home educating families.

The marking and moderation process was also felt to present challenges for staff working in smaller centres, for example with **excluded pupils**, **school refusers**, **teenage parents** or pupils with **medical needs**. Awarding bodies hold information/training events on an annual basis, to advise centres on the criteria and processes for marking and moderating coursework in each subject. However, it was noted that, where staffing numbers were small, it could be unfeasible for teachers to repeatedly take time out of the centre to attend these sessions. In one specialist group for school refusers, teaching staff were employed on an hourly basis and therefore had not attended any training updates. Moreover, some interviewees who had attended training sessions felt that their needs had not been fully met. In another case, the training was felt to have been focused on higher ability pupils, with little attention to the marking criteria for pupils working at the lower end of the GCSE scale, who formed the major part of this interviewee's student body:

Our best is really at the bottom of the GCSE heap and certainly [one] course on science, the deputy head came back and said that the poorest work they looked at was similar to the best we would get, and the chief examiner for that subject was very dismissive of the quality of it (Headteacher, Special School).

As for private candidates, smaller units are able to pay awarding bodies to mark coursework, and this approach may be used where staff feel unequipped to do so. However, the one interviewee who had taken this option felt that the awarding body had been less than '*forthcoming*'. Having been unable to attend the training courses, not being a subject specialist, and given that the service was openly offered by the awarding body at a cost to the centre, the interviewee could not understand the reluctant reception s/he had experienced:

If there is a need for that service, and if it enables pupils to access exams, well then they have to do it ... You can't penalise somebody because their teacher doesn't know how to mark a bit of coursework. It's not that we're thick or unable to do it, it's simply that we haven't had the particular training in that particular subject and we're doing so many other subjects that you couldn't reasonably expect us to do it (Headteacher, Teenage Parents' Unit).

Coursework moderation in smaller centres

The examinations officer of a PRU that offered accreditation in key skills discovered that the awarding body charged a fee of £175 to come and moderate portfolios in centres which always entered 'small numbers'. However, this PRU would enter only two or three candidates per year and it was felt that £175 was an unviable amount to pay for moderation. The examinations officer contacted the awarding body, explained their situation, and suggested that visits to the PRU might be combined with the moderator's visits to other local examination centres. Following further discussion, the awarding body agreed not to charge the PRU at all, due to their exceptionally small numbers, and visits were made at the centre's convenience.

Staff working in a specialist group for school refusers found that, with the small number of pupils they were entering for GCSEs, it was difficult to make judgements when moderating coursework: *'We've got no idea whether the three we've got are average or good or what'*. To overcome this, pupils' English and maths coursework was moderated by the larger PRU, and staff from the specialist group were working increasingly with mainstream schools, attending their moderation days to assist them in grading subjects such as art: *'We can look at theirs and see how ours compare'*.

Finally, an issue raised by interviewees in YOIs was the length of time taken for certificates to be despatched to centres following an examination. It was reported that certificates often arrived after a **young offender** had moved on from the centre and that there could be difficulties in locating the candidate to confer the certificate. Thus, the student sometimes missed out on the positive experience of being awarded and congratulated on their achievements:

We do have an issue with the transient nature of many of our young people, the length of time it takes to get certification back from boards. We understand the difficulty about the mass of marking, the moderating, the validating, all of those things. But in some ways it's soul-destroying for a kid who's in here for six months if they never see the certificate (Education Manager, YOI).

This issue was found to be less problematic with lower level accreditations, where the turnaround period between examination and award was somewhat shorter.

Summary of key issues: authentication, marking and moderation

- Home educated young people will be responsible for identifying a suitable person ‘of integrity’ to authenticate any coursework they wish to submit. They will also have to locate an examination centre willing to mark their coursework, and bear any associated costs.
- For smaller centres, marking and moderation of coursework can be challenging in terms of staff capacity and expertise.
- For young offenders who are mobile, delays in processing certificates can mean that students miss out on being awarded for their achievements.

2.3 Assessment methodology

This section focuses on the assessment process itself and how methods of assessment can pose challenges or barriers to particular vulnerable groups. It covers the following issues:

- **terminal assessment**
- **the examination timetable**
- **pedagogic approach and assessment style**
- **coursework**

2.3.1 Assessment methodology: terminal assessment

GCSEs take two years to complete and are most commonly assessed through terminal examination which contributes from around 40 to 100 per cent of the final grade. Very few assessments at GCSE level (other than some maths and science specifications) are made via modular examinations. As modules alone cannot be accredited, and given that a large proportion of the final grade at GCSE is often based on a terminal examination, the current GCSE format was described by one interviewee as ‘*an all or nothing*’ system, putting those who were not able to complete the full course at a disadvantage, for example **young offenders**:

There’s no way [the young people] can get accreditation for modules they’ve done without completing the whole lot and doing the whole examination at the end. So, if they have done any at all, that work is lost, that achievement is lost (Education Coordinator, YOI).

To add to this, the current examination system at key stage 4 is geared towards a pupil remaining in one place for two years and attending well. Therefore, all **mobile young people**, and those who experience gaps in their education, are particularly vulnerable to not accessing examinations because their mobility means that they may not be entered for examinations, or may be entered but are not at school when the examinations take place. Their mobility will also mean that they are likely to be starting courses and then moving on to other schools that may be using a different

awarding body, specification, style of teaching, and/or different options. They have what was described by one interviewee as an ‘*intermittent experience of the syllabus*’. Mobile pupils may also miss exam preparation such as mock examinations, examination practice, the issuing of pre-release booklets, revision sessions and modular tests (which may begin in Year 10), as an interviewee working with **teenage parents** noted:

Some of the syllabuses are slightly inflexible. Where you’ve got a Year 10 science exam that’s worth 25 per cent of your final, but you can only take it in Year 10 and if you miss it, you’ve had it. For some of the young women who are reengaging as a result of the pregnancy, that means they’ve blown it (Teenage Parents Reintegration Officer).

Mobility-driven gaps in education may also mean that pupils repeat parts of the curriculum whilst missing other parts of the curriculum necessary to complete examinations: ‘*I have come across children who have done the same bit of history three times but missed the other two bits because they’ve changed schools*’ (TES Advisory Teacher). (See Section 2.4 for further discussion on mobility). Thus, a key barrier to examinations for vulnerable pupils who have intermittent experiences of the curriculum is that, under the current GCSE examination system, smaller units of knowledge can not be accredited. Therefore, young people do not receive any recognition for the knowledge they have gained, even when they have taken modular assessments.

With specific reference to **young offenders**, interviewees from YOIs referred to the fact that the majority of sentences served by this group were relatively short, lasting only a few months. In this time it was not possible to complete any ‘significant’ amount of GCSE accreditation. In addition, it was noted that many **young offenders** have a history of poor attendance and were, therefore, likely to have missed much of the curriculum. As a result it was rare that they were achieving at an appropriate level to be entered for GCSE examinations. Given this, most of YOIs in the LEA survey did not offer taught courses at GCSE level, although, for particularly capable students detained during the examination period, the YOI often acted as a host centre to enable candidates to sit final examinations. (See Section 2.2.2 for further detail on transferred candidates).

Interviewees in the LEA survey also indicated that terminal examinations often posed barriers to vulnerable pupils with **medical conditions**, specifically those whose symptoms may cause them to perform unevenly such as autism, and **school refusers** suffering from anxiety and phobias relating to school. Such anxiety resulted in some candidates not turning up to an examination or leaving examinations early:

When we actually get to the exam, as soon as they’re in the room, they want to be out of the room. They find it very difficult ... you get the odd one who would do their hardest but the majority just want to write anything as quickly as possible and then not be there, so they leave as soon as they are allowed (Teacher, PRU).

Furthermore, for anxious pupils, the stressful situation of a terminal examination was felt to have had considerable effect on some candidates' ability to concentrate and even the legibility of their handwriting. One interviewee noted:

It's not that our pupils have a physical disability but that the anxiety causes them to be very anxious about handwriting and have very poor handwriting almost like having the shakes, we can read it but nobody else can ... As they are writing they are getting more and more anxious, so by the time they have been writing for two hours it can be an illegible scrawl (Teacher, PRU).

Moreover, interviewees also suggested that if pupils were **disengaged**, **anxious**, or had a **medical** condition leading them to be away from school for extended periods of time, they might not have experienced mock examinations and were therefore likely to be unfamiliar with examination procedures which may add to their stress. Missing mock examinations is also likely to be an issue for **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils who may also be away from school for extended periods of time. Alternative venue arrangements at a 'local' level, (as discussed in section 2.2) may help to overcome difficulties for pupils who find it 'psychologically' difficult to return to their school to sit examinations and to sit with a large group of candidates in an examination hall. Giving students mock examination experiences so they are less fearful on the day (see cameo below) was also highlighted as a way to familiarise students with the process. It was suggested that where schools were aware of a pupil's difficulty a possible solution would be to enter candidates for qualifications where the majority of the assessment was by coursework.

Realistic 'mock' examinations sessions

One PRU that specialised in working with anxious school refusers held several mock examinations sessions leading up to the examination period in order to help students become familiar with the procedures. In order to prepare pupils for the final examination, it was noted by the Teacher in Charge of the PRU that they '*replicate the experience of the exam as much as possible*'. They kept to the same timings of the examinations so young people could address the challenges associated with travelling to the examination so they would: '*know what it feels like to be getting up at that time and travelling at that time and also travelling at a time when there are other school children travelling*'.

Awarding bodies' regulations stipulate that examinations must not be invigilated by the teacher who has taught the candidates. This was reported to present challenges where centres were operating with a small number of staff and it could be difficult to identify a member of staff who had not been involved with the teaching of the students sitting an examination. Furthermore, it was noted that for **school refusers**, it was important that pupils were familiar and comfortable with the person invigilating their exam and that several invigilators may be needed in order that pupils could take their examinations individually or in very small groups: '*We have to commandeer people to come in and be invigilators, but with our kids that can be dangerous*' (Examinations Officer, PRU).

As was noted in Section 2.2.3, in centres where a significant proportion of candidates had **special educational needs** requiring an assistant, there could be difficulties in providing sufficient individual invigilators and this could have financial implications. Furthermore, it was noted that the workforce reform agenda would remove

invigilation from the tasks which teachers were expected to undertake, potentially increasing such difficulties for smaller centres:

We have young people who it is extremely difficult to get through the door of an exam room. If they were to be greeted by people they did not know at all, they would turn and run. Teachers who have spent a long time preparing a young person for an examination are not going to want to see them fall at that hurdle (Headteacher, Mainstream School).

Summary of key issues: terminal assessment

- A large proportion of the final grade at GCSE is often based on a terminal examination. Modules alone cannot be accredited; therefore pupils who are unable to complete the whole two year course miss out.
- The current examination system at key stage 4 was said to be geared towards a pupil remaining in one place for two years and attending well, thus presenting particular challenges for mobile pupils. Mobile pupils may not be entered for examinations, or may be not at school when the examinations take place.
- Pupils out of school may not receive pre-release booklets, and may miss examination practice, revision sessions, mock examinations, and modular tests.
- Terminal examinations assess candidates' performance on one day; this may be an inappropriate form of assessment for those with medical conditions which may cause them to perform unevenly.
- The stress of terminal examinations could result in some candidates not turning up to an examination or leaving examinations early.
- Examinations must not be invigilated by the teacher who has taught the candidates. This presents challenges for centres operating with a small staff and for vulnerable pupils requiring stable and familiar adult contact. There are difficulties in providing sufficient invigilators for centres where a significant proportion of candidates have SEN.

2.3.2 Assessment methodology: the examination timetable

Candidates take their examination papers according to a fixed pre-set timetable. Although awarding bodies prescribe strict timetabling rules, there is some flexibility in start times. For example, centres are permitted to start examinations up to one hour earlier or later than the scheduled time of the examination within a session (OCR, 2004). Absence on the day of an examination may be an issue for pupils from a number of vulnerable groups, for example, those with **medical needs** or **teenage parents**. In exceptional circumstances, awarding bodies will allow papers to be taken after the date shown on the timetable by 24 hours. As discussed in Section 2.2 where examinations are moved to the next day, overnight supervision of a candidate by a member of staff is required.

It is common for candidates to sit examinations in both the morning and afternoon sessions of a particular day. Interviewees in the LEA survey felt this posed a considerable barrier for pupils with particular medical conditions. Although rest breaks, extra time and timetable deviations could be arranged, it was acknowledged that examinations were nevertheless very tiring for some **pupils with medical needs** for example, those with conditions that cause fatigue such as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME). An interviewee noted:

If they are taking quite a few [subjects], they end up with two examinations on one day. When you have ME actually achieving one is a major achievement, achieving two would be better but sometimes you can't shift it to the next day because there is another one the next day. If we were talking ideals it would be great to be able to move it several days (Representative from the Association of Young People with ME [AYME]).

Interviewees acknowledged that pupils with such difficulties could reduce the number of GCSEs taken to avoid the pressure of having to sit more than one examination per day (although that is not guaranteed). However, by doing this the danger of some students not reaching their full potential was noted.

Aside from slight changes to the examination timing, there are very few options for candidates if the examination is missed. This was identified as a key barrier for those pupils who are unable to take examinations during the scheduled examination period, for example, those with chronic medical illnesses. Where candidates are absent from the terminal component of the examination for 'acceptable reasons' such as **medical needs** (with supporting medical evidence that the candidate was unfit to take the paper) an aggregate award may be given by the awarding bodies (see cameo).

Aggregate awards for pupils who are unable to sit examinations due to illness

In one school, a young boy was diagnosed with cancer during his GCSEs and the awarding bodies were able to make an award on all his subjects apart from maths. They used his coursework and mock examination papers, to provide an award on the basis of these marks. For maths, the mock papers could not be found, and without the evidence of the student's capabilities, the awarding body was unable to issue a grade.

However, this is only possible if a minimum amount (35 per cent) of the assessment has been completed and if there is additional pre-existing evidence (i.e. mock examinations) of attainment available in each of the components missed. If appropriate evidence is not available, no enhanced grade will be issued (JCQ, 2004a). Consequently, the only option available to a number of vulnerable pupils who miss final examinations is to resit them at school or college the following academic year. However, interviewees recognised that many of the pupils they worked with were disengaged and disillusioned with education and hence were unlikely to return to complete examinations:

Unfortunately, I don't know of any of our young parents that have actually wanted to come back into the sixth form. I think it's just moving on for them and perhaps they feel that going back into sixth form is not what they want to

do.... We do try and encourage that, but so far nobody's taken it up (Head of Teenage Parent Unit).

Interviewees in the LEA survey felt that some vulnerable pupils faced difficulties completing GCSEs over the two year time period. It was noted that **EAL pupils** and **new arrivals**, may not attain at the end of Year 11: some needed additional time to develop their English language skills. Furthermore, that there was lack of funding for early FE entry, and limited numbers of places for **new arrivals** on alternative programmes. It was noted that currently many **EAL** and **new arrivals** take GCSEs in Year 11 only to achieve poor grades and then go on to retake in the sixth form or at college. Interviewees highlighted such pupils would probably start to reach their full potential at 17 or 18, signifying the benefits for these students of being able to complete GCSEs over a longer period.

Summary of key issues: the examination timetable

- Candidates take examination papers according to a fixed pre-set timetable and there is only a small amount of flexibility regarding timetable deviations.
- Sitting more than one examination per session can be difficult for pupils with medical conditions such as ME.
- For those pupils who are unable to take examinations during the scheduled examination period there are very few options. In exceptional circumstances an aggregate award may be given by the awarding bodies where a minimum amount (35 per cent) of the assessment has been completed and if there is additional pre-existing evidence of attainment available in each of the components missed. If appropriate evidence of attainment is not available, no enhanced grade will be issued.
- Candidates can resit examinations at school or college the following academic year. However, this will be an unlikely option for these vulnerable pupils such as excludees and teenage parents, who have become disengaged from education.

2.3.3 Assessment methodology: pedagogic approach and assessment style

It was felt that those pupils who were new to the UK faced a considerable barrier in relation to the differing education systems and pedagogic methods they encountered. **Asylum seekers, refugees** and **new arrivals** may not be used to self-directed learning (such as coursework and exploratory questions used in examinations), instead being more familiar with formal and disciplined learning environments with more rote learning. One interviewee noted:

I think the format of our exam system is quite different from a lot of other countries... here it's much more about applying knowledge and that in itself could be called a cultural barrier because the students have learnt in a very

different way and they can't show what they've learnt within our system even if their English is quite good (Head of EMA and EAL).

They may also find it difficult to cope with the informality found in UK classrooms. Changing from one country's curriculum to another was also identified as problematic. It was noted that some young people may have already left school and started employment before arriving in the UK or might have missed one or two years of education, were *'out of the routine of studying'*, and may not have the necessary study skills to access the curriculum or to complete coursework and sit examinations.

It was felt that a lack of academic literacy was a substantial barrier for **asylum seekers, refugees** and other pupils with **EAL** needs, achieving their full potential in examinations at key stage 4. A concern raised by interviewees was that, due to resource restrictions and the consequent time-limited nature of the support available, schools often withdrew language support for EAL pupils at the point at which they achieved *'communicative'* competence. As a result, it was felt that many **EAL pupils** only achieved *'surface fluency in a language'* as opposed to *'full academic literacy'* (Refugee Consultant) prohibiting them from reaching their potential in examinations. Furthermore, the awarding bodies do not permit the translation of examination questions into a candidate's first language.

Other interviewees in the survey felt that the verbal instructions given prior to an examination sometimes lacked clarity, resulting in some **EAL pupils** misunderstanding what was required of them during the session. Interviewees also talked about the layout of examination papers not always being clear and accessible for **EAL pupils**, as well as those with **SEN**. Moreover, relating to the readability of examination papers, it was felt that the rubric was often too complex for such pupils and this resulted in some candidates completing the wrong number of questions or the wrong section of the paper. In particular, the phrasing and sentence structure of examinations questions were said to be *'too formal'*, *'academic'*, and *'not very accessible'* (Head of EMA and EAL).

It was also acknowledged that there were particular difficulties for **EAL pupils**, e.g. some **asylum seekers and refugees**, where an examination question was assessing a range of different skills, such as an analysis or an evaluation question. One interviewee noted, *'it's very difficult for the pupils to hold all that at the same time and their lack of experience in English really militates against them'* (Consultant for Ethnic Minority Pupils). Interviewees also reported that lower level papers, for example in maths, were more likely to include a long preamble to a question to set the context. Although this may be helpful to monolingual students it was felt that this style of questioning served to exclude those students with EAL needs. Furthermore, it was felt that the more direct style of questioning found in higher-level papers was more accessible for **EAL pupils**.

In addition, one interviewee suggested that changes to the English specifications at key stage 4, (which require students to study an anthology of poetry and short stories), presented *'hidden barriers'* to **EAL pupils**: it was felt that these papers not only required pupils to read and write in English, but also to have a detailed knowledge and understanding of *'the cultural aspects and language associated with poetry'* (EAL Coordinator). Furthermore, specifications which stipulated that certain poems should

be pre-nineteenth century, was felt to present further barriers for **EAL students** again because of the cultural aspects and language associated with such poetry. Similarly, in maths, mental arithmetic tasks which involved pupils listening to tapes were felt to present additional barriers for **EAL students**:

Again there's an additional language skill that they need for their maths qualification which wasn't there before. You're good at maths, someone's taught you the English of maths but now you've got this additional worry of mental maths with spoken English, again it's a hidden barrier for EAL students (EAL Coordinator).

Multiple choice examinations were also identified as presenting difficulties for **EAL students** because the range of answers were often phrased and structured in a similar way which meant: *'You have to look really carefully at just one word and if you're not a very confident reader of English you can often miss that one word that is critical'* (Head of EMA and EAL). One interviewee felt that examinations at key stage 4 included *'language traps'*, noting that:

There's a feeling that very often the language of examinations is that they don't want to test what the pupils know but actually want to trick them into getting the wrong answer so it seems there are 'language traps' laid, in some of the questions (Consultant for Ethnic Minority Pupils).

Interviewees in the LEA survey indicated that some of the subject matter included in the specifications at key stage 4 may not be culturally appropriate for some students, e.g. some **asylum seekers, refugees** and **Gypsy/Traveller pupils**. For example, obscure English words, Welsh place names or reference to particular pastimes (see cameo below). Moreover, they reported that such lack of relevance was de-motivating for pupils. Referring to **Gypsy/Traveller pupils** one interviewee noted, *'where there's no reference to their history, their culture, their language, that doesn't help in terms of them seeing it as relevant'* (TES Advisory Teacher). (See 2.4.2 for a discussion of the relevance of the curriculum.)

Overcoming culturally specific questions

Staff in one EMA service worked with young people to prepare them for examinations and to give them techniques so they could answer questions which may not be relevant to their life experiences. Working through mock examination questions, such as *'talk about your hobbies'* with pupils who had no concept of a 'hobby', staff would provide guidance for pupils on how to tackle that type of question should a similar one arise in the final examination. The interviewee noted: *'Where it says 'hobby' we say just talk about what you did on a Sunday and go through the day... Or if it says 'Talk about your family' but the child might say 'My family's dead' so then you've got to say if that type of question comes up you might want to say 'I haven't got a family now but I remember when I had a family'* (Head of EMA Service).

Many of the identified solutions to these difficulties lay in language support provided to students throughout the GCSE course. A number of EMA teachers talked about working with mainstream staff to provide specific examination support such as teaching pupils the language of the examination to try to overcome some of the difficulties in accessing the meaning of questions (as illustrated above). Carrying out mock examinations with past papers prior to taking the GCSE was also felt to help

students become more familiar with the procedures. In addition, some schools were ensuring that **EAL** learners were placed in sets according to their cognitive ability as opposed to their expression in English. Where this was arranged, schools reported more success with their **EAL** pupils. In this respect, several interviewees in the LEA survey felt that there were a number of benefits to entering pupils for GCSE examinations in their first language as well as giving pupils an opportunity to experience the examination system and procedures in a subject they were confident in. Moreover it was noted that where schools were seen to value a pupil's first language, this had a positive impact on pupils' self-esteem.

Summary of key issues: pedagogic approach and assessment style

- Pupils new to the UK may face barriers to accessing examinations because of their previous experience of different education systems and pedagogic methods. They may also be out of the routine of studying and may not have the necessary study skills to complete coursework and sit examinations.
- Awarding bodies do not permit the translation of examination questions into a candidate's first language. EAL pupils new to the UK may only achieve '*surface fluency*' in English prohibiting them from reaching their potential in examinations.
- Interviewees felt that there was often a lack of clarity in instructions relating to examination procedures. The layout and presentation of examination papers were not always clear and accessible for both EAL pupils and those with SEN.
- Both evaluation and multiple choice questions were identified as presenting particular difficulties for EAL candidates. In addition, it was felt that some of the examples used in examination papers were not always culturally appropriate.
- Many of the identified solutions to these difficulties lay in language support and specific examination support, e.g. mock examinations.

2.3.4 Assessment methodology: coursework

Coursework is a fundamental method of many subject assessments at key stage 4. The extent to which it contributes to an overall grade depends on course options, the subject studied and the awarding bodies. Coursework can contribute to up to 60 per cent of a final grade in subjects such as drama and information technology; in others, such as maths however, it only contributes to around 20 per cent. Given the prevalence of coursework in GCSE specifications, pupils may find themselves completing several pieces, across a range of subjects, during key stage 4. Failure to complete a minimum amount of coursework can weaken a candidate's prospect of gaining a satisfactory grade or may result in candidates not being entered for terminal examinations. One interviewee in the LEA survey noted:

Some schools tell me that by Christmas in Year 10, if a child is already behind they're going to struggle at the end of Year 11 to actually sit the exam. So it can start quite early that issue about disengagement and lack of attendance that impacts on completion of the necessary coursework (Education Protects Coordinator).

In the LEA survey, it was identified that for those vulnerable pupils who have been out of school for an extended period of time the completion of coursework itself was a major barrier. This was particularly relevant to mobile pupils such as **Gypsy/Traveller pupils, asylum seekers, looked after children** and some **ethnic minority pupils**. This was also an issue for vulnerable pupils with poor attendance such as **excluded pupils** and **school refusers**, and also other vulnerable pupils who may be out of school, such as **young carers, teenage parents** and those with **medical needs**. Referring to excluded pupils, one interviewee noted:

I think the problem is that when you've got a component of the exam that does depend on you having had that pupil for six months, a year, or even two years, you do have particular difficulties (Representative of the National PRU Network).

It was reported that extended periods of absence from school may mean that vulnerable children often miss coursework deadlines, or specific times during key stage 4 when schools focus on the completion of assignments, such as practical experiments in science, which can be difficult to repeat. Vulnerable pupils out of school were said to be more likely to lose out on teacher support and encouragement for coursework. One interviewee, referring to **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils noted:

If there's poor attendance they're going to miss the opportunities. Sometimes, it's missing just the practical notification of booster classes, extra homework club provision for Year 11 pupils and study classes and that would undermine their coursework quality (Advisor for Gypsy/Travellers).

Furthermore, interviewees reported that vulnerable pupils out of school, such as **teenage parents** on their 'authorised absence period' may also miss out on teachers following them up to complete coursework:

One of the downsides in relation to maternity leave [sic] and coursework is the fact that young people don't get chivvied, in the way that they do in schools. That "well-meaning nagging" you would get in school to make sure your coursework is done and in on time ... (Teenage Parents Reintegration Officer).

For acceptable cases of absence during the period when coursework should have been produced in school, awarding bodies will accept reduced quantities. This is permitted for some subjects without penalty as long as all of the assessment objectives have been covered at least once; however this is not possible where specifications require only one piece of coursework (JCQ, 2004a). Where coursework has been completed but the candidate has either failed to submit the minimum amount or failed to sit the terminal examination, completed coursework can be carried forward for resits. The previous restriction that marks could only be re-used once and within 12 months of the original award has been removed, and there is no longer any restriction on the

number of occasions or the time period, provided it is within the time period of the specification (JCQ, 2004b). Interviewees were also providing students with intensive catch-up support to ensure that sufficient coursework was completed, for example by reducing the numbers of subjects studied (see 2.4.2), accessing support from EMA teams for newly arrived pupils: *‘sometimes newly arrived children might be in a GCSE group and some of the most useful support is tutorial sessions, a lot of which will be focusing on coursework’* (Team Leader Refugees and Asylum Seekers), or providing a private tutor for young people out of school.

In relation to **excluded pupils**, **young offenders** and other pupils out of school, such as those on authorised absence due to pregnancy, interviewees felt that in some cases either appropriate coursework was not being provided for pupils or was not being monitored tightly enough. Furthermore, with specific reference to **excluded pupils**, gaps in educational provision following an exclusion were felt to cause particular difficulties surrounding the completion of coursework. For example, as one interviewee noted, in a ‘worst case scenario’, an exclusion followed by an appeal which occurred near school holiday period could result in a young person being out of education for up to three months.

Furthermore, misplacement of coursework when a pupil changed schools was raised as a major issue by interviewees in the LEA survey, particularly in relation to mobile pupils such as: **asylum seekers** in temporary housing; **Gypsy/Travellers** and **looked after children** changing care placements. It was noted that schools often failed to send pupils’ completed coursework on to their next school (if they knew where it was) and that it was frequently lost or discarded. It was felt that communication between providers was key to overcoming this barrier (see section 2.4.3 for further discussions on communication).

Interviewees in the LEA survey felt that vulnerable pupils such as **looked after children** and **unaccompanied asylum seekers** often faced difficulties in relation to the completion of coursework as they might not have anyone at home who could support them.

Out of school support for vulnerable pupils

A solution used by a looked after children’s service in one LEA in relation to the lack of support for young people in residential homes was to provide the homes with computers, as well as offering specialist study support and coursework catch-up for young people. Reintegration officers from the service were also used to support looked after children and to ensure that coursework was completed by the necessary deadlines.

Many GCSE specifications which include a large coursework component are not available to private candidates, awarding bodies being of the view that large coursework projects would be unfeasible to complete through private study, *‘partly because they’ve got expectations of people doing things with other people’* (Representative of an Awarding Body). Thus, it was felt that **home educated pupils** faced barriers to examinations in that they were limited in both the number and range of subjects they were able to take at key stage 4. Further, it was reported that coursework could be a barrier for private candidates due to manageability issues associated with coursework criteria and requirements which could be difficult to

understand. It was noted by one interviewee that *‘with the best will in the world, if you’re not a specialist in certain subject areas, it is very difficult to understand what the coursework entails’* (Representative of HEAS). However, it was felt by one home educating parent that the awarding bodies prevent private candidates from completing these coursework specifications *‘because the size of the project is such that they think it’s too difficult to do without cheating’*. A common solution for home educated pupils was for them to access GCSEs which were assessed by 100 per cent terminal examination, for example, many of the International IGCSEs offered by Edexcel (see Section 2.2.1 for further discussions on IGCSEs).

Summary of key issues: coursework

- Coursework is a fundamental component of many GCSE specifications. Failure to complete the minimum amount of coursework can prevent a candidate gaining a satisfactory grade or may result in them not being entered for terminal examinations.
- Extended periods of absence from school mean that many vulnerable children miss coursework deadlines and practical experiments required for coursework completion.
- In relation to the non-completion of coursework, vulnerable pupils out of school are unlikely to have teachers following them up. Interviewees felt that in some cases coursework was not provided for vulnerable pupils out of school or was not being monitored tightly enough.
- Awarding bodies may accept reduced quantities of coursework (in exceptional circumstances). This is permitted for some subjects without penalty as long as all of the assessment objectives have been covered at least once.
- Looked after children, teenage parents and unaccompanied asylum seekers often do not have access to out of school support for coursework/homework.
- Many GCSE specifications which include a large coursework component are not available to private candidates. Home educated pupils are therefore limited in both the number and range of subjects they are able to take at key stage 4.

2.4 Curriculum barriers

This section focuses on the main factors influencing vulnerable children's ability to access the curriculum **prior to**, and in **preparation for**, taking examinations at the end of key stage 4. The main barriers identified were as follows:

- **mobility, gaps in education and absence**
- **relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation**
- **continuity of courses and communication between providers**
- **limitations of EOTAS provision**
- **pupil ability**
- **school attitudes**

Some of these issues have already been touched upon but the following discussion outlines in detail these key barriers and means by which they may be overcome identified by interviewees. Data are drawn from the LEA survey and again illustrative cameos are also presented. It should be noted that many of the barriers are interlinked.

2.4.1 Curriculum barriers: mobility, gaps in education and absence

The ability to access the curriculum when pupils are mobile, have gaps in their education and/or periods of absence, was described as a problem for many vulnerable children and has already been highlighted in the previous sections.

Mobile young people were seen as some of the most vulnerable youngsters. Their mobility may be determined by a range of social, cultural, economic and policy factors. Mobility was seen as a key barrier for certain groups, notably **Gypsy/Travellers, asylum seekers, refugees, newly arrived young people and looked after children**. Mobile youngsters' ability to access examinations at the end of key stage 4 was seen as a particular issue because they had to operate within an examinations system designed for a static population.

Asylum seeker and refugee children are particularly vulnerable to being moved frequently. A Consultant on Refugees highlighted that research suggests that, on average, they are likely to move four to six times in their first two years in the UK. Not only does mobility impact on a young person's ability to access the curriculum and examinations, it will also mean that social links, such as friendships within school, crucial for wellbeing and operating effectively in a learning environment, are constantly disrupted. This was seen as likely to have a detrimental impact on a young person's confidence and other school and social skills needed to be an effective learner. Interrupted school attendance due to being moved or moving from one area to another was identified as a barrier for all young people in vulnerable accommodation. Interviewees observed that many highly mobile **Gypsy/Travellers** would not be accessing secondary school at all, whilst those who were semi-nomadic would usually be travelling when GCSE examinations took place.

Interviewees linked the stability and number of care placements experienced by **looked after children** with their ability to access the curriculum prior to taking examinations. The 2004 Children Act places a duty on local authorities, as corporate parents, to promote the educational achievement of looked after children and to ensure that decisions made, for example regarding their care placements, supports

better educational achievement (*Every Child Matters: Change for Children* [DfES, 2004b]). Nevertheless, lack of stability in placement was still seen as a huge issue for looked after children and long periods out of school due to changes in care placement was seen as a key barrier for this group.

Late arrivals/mobile pupils often have little choice in the schools they attend and will access those schools with places, which are often the ones that are '*struggling most*'. Similarly, it was noted that if pupils arrive partway through key stage 4, they may have little choice in the courses/options they take because they will be allocated '*what is left rather than what they want to do*', with subsequent implications for their engagement with learning. Admission at non-standard times was also said to mean that pupils may not complete the whole course. In addition, for **asylum seekers, refugees and Gypsy/Travellers** there may be little warning that they are leaving or arriving at a school [see 2.4.3 communication between providers].

For some mobile young people accessing a school place may be an issue, resulting in periods out of school. This continues to be an issue in some London boroughs and other areas of the UK. One interviewee, for example, observed that, when there is a lack of secondary school places, '*the more mobile families lose out*'. Another highlighted that s/he was working with students who had been in the UK two years but were still unable to access a school place. S/he felt that if they had accessed a school place when they first arrived, they would have been completing examinations at the end of key stage 4. Interviewees from other LEAs also identified difficulties in accessing school places for **asylum seekers and refugees** arriving in key stage 4. Interviewees from out of school provision sometimes identified difficulties accessing work for vulnerable children whilst they were out of school. Conversely, examples for maintaining continuity were given where mainstream schools provided hospital schools with pupils' schemes of work so that **pupils with medical needs** could keep up to date with their work whilst they were out of school (the success of this was dependent on the relationship between the school and the out of school provision). For **teenage parents**, there were issues about schools not following up coursework issues or maintaining contact with young women whilst they were on their authorised absence period. One LEA had overcome this barrier by drawing up a contract with headteachers detailing the work the school was expected to provide for teenage parents when they were not attending school.

Gaps in learning may be addressed by schools establishing 'banks' of courses accessible to students as independent learners enabling them to focus on aspects of the syllabus that they may have missed. This approach was also being implemented by an EOTAS service that was devising 'off-the-shelf packs' for particular courses for young people entering PRUs and alternative education providers within the LEA. Another interviewee noted that her school had established a learning centre where students could access all the departments' lessons if a member of staff was absent and also access revision lessons. She felt this resource could be developed to be used by students who had missed pieces of coursework/syllabus. However, in order for this approach to be successful, students needed to have independent learning skills, highlighting the importance of providing them with those skills. Independent study skills are crucial for students who are accessing distance learning, particularly at GCSE level. One interviewee described a distance learning course they were piloting, which could be used by **Gypsy/Travellers** when they were travelling (and continued

when they returned to school), as well as by other pupils who may have gaps in their education due to **pregnancy, exclusion, medical needs** etc. (see cameo below).

Independent learning pack for English GCSE

This pack developed by a Traveller Education Service could be used for distance learning; or by students who were out of school due to pregnancy, illness etc.; or by students in school: *'The idea is no matter where they are they can continue their studies'* (TES Advisory and Support Teacher). Working through the learning pack, students were able to produce all the coursework required for a set text, as well as study the appropriate syllabus for the examination. Even if students were unable to sit the examination, their coursework would be submitted to the awarding body and they would be graded on that basis [albeit a low grade]. The pack was being piloted with a group of 23 young people in school. The first pack was paper-based but there were plans to place it on the school's intranet so that students could access it via ICT: *'What the school would love to have is a suite of appropriate independent/distance learning materials that you can use for any pupils who are not in school for whatever reason, or to use with groups in school'* (TES Advisory and Support Teacher).

However, it should be noted that this independent learning pack was produced for a particular set text and that, if pupils were following a different specification with different texts, further packs would have to be produced. It was noted that generally, distance-learning resources were time-consuming to produce. In addition, because they were child-centred, they had to be adapted for each individual and students had to be motivated to complete self-directed learning.

Strategies adopted to support mobile pupils or those with gaps in their education identified by interviewees included, catch-up classes to complete coursework, or support to enable pupils to continue following their existing syllabus. Other strategies successfully used by schools for new arrivals in Years 10 and 11, was to reduce the number of GCSEs studied to enable pupils to have three or four periods a week when they had the opportunity to catch up on coursework (although schools and LEAs need to ensure that equality of access to the curriculum was not compromised). The provision of intensive revision sessions and intensive courses, for example a two-year course completed in two terms had also proved successful with some vulnerable pupils. Other strategies included induction support for young people admitted at non-standard times aiding their retention in school and ensuring information regarding their levels of attainment were disseminated to all staff as quickly as possible. In-school support, via learning support or an EAL room where pupils could come with queries about coursework and homework were also seen as useful (see cameo below). The importance of committed staff who were willing to give up their time to help pupils succeed and provide positive approaches was also noted.

In-school learning support

The EAL Coordinator of a secondary school described the provision of an EAL room and student support office in the school that served as drop-in centres for pupils, so if they had a problem they could go in and speak to an adult about it. The EAL room was described as '*more academic*' where pupils could go if they had difficulties completing homework and they could work on it with the EAL Coordinator. Or, if they were unable to complete it at that time the EAL Coordinator could write a note for their teacher to say '*they weren't able to do the work there and then but they'll do it by a set date*'. It was noted that '*sometimes children feel under stress if they've got homework that they can't do, they don't know how to do it and this is a way of helping them with the homework issue and alleviate the stress*' (EAL Coordinator).

ICT provision/e-learning was also used to aid those young people who were away from school for periods of time, as well as helping them fill gaps in their learning when they returned to school. E-learning packages had successfully been used with school refusers, although there were issues about how LEAs provided access to the Internet and virtual support for young people and there was an identified need for a mix of virtual and face-to-face support.

Summary of key issues: mobility, gaps in education and absence

- Mobility, gaps in education and absence were identified as key barriers to many vulnerable pupils accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4.
- Accessing a school place was seen as a particular barrier for some vulnerable children, such as asylum seekers, arriving part way through key stage 4.
- A range of strategies had been implemented by interviewees to 'plug the gaps' for mobile pupils and other pupils missing education, including providing independent learning opportunities, both within and out of school (i.e. distance learning) and intensive catch-up support.

2.4.2 Curriculum barriers: relevance and alternative accreditation

Relevance of the curriculum

An expectation that pupils must follow the full curriculum even though they may not have had any, or limited secondary school experience, was identified as a barrier by interviewees. Young people have to fit the system rather than adapting it to suit their needs. Conversely, schools have the external pressure of league tables and the standards agenda. Furthermore, it was felt that schools were not always as effective as they should be in assessing prior learning, particularly for **asylum seekers and refugees**, and identifying effective learning pathways. Strategies for support identified focused on reducing the numbers of subjects studied and allowing for flexibility in timetabling. Schools ability/willingness to be flexible and creative about how they delivered the curriculum was seen as key. Where schools were willing to be flexible, students were able to access GCSEs and progress on to positive post-16 destinations (see cameo below).

Provision of a flexible and relevant curriculum

A Year 11 Russian pupil from a circus family was put on roll in Year 11 but attended classes in English, ICT and maths in both Years 10 and 11 simultaneously. This meant she received an intensive, limited curriculum that allowed her to gain some GCSEs including a Russian GCSE, which was her first language at the end of Year 11. She went on to college to take a further two GCSEs alongside her A'levels. However, the interviewee noted that *'so many schools ... can't get their head round the idea that you could do this with the timetable or you could do it with their systems'* and that it had taken a huge amount of persuasion and negotiation on the part of the TES to set this up. It was felt that young people were often expected to *'fit into spaces rather than trying to meet the needs of the children ... There aren't many schools that are this adaptable'* (TES Coordinator).

Due to an interrupted education, some **asylum seekers, refugees and other late arrivals** may not have the skills to access a wide range of GCSE courses or may not be working at GCSE level, thus key skills/basic skills courses may be more appropriate for these students. It was suggested that Tomlinson's recommendations regarding students' accreditation in core skills may be beneficial to many of these students. However, interviewees also raised the issue that vulnerable young people, if they were able, should be accessing as full a curriculum as possible. There was evidence that some key stage 4 arrivals were not admitted into schools and instead were placed in alternative provision, which offered a limited curriculum and restricted opportunities for access to examinations and to develop language skills. It was felt that the reluctance of some schools to admit late arrivals in key stage 4 was symptomatic of the view that these young people were seen as 'resource intensive' or that schools were unable to meet their needs. One interviewee felt that a significant number of young people in this age group were not in full-time education or were finding it very difficult to access it [see limitations of EOTAS provision 2.4.4].

In order to make the curriculum more relevant for **EAL students** and increase their ability to access examinations, it was common practice for schools to enter these students and new arrivals for community language examinations. Evidence suggests that the development of first language skills also assists students in learning a second language. Complementary schools were identified as playing a crucial role in the development of first language skills. It was noted that students had potential for high levels of achievement in community language examinations, which was a huge boost for their confidence in learning and participating in examinations. Interviewees suggested that they would enter students as early as possible for these examinations so that they could progress on to AS level as soon as possible. Schools had also established after school clubs for community languages and were cooperating with one another to provide community language examination support for students and share resources, such as bilingual staff. Challenges surrounding accessing first language speakers for oral examinations were raised: in some instances LEAs had taken on that role and taken responsibility for bringing together groups of pupils to take community language examinations at particular schools within the LEA.

Issues concerning the 'mono-cultural' nature of the curriculum and its relevance for young people from a range of ethnic, cultural and social, cultural backgrounds were raised. It was suggested that secondary schools are *'subject and system-focused'*, rather than *'child-focused'* which militates against many vulnerable children accessing the curriculum and examinations. Furthermore, interviewees working with

vulnerable young people felt that the curriculum was not as diverse as it should be and that there was still a degree of rigidity, despite the freedom to develop a more diverse and inclusive curriculum: *'People are still tied to schemes of work but they are not statutory they are there for guidance'* (Refugee and New Arrivals Consultant). Thus, they highlighted the important role played by specialist staff, such as those from Ethnic Minority Achievement Services or TES in supporting schools to integrate pupils and develop a culturally appropriate curriculum. It was also felt that some of the alternative accreditation used by providers was more relevant for the disengaged young people they were working with. Nevertheless, for some young people, for example **Gypsy/Travellers** the curriculum and accessing any examinations at key stage 4, was not always seen as relevant because they had a viable alternative within the Gypsy/Traveller economy. The key to them accessing examinations was to ensure that they viewed the curriculum as relevant for what they wanted to do after they left school (see 2.5.5).

Examples were given of schools and other education providers adapting the curriculum to meet students' needs, for example fast-tracking pupils in danger of dropping out (see cameo below) or offering a range of accreditation which allowed work to be accredited at different levels.

Fast-tracking students in danger of dropping out

This strategy had been successfully used by a secondary school targeting pupils who were in danger of failing to complete Year 11. Students were fast-tracked in Year 10 in core subjects (maths, English and science GCSE). In Year 11, they followed an alternative curriculum: work placement and college placement programmes but also had the opportunity to better their GCSE grades. This meant that even if they did drop out in Year 11 they had some GCSEs and could move on. The positive impact this had on the young people was highlighted: *'The delight on one lad's face who's been in care since he was in school who could say to his mates 'I've got three GCSEs'. OK they were Fs and Gs but he'd got them, which was important for him'* (Assistant Headteacher, Pupil Support). The school entered 16 young people and, apart from one, they all achieved: *'It was a real success. It gave them a lot of kudos. All through school they had been in bottom sets and struggled and they can now say to their peers 'We've got GCSEs''* (Assistant Headteacher, Pupil Support).

Early identification was seen as a key method of overcoming curriculum (and other) barriers to examination access. For example, transition mentors identifying issues in primary school so that support could be provided, for example via alternative curriculum groups from Year 7 onwards, ensuring that by Year 11 the barriers were removed. Interviewees also highlighted the use of learning mentors to ensure that vulnerable pupils were keeping up with the curriculum, arranging flexible timetables, and providing venues for pupils to work under supervision. In addition, interviewees highlighted the benefits of providing homework support for vulnerable pupils e.g. **Gypsy/Travellers, looked after children and young carers**, from the beginning of their secondary school career and not just at examination times, as they might not have support at home or a place to complete homework. This means that pupils were in the routine of completing homework and feeling positive about attending lessons which *'creates the foundations for the exams in key stage 4'* (TES Coordinator). The following cameo presents an example of a young person and a school working together to compile a flexible timetable.

A flexible timetable

An interviewee provided the example of a Gypsy/Traveller pupil who had attended school fairly regularly until the end of Year 9 but then wanted to leave to work within the family economy. The school and the pupil created a part-time table so that he could access the lessons he wanted to access but also work: *'We worked out he'd come in certain days and do certain things and get coursework done. I used to get on the phone and say 'you've got a science practical you've got to do, can you get in to do this?' And teachers would say 'I'll do it with him'* (Head of Learning Support). He went travelling in Europe but returned to complete his examinations and achieved three or four GCSEs. The Head of Learning Support felt that this success was down to the relationships that the school had with families and young people and that school staff were prepared to be flexible to work with pupils when they were in school or after school if necessary. The other success factor was that the school was willing to negotiate and compromise because they knew this pupil would not attend school at all if they said he had to come in full time: *'The more you compromise the more they're willing to do'*.

The need for additional, relevant provision was also highlighted by an interviewee working with Gypsy/Travellers. She noted that increasingly she was approached by young people who had dropped out of secondary school but who then 'reappeared' in Year 12 asking for assistance to access training places at college. Others highlighted the benefits of using the life experiences that young people had and integrating them into the curriculum (this was beginning to be seen in some accreditation e.g. life skills and citizenship courses). In terms of making the curriculum more relevant to young people's life experiences, staff from one TES had developed cultural studies and citizenship courses (accredited by AQA). These courses had been particularly successful with Gypsy/Traveller pupils' because the young people were able to relate them to their own life experiences and the courses helped address issues about the curriculum not reflecting their culture, language, history and experiences. This was seen as a motivating aspect for the retention of pupils: *'The kids get accreditation, it motivates them and it keeps them in school'* (TES Advisory Teacher).

Similarly, it was suggested that **young carers, looked after children, and asylum seekers'** experiences could all provide relevant material for coursework and project work. Thus, rather than viewing their vulnerability, such as their caring responsibilities, as an obstacle it could be seen as providing a range of useful skills: *'The work that they do in engaging as a young carer should actually be able to contribute in some ways towards their syllabus'* (Representative from a young carers' organisation). Interviewees noted that the range of practical experience and skills that vulnerable young people have could be acknowledged. Interviewees were also pleased that the Tomlinson report had highlighted the benefits of paid work (which was seen as particularly relevant for Gypsy/Travellers).

Alternative accreditation

Opportunities for alternative accreditation via the provision of vocational learning are often used as a strategy for retaining vulnerable young people in education. It is now relatively common practice for schools to access FE colleges and alternative education providers for a range of vocational courses and accreditation, as well as providing alternative accreditation opportunities themselves. These can include: ASDAN awards; college placements studying GNVQs in a range of vocational

subjects (such as motor mechanics and painting and decorating); and work placements. Work-based training, work experience and college placements had also been used successfully by one school with **Gypsy/Travellers** arriving in key stage 4 with little or no secondary school experience, giving them opportunities to gain NVQs and key skills qualifications. Schools were also providing opportunities for accreditation via vocational GCSEs, GCSE short courses and GNVQs. The success of these interventions was their flexibility. The support of senior school management was also crucial in ensuring that these packages were effective. The cameo below provides an example of a flexible programme offering a range of accreditation within school for asylum seekers and refugees:

Year 11 project for asylum seekers and refugees

This was a full-time, school-based project for asylum seekers and refugees who had recently arrived in the UK and did not have a school place. It was an LEA-wide intervention and was funded by the Learning Skills Council. The students were full members of the hosting school where the project was based and could access all its resources and facilities. The students followed a programme which included ESOL, maths, ICT, an introduction to science, language skills, PE and art for four days a week. On the fifth day, students took part in specialist arts projects, which the school could offer as a specialist performing arts and media school. Students were accessing ESOL qualifications, Entry Level maths and English and the ASDAN Bronze Award. Students who were able to, had the opportunity to access GCSEs in selected subjects such as maths and art and one was studying GNVQ science at intermediate level in the sixth form. Students were integrated into the Year 11 and sixth form pastoral systems. They attended careers interviews and also accessed work experience. They were able to access fortnightly art therapy sessions if they wished to and had a regular link to the Connexions workers for the Young Refugee Project based in the LEA. Staff from the NHS Refugee Health Team visited students several times a term to run workshops on health-related issues and accessing services.

Interviewees noted an increasing emphasis, where possible, on providing accreditation that had GCSE equivalence. Some felt that government targets for vulnerable children's GCSE attainment, for example, for looked after children may also have provided some impetus. However, where young people were unable to attain at GCSE level, accreditation at Entry Level, 'pre-GCSE' courses, basic skills, key skills and ESOL courses were used to allow young people to achieve and, if appropriate, begin working towards GCSEs. In some instances, students were 'double entered' for a GCSE and a lower level of accreditation if it was uncertain whether they would achieve a GCSE grade, or would take a pre-GCSE course one year and be entered for the GCSE the following year.

The main forms of alternative accreditation identified were courses provided by:

- Open College Network (OCN)
- Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)
- Edexcel, AQA and the Welsh Board's Preparation for Working Life, Life Skills, Key Skills and Citizenship courses
- providers also used the Welsh Board's Certificate of Achievements in English and science (pre-GCSE level).

These were seen as accessible to vulnerable young people because they were wholly or mainly accredited through assessed coursework and the development of portfolios. Most were available at a range of levels and courses such as Life Skills (available from Entry Level to Level 3) were seen as particularly useful for some **SEN** and **EAL** students because they covered issues that students would be facing post-16. Citizenship courses were also seen as beneficial because they were practical and community-based courses that could be completed within a year (see cameo on GCSE (short course) Citizenship below). An interviewee from a school working with a range of students with EAL needs, including refugees and asylum seekers, noted that increasingly they had to find alternatives to English GCSE because of the difficulties students, including UK **EAL students**, had in passing the examination. Instead of students retaking GCSE English in Year 12, the school was beginning to use key skills and ESOL qualifications to enable students to progress on to higher education.

GCSE (Short Course) Citizenship

This course was run with vulnerable, looked after children who were accessing school or other educational provision part-time. It was run one day a week with a small group of Year 11s and one Year 10. The looked after children's service manager chose the course because it had a 40 per cent coursework component which focused on a community project, thus it was seen as practical and 'hands-on' and there was a short one-and-a-half hour examination at the end of the course. There were no text books; the entire course was taken from life experiences. A large part of the examination related to the coursework students had previously completed and the coursework component was seen as the 'safety net' because *'even if the young people went 'off the boil' you've just got to get them in for that exam on that one day for one-and-a-half hours'* (Service Manager, Looked After Children). The short course was chosen because it had GCSE equivalence (counting as a half GCSE).

Another provider, working with vulnerable young people who were mainly out of school (including young people with **behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)**, **moderate learning difficulties (MLD)**, **Gypsy/Travellers**, **looked after children, young offenders and excluded pupils**) offered a variety of accreditation by accessing a range of providers, including GCSEs and courses provided by OCN which importantly gave young people the opportunity to gain GCSE-equivalent accreditation (see cameo below). Access to this provision meant that for the first time in the LEA looked after children who were not in school gained GCSE-equivalent qualifications and the numbers not entered for GCSE had reduced significantly. The success of this provision was felt to lie in the child-centred and child-led nature of the provision. For example if young people were unable to work with a tutor then the tutor would be changed: *'We don't see it as the kids' fault; it's the tutors' fault for not being able to teach that bunch of kids'* (Programme Manager).

The accreditation available via OCN was seen as accessible for some of the most vulnerable young people as it was evidence-based with no examinations (students' levels of basic skills were often very low). Again the flexibility of the programmes was seen as the reason for their success. Young offenders' institutions had also used OCN accreditation successfully, despite young people being with them for relatively short periods of time. Students built up a portfolio and providers could devise their own courses around set criteria.

OCN courses accessed via an alternative education provider

This was an alternative education provider working with young people aged 14-16, the majority of whom were out of school and not going to access GCSE examinations. The provider offered OCN courses in a wide range of areas: building (joinery, plumbing, bricklaying and plastering); car and bike mechanics; hairdressing; beauty; dance; music/DJ mixing; sports and recreation (including basic skills, maths and English, ICT, healthy eating and fitness, sports and fitness, introduction to multi-gym); and catering. All courses were accredited through OCN at Entry Level¹¹, Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. Last year, 108 young people gained qualifications (approximately 370 individual certificates). Ten young people achieved accreditation at Level 2 and there were four Level 3s. The courses run from September to July and the provider tries to ensure that each young person completes two or three courses. It was noted that some young people achieved a lot more and that some of those on the sports courses last year achieved 11 or 12 certificates. Levels of achievement also depended on the number of hours young people attended as this ranged from two to 25 hours a week: *'At the end of Year 10, a lad could have done all the mechanics and building courses and he would have six Level 1s which is equivalent to six GCSEs D-G at Year 10. Then the next year he could move on and do the level 2s which would give him the A-Cs so he'd have six'* (Programme Manager). Last year young people achieved the equivalent of five GCSEs A-C and Level 3s (A-level equivalent) in the performing arts.

One of the perceived benefits was that there was a range of courses available at each level. For example in plastering, there were three or four courses at Level 1 in different skill areas e.g. skimming a wall, plastering a ceiling. *'So if a young person comes at 14 or 15 he can do three courses at Level 1 and the following year he can do two at Level 2. There's flexibility and you're not stuck with one course from September to July - you should be able to get through them in 15 weeks with 30 hours of learning'* (Intervention Manager). The young people themselves chose the courses they accessed. The fact that tutors were qualified in their skill area but were not necessarily *'teachers'* was seen as another success factor because *'if you try to sit them down and teach them then you'll have a problem ... it's the fact that they have someone who is guiding them rather than teaching them'* (Intervention Manager). In addition, the short-based nature of the programmes, i.e. not more than two hours at a time, meant that young people were retained. Young people who attended the provision were going on to employment and training. The provider had links with local companies and training providers and a local bricklaying firm had promised to take on their 'top set' this year. A training provider had also taken on students who had completed the mechanics course.

The courses were also offering viable progression routes for young people to access employment and training:

There's nothing better than going with a specific motor mechanic certificate at Level 1 or 2 if you want to go into that trade. They're recognised by the trade and we tell the young people to take the certificates and the criteria and show them what you've done because it's virtually doing a full service on a vehicle. All the young people who went for these types of jobs and did that, they ended up getting some work. It might not have been an apprenticeship because the

¹¹ After the first year courses at this level were dropped as OCN said that all students were attaining at Level 1

level of their academic skills may not allow them to do that but they certainly got into work (Intervention Manager).

The flexibility of the OCN framework meant that students could work at their own pace and pick up courses of work where they had left off which was seen as particularly useful for mobile youngsters or those who may experience gaps in their education e.g. for nomadic Gypsy/Travellers who would not attend every week, they were accredited for what they did rather than what they did not do (all had achieved Level 1s last year and were hoping to achieve Level 2s this year).

One of the identified strengths of the OCN accreditation was that it had GCSE-equivalence. ASDAN qualifications and awards are another popular form of alternative accreditation used with a wide range of vulnerable children to provide opportunities to develop personal, social and active citizenship skills, work-related skills, key skills and wider key skills. In the past, ASDAN awards did not have formal recognition in the school league tables. However, this year QCA gave formal approval for the ASDAN Awards to be included in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as a pilot qualification with GCSE equivalence (see Appendix 2), providing many vulnerable children, including **excluded youngsters** and those with **SEN**, opportunities to achieve GCSE-equivalent accreditation.

Although interviewees were generally positive about vocational provision as a way vulnerable youngsters could access accreditation, a number of barriers were identified which were likely to impact on some of the most vulnerable youngsters accessing these vocational opportunities. This type of provision is expensive, so there may be funding issues regarding schools' ability to provide such opportunities. Schools have to budget for a limited number of places on these programmes, so if young people arrive part way through the year, it is likely that all the places may have been allocated. Thus, mobile children (seen as some of the most vulnerable) receive the poorest choices. Interviewees raised the additional issue that vocational opportunities might only be available in response to poor behaviour rather than in relation to need. Furthermore, these opportunities are usually only available from Year 10 onwards, which interviewees noted may be too late for some vulnerable pupils. A lack of alternative provision in Year 9 was associated with vulnerable pupils, e.g. **Gypsy/Travellers** and **looked after children**, dropping out of education.

Whilst interviewees highlighted the benefits of vocational alternative accreditation for many vulnerable pupils, they also raised issues regarding the appropriateness of such provision for individual students. Concerns were raised in relation to Gypsy/Traveller students being offered vocational opportunities because they were Gypsy/Travellers rather than because such opportunities suited their needs and learning requirements. There are a wide range of young people for whom vocational opportunities may be suitable and as a TES Coordinator observed it was important to ensure that the stereotype of '*Traveller children need vocational training*' was not promoted:

Some children need vocational training and some of those children are Travellers ... We always stress that this is the first generation of kids to do academic exams and they need to be allowed to find out if that's their bag (TES Coordinator).

Issues were also raised about the pressure on schools to enter pupils, such as those with SEN, for ‘*courses that count*’ (in the league tables) rather than what may be most suitable for individual pupils. The following example was given by a special school headteacher who noted that the ICT Entry Level Certificate was included in the tables but that another course which could be accredited at a higher level, ICT Skills for Life, could not. The dilemma for this headteacher was whether to ‘*play the league tables game*’ or enter pupils for a course where they could attain a higher level of accreditation which would be better for them in the workplace: ‘*Are the accreditations where you get points necessarily the best ones for less able children to do, if you are also looking at their inclusion into society later?*’ (Headteacher, Special School). This dilemma highlighted the tension that interviewees noted could exist between the ‘inclusion’ and ‘standards’ agendas when focusing on vulnerable young people’s access to examinations at the end of key stage 4.

Summary of key issues: relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation

- In terms of ensuring the curriculum was relevant and accessible for pupils who may have gaps in their education interviewees stressed the importance of providing a flexible curriculum adapted to suit the needs of individual pupils.
- Providing flexible timetabling, reducing the numbers of GCSEs studied, entering EAL students for community language examinations, fast tracking students in danger of dropping out, providing alternative educational opportunities (including vocational opportunities) had been successfully implemented to overcome barriers to accessing examinations.
- Interviewees were accessing (and in some instances developing their own) a range of accreditation to ensure that vulnerable pupils were engaged in a relevant curriculum and experienced success at the end of key stage 4. Examples of ‘additional’ subjects studied included: cultural studies; life skills; preparation for working life and citizenship.
- Where appropriate, providers were accessing accreditation at pre-GCSE level, but they also ensured that where pupils were able to, they accessed courses with GCSE-equivalence. Much of the alternative accreditation identified was viewed as accessible to vulnerable young people because of its flexibility and because it was wholly or mainly assessed via the development of portfolios/coursework.

2.4.3 Curriculum barriers: continuity of courses and communication between providers

Continuity of courses

Lack of continuity in courses was seen as a key barrier for mobile youngsters or those vulnerable children who experienced gaps in their education, such as **looked after children** in short-term placements. For any young person changing school late in key stage 4, a lack of continuity in the courses studied was likely to be problematic. An

interviewee provided the example of a Year 11 Gypsy/Traveller pupil who had transferred schools within the same city where:

Nothing that he'd done in his previous school was relevant to the courses at his new school ... He'd done GCSE maths at his previous school and the group he's in now are doing GNVQ maths so his maths bears no resemblance either (TES Advisory Teacher).

Similarly, it was noted that it would be unlikely that **young offenders** would be accessing the same courses in a YOI that they would be accessing in a PRU or in another YOI. The often short-term nature of their incarceration in YOIs meant that continuity in provision/courses was extremely difficult to maintain. Even whilst they were in a YOI, it was noted that their educational provision would be subject to constant disruption due to other demands within the YOI, such as solicitor visits and court appearances, taking priority. In addition, it was noted that staff shortages within YOIs may further restrict young people's access to educational provision. Some out of school provision may not have access to the same resources as schools, thus making it difficult for them to continue with courses that students may have previously been following. It was also noted that examination centres often follow courses with particular awarding bodies, so if a young person arrived who was following a different course with a different awarding body, the pressure may be on that young person to change courses rather than keep them on their previous course. If young people are highly mobile, this scenario is likely to be repeated, resulting in them ending up with nothing. Examination centres may use certain courses because of the culture within that centre but it may not be the most appropriate course for that young person. Course units are not designed to be interchangeable, which would favour many of these students, because, as interviewees observed, awarding bodies are operating within a competitive market.

Strategies used by schools and other providers to overcome a lack of continuity in provision focused on the willingness of staff to provide additional support and flexible solutions. Where there was divergence in the courses taken, interviewees said that they would try and ensure that coursework already completed by a young person was adapted to fit the syllabus they were following in their new school or out of school provision. Alternatively, they would try and maintain the coursework and syllabus the pupils had been following previously (e.g. in English if they had been studying a different set text). For example, one interviewee described how support staff (learning mentors) in her school, would liaise with a young person's previous school to find out which courses they had followed, where they were up to and then, if appropriate, (for example, if they had arrived late in key stage 4), the mentors would work with the young people to keep them on their previous courses.

Interviewees from YOIs said that if **young offenders** were studying GCSE courses when they came to them, they generally could sit the examinations (they would be entered as a transferred candidate) and that they would liaise with schools to access work. In some instances, teachers may even come in to the YOI to check on progress. However, for this to be successful it was noted that the YOI had to rely heavily on the cooperation of the school and that this was not always forthcoming. However, young offenders were often only in individual YOIs for relatively short periods of time, so they could only access GCSEs if they were in the YOI at examination time. It was

noted that YOIs were starting to use electronic Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) to provide information on young people's progress which helped provide continuity when they moved on to another YOI and/or back into the community.

Communication between providers

Interviewees noted that some vulnerable children e.g. **asylum seekers and refugees, Gypsy/Travellers** may move or be moved with little warning, making communication between providers problematic. Often schools and LEAs did not know where young people were moving to, or who was likely to be arriving in their area/at their school. One interviewee noted that they often did not know a young person had left the school: *'We know somebody went to [name of town] not because they told us but because they were absent for a long time and then we got a note from a school in [name of town] saying 'have you got any information on this pupil?''* (EAL Coordinator, secondary school). Interviewees also noted that even where data was passed on; it was not done so quickly enough. Lack of communication and cooperation between key agencies: housing, social services and education was noted, resulting in difficulties accessing information and chasing up things like coursework. Whilst there are requirements for LEAs to track children missing from education it was pointed out that there is no single effective system where all agencies would be alerted to a young person being moved, or a system which ensures that coursework moves with a young person.

Many schools will now ask parents/carers for details of previous schools attended (if known) and will request information from those schools. However, as one interviewee observed: *'I don't think we've ever received coursework from schools'* (EAL Coordinator, secondary school). Thus, even though schools and other educational providers may request information on attainment and coursework completed, they rarely received it. Educational providers noted that information on young people's levels of attainment, for example **teenage parents, young offenders, excluded pupils**, was often inaccurate or missing which frequently resulted in inaccurate assumptions about students' level of need/ability:

The other issue is if kids come in and the paperwork doesn't come in with them from court, which it usually doesn't. That is one of the things that YOTs have not sorted out at all, it's a huge problem. We find we're being forced to put kids through things they've already got ... It would be easier if the paperwork came because we would know what they'd done and we could then manipulate where they went on our timetable, but in the short-term all we've got is either their word for it or our guesswork (Education Manager, YOI).

Summary of key issues: continuity of courses and communication between providers

- Lack of continuity in courses between providers was seen as a key barrier to vulnerable children accessing examinations. The expectation that if young people moved school/education provider they should change specifications was seen as problematic, particularly for those young people who were moving late in key stage 4. Strategies used to overcome these difficulties focused on the willingness of staff to provide support to allow students to continue with existing specifications or adapting work already completed to fit new specifications.
- Interviewees highlighted a need to ensure that information/data/coursework moved with students when they moved between schools or other educational providers.
- For those young people in vulnerable accommodation (i.e. temporary accommodation), there was still felt to be poor levels of communication between the key agencies involved (housing, social services and education) which meant that schools/LEAs may receive little prior notification of a young person leaving or arriving. This inevitably impacted on schools and other educational providers' ability to access information relating to examination entry and work completed.

2.4.4 Curriculum barriers: limitations of EOTAS provision

Access to examinations may be restricted for those vulnerable pupils out of school and attending alternative forms of educational provision. The main limitation of EOTAS provision identified by interviewees was the restricted access to GCSE qualifications that much of the provision could offer. Examples were provided of late arrivals (**asylum seekers and refugees**) in key stage 4, educated in alternative provision rather than school. This provision was often not full-time and it was felt that young people were unable to access the kind of academic curriculum they would like to and were capable of. This was felt to have a negative impact on their progression routes as they were denied the chance to sit examinations: *'I'm certain for most of the kids moving them away from mainstream education is detrimental to their education'* (EAL Coordinator). Furthermore, it was felt that this type of provision restricted their English language development because they were placed in an environment where there were no proficient speakers of English apart from the teacher: *'that can't be a good way to learn English'* (EAL Coordinator). This interviewee noted that previously the school had young people arrive in Year 10 with no English but they were able to access GCSEs and go on to college because interaction with other students had developed their English language skills, but current new arrivals (placed in alternative provision) were denied this opportunity. In another LEA, key stage 4 asylum seekers and refugees without a school place attended college. Although they received 25 hours a week provision within an ESOL department and thus the tuition was tailored to meet their language needs, it was acknowledged that: *'They don't provide the full curriculum and they don't automatically enter them for a range of GCSEs'* (Team Leader, Refugees and Asylum Seekers). Furthermore, it was felt that

college provision might not be appropriate for some of the most vulnerable young people who required a more supportive, nurturing environment.

As noted above, EOTAS provision was not always full-time (due to the nature of the provision and/or students' needs) which inevitably limited the curriculum and associated examinations accessed by young people. There was not always sufficient staff expertise or resources to teach a full range of GCSE courses. In addition, there was concern that EOTAS staff were not always appropriately qualified teachers, for example because they had a primary or FE background. One interviewee was currently fighting a proposal that, due to funding restrictions, home tuition for **pupils with medical needs** would be provided by teaching assistants rather than qualified teachers. Even in special schools, it was acknowledged that **SEN students** were not always accessing a full range of examinations because of a lack of staff expertise to teach some GCSE courses. However, one special school overcame this barrier by students attending part-time in a mainstream school. Similarly, EOTAS providers had expanded the curricula they offered by bringing in mainstream teachers to teach particular subjects; relying on schools to provide and mark work for particular subjects where they did not have the necessary expertise; or linking with schools that could provide resources such as science labs or staff able to moderate work.

There were differences in the approaches to the curriculum taken by EOTAS providers; some interviewees gave reasons why they limited the curriculum: *'We aren't driven by people passing GCSEs. We don't think that that's our main purpose'* (Headteacher, PRU), whilst others talked about offering the widest range possible: *'The more external exams I can enter kids for, the more that does for them'* (Headteacher, PRU). The cameo below presents the wide range of qualifications taken in one **teenage parents** unit.

Qualifications available in EOTAS provision

The following qualifications offered by a teenage parents unit highlighted the range of accreditation that could be available within EOTAS provision: English language and literature (GCSE and Entry level); maths; science (Double award GCSE and Entry level); Human physiology and health (GCSE); Child Development (GCSE); Food and nutrition; Art (GCSE); Law (GCSE); RE (GCSE); Citizenship (GCSE); Preparation for working life (short GCSE); History (GCSE); Geography (GCSE); ICT and Health and Social Care (Vocational GCSE [formerly GNVQ intermediate]). The head of the unit highlighted their willingness to ensure that young people were able to continue studying the range of qualifications that they were accessing previously: *'What we try to do is if somebody comes in from a school and they're already following a course, we pick it up. Last year, for example, we did sociology and psychology GCSE'*. The unit was extremely adaptable and flexible and staff would pick up the different specifications that young people were following. For example: *'With one girl, I'm doing modern world history but with another I'm doing the schools' history project. Last year we did geography spec A and somebody came in doing spec C'* (Head of Unit).

Despite the constraints they were working with, the expertise of EOTAS staff was viewed as a way of overcoming barriers to vulnerable children accessing examinations. Obstacles were overcome because staff *'were willing to put in the effort to make it work for the pupils'* and had a *'can do'* approach. The headteacher from one PRU observed that, because young people were taught by curriculum specialists

who had detailed knowledge of examination specifications and were *'experienced at assessing where the gaps are and plugging them'*, young people's self-esteem, attendance and commitment increased, which was directly attributed to their success in achieving *'one grade higher than they would have done if they'd remained in mainstream'*. EOTAS providers had also successfully linked up with specialist providers such as City Learning Centres (CLCs) to use ICT to deliver the curriculum, including the development of resources to expand the range of subjects studied. For example, a CLC and hospital school had developed a micro science lab that could be used by young people at home and in hospital. Awarding bodies will allow science practicals to be completed on laptops.

Lack of formal accreditation opportunities within alternative provision was identified as a barrier, particularly in interventions that were not education-focused and did not have teaching members of staff, such as youth service provision: *'if you're in [some] alternative education, access to GCSEs is generally not possible'* (Representative from YOI). This issue had been resolved in one LEA with all alternative providers agreeing to offer students GCSE maths and English as a guaranteed minimum (or Entry Level if that was more appropriate). On-line resources were used to expand the range of accreditation available and the subjects studied. The LEA provided support through a team of fully qualified teachers who produced materials and supported the youth service and voluntary sector providers, particularly those who were new to providing GCSEs. However, it should be noted that for a significant number of vulnerable young people attending EOTAS provision, access to GCSE courses may not be appropriate and that alternative accreditation may be more suitable.

For **home educators** there may be a range of options for accessing GCSEs (e.g. distance learning, adult education colleges). However, it is unlikely that these young people will be able to access the range of GCSEs that would be available to them in school, due to restrictions on the specifications available to private candidates imposed by awarding bodies. Where home education is not a 'lifestyle choice' and is a result of young people experiencing problems in school, parents may not have the knowledge and skills to support effective learning: *'There's more and more people coming to home education with teenagers who they have withdrawn from school for crisis reasons ... Those families often find it very difficult to access any formal learning'* (Education Otherwise Representative). In addition, home educated young people may experience difficulties accessing opportunities for practical or group work. Strategies employed to overcome some of these barriers included part-time attendance at schools/colleges and home educators coming together to provide opportunities for group work.

Summary of key issues: limitations of EOTAS provision

- Access to examinations may be restricted for those young people attending EOTAS provision due to the nature of the provision and/or students' needs.
- In some EOTAS provision, limitations in staff expertise and resources restricted young people's access to a full range of GCSEs. Nevertheless, despite the constraints they worked with the expertise and commitment of EOTAS staff was viewed as a way barriers to accessing examinations could be overcome.
- Lack of opportunities for accessing GCSEs was still an issue for some alternative education providers, although LEAs were implementing strategies to try and resolve this.

2.4.5 Curriculum barriers: pupil ability

Many of the interviewees spoken to highlighted that they were working with vulnerable children who were unable to access GCSEs, either because of their levels of special educational need or disengagement: '99 per cent of the kids we pick up are kids who would never do a GCSE' (Alternative Education Manager). Another interviewee observed that nearly 50 per cent of the Year 11 **looked after children** in the LEA had a statement of SEN¹² and, although they were in appropriate educational provision, they were effectively disappplied from the GCSE curriculum because of the severity of their needs. Interviewees working with these students highlighted the benefits of being able to access alternative accreditation at appropriate levels (see 2.4.2).

Gypsy/Travellers' underachievement at key stages 1 to 3 was identified as a key barrier to them accessing examinations at key stage 4. The following summation by an advisor working with Gypsy/Travellers highlighted the range of issues which can impact on pupils' underachievement:

Underachievement rooted in poor attendance, late access, prejudiced teaching (explicitly or implicitly). Implicitly the prejudiced teaching comes from a curriculum that is devoid of all affirmation of you and explicitly through the leaked prejudices of teachers who look professionally correct but the child knows they're disliked. The system implicitly tells the child 'this is not for you, you are not academic, you are not bright' (Gypsy/Traveller Consultant).

For pupils with low levels of basic skills, the inappropriateness of an academic, GCSE-focused curriculum is likely to be accentuated as they move through secondary school and the learning becomes more advanced, resulting for some in disengagement and non-retention in school. A lack of family literacy e.g. for some **Gypsy/Travellers** and **EAL students** may present further barriers. As noted earlier, whilst **EAL students** might acquire 'surface' fluency in language skills relatively quickly, a key barrier for them in accessing examinations was felt to be that they did not acquire the academic literacy skills necessary for written work.

¹² Nationally 27 per cent of looked after children have a statement

For those vulnerable students who did have the potential to access GCSEs but perhaps required some additional support, a range of strategies were identified (see 2.4.2 for additional strategies) including: revision support for **SEN pupils** - drawing up revision plans with pupils as part of their IEP or statement review; providing schools with grants for Year 11 **looked after children** to ensure that they were entered for GCSEs and to boost their grades. In terms of identifying pupils who may be vulnerable to not accessing GCSEs, schools and LEAs were monitoring attainment and carrying out data analysis on the performance of particular groups within schools, for example **minority ethnic pupils**, and **looked after children**. The cameo presented below highlights how monitoring the attainment of under-performing pupils, in this instance **minority ethnic pupils**, was used to inform mainstream practice.

Monitoring attainment to inform practice

This was an intervention tracking minority ethnic pupils deemed to be at risk of underachievement from primary through to secondary school. Staff were employed in eight to ten schools within the LEA to track pupils' progress across the subject areas. This information was then collated and used to inform overall practice at the year level: *'It shouldn't just be about those children, it's about the protocols and procedures within the organisation at a year level. The trick here is that you learn from addressing minority issues to inform the majority issue which is basically the whole system'* (Team Leader for Ethnic Minority Achievement).

Summary of key issues: pupil ability

- It was noted that many interviewees were working with vulnerable children who, due to their levels of special educational need or disengagement, were unable to access GCSEs. The benefits of accessing alternative accreditation for some of these young people were noted.
- In order to address issues of underachievement, LEAs were monitoring the attainment of vulnerable groups in order to inform mainstream practice.

2.4.6 Curriculum barriers: school attitudes

School attitudes were seen as a key barrier to vulnerable children accessing examinations but also could be a key factor in overcoming the barriers identified. Thus, schools' attitudes were felt to play a crucial role in determining access. For example, it was noted that if schools were unwilling to liaise and develop relationships with parents, and address issues of retention in secondary school sensitively then it was unlikely that **Gypsy/Traveller pupils** would be retained:

I've got schools that bend over backwards to invite parents in and talk to them and spend hours with them and turn themselves inside out trying to find ways to make it work. I've got schools where there's no space for any work, you're [as a pupil] expected to go in and conform to whatever you're ordered to do

and if you won't or can't do that, then you're not supposed to stay there (TES Coordinator).

Interviewees noted that with an adaptable and cooperative school they could work round the barriers presented: *'there's a danger when we look at barriers and failures that we don't identify the extent to which good practice and flexibility by schools can change things and affect outcomes'* (TES Advisory Teacher). Schools need to have a flexible attitude and be willing to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the young person but it was acknowledged that *'it takes quite a commitment from a school to be willing to do that'* (Head of Learning Support). The example was given of a pupil who had started at their school in the September of Year 11 who had not been in school for several years but was quite good at maths. So, a member of staff worked one-to-one with her enabling her to complete all her maths coursework in a few weeks. This level of commitment from individual staff meant that students were able to succeed. In other circumstances, it was often the responsibility of external support agencies to convince schools to enter pupils for examinations and ensure that coursework was completed. In this context, it was again acknowledged that some schools were reluctant to enter vulnerable children, for example **school refusers**, or **pupils with medical needs**, because of low expectations of pupils' likely attainment levels.

Strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers included ensuring that the senior management of schools were 'on board' when trying to access support for vulnerable children, for example in setting up alternative programmes and flexible timetables and, in addition, that there was a key point of contact (preferably a senior member of staff) within the school for vulnerable students. Interviewees also highlighted the need for schools to be aware of the barriers vulnerable children might be facing, for example via the development of self-review documentation to identify barriers and possible solutions (see 2.5.1). There was a recognised need for schools to take responsibility for all their students, including those deemed vulnerable, and identify them as belonging to the school rather than support services. Schools were seen as having a responsibility to *'adapt their policies and practices to meet the needs of the many diverse groups within the school population and access to examinations also have to be placed in that context and review policies and procedures to identify barriers'* (Refugee Consultant).

Summary of key issues: school attitudes

- School attitudes were seen as playing a crucial role in determining vulnerable pupils' access to examinations.
- The willingness of schools to be flexible and to see round the barriers identified were viewed as crucial in ensuring vulnerable pupils' access to examinations. The commitment of individual members of staff, along with the support of senior management within school, was also noted as a key to success.

2.5 Wider issues

This final section addressing barriers, collates and reflects in detail on the wider issues or underlying features of vulnerable young people's lives which may present as barriers to accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4. The main barriers identified were as follows:

- awareness and identification
- cultural capital of GCSEs
- disaffection and disengagement
- expectations and assumptions
- cultural factors and parental issues
- social concerns

2.5.1 Wider issues: awareness and identification

Awareness issues were raised as a potential barrier in relation to both schools and parents. A lack of school/LEA awareness of the needs of vulnerable children may be a barrier to accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4. Interviewees felt that schools needed greater awareness of the problems faced by vulnerable pupils and also information about where they could access support for these young people. In addition, it was felt that in the case of **young carers**, better links between the services that support children and those that support adults were required. Schools need to be aware that some vulnerable young people, for example **young carers** and **Gypsy/Travellers**, may be reluctant to identify themselves due to fears of bullying and racism. Without identification, their needs cannot be addressed appropriately. For young carers, non-identification was viewed as the key barrier to them accessing examinations, highlighting the need for greater awareness, thus enabling young people to be supported appropriately: *'The first hurdle where most young carers fall is that the school isn't aware they are a young carer'* (Representative from a young carers organisation). It was also noted that, even when schools did identify young carers, it was often so late that their difficulties had become entrenched, creating further barriers to them accessing examinations. For **pupils with medical needs**, there may be an issue about raising awareness amongst medical staff of the importance of examinations and changing the timing of procedures to increase access to examinations: *'You need to have the confidence to say to the consultant: 'Can we move this procedure because this person needs to access this exam because this is their future?''* (Headteacher, Hospital School).

In terms of raising schools' awareness of the inclusion of vulnerable children in examinations, interviewees highlighted the benefits of data monitoring and self-review. In some, LEAs' data monitoring and self-review processes had been used to identify issues regarding the lack of access/attainment in GCSEs of certain vulnerable groups. For example, in one LEA the TES had developed a self-review document for schools for **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils. This was then expanded to focus on inclusion generally and encompassed **looked after children** and **Black and minority ethnic pupils**. This self-review process had assisted schools in identifying the measures they needed to take to be more inclusive, including a focus on access to GCSEs.

Lack of parental awareness of the examination system was also identified as a barrier. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge of examination requirements and specifications was

seen as a significant barrier for **home educating families**, particularly for those who had withdrawn their children from school for ‘crisis’ reasons, rather than those who had chosen this form of education for their children. Home education organisations can provide advice and assistance for these families. Other specialist services, such as home and hospital tuition, also were seen to play a crucial role in raising parents’ awareness of how their children could access examinations.

Summary of key issues: awareness and identification

- Schools need to be aware that some young people, such as young carers and Gypsy/Travellers, may be unwilling to identify their vulnerability due to fears of bullying and racism. Without identification their needs might not be addressed appropriately. The non-identification of young carers was seen as the key barrier to this vulnerable group not accessing examinations.
- Interviewees highlighted the benefits of data monitoring and self-review in raising schools’ awareness of vulnerable children’s access to examinations.
- Lack of parental awareness of the examination system and processes were identified as a barrier to access.

2.5.2 Wider issues: the cultural capital of GCSEs

GCSEs were seen as a ‘*right of passage*’, even for some of the most disengaged young people, because they wanted to be the same as their mainstream peers. Thus, the ‘cultural capital’ associated exclusively with GCSEs as a qualification at key stage 4, could act as a barrier to vulnerable children accessing more appropriate examinations and therefore positive future progression routes. It was noted that the pressure to achieve GCSEs could induce a sense of failure if young people were unable to attain at this level. An interviewee working with **pupils with medical needs**, who often had high expectations of achievement at GCSE, whilst acknowledging the existence of alternative access arrangements for FE and HE, observed that young people and parents usually viewed these as inferior progression routes: ‘*I’ve had sad phone calls from parents saying my 16-year-old can’t take any GCSEs and they’re on the scrap heap*’ (Representative of an association representing young people with ME).

Interviewees noted that it was particularly important for **young people in PRUs** to be able to say that, despite attending a PRU, they were still accessing GCSEs. To address this specific issue, one PRU had developed AQA unit awards which mapped on to parts of the GCSE specifications. If a pupil amassed sufficient unit awards, they covered the GCSE content and therefore could ‘convert’ the unit awards to GCSE coursework and examination. However, interviewees also acknowledged that many vulnerable young people were working below GCSE level, and there remain issues about the value attributed to lower levels of accreditation. A significant number of vulnerable young people cannot attain the goal of five A*-C GCSEs and interviewees felt that these young people should nevertheless be able to receive recognition for what they were able to achieve. This was deemed to require a shift in thinking

regarding the value placed on non-GCSE accreditation, including qualifications that have GCSE equivalence.

Summary of key issues: the cultural capital of GCSEs

- It was important for vulnerable students, particularly those out of school, to feel that they were working towards similar forms of accreditation as their peers i.e. GCSEs. However, the expectation that everyone accesses GCSEs was felt to be a significant barrier to those young people who were unable to attain at this level.
- Interviewees noted the importance of raising the value of other forms of accreditation but that this would require a significant cultural change, reflecting the ‘parity of esteem’ debate that has been evident for a number of years.

2.5.3 Wider issues: disaffection and disengagement

Disengagement from school is inevitably a significant barrier to vulnerable pupils accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4. Issues of disengagement may become particularly acute from Year 9 onwards, when the relevance and accessibility of the curriculum may become more challenging for many vulnerable students. Thus, retention in key stage 4 was seen as an issue, particularly for **Gypsy/Travellers** (see 2.5.5) but also for other vulnerable young people at risk of disengagement, such as, **looked after children, young carers, teenage parents, and excluded pupils**. For all vulnerable youngsters, there was felt to be a need to address the problems that may arise in relation to insecurity within the secondary school context, often manifested in non-attendance or behavioural difficulties. Clearly, disengagement from the learning environment will mean that it is unlikely that students will access examinations at the end of key stage 4. For example, it was noted that many **teenage parents** were young people who were disengaged from school prior to their pregnancy so *‘if they’d been missing from school for two years before (they became pregnant) then they’re not going to go to school’* (Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer).

For **looked after children** issues were raised regarding a *‘truanting culture’* within residential homes and the need to change expectations regarding school attendance and the importance of education within the home. One example of attempts to address this was given. If a young person was not in school for any reason, apart from illness, they were expected to attend ‘school’ within this particular residential home. They had to get up as if they were going to school, wear their school uniform and complete work in the dining room of the home. It was noted that the first looked after child in the LEA living in a residential home to achieve 5 A-Cs lived at this home (although it was acknowledged that his success was also down to his own internal resilience, his family’s educational experiences [he had two brothers who had gone on to university] and the stability of his care placement).

Interviewees raised the issue that, for many vulnerable children, if they felt they were unlikely to achieve accreditation, then their motivation to continue to attend school was virtually non-existent. Many vulnerable students’ experience of disaffection was underpinned by low levels of self-esteem and interviewees noted that they frequently

articulated feelings that they were going to fail which impacted on their ability and confidence to access GCSEs. Interviewees also highlighted that they had difficulties coping with the relatively long-term nature of GCSE courses because of the day-to-day difficulties they experienced in their lives. Solutions to these barriers presented by interviewees included the provision of smaller unitised awards that helped motivate students and providing a more relevant student-directed curriculum with alternative accreditation (see 2.4.2). In addition, educational providers ensured that young people did experience success by, for example, entering them for lower levels of accreditation to boost their confidence and self-esteem (although there was an acknowledged need to ensure that this strategy did not have a negative impact on the motivation of higher achievers).

For some disengaged young people, for example those who may have been bullied at school or **school refusers**, home education was seen as a possible solution to their difficulties. However, interviewees acknowledged that it was extremely difficult for these young people, particularly if they left school during key stage 4, (which often they did), to access examinations.

Suggested strategies for overcoming disengagement have been highlighted throughout this report. Interviewees felt that education providers needed to be *'more creative about alternative educational provision'* from Year 9 onwards (see 2.4.2 for discussion of provision that is currently being accessed). Strategies used by schools to prevent disengagement and drop-out for vulnerable young people included: mentoring (from Year 7 onwards); appointing non-teaching heads of year so that when problems arose they were dealt with immediately by a senior member of staff; addressing issues of non-attendance and exclusion and ensuring that appropriate reintegration strategies were implemented; and senior staff monitoring identified pupils to ensure that vulnerable children had support from an authority figure within the school.

Summary of key issues: disaffection and disengagement

- Vulnerable young people disengaged from the learning environment are unlikely to access examinations at the end of key stage 4. Furthermore, the difficulties faced by many vulnerable young people may compound their insecurity within the learning environment.
- Vulnerable pupils' disaffection was often under-pinned by low levels of self-esteem and sense of failure. Educational providers attempted to overcome these barriers by providing them with opportunities to experience success.
- It was noted that for many vulnerable youngsters, levels of disengagement were particularly acute from Year 9 onwards, when the relevance and accessibility of the curriculum often became more challenging. It was suggested that opportunities to access alternative education opportunities and accreditation needed to be widened and to be available earlier.

2.5.4 Wider issues: expectations and assumptions

The expectations of young people, their families, schools and teachers can all present as barriers to accessing examinations. The low expectations of school staff in relation to **asylum seekers** as noted already was identified as a particular issue. It was suggested that these young people were often labelled as *'traumatised'* and therefore unable to learn, despite many having had no direct experience of war or persecution. Similarly, there was an issue that these students were thought of in terms of a *'deficit model'*. That is they were seen as *'lacking'* because of their levels of English language competency, rather than as young people who were bringing skills that could be built upon and who had aspirations. It was noted that some 'good practice' schools promoted bilingual learners to higher or mixed ability sets if they had a history of schooling. Developing more sophisticated first language assessments and moving them quickly through sets had changed expectations of asylum seekers within these schools and had also resulted in the schools improving their position in the league tables. However, this practice was still seen as *'an exception rather than the rule'* (Consultant for Ethnic Minority Achievement). League tables and subject competition were seen to militate against raising schools' expectations of some **minority ethnic pupils**. In terms of motivating pupils, placing some key stage 4 new arrivals in alternative educational provision was seen as *'catastrophic'*, when most had high expectations and wanted to attend mainstream school and access examinations.

It was suggested that many vulnerable pupils conformed to the low expectations held by school staff, for example for **excluded pupils**: *'Nothing has been asked of them, so nothing is what you've got'* (Headteacher, PRU). These low expectations were seen to have a detrimental impact on young people's levels of self-esteem and confidence: *'they think they're thick'*, and was viewed as one of the biggest barriers to them accessing GCSEs. A number of EOTAS providers said they tried to address this issue by ensuring that, when working with key stage 4 students, they emphasised that they were taking GCSEs and were on a par with their mainstream peers.

There was a concern from interviewees that lower expectations of some **minority ethnic pupils**, for example Black Caribbean pupils, resulted in higher numbers not being entered for GCSEs. Furthermore, minority ethnic pupils in one LEA commented that they had been entered for 'half GCSEs' (GCSE short courses) but pupils did not know what that meant and how it might affect their progression, this illustrated an apparent lack of communication between pupils and school staff. Young people felt that they had been entered for a 'half GCSE' because they could not be trusted to achieve a 'whole' GCSE. Again, this was seen as an issue about expectations, young people and/or staff had unrealistic expectations about their performance and were not communicating the reasons behind entering them for this level of accreditation. There was still an issue for some interviewees working with **students with SEN**, that certain pupils in special schools who were capable of achieving were either not being entered, or were entered for lower level examinations. Due to issues of non-retention in secondary school, TES interviewees noted the importance of working in partnership with families and schools to address these issues and raise expectations on both sides. Furthermore, the reluctance of some schools and teachers to enter **Gypsy/Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees** and other migrant workers for examinations due to an expectation that they would leave, was acknowledged.

It was acknowledged that schools' low expectations of vulnerable young people were often grounded in a well-intentioned belief that they were doing the best for the young person, for example because of their caring responsibilities or illness. However, interviewees stressed the importance of gaining accreditation to act as a 'buffer' against their vulnerability. It was suggested that there needed to be a balance between flexibility and sensitivity regarding their needs, whilst acknowledging the importance of education and access to examinations. For example, one provider working with **looked after children** described how a school had suggested that *'it won't be appropriate for him (looked after child) to do exams, but we've got some good alternative accreditation'* (Looked After Children Coordinator). Her contention was that vulnerable youngsters like this student needed examinations more than anyone else. Therefore, interviewees were supportive of the GCSE targets implemented for vulnerable young people (for example, looked after children) because they had helped raise expectations around some of the most disengaged young people accessing GCSEs and GCSE-equivalent courses (see 2.4.2), which may not have happened in the past.

Whilst most of the comments related to expectations of vulnerable children being too low, issues were also raised about expectations being too high. Examples were provided of **young carers, school refusers** and **pupils with medical needs** who felt they had failed because they were unable to access GCSEs or the full range of GCSEs. This again highlighted the need for both pupils and their parents to have realistic or calibrated expectations about their levels of achievement at GCSE.

Summary of key issues: expectations and assumptions

- A 'deficit model' of thinking concerning some vulnerable pupils, for example asylum seekers and students with SEN, meant that young people did not always achieve their full potential. Interviewees raised concerns about the placing of key stage 4 new arrivals in alternative educational provision and the detrimental impact this had on their ability to access examinations.
- Furthermore, it was suggested that many vulnerable pupils conformed to the low expectations held of them.
- It was acknowledged that schools' low expectations of vulnerable young people were often grounded in a well-intentioned belief that they were doing the best for the young people. The implementation of GCSE targets for some vulnerable groups, for example looked after children, was felt to have helped raise schools and LEAs' expectations and counter assumptions.

2.5.5 Wider issues: cultural factors and parental issues

The main cultural factors/parental issues identified as potential barriers to vulnerable children accessing examinations focused on lack of support and awareness. Lack of parental/carer support with homework and/or coursework was identified as a possible barrier for all vulnerable children, but as a particular issue for **asylum seekers and refugees** and other minority ethnic pupils, such as **Gypsy/Travellers** and **EAL**

pupils. It was noted that parents may not have the skills and understanding of the examinations system to support their children with homework or coursework or to realise the importance of option choices. Furthermore, parental difficulties in negotiating the structures of large secondary schools may present as a barrier. For example, many **Gypsy/Traveller parents**, if they attended secondary school, often had very poor experiences and thus had negative attitudes towards their relationships with secondary schools. However, it was noted that schools may be reluctant to meet families in their own homes where they might feel more confident. Similarly, the parents of **young carers** may experience difficulties communicating effectively with schools, particularly if schools are unaware of their difficulties. Building positive relationships with families was seen as a key factor in overcoming many of the barriers identified:

It's having that partnership and real involvement of parents with the learning of their kids even if they don't understand or haven't got English as a first language you set up programmes that they can feel they have a contribution to make (Head of Diversity and Inclusion).

The importance of developing strong links with families was emphasised, by for example, identifying a key link person within school who parents and pupils could access for support. Home/school liaison was seen as particularly important for those parents unfamiliar with the education system and the structure of accredited programmes, for example parents new to the UK and Gypsy/Traveller parents. The benefits of community mentoring were also acknowledged (see cameo below), along with mentoring within peer and cultural group within school.

Community mentoring

This was a long-term (two year), community mentoring project for BME pupils. It targeted young people who achieved a Level 5 in their key stage 3 tests but who schools felt would not attain five A-Cs because of their behaviour. One of the success factors of the project was that it was based out of school: *'I think that's important for young people who are vulnerable to have good out of school programmes that are supportive to their engagement'* (Head of Diversity and Inclusion). In Year 11 the programme had a particular focus on subjects young people had difficulties with in school. The project included support from pastoral and academic mentors, as well as a range of social activities: *'They look at identity, racism, sexism etc. as well as going to a theme park or the theatre'* (Head of Diversity and Inclusion). The project was deemed to have a high success rate, with 78 per cent of pupils achieving 5 A-Cs. The project's success was attributed to its longevity *'you have to have a sustainability of support that makes a difference'* and parental involvement *'in terms of understanding the programme and what's happening with the kids. Many parents become disaffected with schools because of their children's behaviour, they're only contacted when there's a problem'* (Head of Diversity and Inclusion).

It was also acknowledged that there was still a lack of awareness and support for examinations from some non-education professionals working with vulnerable children. It was felt that social workers were still making decisions about **looked after children** without a full awareness of the impact these decisions might have on a young person's access to education and examinations. Similarly, for **unaccompanied asylum seekers** accommodated in private residential homes it was felt that there was

little support for education: *'It's easy for them not to come in or do homework. There isn't the link between the school and those homes'* (EAL Coordinator). A designated teacher noted that for a looked after child, their school placement may be the most stable part of their life. However, there was still a tendency if a young person was experiencing problems in school to move schools rather than try and address the problem. This issue is being addressed and many local authorities are working with social workers and carers to raise their awareness of the importance of education and examinations and the impact that moving care placements may have on educational access and achievement.

It was noted that parents needed to be familiar with the examination system and processes so that they knew what their children should be doing, for example, during study leave. However, for **EAL students** a lack of funding to translate information about examinations into community languages (especially more unusual languages) may act as a barrier to improving parental awareness. Furthermore, a lack of communication between parents and pupils might mean that parents might not be following up issues of revision and examination preparation. It was also noted that if pupils were not familiar with the examination system and processes they would be unaware of the steps they needed to go through and therefore would be unable to inform their parents/carers. Conversely, it was suggested that if parents/carers were involved, understood the subjects/courses their children were studying and how the school system worked, then they were likely to access examinations more successfully. Interviewees felt that in order to overcome some of the language barriers for **EAL students** schools had to ensure that parents felt they and their language were valued and that pupils should be encouraged to talk to their parents about their school experiences in their own language. One LEA had run community-based study support in community centres used by refugees and had worked with parents on how to support their children in examinations.

Barriers were also identified in relation to study leave and issues of family literacy. It was noted that pupils receive a print-out of their examinations timetable but if parents are not literate then they are dependent on their children remembering when their examinations are. For example, **Gypsy/Traveller** families do not necessarily have calendars and diaries and interviewees provided examples of pupils not turning up for examinations or getting the dates mixed up. Similarly, for any vulnerable pupil out of school during study leave, e.g. **teenage parents** on authorised absence, they are effectively 'out of the loop' which may increase the possibility of them not turning up for the examination or not receiving information about changes to the timetable. It was noted that in some residential homes other issues, such as staffing shortages or *'other kids kicking off'* may mean that looked after youngsters who needed transport to examinations did not receive it. Strategies used by support services to overcome these barriers included phoning young people to remind them they had an examination, transporting them to the examination and providing intensive support in Year 11 to overcome a lack of family literacy. The importance of effective communication links was noted:

At GCSE, good practice would be where schools, LEAs and Traveller Education Services are establishing good Year 10 and 11 communication systems through ICT and mobile phones so that youngsters are always being told, irrespective of where they are, about deadlines and dates for coursework

or when they have to sign a form. So it's about a sophisticated structure of communication with the client group (Gypsy/Traveller Advisor).

Other cultural factors identified as a potential barrier focused on relationships between staff and pupils: **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils, for example, are seen as adults within the Travelling community but as children within school, leading to possible conflict around behaviour, attitudes and relationships, which may lead to their disengagement from school. Furthermore, older children have traditionally been expected to take up a place within the Traveller economy, which along with issues of racism, also impacts on their retention in secondary school. A TES Advisory Teacher noted the perceived irrelevance of examinations within the Gypsy/Traveller community: *'The young people themselves don't see why they need exams 'why do I have to do this?'* For many pupils this was rooted in the existence of pre-determined progression routes into the family business. Different educational values, the perceived irrelevance of examinations within the Gypsy/Traveller community and racism, may lead to tensions between the Gypsy/Traveller culture and pupils participating fully within the secondary education system. The value placed on work and self-employment and the existence of economic alternatives within the Traveller economy meant that: *'You can't dangle the carrot of 'if you don't get GCSEs you can't go to college or won't get a good job' because they don't want that anyway'* (TES Advisory Teacher). In addition, a TES Coordinator highlighted how gender issues impacted on Gypsy/Travellers' retention in secondary school. It was felt that men colluded with boys' non-attendance and took them off to work (which also reinforced their cultural identity via the maintenance of the Traveller economy), whilst more girls were completing GCSEs and going on to FE courses.

Strategies for overcoming these barriers identified by interviewees focused on ensuring examinations/accreditation were seen as relevant for pupils' lifestyle/culture and desired progression routes, for example, teaching about health and safety issues and linking it in with work they were doing. Furthermore, it was noted that Gypsy/Traveller pupils were accessing GCSEs in those schools where they *'delight in the children ... the child knows that the school knows that they are a Gypsy and they still love them. So it's the 4 As again: 'Access, Attendance, Achievement and Acceptance'* (Gypsy/Traveller Advisor).

The issue of some **minority ethnic pupils** taking extended holidays was raised by one interviewee and the tension between wanting to support these important cultural events whilst having concerns about the time missed was acknowledged. This interviewee observed that pupils taking extended holidays in key stage 4 were given coursework, but that it was rarely completed. This highlights the need to raise parental awareness of the importance of the work and/or provide intensive catch-up support. Finally, the culture within schools, YOIs and PRUs of it being *'cool not to learn'*, along with peer group pressure, were also seen as barriers to access. Furthermore, the stigma within the community associated with attending a PRU was acknowledged as presenting as a barrier. PRUs were associated with young people who do not achieve and poor results. Interviewees felt that if they could break down this barrier with parents, parents could then act as advocates within the community, and also help pupils overcome this stigma.

Summary of key issues: cultural factors and parental issues

- Lack of parental support and awareness of the examinations system was identified as a particular barrier for those parents who had little experience of secondary school or education in the UK. Building positive relationships and improving communication with families was seen as a key factor in overcoming many of the barriers identified.
- It was still the case that the culture within some residential homes meant that support for the education of looked after children was limited.
- Cultural expectations, the importance of work within the family economy, the perceived irrelevance of examinations, along with issues of racism, may impact on Gypsy/Traveller pupils' retention in secondary school and their access to examinations. Strategies for retaining pupils in school included the provision of a more flexible and relevant curriculum, building positive relationships with families and addressing issues of racism.

2.5.6 Wider barriers: social concerns

Interviewees identified a wide range of other issues that vulnerable children had to address which could impact on their ability to access examinations, including accommodation issues, health concerns (the young person's and/or their parents/carers), caring duties, offending issues and their legal status within the UK.

Housing and accommodation issues were seen as a key barrier for all young people in vulnerable accommodation (i.e. temporary accommodation), but particularly for **asylum seekers, Gypsy/Travellers** and **looked after children**. Interviewees raised the issue that young people in vulnerable accommodation can be moved at any time and that a lack of access to stable accommodation had a detrimental impact on their access to education and examinations (see 2.4.1). Overcrowded living conditions with little or no access to additional resources (i.e. computers) or a quiet place to complete work also impacted on vulnerable pupils' ability to complete homework and coursework. It was felt that looked after youngsters who were living independently need much more support to enable them to access examinations. These young people were often extremely isolated and unlikely to access examinations. The change in status for **looked after children** when they reached 16 could be a real barrier as they might be moved out of the LEA and change to a different social work team with a different social worker. These changes and potential upheaval were viewed as a significant problem at such a critical time. One interviewee also noted the disparity apparent in the extent to which students with **SEN** from less advantaged backgrounds were able to overcome learning difficulties and access examinations, as compared to their middle-class peers.

Issues were raised regarding **Gypsy/Traveller** families access to secure, i.e. safe sites, without which engagement in the educational process was likely to be severely curtailed. It was felt that there was a *'huge lack of understanding ... by schools and LEAs about the living conditions and the extreme marginalisation they experience'*

(TES Coordinator). In one LEA, a slow upward trend in the numbers of Gypsy/Traveller pupils taking GCSEs was directly related to accommodation issues. It was felt that the provision of sites had not only created healthier living conditions where families felt secure, but had also provided a 'place' for them in the local community: *'I think all of that, the accommodation issues, sufficient and well-serviced, managed sites is absolutely crucial'* (TES Coordinator). Issues of racism, both within and outside of school, were identified as a key barrier for Gypsy/Traveller pupils' engagement within secondary school, as were the low expectations held by schools and families.

The legal status of **asylum seekers** within the UK was presented as a barrier in terms of young people's fears that they would be deported at 18. Interviewees highlighted examples of young people receiving letters when they were 16 informing them that on their eighteenth birthday they would be deported. This was seen as having a detrimental impact on their engagement with learning and their motivation to learn, as one interviewee observed *'they think what's the point?'* (Team Leader Refugees and Asylum Seekers). The impact of deportation, or the threat of deportation, was not only seen as detrimental for the young person concerned but also impacted negatively on the other young people around them.

Examples were also provided of the forced relocation of **asylum seekers** within the UK, often to areas where there was relatively little community support for asylum seeking families. Thus, young people who perhaps might have been in the UK for only a relatively short period of time, had to cope with the additional challenge of settling into a new school environment and a new area. In many instances families did not want to stay in these areas because of the lack of community support so children were less likely to access education if the family intended to move on: *'they might be reluctant to put roots down because in their heads they're not staying they're getting back as quickly as possible to the areas they know'* (EAL Coordinator).

It was noted that many vulnerable pupils, for example **young carers, asylum seekers and refugees, teenage parents, and Gypsy/Travellers** often had other caring and work responsibilities within the family or extended family, that impacted on their ability to attend school, engage with education and access examinations. In addition, interviewees highlighted that because of the difficulties they faced or because of their mobility, many vulnerable pupils did not have the *'emotional staying power'* or *'might not be around long enough'* to complete a GCSE course. They were working with young people who because of the chaotic nature of their lives had difficulty *'seeing past tomorrow, let alone planning for two years down the line'*. Thus, accreditation, such as unitised awards which could be built up or students could return to, was viewed as extremely beneficial.

It was also noted that many vulnerable young people are coping with a range of personal needs which are so great, for example health concerns, issues of personal safety, and caring responsibilities, that *'school's so far down on their list of what's important in their life because they're so busy dealing with 'Am I safe?' 'Am I going to have to move placement?'* (Education Protects Coordinator). It was also felt that their fear of failure could be so great that they would overcome this by not taking the examination. Interviewees highlighted the importance of ensuring that young people were valued for who they were and were not judged, stressing the importance of

building up their self-esteem: *‘They know whatever they do there’s always somebody there for them, by doing that we can get them through’* (Alternative Education Manager). Interviewees highlighted the benefits of providing vulnerable pupils with additional support so that, for example **young carers** could contact their parents during the school day if they were worried about them.

For vulnerable groups such as **looked after children, young carers, teenage parents, school refusers** and other pupils with unsettled domestic situations, some providers described the wider holistic support they would offer during examination times, including: ‘reminder’ telephone calls on the morning of exams; taxis to collect pupils from home and bring them to the examination centre; childcare during examinations; and ‘examination breakfasts’ to ensure that pupils were present and had eaten properly on the morning of examinations.

Summary of key issues: social concerns

- Social concerns which were seen to impact on vulnerable pupils’ access to examinations included: accommodation issues, health concerns, caring duties and young people’s legal status within the UK.
- In one LEA, a slow upward trend in the numbers of Gypsy/Travellers accessing GCSEs was directly related to the provision of sites.
- Vulnerable pupils caring responsibilities impacted on their ability to attend school, engage with education and access examinations.
- The provision of wider holistic support during examination times including: assistance with transport and childcare and ‘reminder’ telephone calls ensured that vulnerable pupils were able to access examinations despite the other challenges they might be facing.

Part Three

Towards solutions

3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on interviewees' recommendations for the implementation and/or development of further strategies to overcome the barriers identified in Part Two. It focuses on the four areas previously explored: the **examination process, assessment methodology, curriculum barriers and wider issues/underlying factors**. The report concludes with recommendations for future development.

3.2 The examination process

3.2.1 Access to an examination centre: towards solutions

The majority of suggestions for improvement regarding access to an examination centre came from interviews representing **home-educated** young people. There was a strong call for an increase in the number of 'open centres' available, where candidates could enter independently, without affiliation to a school or college. In the opinion of the home educating parents interviewed, an open centre in each LEA was not felt to be a major undertaking financially or administratively: *'Basically, it's a couple of rooms and a few invigilators for a few weeks in a year, plus a safe to keep the papers in. It's not a big deal'*. However, the first-hand experience reported by the representative of an awarding body stood in opposition to this, in that declining levels of demand and financial constraints had led their open centre to close. One interviewee cited an LEA in which Excellence in Cities funds had been secured by the Advisor for Education Otherwise to establish an open centre for the authority. This interviewee also noted that private candidate arrangements were much more accessible in the USA. Furthermore, s/he highlighted the wider benefits of open centres, in that they were accessible to the whole community, including adult learners: *'A granny who wanted to do a GCSE biology could go along there and do it'*. Thus, there would be potential benefits for other young people without a school place, e.g. **asylum seekers, school refusers** and other **'hard to place'** or **newly arrived** pupils.

It was also suggested that the difficulties of mainstream schools' reluctance to accept private candidates might be lessened if they were better informed of what the process entailed. For an examination-only specification, interviewees felt that the school would have little to do but provide an extra desk and chair in the examination hall, although it was acknowledged that the marking and verification of coursework options presented more complications. Some interviewees went so far as to suggest that LEAs might play a part in encouraging schools to accept private candidates, through support and advice (e.g. on managing coursework) and possibly even financial incentives or legal obligation. However, this raises issues regarding the extent to which home educating families wish LEAs to be involved in educational provision for their children. Beyond satisfying themselves that the child is receiving a 'suitable' education, LEAs currently have no obligation to support the education of

children whose parents choose to home educate, financially or otherwise. It is unlikely that LEA involvement at the time of GCSEs could be managed without considerable conflict of interests.

Regarding **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils' access to an examination centre, one interviewee noted that, for National Curriculum tests at key stages 2 and 3, some LEAs would arrange for papers to be taken to the children wherever they were at the time. It was suggested that the option of alternative accommodation arrangements could be exploited more in this way, such that GCSE examinations were taken to Gypsy/Traveller pupils on site, to be completed under supervision. Alternatively, it was suggested that – as for **home educated young people** – a network of regional open centres could be established, so that Gypsy/Traveller pupils could go to their nearest centre at the time of GCSE examinations (the Traveller Education Service could play a key role in tracking pupils throughout the examination process):

If there was a designated exam centre there and I could say: 'Can so-and-so come along on such a morning to do their maths paper?' ... If I could just say to somebody 'He will turn up, there's an extra paper here that you'll need, can we have that as a centre?', then you're likely to get them to go but they're not going to come back [here] to take an exam (Deputy Headteacher, mainstream school).

A number of interviewees called for greater flexibility on the part of awarding bodies around the arrangements for alternative venues. The logistical challenges faced by schools and PRUs/EOTAS providers would be eased if there could be earlier opening of packs and more time allowed for the transfer of papers to alternative (secure) venues, e.g. the night before the examination. Alternatively, it was suggested that awarding bodies might send single or small packs of papers directly to alternative sites (without recourse to 'formal' transferred candidate arrangements, described in Section 2.2.2):

It would be helpful to have a bit more flexibility from the school/exam board point of view. It's less of a problem getting them back at the end of the exam, but certainly the release an hour beforehand doesn't make it easy. We're flying around all over the place and 'foot to the ground' to meet the deadlines, which is not what you should be doing really (Head of EOTAS Service).

Finally, an education manager at a YOI hoped that more efficient communication with youth offending teams – from the beginning of key stage 4 – would improve swift access to an examination centre for **young offenders** leaving custody around GCSE examination times.

3.2.2 Entering candidates: towards solutions

In terms of difficulties in making accurate estimated entries, there was a sense that there was no real 'solution' and that the approach of 'best guesses' would continue, on the understanding that these were somewhat arbitrary:

I realise you can't really do it any other way. If you're running a huge exam series, you can't really wait 'til [name of PRU] has decided the day before the exam that this kid really would like to do it (Examinations Officer, PRU).

However, regarding the common challenge of late entry fees for PRUs and EOTAS providers, several interviewees called for greater flexibility on the part of awarding bodies and some lenience around the charges, in recognition of the fact that such centres were always going to need to make entries beyond the formal deadline:

I wonder if there is some way that the boards could look at slipping on deadlines for entries, to give us a little bit more flexibility in providing them with the information. It's not that we don't want to comply – in many cases we can't comply because we just haven't got the information that they want at the time they want it (Examinations Officer, PRU).

It was also suggested that some alternative system might be developed for non-registered centres, whereby awarding bodies could accept late entries directly from EOTAS providers without the paperwork and negotiations entailed in a formal transferred candidate arrangement:

If the examination bodies knew that [we] dealt with excluded youngsters, maybe the support could be there, just somebody saying: 'Fill in this form if you have any late entries', without going round all the paperwork that schools have (Student Support Coordinator, Excluded Pupils).

In terms of schools' attitudes, an EOTAS provider working with **excluded pupils** expressed the view that schools should be legally obliged to retain responsibility for entering pupils excluded during key stage 4, and to support the service providing education out of school. Firstly, schools would have received the funding to pay for GCSE entry when pupils were in Year 10, and secondly, it was felt that maintaining the link with the mainstream school would make the process of coursework marking and moderation much easier:

We'd be able to get their work moderated a lot easier, without having to pay supply teachers to do it, or beg, steal and borrow other teachers to do it ... You don't have to have them on your premises, they don't have to sit the exam on your site or anything, but you must support that examination process (Student Support Coordinator, Excluded Pupils).

As described above, however, other providers felt their situation would be improved if all pupils were transferred onto the roll of the 'alternative' provider for the purposes of making entries. Also, regarding transferred candidates arrangements, an interviewee working with pupils with **medical needs** felt it would be useful if pupils' results could be sent to the Host Centre as well as the Entering Centre. Whilst they would not be included on the Host Centre's league table figures, where young people had spent much of key stage 4 with the alternative provider, it was thought that centres would appreciate being 'automatically' informed of results for their internal records.

In terms of the administrative burden, it was noted that a dedicated examinations officer would be an improvement for many smaller units. However, the realistic possibility of this, within limited budgets was felt to be small. Finally, one interviewee suggested that an online application for transferred candidate arrangements would streamline the process, and some interviewees noted the improvements that would be felt when the convergence of awarding bodies' procedures was completed: *'Centralisation of administration so you don't have to submit the same thing to umpteen different boards. That would be wonderful and would make a big difference'* (SENCO, mainstream school).

3.2.3 Access arrangements and special consideration: towards solutions

Generally, there was felt to be a need for greater awareness of the JCQ regulations and guidance around access arrangements and special consideration. This then might lead to greater proactivity or willingness on the part of schools to *'push the boat out'* for pupils with **special educational needs**. A number of interviewees suggested a briefer overview document – a sort of *'idiot's guide'* – might be helpful for staff working with vulnerable groups, but less directly involved in the examination process. The need for this information to be widely accessible to teachers, support staff, specialist services (e.g. teenage pregnancy teams) and parents, as well as SENCOs and examinations officers, was also stressed. Several interviewees highlighted the need for increased training in this area. A SENCO stressed the importance of whole-staff training on access arrangements and special consideration, to be updated regularly, given ongoing amendments to JCQ procedures and developments in assessment resources available. Specific training for staff working with vulnerable pupils was also called for, both in terms of the procedures for making access arrangements, and on how to manage them in practice:

Training for staff on how to put it into place as well ... how to get kids to use that properly so that you train them to look at their paper and to use the extra time appropriately rather than just sit there and throw rubbers at each other (Teaching Team Manager for Pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties).

A key challenge for those working with students with **special educational needs** was the difficulty of accessing an EP or specialist teacher to carry out assessments. One way of overcoming this, suggested by some interviewees, was to relax the requirements for specialist qualifications and allow SENCOs to carry out the necessary tests. However, the viewpoint was also raised that this risked reducing the integrity of the examination process: the level of professional understanding and experience assured by the qualification was felt to be important to the accuracy and validity of the tests.

A number of suggestions were made as to areas in which the JCQ regulations could be amended or extended. Regarding the use of bilingual dictionaries by **asylum seekers** and other **ethnic minority** pupils for whom English is an additional language, it was felt that an extension of the two-year cut off point was necessary, given the evidence that it may take up to five years for a learner to reach the same level of 'academic' language competence as a native speaker. It was also suggested that the use of electronic dictionaries, currently not permitted by JCQ regulations, would be a

significant improvement. The time-saving benefits of these were highlighted, as well as the fact that many students were now using them regularly as their ‘normal way of working’. Whilst it was acknowledged that the ‘external’ nature of GCSE examinations meant they were somewhat more restricted than National Curriculum tests, it was also suggested that there could be more lenience in terms of translating certain words for candidates. A formal list of ‘permitted’ words for translation, such as that provided for key stage 3 tests would have been appreciated by some interviewees. Going further, some interviewees felt there could be scope for examinations to be delivered in a candidates’ community language. For example, where knowledge and understanding of science were the primary skills being tested, it was felt to be reasonable to assess through the medium of the first language, rather than English.

One interviewee suggested that, for pupils with **physical disabilities**, the possibility of an audio recording of their responses might be added to the current options of word-processing or use of a scribe, as it was felt that this might be less tiring. Regarding pupils whose reading speed limited their ability to perform in English examinations, it was proposed that readers be permitted, but with a proportional deduction of marks or an indication on the students’ certificate to say that a reader had been used. Regarding the relative lack of attention to the needs of pupils with **social, emotional and behavioural difficulties**, it was felt that the regulations could be amended to include more access arrangements directed at conditions such as ADHD and Aspergers Syndrome. As noted by a teaching team manager for pupils with specific learning difficulties: *‘If we are now including more and more children with a range of difficulties, we have to have a flexible response’*. In this respect, another interviewee highlighted the need for improved understanding of these types of conditions and what types of access arrangements might be appropriate and genuinely helpful to candidates. There was also some suggestion that, through special consideration, there could be greater recognition of the long-term educational disadvantage faced by **young carers** and pupils with **medical needs**.

Finally, a number of interviewees raised the issue of the administrative burden on examinations officers regarding access arrangements and special consideration, calling for some degree of ‘streamlining’. As noted in section 2.2.3, the JCQ, awarding bodies and the NAA are all taking steps to address these issues. However, an additional suggestion was made to merge the access arrangements guidance with information on timetable deviations and overnight supervision: these issues often arose in parallel, but regulations and guidance currently appear in separate documents.

3.2.4 Authentication, marking and moderation: towards solutions

Four main suggestions were made with regard to these aspects of the examination process. The headteacher of a special school felt it would be useful if awarding bodies ran a marking and moderation course specifically aimed at those supporting less able students, where expected grades would be at the lower end of the scale. Other interviewees called for better exemplar materials from awarding bodies and a greater willingness to mark coursework on behalf of smaller examination centres operating with a small staff. Finally, as noted earlier, an Education Manager at a YOI made a plea for faster turnaround of certification for young offenders who were likely to move on: *‘That would be a huge reward for the kids, to get their certificate really*

quickly ... That gives them more motivation. It's surprising what a bit of praise and thank you does for these lads'.

3.3 Assessment methodology

3.3.1 Terminal assessment: towards solutions

The majority of suggestions for improvement related to opportunities for pupils to build up smaller, incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2. It was felt that such forms of assessment would allow **mobile candidates** and vulnerable pupils, such as **young offenders**, to be accredited for short units of work as they completed them. Opportunities for gaining accreditation for the work they completed that was also transferable and recognised by other providers would resolve many of the difficulties faced by mobile pupils and pupils out of school, particularly if they had GCSE equivalence:

We find the concept of unit awards, which are short term pieces of work, valuable. If they had the kudos of being 0.1 of a GCSE that would be helpful (Headteacher, PRU).

It was said such developments would ensure that vulnerable students could reach achievable goals and could also help resolve difficulties associated with providers using different specifications. A core content of interchangeable course units was seen as one possible way forward. However, it was acknowledged that this approach would require detailed electronic recording and transfer of data.

I would like more bite size pieces with progression and some recognition that in those bite sizes you can trade that in for something. Like if I've got 20 bite sizes I can trade that in for a GCSE as long as I've got core components in this, this and this (PRU Headteacher).

Other suggestions for improvement centred on further development of alternatives to closed terminal examinations, for example, coursework and portfolio-based assessment, particularly for students who may experience difficulties coping with the stress of an examination such as **school refusers** and **pupils with medical needs**:

It would be nice to have more qualifications that haven't got an exam at the end of them. We have got people who won't go into exams because of the sheer fact that it's an exam. Or, [a solution would be] if they could do an extra piece of coursework instead of a final exam (Teaching Team Manager PRU).

Conversely, for some vulnerable young people, for example **mobile pupils** and **EAL students**, it was felt there may be a need to look at specifications with less coursework as these young people may perform better with just taking a terminal examination. Thus, an opportunity for providers to explore a wider range of specifications to suit the needs of the vulnerable young people they were working with was suggested.

It was also felt that there needed to be more systematic recording of attainment to allow for possible special consideration if pupils missed examinations. Where

candidates are absent from the terminal component of an examination, pre-existing evidence of attainment in each of the components missed is required for an aggregate award to be given by the awarding bodies.

In terms of further support, interviewees indicated that providing pupils with individual support such as catch-up and study skills sessions for mobile and other vulnerable pupils with gaps in their education was critical to their success in examinations. Currently, due to funding/staffing constraints, such support was not always available.

3.3.2 The examination timetable: towards solutions

A number of interviewees highlighted the need for a more flexible approach to GCSEs as a whole.

Do you really have to take exams at one particular point in the year? Could you have a situation where young people could take exams when they were ready for them? That would help an awful lot of young people (Headteacher, hospital school).

It was suggested that allowing students to take GCSEs at a number of points during the year, or lengthening/shortening the time taken to study for GCSEs would enable students to sit examinations when they were ready and thus further enable them to reach their full potential. This would be of particular benefit for **new arrivals** and those vulnerable pupils who had missed large parts of the curriculum. Examples were provided of **asylum seekers** achieving 8 A-Cs by taking GCSEs over three years because in the third year their level of competence had increased so much: ‘*So certainly encouraging institutions to be flexible in that way would be good for this group of children*’ (EAL Coordinator). However, interviewees also pointed out that under the current system, if pupils take more than two years to complete GCSEs, their examination results are not included in performance data, which may pose an additional barrier for schools to be flexible:

The system about the way pupils’ performance is reported doesn’t support that and every single secondary head that I talk to about putting [such measures] in place raises that [aspect] as a barrier (Head of Ethnic Minority Achievement).

It was also suggested that greater flexibility might be possible where candidates could not sit an examination on the timetabled day. For example, where it was known well in advance that a **pregnant pupil** was likely to give birth on the scheduled day of an examination, or where candidates with **medical needs** were sitting more than one examination per day, it was felt that there could be less bureaucratic arrangements about rescheduling.

3.3.3 Pedagogic approach and assessment style: towards solutions

The need for increased attention to linguistic and cultural factors in the writing of examination papers was highlighted. Furthermore, it was felt that awarding bodies could provide further opportunities for practitioners to comment on the language used

in GCSE examinations. The consultation process with practitioners for key stage 3 tests was said to provide a good example of how to address possible issues of cultural and linguistic bias in examination papers:

I feel that the people who write the exams for key stage 3 have really made an effort to make their exam papers as inclusive as possible for students with special needs and EAL. I don't think GCSEs have got the same dialogue at all (EAL Coordinator).

As a result of this consultation process at key stage 3, a number of changes had been made, including altering the sentence structure used in papers and items that were seen as culturally obscure and 'Anglo-centric'. It was noted that the ways in which questions were phrased and the examples used had a bearing on the way in which examinations were received by individuals: '*Kids from different cultural backgrounds both ethnic cultural and social cultural can be affected by that*' (Head of Diversity and Inclusion). Interviewees highlighted the need to improve accessibility by thinking about the complexity of language used in different levels of papers. For example, as already highlighted in 2.3.3, the language used in some lower level papers was felt to be more complex than the language used in higher level papers. Thus, it was felt that the desire to provide lower level ability students with greater explanation in the questions posed, effectively excluded some EAL pupils and that there was a need to look at: '*Ways those [lower level] papers can be made accessible to children that are newer to English*' (Team Leader Refugees and Asylum Seekers).

In addition to this, it was noted that additional and focused examination preparation was required to support new arrivals in learning the 'language of exams'. Interviewees also felt that there was a need for a wider range of GCSE accreditation in community languages: '*Examination boards need to be developing exams, particularly in languages like Somali, where we're getting increased numbers in that particular community*' (EAL/Refugee Consultant).

3.3.4 Coursework: towards solutions

Generally, there was felt to be a need for greater coordination and funding of catch-up support/study skills for coursework for vulnerable children, including the provision of additional support through schools, the community and/or the LEA to ensure that vulnerable young people were not disadvantaged compared to their peers. Furthermore, it was noted that there should be rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion to avoid vulnerable children missing deadlines, as well as allowing for early identification of problems. A number of interviewees called for greater advice and recommendations for those selecting specifications, particularly which specifications (e.g. mostly coursework or no coursework, modular or linear) would be most suitable for different pupils, e.g. EAL pupils.

I think one thing that would be really helpful would be for the teachers who are responsible for choosing the courses and the syllabus to have an idea of ... how EAL students fare with the different exam specifications (EAL Coordinator).

There was also a suggestion that when choosing specifications teachers needed to think more about the way examinations are organised and how this might impact on vulnerable pupils' access and levels of achievement.

3.4 Curriculum barriers

3.4.1 Mobility, gaps in education and absence: towards solutions

Many of the recommendations for addressing mobility and gaps in education did not focus on addressing young people's mobility per se but on ensuring that information and data were transferred effectively and that mobility/gaps in education did not preclude students from accessing examinations. It was suggested that improvements in admission and induction procedures were required for all pupils arriving at non-standard admission times. The increased use of induction mentors for vulnerable pupils was also identified as a useful strategy. Similarly, more effective assessment of prior learning, particularly for **EAL students** arriving in key stage 4, would underpin students' swifter and more effective access to the curriculum. Access to examinations could be improved through schools' and other education providers' continued development of individualised learning opportunities (such as via the establishment of 'learning banks', and distance and e-learning opportunities). These would enable students to catch up with work they had missed or to continue to access the curriculum whilst they were out of school.

3.4.2 Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation: towards solutions

The need for a 'policy drive' to ensure that examinations were accessible and inclusive for all vulnerable children was highlighted. This was beginning to be reflected in Tomlinson's recommendations and the reform of the 14-19 curriculum. Increased flexibility in the opportunities available at key stage 4, including the introduction of more individualised and personalised learning with vocational opportunities, was seen as improving accessibility and relevance of the curriculum for vulnerable pupils. Despite such improvements, interviewees still felt there was a need to increase the variety of vocational opportunities on offer and allow pupils to access them at a younger age i.e. from Year 9 onwards. In terms of addressing disengagement and relevance, it was felt that there was a need to be more: *'creative about what we're calling education and really looking at GCSE equivalent alternatives that are more imaginative than what's on offer to them at the moment'* (Education Protects Coordinator).

It was suggested that schools needed to continue to review their curriculum to ensure it was relevant for all students and to analyse data and performance to maintain awareness of under-achieving groups (raising the issue that pupils need to be willing to identify themselves and their vulnerability, for example **Gypsy/Travellers** or **young carers**). Interviewees stressed the importance of analysing trends and patterns and carrying out more detailed analysis of, for example, **ethnic minority attainment**. As one interviewee observed, ethnicity categories such as 'Black African' say very little about the attainment of specific ethnic groups. Many LEAs do conduct more detailed analysis of ethnic backgrounds and the DfES makes available over 90 'extended codes' of the main ethnic groups available in PLASC (DfES, 2005).

However, interviewees felt there were still opportunities for further development in this area.

It was also felt that schools and other education providers needed to have a clear sense of the impact the support they gave had on vulnerable children's access to examinations i.e. what difference does it make? Furthermore, it was noted that interventions for supporting vulnerable children, for example **minority ethnic pupils** needed to be implemented within a mainstream context so that they were not viewed as an 'add on' or side issue to mainstream provision. Without this change in focus, it was felt unlikely that mainstream provision would change to meet the needs of vulnerable children. Issues of parity of status were thus essential to the success of initiatives:

When I was asked to look at a project focusing on Black boys' underachievement, I refused. I didn't want to set up another project amongst many projects because they happen outside the mainstream. If projects happen in that context they say 'it's the minority achievement team who'll deal with it' and guess what happens, they're not connected with the mainstream (Team Leader Ethnic Minority Achievement).

In terms of increasing the relevance of the curriculum, interviewees suggested that further development of independent learning opportunities for GCSE were required for **mobile youngsters, home educated children** and others out of school such as **young offenders, school refusers** and **pupils with medical needs**. Greater differentiation of the curriculum to suit individual learning needs and wider use of existing GCSE-equivalent accreditation such as GCSE short courses and OCN-type portfolio accreditation were highlighted:

What would really help us is more short GCSE courses, because it would help us to offer a broader curriculum at a higher level. We have some really bright children who are really quite seriously ill and it would be nice if there was a short physics course, I'm not just necessarily talking about vocational courses (Headteacher, PRU).

Furthermore, interviewees called for greater flexibility around **locally** defined models of accreditation in order to meet the needs of the student population/vulnerable subgroup. Finally, the need for increased recognition/value to be given to alternative forms of accreditation, such as NVQs, was highlighted. Interviewees felt there was a need to ensure that such accreditation was available to all students and should be included in performance tables. Interviewees highlighted the need to move away from the '*hierarchy of knowledge*' (TES Advisory Teacher) and the 'cultural capital' associated with GCSEs, whilst raising the value of other forms of accreditation.

3.4.3 Continuity of courses and communication between providers: towards solutions

The main suggestion here was for the development of a centralised database where schools could access a range of educational data, including the results of key stage 2 and 3 tests, and ideally, information about the GCSEs they were taking and the coursework they had completed. Ensuring that young people brought coursework with

them when they moved and that this would be recognised by their new education provider was also noted.

Improved communication between agencies may result from the implementation of the recommendations in *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003b). The resulting 2004 Children's Act and the establishment of integrated children's services mean that local authorities now have a duty to share information, including provision for databases and indexes containing basic information about children and young people, but this is still in the early stages of development. Nevertheless, interviewees noted that greater availability of data from all the agencies working with vulnerable children, (including children missing education), should lead to better assessments of need and thus better support. Despite these ongoing developments, it was felt that more effective communication links and information exchange still needed to be established between particular agencies, for example education/social services and housing for **asylum seekers** and other **young people in vulnerable accommodation** in relation to informing agencies of a young person's impending arrival/departure. For **young carers** it was felt that there still needed to be better communication between the agencies supporting the young person and those supporting their parent(s). Interviewees also identified a need for better communication between schools and those services/agencies working with vulnerable pupils, particularly those **out of school** and **mobile pupils**. Thus, it was noted that more effective communication/links were still required to allow for the efficient transfer of educational information, marks, and coursework between schools and PRUs, home and hospital tuition service, YOIs, teenage pregnancy units, and other alternative education providers.

3.4.4 Limitations of EOTAS provision: towards solutions

In terms of overcoming the limitations of EOTAS provision, it was suggested that there should be more collaboration between schools/colleges and EOTAS providers to offer a better range of accreditation at GCSE level for young people out of school: *'It would be good if there was some way of linking colleges and schools and that's something we're looking at at the moment, how we can broaden the curriculum for these children* (Team Leader, Refugees and Asylum Seekers). It was felt that further access to e-learning opportunities and learning in virtual classrooms would allow pupils attending PRUs and hospital schools, as well as those educated at home, to access a wider range of subjects at GCSE level. One interviewee highlighted the need to have more qualified teaching staff amongst alternative education providers. This was linked to the fact that these interventions were staffed by youth workers and that a push for greater accreditation at GCSE level meant that there was a recognised need: *'To have a qualified teacher ...it's something that we keep asking for ... all of the projects will say that what they lack is qualified teacher input'* (Head of EOTAS). Interviewees also identified that there was still a need for interim educational provision for excluded pupils, whilst new educational placements were identified.

3.4.5 Pupil ability: towards solutions

The issue of academic literacy was raised in relation to pupils with EAL needs. It was felt that increased ‘*national debate about academic literacy and the resources that we put in to secure academic literacy among refugee children*’ (Consultant on Refugees) was required to ensure that pupils had full access to examinations at the end of key stage 4.

3.4.6 School attitudes: towards solutions

A number of interviewees from services supporting a range of vulnerable youngsters including **young carers, school refusers, pupils with medical needs, teenage parents** and **Gypsy/Travellers** raised the issue of ensuring schools take responsibility for vulnerable children and that this responsibility was reflected in the attitudes of senior management within schools.

3.5 Wider issues/underlying features

3.5.1 Expectations and awareness: towards solutions

In terms of expectations, interviewees identified the need to further raise schools and teachers’ expectations of vulnerable groups, for example, **looked after children, asylum seekers, and young carers**. Ensuring that different agencies were working together to improve access, for example raising social workers’ and carers’ awareness of educational issues for looked after children, was also highlighted as an area for further development. In terms of awareness-raising there was felt to be a need for improving the identification of ‘hidden’ vulnerable groups within schools e.g. **young carers** and **Gypsy/Travellers**, but that this would only be successful when young people felt confident enough to identify their ‘vulnerability’ within the school context. It was suggested that pupils could be asked about their caring responsibilities during induction (whether they would feel confident to declare such responsibilities would be another issue). Interviewees also felt that parental awareness of the examinations system could be raised by awarding bodies producing guides in community languages, similar to those produced by QCA for key stage 3 examinations.

3.5.2 Cultural factors: towards solutions

Suggestions for improvement focused on improving consultation with families and developing home school liaison. Interviewees felt that there was need for improved consultation with parents, pupils and communities from those vulnerable groups who were not experiencing examination success, for example **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils and some **minority ethnic pupils** such as Somali pupils and their families. As one interviewee put it, there was a need to:

... start to develop awareness at a local level about what may be barriers to achievement and access and also take on board what students, parents and communities are saying about what they feel can improve (Refugees and New Arrivals Consultant).

Improving home school liaison for vulnerable groups, such as **young carers, asylum seekers and Gypsy/Travellers** was seen as a strategy for maintaining engagement

and access to examinations. Interviewees noted that for some parents, different methods of communication, such as phone contact, taped information or home visits may be required, to enable disabled (schools have a duty under the Disability Discrimination Act to ensure that they are accessible for pupils and their families/parents) or non-literate parents to have equality of access. Ensuring that information about examinations and the examination process is communicated in a variety of formats should ensure that parents' awareness and understanding of the system is raised. The identification of a key link person in school was also seen as a useful strategy which should be adopted for vulnerable pupils and their parents.

3.5.3 Social concerns: towards solutions

Suggestions for improvement focused on increasing the mentoring opportunities available for vulnerable children, for example for **looked after children**, **young carers** and **asylum seekers**. One LEA was exploring the possibility of providing mentors for looked after children in residential homes to focus on supporting their social, emotional and educational needs. It was felt that looked after children in residential homes often did not have access to an adult who valued education and who could support them with things like homework and coursework issues:

We [LEA and social services] are actively looking at trying to expand the mentoring scheme to try and give children in care access to a mentor. The research shows that where children have a consistent adult who's taking an interest, someone who encourages them and values education, then they do well. Often there are groups of children again ... particularly those in children's homes where there's not that one person who takes responsibility, where they don't get that consistent message (Education Protects Coordinator).

The appointment of specific 'examinations mentors' was also suggested as a way of assisting vulnerable pupils' retention in school, as well as improving their access to examinations:

I think that some vulnerable children, particularly Gypsy/Travellers, ought to have an examinations, or qualifications or learning mentor, particularly for Year 11, with just that focus of getting them up to the hurdle and feeling confident to take it on. Halfway through Year 10, the youngster could be told or could choose, that would be even better, an examination mentor so it locks them into the process (Gypsy/Traveller Advisor).

It was noted that it was important that pupils who were out of school for a limited period of time, for example **teenage parents** on authorised absence, did not lose access to learning mentor support from their school. The benefits of maintaining these links were highlighted by a Teenage Parent Reintegration Officer who suggested that academic mentors from a young person's school should continue to visit them at home, which would also help negate their isolation whilst they were out of school.

Other suggestions for improvement focused on ensuring vulnerable students, for example **asylum seekers** and **Gypsy/Travellers**, had access to safe and secure accommodation. Addressing issues of racism within schools, helping prevent

disengagement and drop out and providing more holistic support for vulnerable children in the form of childcare, transport and collaboration with social services, was also highlighted.

Overleaf, Table 3.1 draws together the suggestions for improvement in all the areas and aspects of access to key stage 4 examinations highlighted in the study, namely: the examination process; assessment methodology; curriculum barriers; and wider issues. It also presents the suggestions as to what contributions could be made at national/policy, LEA and school-level.

Table 3.1 Overview of suggestions for improvement at National/LEA and school level

	National/policy level	LEA level	School level
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More open centres • Increased flexibility regarding alternative venues • Improved awareness and dissemination of private candidate procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved awareness and dissemination of private candidate procedures • Increased use of alternative venues • Improved communication regarding mobile pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved awareness of private candidate procedures • Increased use of alternative venues • Improved communication regarding mobile pupils
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remission of late entry fees for alternative providers/vulnerable children • Simplification of entry and other administrative procedures for alternative providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of responsibility for entry of excluded pupils and those in alternative provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of responsibility for entry of excluded pupils and those in alternative provision
<p><i>Access arrangements and special consideration</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of access arrangements and training on implementing them • Broadening the range of access arrangements to acknowledge the needs of certain vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of access arrangements and training on implementing them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of access arrangements and training on implementing them
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored training and guidance for those supporting less able children • Swifter certification for mobile pupils 		

	National/policy level	LEA level	School level
Assessment methodology <i>Terminal assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual support for mobile and other vulnerable pupils with gaps in their education e.g. catch-up support, study skills etc. • Systematic recording of attainment to allow for possible special consideration if pupils miss examinations
<i>The examinations timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased flexibility regarding timetable deviations • More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year or over three years 		
<i>Pedagogic methods</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased attention to linguistic and cultural factors in the writing of examination papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused examination preparation for new arrivals and other EAL students including learning the ‘language of examinations’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused examination preparation for new arrivals and other EAL students including learning the ‘language of examinations’
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater coordination and funding of catch-up support/study skills (coursework and curriculum) for vulnerable children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater coordination and funding of catch-up support/study skills (coursework and curriculum) for vulnerable children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) • More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion for vulnerable children

	National/policy level	LEA level	School level
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better admission and induction procedures for mobile pupils and more effective assessment of prior learning Funding availability e.g. travel grants to enable young people to continue to attend their school if they move within an area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further opportunities for mobile pupils and those with gaps in education to access ‘banks of learning’ Further development of e-learning and distance learning opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further opportunities for mobile pupils and those with gaps in education to access ‘banks of learning’ Further development of e-learning and distance learning opportunities
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the availability of vocational opportunities, if possible, at a younger age Increased opportunities for alternative GCSE equivalent accreditation Increased recognition/value attributed to alternative and vocational accreditation Expanding GCSEs available in community languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the availability of vocational opportunities, if possible, at a younger age Increased opportunities for alternative GCSE equivalent accreditation Increased recognition/value attributed to alternative and vocational accreditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the availability of vocational opportunities, if possible, at a younger age Increased opportunities for alternative GCSE equivalent accreditation Increased recognition/value attributed to alternative and vocational accreditation More sophisticated data analysis of vulnerable children’s access and attainment in examinations
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A national framework for accessing or transferring coursework and any information relating to progress towards examinations. Young people able to take information with them Improved communication links and information exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication between providers regarding mobile pupils (e.g. YOIs and schools, PRUs and schools, hospital schools and schools, old and new schools for all mobile pupils) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication between providers regarding mobile pupils (e.g. YOIs and schools, PRUs and schools, hospital schools and schools, old and new schools for all mobile pupils) Schools ensuring that educational records are transferred when young people move
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding additional staff to provide GCSE courses and widen the range of courses available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EOTAS linking up with other providers to enable access to GCSEs or a wider range of subjects at GCSE level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools linking with EOTAS providers to broaden the range of accreditation available
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a need to improve the academic literacy of EAL students and ensure there are sufficient resources to support this work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for an increased focus on developing academic literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for an increased focus on developing academic literacy
<i>School attitudes</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vulnerable children’s access to examinations should be viewed as an LEA-wide school improvement issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring schools take responsibility for vulnerable children and that this responsibility is reflected in the attitudes

			of senior management
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	National/policy level	LEA level	School level
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National drive and targets to raise achievement for vulnerable children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising schools and teachers expectations of vulnerable groups e.g. looked after children, asylum seekers, young carers Improving parental awareness of examination system Improving identification and awareness of 'hidden' groups of vulnerable children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising schools and teachers expectations of vulnerable groups e.g. looked after children, asylum seekers, young carers Improving parental awareness of examination system Improving identification and awareness of 'hidden' groups of vulnerable children
<i>Cultural factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production of examination guides in community languages 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved consultation with parents of vulnerable children Improving parental awareness of examination system
<i>Social concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to safe and secure accommodation for those young people in vulnerable accommodation Addressing issues of racism Funding increased mentoring opportunities for vulnerable children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing issues of racism Increase in mentoring opportunities for vulnerable children Holistic support for childcare, transport, social services collaboration etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing issues of racism Increase in mentoring opportunities for vulnerable children Holistic support for childcare, transport, social services collaboration etc.

3.6 Conclusions and key recommendations

One of the key barriers highlighted in relation to vulnerable children accessing examinations at the end of key stage 4 was the issue surrounding their **mobility** and **gaps in education**. The GCSE examination process is based on a sedentary, linear system with an assumption that young people will be relatively static throughout the two-year course. This effectively excludes many vulnerable young people from participating in the examination process fully. The report has demonstrated that, where vulnerable children have successfully participated within the examinations system, the key to their success lay in the **flexible approaches** adopted by support staff and schools and **effective communication between providers**. In light of this, the following issues may usefully require further consideration by different stakeholders (i.e. policy makers, awarding bodies, education providers, schools and other agencies working with vulnerable children):

- The value of developing more **flexible approaches to accreditation** at the end of key stage 4 to help vulnerable children access examinations is very evident through out the study. Opportunities for vulnerable children (and all pupils) to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation (at Levels 1 and 2), which are portable between providers, may resolve many of the barriers to access identified in this report.
- Where staff/schools were willing to be flexible, for example in relation to timetabling and providing alternative educational and vocational opportunities, vulnerable children were overcoming many of the barriers identified. The further provision of additional opportunities for students to access **GCSE-equivalent accreditation** would therefore be beneficial.
- One way forward suggested was the **development of portable learning packages**, ensuring young people are accredited for the work they have completed, rather than penalised for the work they have not, (and giving them opportunities to build on that in a different place or at a later date). Thus, flexibility is also required regarding the **overall time taken to complete accreditation**, as other issues faced by vulnerable children may mean that they are not in a position to complete courses at a given point. Opportunities for young people to be able to return to examination work when ready would be helpful. However, it was noted that, for this approach to be successful, there is a need to ensure that schools are not penalised for adopting flexible approaches.
- In addition to flexibility regarding *when* students take examinations, there also needs to be greater flexibility about **location** i.e. *where* students are able to access examinations. Improving the ease with which mobile pupils, those out of school and home educated youngsters can access an examination centre was recommended by interviewees.
- The identified difficulties in accessing information and data when young people move between providers showed a clear need to ensure that educational providers, especially schools, transfer such information when a young person leaves them. Thus, more **effective communication links/liaison** between providers should ensure that educational information relating to all pupils, including vulnerable pupils, is transferred when they move schools/providers.

- There is also a need to **ensure that communication and information exchange is effective between staff within organisations** (and the young people themselves), for example between SENCOs and examinations officers, about the needs of vulnerable young people requiring access arrangements. Examinations officers in out-of-school provision, e.g. PRUs, may be extremely isolated and require information about what they can do to support students. Staff with **specialisms regarding vulnerable children** and those with **specialisms in relation to the examination process** need to come together to share expertise.
- There is also a need to **clarify staff roles and responsibilities** (in relation to examinations) with regard to excluded pupils and those in alternative provision. There is perhaps a need for mainstream schools to have a legal obligation to enter and mark coursework for fixed-term excluded pupils and other vulnerable pupils attending away from the main centre (e.g. those with medical needs).
- **Simplification of the examination entry and administrative procedures** for alternative providers, to reduce the administrative burden for examinations officers, may prove beneficial, especially in smaller units where staff are carrying out a number of other duties/roles.
- In terms of raising **parental awareness** of the examination system, there is a need to ensure that strategies for informing parents about examination procedures and processes are as accessible as possible, for example by ensuring that they are available in a wide range of community languages and that alternative forms of communication are explored.
- Extending the opportunities for staff within educational settings to **acquire qualifications** to carry out assessments for access arrangements, along with **tailored training and guidance** for those moderating the work of less able students also emerges as a recommendation from the study.
- Finally, unless the value attached to **GCSE-equivalent accreditation** is on a par with GCSEs, difficulties in viewing them as having equivalence/‘parity of esteem’, will remain. The importance of these forms of accreditation for vulnerable young people is highlighted throughout this report.

Appendix 1

Overview of key issues for vulnerable groups

This appendix contains a series of tables giving an overview of the key barriers/challenges raised by interviewees regarding specific vulnerable groups, alongside ways in which these had been overcome and suggestions for improvement. The tables reflect the key issues highlighted in the main body of the report. However, in describing each group individually, it is possible to summarise the issues pertaining more specifically to the various groups. The tables are ordered as follows:

Table 1.1	Asylum seekers and minority ethnic pupils
Table 1.2	Excluded pupils
Table 1.3	Gypsy/Traveller pupils
Table 1.4	Home educators
Table 1.5	Looked after children
Table 1.6	Pupils with medical needs
Table 1.7	School refusers
Table 1.8	Pupils with special educational needs
Table 1.9	Teenage parents
Table 1.10	Young carers
Table 1.11	Young offenders

Table 1.1 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Asylum seekers and minority ethnic pupils

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils without any school place will not have ‘affiliation’ to a centre in which to sit examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils enrol on courses at FE college and so have ‘affiliation’ to this centre • Liaise with willing mainstream schools, to enter pupils with no school place as private candidates • More open centres at a national level
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs incurred where centres register with additional awarding bodies to provide alternative accreditation • Late entry fees incurred due to new arrivals late in the school year; schools may be reluctant to meet these costs • Administrative issues around, for example, official and familiar names, educational history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the alternative accreditation offered by awarding bodies already used, e.g. ESOL skills for life • A positive attitude on the part of schools towards entering all candidates – willingness to meet the costs of late entries • Effective communication with candidates regarding personal information and educational history
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language support available through access arrangements is limited to those candidates who have been in the country for less than two years, although there is evidence that fluency takes up to five years • Notably less language support available at GCSE-level as compared to key stage 3 • Difficulties buying dictionaries in some languages and also cost prohibitive • Effective use of a dictionary relies on familiarity with such a tool • There may not be equivalent translations for some technical or subject-specific vocabulary • Difficulties in assessing underlying special educational needs for pupils for whom English is an additional language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of the two-year allowance for use of a bilingual dictionary • Use of electronic dictionaries • Increase in the amount of language support permitted around non-technical and contextual vocabulary • Examination papers translated in to the community language, where the subject content being tested is not affected (e.g. science)
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>
<p>Assessment methodology</p> <p><i>Terminal assessment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils new to the UK will have missed large proportions of the specifications and are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations • Language barriers mean that asylum seekers and other EAL students may face difficulties completing GCSEs over two years. The ‘all or nothing’ format of GCSEs means that pupils cannot be accredited for the part completion of courses • For those arriving late in Year 11 it is often not possible to complete any ‘significant’ amount of GCSE accreditation • Late arriving asylum seekers may have missed pre-release booklets, examination practice, revision sessions, mock examinations, and modular tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual support for pupils e.g. language support and study skills etc. • Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment

<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education mean that pupils face difficulties completing GCSEs over two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year or over three years
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils have experienced differing education systems and pedagogic methods • Pupils may be out of the routine of studying, and may not have the necessary study skills to complete coursework and sit examinations • Examination questions cannot be translated into a candidate's first language • Lack of clarity in instructions relating to examination procedures and rules • Evaluation and multiple choice questions present particular difficulties for EAL candidates • Examples used in examinations were not always felt to be culturally relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam and coursework focused sessions in school provided by EAL specialists • The provision of additional support focusing on examination procedures • Consultation with awarding bodies to comment on the examples and language used in examination papers • Using alternative accreditation e.g. Welsh Board Certificate of Achievement and ESOL examinations • Entering pupils for community language examinations to provide candidates with an experience of the examination process and to build self-confidence through success
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late entry/gaps in education: limited time to complete coursework • Coursework is demanding for students who are not fluent in English • Pupils new to the UK may not be suited to/skilled in this type of independent study • Poor transfer of work from previous school/establishment when asylum seeker pupils move • Pupils may have been studying different specifications or may miss coursework deadlines and practical experiments required for coursework completion • Pupils may not have support at home for the completion of coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual coursework support • Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) • Submit fewer pieces of coursework, if no alternative, while meeting minimum requirements (special consideration from examination board) • More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion • Improved methods of communication/transfer of information between educational providers
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil mobility a key barrier, particularly for asylum seekers and refugees. Although it was noted that minority ethnic pupils, not just asylum seekers and refugees, make up a large proportion of new arrivals • Difficulties accessing a school place/little choice in the schools attended or the options taken • Some key stage 4 arrivals not admitted into school and attending alternative provision with restricted opportunities for access to examinations • Issue of exclusion prior to mocks for some minority ethnic pupils. Although entered for examinations this disruption at such a crucial time might have a negative impact. More able pupils excluded so impact greater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of effective induction procedures for new arrivals • The provision of intensive catch-up and EAL support • Ensuring where possible (and if appropriate) key stage 4 pupils are admitted to school • Close monitoring of exclusions of minority ethnic pupils

<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools ineffective in assessing prior learning • Difficulties accessing a curriculum which may be viewed as mono-cultural • Rigidity of the curriculum negating against developing a more diverse and inclusive curriculum • For those who arrived partway through key stage 4 difficulties accessing the full curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate, accessing alternative accreditation e.g. half GCSEs, OCR, ASDAN and for those students not operating at GCSE level (due to interrupted education and/or language issues) opportunities to access key skills and basic skills accreditation • Providing a flexible curriculum to meet pupils' needs e.g. reducing the number of GCSEs studied, entering EAL students for community language examinations, developing a culturally appropriate curriculum • Continued development of first language skills and after school clubs in community languages
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data not being passed on quickly enough • Education providers unaware that young people are arriving or leaving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An identified need for more effective forms of communication and data transfer
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue that key stage 4 arrivals placed in EOTAS provision • Pupils unable to access GCSE examinations courses due to restricted curriculum/resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion for greater links to be developed between EOTAS providers and schools/colleges to allow access to a broader curriculum
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language issues for EAL students • Under-achievement for some minority ethnic pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater support for developing academic literacy • Community mentoring and use of complementary schools • Focused monitoring of attainment used to inform mainstream practice
<i>School attitudes</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cool not to learn/peer group pressure • Lack of coordination between supplementary schools and schools have different expectations re academic achievement which can cause problems • Lack of parental support/awareness of exams system • Low expectations of school staff regarding pupils' attainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need for information on the examinations system to be available in a number of community languages • Motivational opportunities to celebrate the achievements of minority ethnic pupils e.g. Black Caribbean pupils
<i>Cultural factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding to translate information about the examinations system into unusual languages • No supportive community framework: lack of awareness and support for exams, no drive/pressure from the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need for information on the examinations system to be available in a number of community languages • A need to increase parental awareness and support for exams
<i>Social concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties establishing social networks within school if pupils are moving frequently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of opportunities for peer mentoring • Support with transport to maintain placements in school if at all possible

Table 1.2 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Excluded pupils

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying a suitable centre for pupils working via distance learning or for excluded pupils with no school place Alternative providers may not have examination centre status PRUs may not be registered with all the awarding bodies whose specifications pupils have been using in school The logistics of transporting papers for candidates in alternative venues can be difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a ‘satellite’ centre model, whereby pupils are on the roll of the registered ‘hub’ centre but can take examinations at other agreed locations Longer advance time to open and transport papers for candidates at alternative venues and/or housing of papers at a location nearer to the alternative venue Assign members of staff as ‘runners’ to transport examination papers to alternative venues Awarding bodies despatch examination papers in smaller sealed packs, which can be transported under secure supervision in advance of the examination
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An ongoing student intake means it is difficult to make estimated entries. Candidates may also withdraw their entries where they have disengaged or have other personal reasons An ongoing and fluctuating student intake means specialist unit centres often incur late entry fees Paperwork regarding entries and transferred candidate arrangements can be burdensome, especially where there is no dedicated examinations officer Lack of adequate ICT facilities to benefit from awarding bodies’ online facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remission of late entry fees for PRUs, where late entries are commonplace Clarification of responsibility for entry of excluded pupils and those in alternative provision Agreement locally that secondary schools will not exclude Year 11 pupils after examination entry deadlines have passed Mainstream schools enter all (fixed-term excluded) pupils who then sit examinations at PRU as transferred candidates, if necessary Simplified examination entry and administrative procedures for alternative providers (e.g. regarding transferred candidates) A dedicated examinations officer/more time for the role
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time-consuming paperwork where the majority of candidates have special educational needs of some kind No staff member qualified to make SEN assessment: expense and/or lack of access to EP Assessment process can be unpleasant for the student Access arrangements do not sufficiently address the needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties A lack of space/human resources where many candidates have needs requiring access arrangements (e.g. scribes, readers, separate invigilation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good working relationship with EP service Relaxation of the requirements for EP/specialist teacher status More attention to the needs of candidates with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the regulations and guidance on access arrangements, based on expert knowledge of ‘what works’ Focus on (appropriate) alternative qualifications which do not have such stringent requirements for EP assessment (e.g. Entry Level) Streamlining of the access arrangements process by JCQ and the NAA (underway)
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfeasible costs to centres for moderation of small numbers of entries A shortage of invigilators who have not been involved in the teaching of candidates, where overall staff body is small 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrangements with awarding bodies to reduce or waive fees for moderation Tailored training and guidance on marking coursework for those supporting less able children

Assessment methodology <i>Terminal assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excluded pupils may have missed significant amounts of the specifications and are at risk of not being entered for examinations Pupils cannot be accredited for the part completion of courses Pupils may have missed mock examinations and are unfamiliar with examination procedures Pupils uncomfortable with the examination environment and therefore may not turn up for the exam, leave early or cause disturbances Those out of school may not receive pre-release booklets, and may miss examination practice, revision sessions, mock examinations, and modular tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing individual support for pupils with gaps in their education e.g. catch-up support, study skills etc. Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment Under the provisions of access arrangements, allow candidates to sit examinations under separate invigilation Provide students with mock examination experiences
<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excluded pupils who miss examinations are unlikely to resit at school or college the following academic year 	<i>No comments made</i>
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils find the examination experience stressful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment Provide students with mock examination experiences
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaps in education mean coursework may be incomplete or missing which can prevent examination entry Late entry/gaps in education: resulting in limited time to complete coursework (in specialist units) Large gaps in educational provision following an exclusion mean coursework may not be completed Pupils not suited to/skilled in this type of study: do not complete work or submit work late Poor transfer of work from mainstream school Lack of ongoing communication with mainstream school regarding work covered/required May have been studying different specifications in mainstream school Pupils not being monitored tightly enough regarding coursework completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion Submit fewer pieces of coursework, if no alternative, while meeting minimum requirements (special consideration from examination board) Teachers willing to work with awarding bodies and the student to adjust/adapt their coursework to fit new specification Need to improve communication links and transfer of work
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low/erratic attendance Gaps in education May not have completed any GCSE work 'Grey Exclusions' Pupils arriving part-way through may impact on group dynamics and behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-to-one tuition in the first instance helping them to reengage Use modular units so it is easier for students to 'slot in' if they arrive part way through the year. Further opportunities for mobile pupils and those with gaps in education to access 'banks of learning'. Further development of e-learning and distance learning opportunities
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils often disengaged from the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer Entry level qualifications

<i>alternative accreditation</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrol on FE college courses • Increase the availability of vocational opportunities, if possible at a younger age • Increased opportunities for alternative GCSE-equivalent accreditation • Increased recognition/value attributed to alternative and vocational accreditation
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of provision during exclusion process • Poor transfer of educational information/records • May not be able to continue with all their subjects • May have been studying different specification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national framework for accessing or transferring coursework and any information relating to progress towards examinations. • Educational providers need to ensure that educational information and data are transferred when young people move • Young people taking information with them • Improved communication links and information exchange • Improved communication between providers regarding mobile pupils (e.g. YOIs, PRUs, hospital schools and schools)
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited staffing and resources/facilities • Lack of expertise/qualifications among staff • Limited teaching time in PRUs due to other issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If exam boards could support in finding access to practical facilities (e.g. liaising with local mainstream schools) • Qualified ‘visiting teachers’ going to alternative providers • Staff willing to give individual tuition in subjects not normally covered at the PRU • Greater number of qualified teachers (cost implications) • Use of online education, City Learning Centres, e-learning centres • Use specifications without a coursework or practical element (useful if there were more) • EOTAS linking up with other providers to enable access to GCSEs or a wider range of subjects at GCSE level • Agreeing with alternative providers a goal of a minimum of English and Maths GCSE for every pupil
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excluded pupils’ learning needs may include low achievement, or under-achievement, or SEN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer Entry level qualifications • Increase opportunities for work-related learning and vocational opportunities, if possible at a younger age • Increased opportunities for alternative GCSE-equivalent (if appropriate) accreditation • The provision of unitised awards allowing students to build up accreditation • Increased recognition/value attributed to alternative and vocational accreditation
<i>School attitudes</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>

<p>Wider issues</p> <p><i>Expectations and awareness</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low expectations of pupils, parents and mainstream schools • Schools ‘<i>washing their hands of</i>’ excluded pupils – refusal to enter them for exams • Mainstream school culture not suited to pupils • Stigmatised perceptions of PRUs • Low status attributed to alternative/lower-level qualifications • Negative attitudes to education, disengagement, lack of motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive approach, encourage students to believe that they can succeed • Need for excluding mainstream schools to have a legal obligation to enter excluded pupils for examinations and mark their coursework • Offer Entry level qualifications giving students a chance to succeed
<p><i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self-esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive approach, encourage students to believe that they can succeed
<p><i>Social concerns</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils may be experiencing a range of personal/social difficulties • Low self-esteem, fear of failure • Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive approach, encourage students to believe that they can succeed

Table 1.3 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Gypsy/Traveller pupils

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils without any school place will not have ‘affiliation’ to a centre in which to sit examinations. • Alternative providers may not have examination centre status • Mobile pupils may not logistically be able to access their centre at examination times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traveller Education Services liaise with willing mainstream schools, to enter pupils not attending school as private candidates • Families may make private candidate entries themselves (but this is not a straightforward option, especially where families are not ‘empowered’ around the education system) • More open centres at a national level, whereby Travelling pupils can access their nearest centre as necessary (Traveller Education Services could play a key role in tracking pupils throughout the examination process) • Increased use of alternative venues, e.g. taking examination papers to pupils on site
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools unwilling to submit late entries and meet the cost of late entry fees • Administrative challenges in establishing candidates educational history, prior attainment levels, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive attitude on the part of schools towards entering all candidates – willingness to meet the costs of late entries • Effective communication with candidates and previous education providers
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where pupils have special educational needs, difficulties in obtaining an EP/specialist teacher assessment may be compounded by pupils’ mobility or irregular attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication with candidates and previous education providers
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>
<p>Assessment methodology</p> <p><i>Terminal assessment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile pupils may have missed large amounts of the specifications and are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations • Pupils cannot be accredited for the part completion of courses • Difficult for mobile pupils to complete a ‘significant’ amount of GCSE accreditation • Pupils may be not at school when terminal examinations take place • Pupils may have missed pre-release booklets, examination practice, revision sessions, mock examinations, and modular tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual support for pupils with gaps in their education e.g. catch-up support, study skills etc. • Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment
<p><i>The examination timetable</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education mean that pupils face difficulties completing GCSEs over two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year or over three years
<p><i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination papers may not be culturally appropriate or relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with awarding bodies for GCSEs to comment on the examples and language used in examination papers • Teachers to provide specific examination support, e.g. past papers
<p><i>Coursework</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to mobility/disrupted education coursework may be incomplete or missing which can prevent examination entry • Late entry/gaps in education: limited time to complete coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) • More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils not suited to/skilled in this type of independent study: do not complete work/submit work late • Poor transfer of work from previous school/establishment sometimes means work is repeated • May have been studying different specifications • May have missed miss coursework deadlines and practical experiments required for coursework completion • Appropriate coursework not being provided or completed whilst travelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit fewer pieces of coursework, if no alternative, while meeting minimum requirements (special consideration from awarding body) • Teachers willing to work with students to adjust/adapt their coursework to fit new specifications or provide support to allow them to continue accessing previous specifications • Extension of coursework deadlines (internal and/or awarding body)
<p>Curriculum barriers</p> <p><i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly mobile pupils unlikely to access secondary school, whilst semi-nomadic pupils may be travelling at the time of exams • Pupils may miss option choices resulting in them studying subjects they do not want to do (issue for all mobile pupils) • Pupils may have little choice in the school they attend and likely to access those with places, which are often the most challenging schools • Pupils may have difficulties accessing a school place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools devising ‘banks of learning’ to enable students to focus on the work they might have missed • Development of distance learning opportunities and independent learning packs which can be used both in and out of school by a range of pupils who may experience gaps in their education • ICT provision/e-learning to support mobile pupils
<p><i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectation that pupils must follow the full curriculum • Lack of vocational courses and alternative accreditation • Gaps in knowledge due to mobility/disrupted education • Non-recognition of culture within the curriculum • Perceived irrelevance of the secondary curriculum and examinations to many Traveller pupils • Schools lack of adaptability in relation to the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the numbers of subjects studied/GCSEs taken • Schools and pupils developing flexible timetables accommodating their lifestyle and cultural needs. Schools’ willingness to be flexible was seen as crucial to Gypsy/Traveller pupils accessing examinations • The development of cultural studies and citizenship courses • Acknowledging and including Gypsy/Traveller culture within the curriculum • Provision of additional vocational opportunities (if appropriate) and for them to be available earlier in their secondary school career i.e. from Year 9 onwards • Work-based training, work experience and college placements successfully used with pupils with no secondary school experience • Provision of alternative accreditation opportunities (non-examination assessment) • TES working with schools to ensure curriculum is inclusive
<p><i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools may receive little warning that pupils are arriving or leaving, leading to issues regarding the transfer of information and coursework • Lack of continuity in courses was seen as a key barrier for all mobile pupils including Gypsy/Travellers • Lack of communication, cooperation and information exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to establish more effective forms of information exchange • Schools providing additional support and liaising with previous schools to allow pupils to continue accessing previous GCSE specifications • Opportunities for pupils to take information/coursework etc. with them when they move

	between key agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national framework for accessing or transferring coursework and any information relating to progress towards examinations. • Educational providers need to ensure that educational information and data are transferred when young people move
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing numbers of secondary aged children and their families opting for home education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved monitoring of home education arrangements • Key stage 4 arrivals without a school place accessing alternative provision which can include access to GCSEs
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of attainment due to gaps in knowledge – underachievement at key stages 1 to 3 seen as a key barrier resulting in little motivation to achieve at key stage 4 • Disengagement due to perceived irrelevance of the curriculum with few opportunities to experience success • Pupils drop-out and fail because they do not see any possibility of achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to focus on raising achievement in key stages 1 to 3 • Data monitoring and self-review helping schools identify issues regarding poor achievement and lack of attainment in GCSEs
<i>School attitudes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative school attitudes/racism leading to non-retention in secondary school • Schools not taking ownership of Gypsy/Traveller pupils seeing them as the responsibility of TES • Schools’ negative attitudes towards families seen as a potential barrier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing issues of racism within schools e.g. TES working with schools to ensure curriculum is inclusive • Support of senior management seen as crucial for addressing many of the barriers identified • Positive attitudes of schools helping pupils and families address challenges associated with secondary school attendance and access to examinations
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil and parents’ lack of awareness of the importance of option choices, the examinations system etc. • Some parents non-literacy may mean that they are unable to access information about examinations • Non-identification of Gypsy/Traveller pupils because of fears of bullying and racism • Schools reluctant to enter pupils for examinations because there was an expectation that they would leave/low expectations of Traveller pupils’ ability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to improve parental awareness of the examination system linked to the development of effective relationships with parents and pupils • Ensure that information about examinations and the examination process is communicated in a variety of formats e.g. via taped information, face-to-face meetings or telephone contact • TES raising schools’ awareness of what the barriers are and incorporating them into self-review processes • Schools viewing the barriers as a school improvement issue
<i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental difficulties in negotiating the structures of large schools • Pupils seen as adults within the Travelling community but as children within school, leading to conflict around behaviour, attitudes and relationships • Perceived irrelevance of the secondary curriculum and examinations to the Gypsy/Traveller culture: traditionally older children take up a place within the Traveller economy • Issues of bullying and racism at school • Schools reluctance to meet families in their own homes where they 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of effective home/school liaison • Identification of a key person in school who parents/pupils can contact • In-school support for the completion of homework and coursework • Schools addressing issues of racism • Linking the curriculum to meet the needs of the Traveller economy

	<p>feel more confident</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support at home to complete homework and coursework • Gender issues regarding retention in secondary school with girls staying longer than boys 	
<i>Social concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-retention in secondary school • Accommodation issues impacting on pupils' ability to access education and examinations • Issues of discrimination, prejudice and bullying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of well-serviced sites assisting pupils' access to education and ultimately examinations • Developing opportunities for mentoring including the appointment of examinations mentors to 'lock' pupils into the process • Schools and TES addressing issues of discrimination, prejudice and bullying

Table 1.4 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Home educators

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onus on the candidate to find an examination centre willing to accept private candidates – options are limited nationally Families may have to travel and incur overnight costs to attend a centre Mainstream schools often reluctant to accept private candidates. There is a perceived lack of awareness of the relative simplicity of this process Pupils home educated for behavioural or anxiety- based reasons may not want to take examinations in a large centre with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increased number of ‘open centres’ at a national level, which accept all private candidates Studying via an FE or adult education college provides the necessary ‘affiliation’ to an examination centre Families may be able to negotiate arrangements with more accommodating local schools. Improved awareness of private candidate procedures on the part of mainstream schools Greater support from LEAs to encourage mainstream schools to accept private candidates Early planning and ‘tenacity’ on the part of families in order to secure examination access
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families must meet the cost of examination entry and centres may charge an additional fee Onus is on families to be proactive in contacting awarding bodies for specifications, key dates, etc. Families need to be aware of deadlines and be organised well in advance Where home education begins during Year 11 (e.g. due to anxious school refusal or behavioural difficulties) entry deadlines may have been missed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and advice for parents about the examination process and alternative entry options for pupils coming out of mainstream school during key stage 4
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private candidates will need to find an authenticator and an examination centre willing to mark coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater (perceived) willingness on the part of awarding bodies to mark coursework from private candidates
<p>Assessment methodology</p> <p><i>Terminal assessment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties accessing FE colleges pre-16 (some are ready to take GCSEs earlier) Where home education begins during Year 11 (e.g. due to anxious school refusal or behavioural difficulties) there is little time to make plans and necessary arrangements to complete courses and examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further support for home educating parents
<p><i>The examination timetable</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>
<p><i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courses with oral and practical elements may not be available to private candidates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further development of e-learning and distance learning opportunities
<p><i>Coursework</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many coursework specifications unavailable to private candidates Coursework is difficult to organise and is not an easy option for home educated children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International GCSEs that do not have coursework Further support for home educating parents

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements may be complicated to grasp for a parent-tutor or self-studying child • Where home education begins during Year 11 (e.g. due to anxious school refusal or behavioural difficulties) there is little time to make plans and necessary arrangements to complete courses and examinations • Schools sometimes lose the coursework of pupils who leave school for home education 	
Curriculum barriers	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>		
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE curriculum may be seen as irrelevant by some home educating families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples were provided of young people not taking GCSEs and going straight on to study A'levels
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some specifications not available to private candidates • Parents may not feel they have the skills to deliver/facilitate certain subjects • The number of GCSEs young people can access may be limited • Difficulties completing group and practical work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people accessing GCSEs via distance learning correspondence courses (expensive option) and adult education colleges • E-learning opportunities • Part-time attendance at school/college to provide opportunities to complete group and practical work • Home educators coming together to provide opportunities for group work
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increasing number of young people and their families accessing home education in key stage 4 as a result of disengagement from school may not have the ability/motivation to complete self-directed learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support available from home education advisory groups and networks
<i>School attitudes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools not supportive of pupils who leave school for anxiety or BESD-related issues • Schools/LEAs not aware of the legality and positive aspects of home education • Home education not seen as a viable alternative by LEAs • Schools and LEAs not supportive of home education (have no duty to fund, and/or may have negative attitude) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive schools allowing home educated youngsters to access courses such as music and/or sit examinations
Wider issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents may have insufficient awareness of the examination system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving parental awareness of the examination system • Home education advisory groups and networks providing advice and support
<i>Expectations and awareness</i>		

<i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some families choose not to take GCSEs • Pupils who have left school for anxiety/BESD-related issues may have a family background which is not supportive of education. Parents may have to address behavioural difficulties, as well as educational provision • Difficulties for young people when there is little financial and/or motivational support from the family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people accessing alternative forms of accreditation • Need for greater support for families who are home educating for crisis reasons rather than as a lifestyle choice • Some young people’s personal commitment/internal resilience ensures that they overcome both motivational and financial barriers
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional difficulties when the reason for home education is linked to anxiety or BESD. If home education fails young people may effectively be left stranded without any educational provision 	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>

Table 1.5 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Looked after children

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
The examination process	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Access to an examination centre</i>		
<i>Entering candidates</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late entry fees may be incurred where a pupil arrives new to the school/LEA part-way through Year 11 • Administrative challenges in establishing candidate’s educational history, prior attainment levels, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive attitude on the part of schools towards entering all candidates – willingness to meet the costs of late entries • Effective communication with candidates and previous education providers
<i>Access arrangements</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
Assessment methodology		
<i>Terminal assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of stability in care placements leading to time out of school means pupils may miss large amounts of the curriculum and are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations • ‘All or nothing’ format of GCSEs meaning that pupils cannot be accredited for the part completion of courses • Pupils may have missed pre-release booklets, examination practice, revision sessions, mock examinations, and modular tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual support for pupils with gaps in their education e.g. catch-up support, study skills etc. • Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment
<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May find it difficult to concentrate during the examination if they have recently moved or are worried or anxious about their care placement • If young people are in semi-independent living at sixteen they may experience difficulties with personal organisation including accessing examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEAs implementing measures to reduce the number of care placements experienced by looked after children and providing support around examination times • Flexibility about examination start time and about where examination is taken (as available/appropriate) e.g. in a separate room in school • More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education mean coursework may be incomplete or missing • Changes in school may mean that looked after children may miss practical experiments required for coursework completion • Changes in schools may mean that coursework is not completed • May have been studying different specification • Poor transfer of work from previous school/establishment sometimes means work is lost or repeated • Difficulties in accessing materials and a suitable place to work for those in residential homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) • Effective communication with candidates and previous education providers • Teachers willing to work with students to adjust/adapt their coursework to fit new specifications • Extension of coursework deadlines (internal and/or awarding body) • More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not have out of school support for coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual support for coursework
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of stability in care placements leading to time out of school and difficulties accessing the curriculum and examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEAs implementing measures to reduce the number of care placements experienced by looked after children
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of non-entry and disengagement due to gaps in learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast tracking vulnerable students in danger of dropping out in Year 11 in core GCSE subjects • Providing catch-up support • Reducing the numbers of subjects studied focusing on key subject areas • Accessing alternative accreditation with GCSE-equivalence • Funding to schools to support Year 11 looked after children to ensure they are entered for GCSEs and to boost their grades
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not following pupils when they move • Schools have little awareness of, or involvement in, planned moves for looked after children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools using learning mentors to liaise with pupils' previous schools to allow pupils to continue accessing previous GCSE specifications • Improved communication links between social workers and schools/social workers involved in the educational process
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited opportunities for pupils to access GCSEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities to access accreditation with GCSE-equivalence or half GCSEs • Careful monitoring and tracking by looked after children's services to ensure that, where appropriate, young people are entered for GCSEs
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of SEN effectively disapply a significant number of students from the GCSE curriculum • Low levels of basic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding to schools to support Year 11 looked after children to ensure they are entered for GCSE and boost their grades • Developing opportunities to access pre-GCSE level accreditation, as well as alternative accreditation with GCSE equivalence • Targeted basic skills support
<i>School attitudes</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social workers lack of awareness and support for examinations • Teachers' expectations of looked after children low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing teachers and other professionals low educational expectations of looked after children • The appointment of designated teachers helping address issue of low expectations
<i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of some residential homes not supportive of education and examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased mentoring opportunities and raising the awareness of non-educational professionals of the importance of examinations
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people likely to be addressing a range of significant personal needs which means that school and education is not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased mentoring opportunities regarding social and emotional issues

	<p>prioritised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsettled domestic situations might mean they miss examinations • Change in status of looked after children at the age of 16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of wider holistic support during examinations e.g. transport • Ensuring young people in residential homes have access to an adult who values education and can provide support (including post-16/transition support)
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Table 1.6 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Pupils with medical needs

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist units may not have examination centre status • Physical/logistical inability to access the main examination centre • The logistics of transporting papers for candidates in alternative venues can be difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of alternative venue arrangements (e.g. the candidate's home, hospital teaching unit) • Allow longer advance time to open and transport papers for candidates at alternative venues
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication between mainstream school and specialist provider regarding the examination entry process • Paperwork regarding transferred candidate arrangements can be burdensome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication/liaison between specialist units and mainstream schools, regarding planning and responsibilities for examination entries • A dedicated examinations officer/more time for the role (in specialist units) • Simplified examination entry and administrative procedures for alternative providers (e.g. regarding transferred candidates).
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils missing out on access arrangements due to a lack of awareness or lack of proactivity on the part of mainstream schools. They may not understand the range of difficulties that the young person is facing, especially if they have been out of school for some time • Deadlines for access arrangements – may have to apply late or ask for special consideration after the exam in the case of an emergency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of access arrangements and training on implementing them • Plan for the 'worst case scenario' if a candidate's medical condition is unpredictable • Increased dialogue between awarding bodies and specialist services/teams regarding access arrangements and special consideration • Greater recognition, through special consideration, of the longer-term educational disadvantage faced by pupils with medical conditions • Streamlining of the access arrangements process by JCQ and the NAA (underway)
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>
<p>Assessment methodology</p> <p><i>Terminal assessment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education due to illness may mean that pupils are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations • In relation to GCSEs, pupils unable to receive accreditation for work completed prior to their illness • May simply miss the examination if it coincides with serious illness • The varying and unpredictable symptoms of illness are difficult to plan for • Pupils with particular medical conditions may perform unevenly in examinations • Taking more than one examination on one day may be a considerable barrier e.g. pupils with ME/CFS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for the 'worst case scenario' if a candidate's medical condition is unpredictable • Flexibility regarding where the examination is taken (as available/appropriate) e.g. at home, in hospital, in separate room in school, in LEA's alternative/specialist unit. Opportunities to suspend GCSE work until they are well • Use of timetable deviations if necessary • Rest breaks (e.g. to use toilet) • Physical comfort arrangements (e.g. cushions, beanbags) • Apply for special consideration • Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may not be appropriate/practical for pupils to sit an examination at the main location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment Opportunities to gain accreditation for work completed and to return to work completed at a later date Systematic recording of attainment to allow for possible special consideration if pupils miss exams
<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two exams on one day can be a considerable barrier e.g. pupils with ME/CFS Lack of flexibility regarding timetable deviations for pupils who are ill on or around the day of the examination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased flexibility regarding timetable deviations More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year or over three years Systematic recording of attainment to allow for possible special consideration if pupils miss exams In exceptional circumstances an aggregate award may be given by the awarding bodies
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaps in education mean coursework may be incomplete or missing which can prevent exam entry Gaps in education may result in limited time to complete coursework (specialist units) May have missed miss coursework deadlines and practical experiments required for coursework completion if they have been absent for long periods May have been studying different specifications in mainstream school Appropriate coursework not being provided for those out of school Pupils not being monitored tightly enough regarding coursework completion Lack of ongoing communication with mainstream school regarding work covered/required Poor transfer of work from previous school/educational establishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) Teachers willing to work with awarding bodies and students to adjust/adapt their coursework to fit new specifications Extension of coursework deadlines (internal and/or awarding body) Submit fewer pieces of coursework, if no alternative, while meeting minimum requirements (special consideration from awarding body) Awarding bodies willingness to prime mark students' work More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion Home visits from school's pastoral support staff (maintaining links) Option to repeat Year 11 (take GCSEs in Year 12)
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaps in education Frequent absences for health appointments, etc. Difficulties accessing work whilst they are out of school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual programmes to enable students to continue with as many subjects as possible Clear stipulations regarding the work to be provided whilst young people are out of school Development of e-learning opportunities, independent learning packs and 'banks' of learning allowing students to continue accessing the curriculum, keep up to date with work and/or catch up on their return
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties accessing the full curriculum because of health needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring pupils access an appropriate curriculum suited to their

<i>alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hospital schools are not obliged to follow the national curriculum 	<p>health needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most hospital schools aiming to follow the national curriculum to ensure that pupils have full access to educational opportunities
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Late arrivals may have been studying different specifications Lack of ongoing communication with mainstream school regarding the work covered/required Difficulties accessing work from schools Young people taken off the school roll due to non-attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access previously completed work from school Maintain links with mainstream school if young people are returning Support services contacting schools to ensure pupils are still on roll and entered for examinations
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restricted range of qualifications/subjects in specialist units (due to time, facilities and/or staff availability/expertise) Difficulties completing speaking and listening tests and accessing group work Teaching time limited in specialist units Access to appropriately qualified tutors for those on home tuition Small numbers of staff: may mean that they are unable to take time off to attend exam board/ moderation meetings for every subject Lack of expertise of staff to mark coursework (awarding bodies reluctant to prime mark) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of e-learning opportunities Flexibility and willingness of staff to access as many subjects as possible for young people Using the expertise of school staff to assist with marking and moderation Linking with schools to provide additional accreditation opportunities or to enable the completion of practical work Accessing specialist support/tuition from external providers e.g. the development of a micro science lab which can be used at home or in the hospital school Awarding bodies allowing science experiments to be completed on laptops
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health needs may impact on pupils' ability to access the full range of GCSEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limiting the numbers of GCSEs taken
<i>School attitudes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues regarding schools insistence that pupils with medical needs only drop one or two GCSEs when for many pupils this may still be too much. Pupils are overloaded and do not achieve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limiting the numbers of GCSEs taken
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In some instances pupils, parents and schools' expectations are too high, whereas in other instances they may be too low Re-establishing pupils' aspirations regarding examinations The belief that pupils with medical needs should not be pushed to complete examinations Schools unaware of the difficulties pupils are facing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising schools' awareness of the issues faced by young people with medical needs Raising schools, pupils and parents expectations that although pupils may have medical needs many are capable of completing examinations Support groups/home and hospital tuition services providing parents and young people with information and advice in relation to accessing examinations
<i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health needs prevent pupils access to examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring pupils access a curriculum suited to their health needs Providing transport to ensure young people can sit exams or allowing them to sit examinations at home

Table 1.7 Overview of key barriers and solutions: School refusers

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying a suitable centre for pupils working via distance learning or for pupils with no school place Alternative providers/specialist groups may not have examination centre status The logistics of transporting papers for candidates in alternative venues can be difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils attending unregistered groups/units enter as candidates of other (larger) LEA providers, which have examination centre status (e.g. PRUs) Allow longer advance time to open and transport papers for candidates at alternative venues
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No dedicated exams officer in alternative provisions Lack of adequate ICT facilities in alternative provisions to fully benefit from awarding bodies' online facilities An ongoing student intake in specialist groups means it is difficult to make estimated entries. Candidates may also withdraw their entries where they have disengaged or have other personal reasons An ongoing and fluctuating student intake means specialist groups/units often incur late entry fees Schools may be reluctant to enter a pupil who has not attended school for some time Paperwork regarding transferred candidate arrangements can be burdensome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A dedicated examinations officer/more time for the role (in alternative provisions) Adequate funding in specialist units to cover late entry fees/remission of late entry fees for specialist units Simplified examination entry and administrative procedures for alternative providers (e.g. regarding transferred candidates) Effective communication/liaison between alternative providers and mainstream schools, regarding planning and responsibilities for examination entries A positive attitude on the part of schools towards entering all candidates – willingness to meet the costs of late entries
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time-consuming paperwork where the majority of candidates have SEN of some kind No staff member qualified to make SEN assessment: expense and/or lack of access to an EP Assessment process can be unpleasant for the student Access arrangements do not sufficiently address the needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good working relationship with EP service Relaxation of the requirements for EP/specialist teacher status More attention to the needs of candidates with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the regulations and guidance on access arrangements, based on expert knowledge of 'what works' Plan contingencies for the 'worst case scenario' (e.g. alternative accommodation) where a pupil's emotional state is unpredictable
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where specialist units are operating on a small staff, it may not be feasible to take time off to attend all the awarding body training/information meetings. This may result in a lack of expertise among staff to mark coursework Small numbers of entries mean it can be difficult to judge the relative quality of work for the purposes of grading and moderation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with mainstream schools for indicators of comparative quality of work, for grading/moderation purposes
<p>Assessment methodology</p> <p><i>Terminal assessment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaps in education mean that pupils may have missed large proportions of the specifications and are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations Students have low levels of self-esteem and are extremely anxious about taking examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year or over three years Providing individual support for pupils with gaps in their education e.g. catch-up support, study skills etc.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They may not want to return to mainstream school to sit examinations • Pupils do not like crowded examination environments • Increased anxiousness caused by stranger (invigilator) in the examination room • Fear of examinations may result in pupils not turning up to an examination or leaving early • Fear of examinations can impact on a pupil's ability to concentrate and their performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment • Systematic recording of attainment to allow for possible special consideration if pupils miss examinations • Providing students with mock examination experiences • Under the provisions of access arrangements, allow candidates to sit examinations under separate invigilation
<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of examinations may result pupils not turning up or turning up late to an examination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased flexibility regarding timetable deviations • Flexibility about examination start time and about where the examination is taken (as available/appropriate) e.g. at home, in a separate room in school
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education mean coursework may be incomplete or missing which can prevent examination entry • Late entry/gaps in education: limited time to complete coursework (specialist units) • Pupils not suited to/skilled in this type of study: do not complete work/submit work late • Poor transfer of work from previous school/establishment sometimes means work is repeated • May have been studying different specification in mainstream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) • More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion • Submit fewer pieces of coursework, if no alternative, while meeting minimum requirements (special consideration from examination board) • Teachers willing to work with awarding bodies and the student to adjust/adapt their coursework to fit new specification
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people are likely to have gaps in their key stage 4 education and may not have completed any GCSE work • Poor transfer of work from mainstream school and poor transfer of educational information/records • May have been studying different specifications • Low/erratic attendance • Late entry/gaps in education: limited time to complete coursework (specialist units) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further development of e-learning and distance learning opportunities (although issues surrounding the continued isolation of school refusers if they are studying at home and a need for them to access additional forms of provision)
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time out of school may mean that young people are unable to access the curriculum • Lack of expertise of staff to mark coursework (awarding bodies reluctant to prime mark) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further development of independent learning opportunities • Greater differentiation of the curriculum to suit individual learning needs and wider use of existing accreditation such as GCSE short courses
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late arrivals may have been studying different specification • Lack of ongoing communication with mainstream school regarding work covered/required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EOTAS provision ensuring pupils are entered and accessing alternative examination centres if necessary • Provision of support to ensure young people continue with existing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor transfer of work from mainstream school and poor transfer of educational information/records. Difficulties accessing completed coursework • Pupils may have been studying different specifications • Young people taken off the school roll due to non-attendance • Staff in school may be unaware of the difficulties young people are facing because they are not in school. Poor communication and liaison between schools and home tutors 	<p>specifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national framework for accessing or transferring coursework and any information relating to progress towards examinations. • Educational providers need to ensure that educational information and data are transferred when young people move • Young people taking information with them • Improved communication links and information exchange • Support services contacting schools to ensure pupils are still on roll and entered for examinations
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited staffing and resources • Pupils unable to continue with all the GCSE subjects they studied in mainstream school • Lack of expertise/qualifications among staff • Limited teaching time due to other issues • Home education viewed as a possible solution but pupils levels of disengagement and other difficulties may mean this is not a successful approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff willing to give individual tuition in subjects not normally covered at the PRU • Using home tutors who work part-time in schools so they can access relevant and up to date teaching resources
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>School attitudes</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have low expectations of school refusers because of their time out of school therefore they are reluctant to enter them for examinations • Parental expectations may be too high 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring the commitment of senior managers within school in raising expectations • EOTAS providers entering pupils for examinations • ensuring parents have realistic expectations of their children if they reengage in education
<i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low expectations of pupils, parents and mainstream schools • Mainstream school culture not suited to pupils' needs and difficulties • Low status of alternative/lower qualifications • Parents do not know how to support their children in accessing examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to raise parental expectations • Need to raise the status/value of alternative/lower qualifications • Provide parents with support e.g. help sheets and telephone support prior to and during the examination period so that they know how to support their children through the process
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils may have negative attitudes to education, disengagement • Low levels of self-esteem and confidence • Personal/social difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing targeted support to increase self-esteem and address personal and social difficulties. The benefits (in relation to raising self-esteem) of attending some form of educational provision rather than studying at home were acknowledged • Transport provided to ensure that pupils accessed examinations or pupils completing 'practice journeys' to ensure they were comfortable with travelling to examinations

Table 1.8 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Pupils with special educational needs

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
The examination process		
<i>Access to an examination centre</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Entering candidates</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Access arrangements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expense and/or lack of access to EP or specialist teacher for assessment (pupils who are not assessed cannot have certain types of access arrangement) • Assessment not pleasant for the student • Where a large number of pupils require specialist assessment, there can be time pressures in completing all assessments before the application deadline • Pupils missing out on access arrangements due to a lack of awareness or proactivity on the part of mainstream schools • Time-consuming paperwork for examinations officers and SENCOs • A lack of space/human resources where many candidates have needs requiring access arrangements (e.g. scribes, readers, separate invigilation). • Perceived ‘insufficiencies’ in access arrangements, e.g. no readers or scribes in English examinations, withdrawal from 2004 of ‘exemption’ options for pupils with a physical or sensory disability, lesser attention to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties • Constraints of the minimum criteria for eligibility, where candidates narrowly miss the ‘threshold’ for support • The need for training/practice to make effective use of access arrangements (e.g. scribes) • Pupils’ reluctance to accept/make full use of the support offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A local network of specialist teachers, available to all centres • Relaxation of the requirements for EP/specialist teacher status • A member of permanent staff acquiring a recognised qualification to carry out the assessments • Greater awareness of access arrangements and training on implementing them • Effective communication between examination officers, SENCOs and candidates regarding support needs • Streamlining of the access arrangements process by JCQ and the NAA (underway) • Mock examinations and practice sessions to train the candidate in the use of the access arrangement and to understand its value • Increased options for method of response for physically disabled pupils (e.g. audio recording) • More attention to the needs of candidates with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the regulations and guidance on access arrangements, based on expert knowledge of ‘what works’ • Students to be fully involved in applications for access arrangements on their behalf
<i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus at training sessions on marking coursework produced by higher ability candidates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored training and guidance for those supporting less able children
Assessment methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils with conditions such as autism may perform unevenly in examinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment
<i>Terminal assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where pupils with SEN are unable to demonstrate a skill they are not eligible to have their scores boosted in other areas of assessment 	
<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often pupils attending special schools or units travel long distances to school which means that early exam start times can be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased flexibility regarding timetable deviations

	a barrier	
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal instructions relating to examination procedures can be difficult for some pupils with SEN to understand and remember • The layout of examination papers are not always clear and accessible • The rubric at the beginning of examination papers and the passages of text used in some papers can be too long and complex for pupils with processing difficulties • The phrasing and sentence structure of examination questions may be 'too formal' and 'academic' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased attention to linguistic factors in the writing of examination papers • Opportunities for practitioners to comment on the language used in GCSE examinations • Focused examination preparation including support on examination processes and procedures • Carrying out mock examinations with past papers prior to taking the examination
<i>Coursework</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
Curriculum barriers		
<i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils with SEN effectively disappplied from the GCSE curriculum because of the severity of their needs • Pressure on schools to enter pupils for courses that count in the league tables rather than what might be most relevant for young people in terms of post-16 progression • Pressure on special schools for pupils to access GCSEs and Entry level qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of opportunities to access Entry level qualifications • Vocational opportunities • Accreditation that is not assessed through examination • 'Life skills' courses seen as particularly relevant and useful for students positive post-16 experiences and progression
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties accessing coursework and information from pupils previous schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the minimum amount of coursework required or access examination only courses
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those in special schools often follow a limited curriculum and may be unable to access GCSEs • Access to GCSEs also limited by a lack of staff expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special schools linking with mainstream schools to allow pupils to access GCSEs
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils with SEN may be incorrectly placed in mainstream schools • Levels of SEN may prevent them from accessing examinations • Difficulties acknowledging the achievement of some pupils with SEN, such as autism, because they perform unevenly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better assessments of need required • Revision support for those pupils who have the potential to access GCSEs but may have difficulties preparing for examinations
<i>School attitudes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some examinations officers were felt to be unsupportive of the needs of pupils with SEN • Some teachers not seeing any purpose or need for pupils to access GCSEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENCOs need to work closely with examinations officers to change their attitudes
Wider issues		
<i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils capable of attaining GCSEs not being entered or entered for lower level examinations because of low expectations of staff in special schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising expectations of staff in special schools and providing pupils with opportunities to access GCSEs via linking with mainstream schools

<i>Cultural factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and pupils do not see the point of GCSEs, wanting to go straight into work 	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils reluctant to access examinations because feel they will fail • Stigma associated with having a reader and other access arrangements • Difficulties coping with the pressure of examinations • Drug and alcohol issues may mean that pupils are unable to take exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More appropriate assessments of need • Providing students with opportunities for success e.g. incremental accreditation which can be built up over a period of time • Exploring alternative forms of assessment • Students involved in and consulted on applications for access arrangements

Table 1.9 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Teenage parents

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may not be appropriate/practical for a heavily pregnant pupil to sit examinations in the main examination hall • If the pupil has disengaged from education or feels self-conscious, she may not want to return to mainstream school to sit examinations • Specialist units may not have examination centre status • The logistics of transporting papers for candidates in alternative venues can be difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of alternative venues (e.g. home, specialist group premises) when, for practical or personal reasons, the pupil does not want to attend the main examination centre • Retaining pupils on their mainstream school's roll and sitting examinations as transfer candidates at specialist units (especially useful if pupils enter a specialist unit late in key stage 4 or have been studying different specifications) • Allow longer advance time to open and transport papers for candidates at alternative venues
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No dedicated examinations officer in smaller specialist units • Difficulties in communication with mainstream schools regarding administrative details such as unique candidate identifiers • Part-time staffing of smaller units can make communication/organisation around examination entries difficult • An ongoing student intake means it is difficult to make estimated entries. Candidates may also withdraw their entries where they have disengaged or have other personal reasons preventing them from sitting the examination • An ongoing and fluctuating student intake means specialist units often incur late entry fees • Paperwork regarding transferred candidate arrangements can be burdensome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dedicated examinations officer/more time for the role (in specialist units) • Improved liaison between specialist key workers and examinations officers in mainstream schools • Effective communication with awarding bodies: having a designated contact who is accessible and responds to queries/requests, etc. • Make overestimates of the number of probable entries • Adequate funding in specialist units to cover late entry fees, or remission of late entry fees for specialist units • Mainstream school enters all pupils for examinations, then reassesses need nearer the time, making access arrangements as necessary (e.g. for transferred candidates) • Simplified examination entry and administrative procedures for alternative providers (e.g. regarding transferred candidates)
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy/parenthood is not an 'automatic' criterion for access arrangements and special consideration • Some mainstream schools are not proactive in accommodating the practical needs of pregnant candidates or seeking special consideration where appropriate • Lack of communication between girl and her parents and the school, about how the candidate wants to approach the situation, can be an obstacle to schools' ability to make supportive arrangements • Lack of dialogue between awarding bodies and specialist support teams (e.g. Reintegration Officers) regarding access arrangements and special consideration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan well ahead for arrangements which might be needed • Flexibility around alternative venues, e.g. at home, in hospital, in separate room in school, in a specialist unit • Accommodate the candidate's physical and emotional comfort needs, e.g. rest breaks to attend to baby or to use the toilet, water, extra cushions or beanbags • Apply for special consideration if examinations are taken very close to giving birth • Assemble evidence of candidates' prior attainment as a contingency in the event that the pupil misses an examination due to childbirth • Increased information and dialogue with awarding bodies for specialist support teams, regarding access arrangements and

		special consideration
<i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where specialist units are operating with a small staff, it may not be feasible for them to take time off to attend all awarding body training/information meetings The above may result in a lack of expertise among staff to mark coursework; awarding bodies may be perceived as reluctant to mark coursework on their behalf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater (perceived) willingness to mark coursework, on the part of awarding bodies
Assessment methodology <i>Terminal assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils may miss examinations if it coincides with birth The ‘all or nothing’ format of GCSEs means that pupils cannot be accredited for the part completion of courses Gaps in education mean that pupils may have missed large portions of the specifications and are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations Pupils may have missed pre-release booklets, examination practice, revision sessions, mock examinations and modular tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the provisions of access arrangements, allow candidates to sit examinations at hospital Systematic recording of attainment to allow for possible special consideration if pupils miss exams More opportunities for alternatives to examinations e.g. via the provision of coursework and portfolio-based assessment Opportunities to repeat Year 11 and take GCSEs in Year 12 in school or FE college Opportunities for gaining accreditation for units of work completed
<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of flexibility regarding timetable deviations for pupils giving birth on or around the day of the examination Lack of funding to complete GCSEs in Year 12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased flexibility regarding timetable deviations More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year or over three years
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaps in education mean coursework may be incomplete or missing Appropriate coursework not provided for pupils whilst they are out of school Incomplete/late coursework which can prevent exam entry Lack of ongoing communication with mainstream school regarding work covered/required No ‘chivvyng’ to maintain impetus during 18 week maximum authorised absence period Pupils may miss coursework deadlines Erratic pupil attendance: difficult to complete work Late entry/limited time to complete coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good liaison between exams officer and teenage parents key worker Extension of coursework deadlines (internal and/or awarding body) Submit fewer pieces of coursework, if no alternative, whilst meeting minimum requirements Teachers willing to work with student to adjust/adapt their coursework to fit new specifications/complete sufficient amounts of coursework in the time available
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erratic pupil attendance: difficult to complete work 18-week authorised absence period Gaps in education (longer term) Necessary absences for health appointments, scans or treatment etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home tuition during their authorised absence period (LEA or school) Home visits from school’s pastoral support staff (maintaining links) A range of options for continued educational provision (e.g. mainstream school, specialist group, individual tuition)
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues of disengagement from education/curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home tuition during authorised absence period

<i>alternative accreditation</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-school liaison (e.g. home visits by learning mentors who take and collect work) • One-to-one lessons out of hours in mainstream school • Maintain links with mainstream school if returning • For those pupils who are disengaged from learning, opportunities to work in a supportive environment within learning support units in school may assist their reintegration • Individual tuition for catch-up support • School/specialist unit encourages attendance and continuity in education • A designated teacher/key worker to maintain education (and offer pastoral support, advocacy)
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For those young people out of school, a lack of ongoing communication with mainstream schools regarding the work covered/required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good liaison between the examinations officer and teenage parent key worker • Access previously completed work from school • Draw up contracts with schools regarding ongoing communication and provision/transfer of work
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricted range of qualifications/subjects in specialist units (due to time, facilities and/or staff availability/expertise) • Teaching time limited in specialist units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access mainstream school facilities especially for practical subjects (e.g. science labs) • Use IT facilities, portable science labs etc. to access a wider range of subjects • Using teaching staff who can teach a range of subjects • Individual programmes – try to enable students to continue with as many subjects as possible • Need a highly dedicated and committed staff • Ideally, pupils remain in mainstream school. Attending a specialist group, where they exist, preferable to individual home tuition but is dependent on the needs, preferences and aptitudes of the pupil
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of disengagement of teenage parents may restrict their ability to access GCSEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of a relevant curriculum seen as meeting their needs most effectively
<i>School attitudes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools reluctance to support girls who have disengaged • Schools view that staying in school and taking exams is just ‘<i>out of the question</i>’ once pregnant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive school approach, flexible and supportive – proactive approach to meeting their needs • Maintaining pupils on mainstream school’s roll wherever possible (possibly with short-term attendance at a specialist unit) • Ensuring schools take responsibility for teenage parents and that this is reflected in the attitudes of senior management • Remind schools that pregnancy is not a reason for exclusion, whether formal or informal (DfES/0629/2001)
Wider issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health services’ lower concern for education as a priority, e.g. clashing appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family/parental support • School empathetic to situation (e.g. one-to-one lessons, allow

<i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few young people want to move on to post-16 education 	<p>pupils to arrive late or leave early or use taxis to avoid crowds)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and support for moving to post-16 education Specialist units open to post-16s for advice and support to help maintain engagement and support for moving on, for example to sixth form or FE college or work-based learning
<i>Cultural factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some ethnic groups/cultures may remove young women from school if they become pregnant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist groups can help with gradual reengagement with education
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for childcare and transport Lack of sleep Lack of support at home Disengagement from education Some young people may also have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties Rejection/hostility and bullying from peer group if in mainstream school (actual or fear of this) Motherhood may take priority over education, particularly in some deprived communities and ethnic/cultural groups Need for holistic support Illness during pregnancy Other social exclusion issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision/funding of childcare and transport The provision of exam breakfasts Telephoning pupils the morning of the examination to ensure they are ready (and arrange transport if necessary) Apply for special consideration if the mother is dealing with difficult personal circumstances (e.g. baby taken into care) More staff in school and specialist units trained in counselling/pastoral support Holistic support for health, parenting skills, planning for the future (including education and living independently) Holistic support for childcare, transport, social services collaboration etc.

Table 1.10 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Young carers

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
The examination process		
<i>Access to an examination centre</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Entering candidates</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Access arrangements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a young carer is not an automatic criterion for access arrangements/special consideration • Some schools are not proactive in seeking special consideration for young carers, where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance for schools on circumstances under which a young carer would be eligible for special consideration • Schools putting in place ‘reassurances’ for pupils during examinations, e.g. making telephone calls home at regular intervals • ‘Holistic’ support from schools, social services and young carers associations to address wider access to education
<i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
Assessment methodology		
<i>Terminal assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education due to caring responsibilities may mean that young carers will have missed large portions of the specifications and are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations • Pupils may have missed pre-release booklets, examination practice, revision sessions, mock examinations, and modular tests • May find it difficult to concentrate during the examination if they are worried or anxious about the person they are caring for • May miss examinations if they coincide with death or serious illness of parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual support for pupils with gaps in their education e.g. catch-up support, study skills etc. • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment • Opportunities for young carers to stay in contact with parents during examination times if they are worried about them. • Apply for special consideration if the young carer is dealing with difficult personal circumstances (e.g. death of a parent) • Systematic recording of attainment to allow for possible special consideration if pupils miss exams
<i>The examination timetable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be late for examinations due to their caring responsibilities • May find it difficult to concentrate during the examination if a young carer is worried or anxious about the person they are caring for • May miss examinations if they coincide with death or serious illness of parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan ahead for what might be needed • Flexibility about examination start times and about where examinations are taken (as available/appropriate) e.g. at home, in a separate room in school • Someone from school keeping in regular contact with parents during the examination • Rest breaks (e.g. for the teacher to inform them of their parents’ condition) • Apply for special consideration if there has been a death or admission to hospital with serious illness • Social services liaising with schools to provide respite care to the person they are looking after during the examination period. • More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities

		to take GCSEs at other times in the year
<i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have missed miss coursework deadlines and practical experiments required for coursework completion if they have been absent for long periods because of their caring role • Young carers may have a limited time to complete coursework because of their caring responsibilities • If coursework involves group work a young carer is not always able to attend after school sessions • May not have support from home for the completion of coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of coursework deadlines (internal and/or awarding body) • Submit fewer pieces of coursework, if no alternative, while meeting minimum requirements (special consideration from examination board) • The provision of home tuition after school and lunchtime clubs • Schools appointing link workers for young carers liaising between home and school and to provide support • Home visits from school's young carers link worker • Schools and families work together to ensure young carers have 'protected time' without caring responsibilities to complete coursework
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education • Frequent absences due to illness/needs of the person they are caring for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional support e.g. lunchtime clubs to provide support with homework and the completion of coursework
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling that the curriculum is not relevant to their life experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrating young carers' life experiences into the curriculum e.g. via project or coursework
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of poor communication between those agencies supporting young carers and those working with their parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for improved contact between agencies supporting children and those supporting their parents. Need for schools to be aware of who they need to contact in order to access support
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring responsibilities impact on young carers' ability to access examinations and complete coursework 	<i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i>
<i>School attitudes</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>	<i>See expectations and awareness</i>
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-identification of young carers viewed as a key barrier to pupils accessing examinations • Schools knowledge and awareness of the needs of young carers may be limited • Schools lack of proactivity or practicality in addressing their needs • Schools reluctant to support those who appear to be 'problem pupils' i.e. regular absences and lateness • Schools' reluctance to enter a young carer for examinations because expected low grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to improve the identification of young carers within schools for example during induction ensuring young people are asked about their caring responsibilities • Having a young carers worker to act as an advocate • Links with the family and the school through an EWO • Schools keeping in regular contact with the parents or social workers connected to the family

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools turning a ‘blind eye’ when young carers have not completed coursework because they are aware of their caring role • If parents are sick or disabled they often miss parents evenings and are not always aware of deadlines for coursework and examination dates 	
<i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers relating to parents dependence on the young person • Young carers’ parents may experience difficulties communicating effectively with schools, particularly if schools are unaware of their difficulties. Whereas schools may feel that they are not interested • Lack of support at home to complete homework and coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools need to explore the reasons why it may be difficult to contact parents and to examine different ways of communicating with parents • Identification of a key person in school who parents can contact • In-school support for young carers e.g. lunchtime homework clubs and provision of key workers
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness due to their caring duties • Lack of support at home • Disengagement from education • Rejection/hostility from peer group if in mainstream school (actual or fear of this) • Social isolation within school because of their caring responsibilities • Caring may take priority over education • Need for holistic support • Low self-esteem: young carers just see themselves as carers, they often do not recognise the value of exams • lack of contact between agencies supporting young people and those supporting parents/carers • Transport is a problem it can mean that young carers are late for exams • Need for support in the caring role • The home can be a chaotic environment in which it is difficult to complete coursework and to revise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for special consideration if the young carer is dealing with difficult personal circumstances (e.g. death of a parent) • Opportunities for young carers to stay in contact with parents during the school day/at examination times if they are worried about them. Also the establishment of contingency plans for support if parents need care during examinations • Opportunities for after school activities or involvement in young carers projects giving them opportunities to be away from their caring responsibilities and to socialise with their peers and other young carers • Clear lines of communication and liaison between all the agencies involved i.e. education, social services, and health

Table 1.11 Overview of key barriers and solutions: Young offenders

	Barriers/challenges	Solutions/suggestions for improvement
<p>The examination process</p> <p><i>Access to an examination centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Offenders' Institutions (YOIs) will generally be registered as examination centres. However, space may be at a premium and there may be disturbances from outside noise • Poor communication between YOIs and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) resulting in difficulties finding a centre for young offenders released close to examination time • Mainstream schools' reluctance to accept young offenders to sit examinations • Alternative providers working with young offenders may not have examination centre status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved communication between YOIs, YOTs and mainstream schools regarding examination centre access for young offenders leaving secure accommodation • Use of alternative venue arrangements if it is not felt to be safe/appropriate for a young offender to sit an examination at the main centre
<p><i>Entering candidates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions on ICT/internet facilities within YOIs (for security reasons) means they cannot make full use of awarding bodies' online entry procedures • Security checks on emails: electronic correspondence from awarding bodies is edited or has sections removed, obstructing efficient communication and information flow • Late entry fees incurred by schools and alternative providers where a young offender leaves custody and joins the centre after the entry deadline. Schools may be reluctant to meet this cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to ICT/internet facilities • A more positive attitude from mainstream providers towards entering young offenders for examinations, and meeting any additional costs
<p><i>Access arrangements</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>
<p><i>Authentication, marking and moderation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of space in YOIs for storing key skills and coursework portfolios • Slow processing of certificates, meaning that young offenders have often moved on, cannot be traced, and so do not receive recognition for their achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swifter turnaround of certification for mobile young offenders
<p>Assessment methodology</p> <p><i>Terminal assessment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education mean that pupils may have missed large proportions of the specifications and are at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations • Students are not suited to paper-based exam format • Short sentences in YOIs mean that it is not possible to complete any 'significant' amount of GCSE accreditation • 'All or nothing' format of GCSEs meaning that pupils cannot be accredited for the part completion of courses • Lack of time in a YOI to achieve a '<i>meaningful qualification</i>' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing individual support for pupils with gaps in their education e.g. catch-up support, study skills etc. • Opportunities to build up smaller incremental units of accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 • More opportunities for alternatives to closed terminal examinations e.g. coursework and portfolio-based assessment • Opportunities for gaining accreditation for work completed while detained in YOI that is transferable and recognised by other providers
<p><i>The examination timetable</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education mean that pupils face difficulties completing GCSEs over two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexible approaches towards examinations e.g. opportunities to take GCSEs at other times in the year or over three years
<p><i>Pedagogic approach and assessment style</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>	<p><i>No difficulties were highlighted through this research</i></p>

<i>Coursework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in education mean coursework may be incomplete or missing • Pupils not suited to/skilled in this type of study: do not complete work/submit work late • Short length of stay in YOI means coursework often does not get completed • Poor transfer of work from previous school/establishment sometimes means work is repeated or lost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of different options available (specifications and different types of award) • More rigorous monitoring and tracking of coursework completion
Curriculum barriers <i>Mobility, gaps in education and absence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of provision during exclusion process • Gaps in education • Absences due to court appearances • School condoned absence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further opportunities for mobile pupils and those with gaps in education to access 'banks of learning' • Further development of e-learning and distance learning opportunities (although there may be restrictions on e-learning in YOIs)
<i>Relevance of the curriculum and alternative accreditation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the availability of vocational opportunities, if possible at a younger age • Increased opportunities for alternative GCSE-equivalent accreditation. Young offenders achieving OCN accreditation despite being based within YOIs for relatively short periods of time • Increased recognition/value attributed to alternative and vocational accreditation • Teachers in YOIs used to working with disaffected learners and choosing courses that are achievable
<i>Continuity of courses and communication between providers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variation in the courses/qualifications YOIs and PRUs are working towards. Courses are not transferable • Poor transfer of educational information/records. Information often inaccurate or missing • Lack of communication/transferred information between schools/YOIs/PRUs/YOTs/courts • Young person being placed a long way from home LEA • Young offenders relatively short stays in YOIs mean that continuity of courses is difficult to maintain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national framework for accessing or transferring coursework and any information relating to progress towards examinations. • Educational providers need to ensure that educational information and data are transferred when young people move • Young people taking information with them • Improved communication links and information exchange • Improved communication between providers (YOIs, schools, YOTs and PRUs) regarding young offenders • Use of electronic individual learning plans (ILPs) helping improve continuity when young people move on
<i>Limitations of EOTAS provision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most YOIs do not offer taught courses at GCSE level • Alternative providers not equipped to offer GCSEs • Alternative providers lacking facilities and resources • Alternative providers tend to target courses at lower ability level students, those operating at a higher level of ability may not be challenged • Alternative providers lacking qualified teaching staff • YOIs offering a restricted range of subjects due to smaller staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For particularly capable students detained during the examination period, YOIs acted as host centres to enable candidates to sit final examinations

<i>Pupil ability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor levels of basic skills due to exclusion or truancy • Issues of disengagement • Very few operating at GCSE level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to gain accreditation at entry level • Small group work in YOIs with learning support assistance addressing issues of poor basic skills
<i>School attitudes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions to education in YOIs: education not prioritised in wider regime • Schools' generally negative view of young offenders leading to condoned absence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring schools take responsibility for young offenders and that this responsibility is reflected in the attitudes of senior management
Wider issues <i>Expectations and awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low expectations of pupils, parents and mainstream schools • Young people never experienced success so do not expect to achieve – lack of acknowledgement of their achievement • Lack of motivation and aspiration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of YOIs and YOTs regarding young people's educational attainment helping to raise expectations and motivation of young people • Young people in YOIs have to attend educational provision within a structured environment • Need to raise the status of lower level qualifications • Need to raise awareness of youth justice system and the management of young offenders within schools. Developing youth offending service 'school packs' to try to overcome the stigma associated with offending
<i>Cultural factors and parental issues</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream school culture not suited to pupils • Peer group pressure to reject education. Peer group culture of YOIs does not value education • Desire to enter paid work rather than study • Low status of alternative/lower qualifications • Priorities of YOIs are not education-focused. Education not prioritised in wider regime leading to disruption in educational provision • Disengagement and disaffection • Lack of parental involvement in education and lack of parenting skills to ensure attendance at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to raise the status of alternative/lower level qualifications • Need to prioritise education within the wider regime of YOIs
<i>Other concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other personal/social issues may take priority over education • Coming to terms with sentences imposed and consequences of offending behaviour means that education and examinations become a low priority • Low levels of self-esteem and lack of confidence • Delayed speech and language development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For those young people who are lacking in self-esteem, educational provider entering them for accreditation at a lower level to ensure they experience success • Need for consistency of support, e.g. mentoring, speech and language therapy, across schools and age ranges

Appendix 2

Key contacts and useful documents

This appendix gives an overview of key or useful organisations working in the area of examinations and/or support for vulnerable children. Contact details and a brief outline of activities (where applicable) are given regarding:

- The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
- The Joint Council for Qualifications
- The unitary awarding bodies
- The National Assessment Agency
- The National Examinations Officers Association
- Communicate-ed
- The Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties
- The Home Education Advisory Service
- Education Otherwise
- Exams Together Limited
- Useful sources of information on qualifications at key stage 4.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is the statutory **regulatory authority** for England. As defined by QCA (2004b), a regulatory authority is ‘*An organisation designated by Parliament to establish national standards for qualifications and to secure consistent compliance with them*’. A principal role of the regulatory authorities is to ensure that external qualifications are of high and consistent quality, that they are fit for purpose, and that the public understand and have confidence in them. They are responsible for establishing subject criteria (i.e. the curriculum) for general and vocational/occupational qualifications, and for accrediting the subject specifications (formerly ‘syllabuses’) of awarding bodies.

The regulatory authorities produce an annually revised guidance document: ‘*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*’ (QCA, 2004c). This provides guidance to awarding bodies on the principles and approaches to statutory regulation and the criteria which must be fulfilled in order to gain accredited status for various qualifications. The regulatory authorities also have a remit to promote participation in education and lifelong learning by improving access and ensuring a broad range of accredited courses and progression routes in a variety of fields.

QCA’s website contains much useful information on external qualifications and the accreditation and regulatory process. Appendix 7 of the guidance document (QCA, 2004c) includes a glossary of terms related to the regulatory process. A shorter glossary of selected terms can be found online at: <http://www.openquals.org.uk/openquals/help.aspx?nav=hlp#glossary>. An overview of

recent changes to the National Qualifications Framework can be found at: <http://www.qca.org.uk/493.html>.

The statutory regulatory authorities for Wales and Northern Ireland are (respectively): the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales/ Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm Ac Asesu Cymru (ACCAC); and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). Further information about each of the regulatory authorities can be found on their websites:

Regulatory authorities' websites

QCA: www.qca.org.uk

ACCAC: <http://www.accac.org.uk>

CCEA: <http://www.ccea.org.uk>

The Joint Council for Qualifications

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), formerly the Joint Council for General Qualifications, became operational in January 2004. It represents the five unitary awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (listed above) in addition to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and City and Guilds (a provider of a wide range of vocational qualifications). The JCQ has been formed to enable the member awarding bodies to act together in providing, wherever possible, common administrative arrangements for the schools, colleges and other providers which offer their qualifications. In this respect the JCQ office acts as an administrative hub for the joint and collaborative work of the members.

Previously hosted in rotation by the three unitary awarding bodies of England, since 2004 the JCQ has had a permanent staff based in London. Its activities include the collation of examination results at a national level and the publication of common documents, for example, regulations and guidance, instructions for the conduct of exams and 'notices to centres'. All joint regulations, guidance, forms, other administrative documents, systems and procedures are produced through collaborative working and are introduced and used with the agreement of the members. In this respect it is the experts from each awarding body that develop and agree the regulations and arrangements. The JCQ badge is used to denote where the awarding bodies have acted together; the JCQ staff do not write regulations and the ownership of the joint regulations and administrative arrangements lies with the members.

The Joint Council for Qualifications

Veritas House, Finsbury Pavement, London, EC2A 1NQ

Website: www.jcq.org.uk

NB: All general enquiries are dealt with by the awarding bodies – see below.

The Unitary Awarding bodies

As defined by QCA (2004b), an awarding body is '*an organisation or consortium recognised by the regulatory authorities for the purpose of awarding accredited*

qualifications'. There are five unitary awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland:

- The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)
- Edexcel
- Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- The Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC)
- Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).

The unitary awarding bodies were established throughout the latter half of the 1990s, bringing together a number of existing examining/awarding bodies, in order to rationalise the number of subject specifications and to ensure consistency and comparability of standards. These unitary awarding bodies offer GCSE, GNVQ, Entry Level and Key Skills qualifications (amongst others), accredited and regulated by the three regulatory authorities. There are also a number of other awarding bodies offering qualifications, often in vocational or specialist areas, for example, City and Guilds, Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the National Open College Network (OCN). A full list of awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (with contact details) can be found online at: http://www.ucas.com/candq/ukquals/eng/append/Appendix_B.pdf.

Awarding bodies devise specifications for the various subject qualifications and examination centres are able to select from these the courses they wish to offer their students. The unitary and larger awarding bodies have regional offices and specialist departments which offer advice and support to teachers and examinations officers. For example, there are likely to be designated contacts for specific subjects or for access arrangements and special consideration. The unitary awarding bodies also produce documentary information and guidance on specifications and the examination process (much of which is available electronically) and are in the process of developing online systems for registering candidates and accessing results information. Further information about the unitary awarding bodies can be found on their websites.

Unitary awarding bodies' websites

AQA: www.aqa.org.uk

Edexcel: www.edexcel.org.uk

OCR: www.ocr.org.uk

WJEC: www.wjec.co.uk

CCEA: <http://www.ccea.org.uk>

The National Assessment Agency

Launched in April 2004, the National Assessment Agency (NAA) has a remit to 'deliver a modern and secure examinations system' in the following ways:

- By driving the modernisation of the public examinations system to:
 - reduce the administrative burden on schools and colleges
 - improve the logistics of the system
 - increase the availability of examiners

- raise the standard of marking
 - provide support and training to exams officers.
- By supporting the delivery of public examinations, working with the awarding bodies to identify and resolve threats to the smooth operation of the system.
 - By developing, delivering and modernising the national curriculum tests for key stages 2 and 3, as well as Year 7 progress tests and QCA's optional tests for Years 3, 4, and 5 and Years 7 and 8. The NAA also coordinates the national data-collection programme, as well as managing external marking arrangements and test administration.

(Source: <http://www.naa.org.uk/aboutus/index.aspx>)

Key achievements of the NAA to date include a country-wide series of training events for new and experienced examinations officers and the introduction of a free courier service, to deliver and collect GCSE exam papers for all examination centres. As noted in the main body of the report, 'capital equipment grants' have been made available to examinations officers, and the NAA plans to develop universal systems and guidance for all exam entries, access arrangements and special consideration. The NAA has also published a 'good practice guide' for examination centres (NAA, 2004).

The National Assessment Agency

29 Bolton Street, London, W1J 8BT.

Tel: 0870 0600 622

Email: info@naa.org.uk

Website: www.naa.org.uk

The National Examination Officers Association

The National Examination Officers' Association (EOA) is an independent organisation run by experienced examination officers. The EOA aims to provide a representative voice for examination officers, along with peer support and networking opportunities. The EOA have also carried out surveys among examination officers gathering data on such issues as relationships with awarding bodies and factors impinging on their examinations role. Membership of the EOA is free and further details can be found online.

Examinations Officers Association

4th Floor, 29 Bolton Street, London, W1J 8BT

Email: info@examofficers.org

Website: <http://www.examofficers.org>

Communicate-ed.

Communicate-ed is a company offering training to education professionals working in the area of special educational needs. Specific courses are run focusing on the regulations and guidance around access arrangements and special consideration at GCSE level, details of which can be found on their website.

Communicate-ed

PO Box 2652, Maidenhead. SL6 8ZL

Tel: 01628 776 492

Email: admin@communicate-ed.org.uk

Website: <http://www.communicate-ed.org>

The Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

PATOSS is an association for professionals working in the field of specific learning difficulties. The organisation provides information, advice and networking opportunities for its members and also publishes books, bulletins and resource lists, which are available to order via its website.

The Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

PO Box 10, Evesham, Worcs WR11 1ZW

Tel: 01386 712 650

Email: patoss@evesham.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.patoss-dyslexia.org>

The Home Education Advisory Service

The Home Education Advisory Service (HEAS) is a charity providing advice and support to home educating families in the UK. Information is available on educational materials, resources, GCSE examinations, special educational needs, information technology, legal matters and curriculum design.

The Home Education Advisory Service

P.O. Box 98, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6AN

Phone: 01707 371854

Email: enquiries@heas.org.uk

Website: <http://www.heas.org.uk>

Education Otherwise

Education Otherwise offer support and information to families who choose to educate at home. They have produced information leaflets entitled 'GCSEs' and 'Courses and Qualifications'. These, and other leaflets in the Education Otherwise Information Leaflet Series, are available on request.

Education Otherwise Association Limited

PO Box 7420, London, N9 9SG.

Tel: 0870 7300074

Email: enquiries@education-otherwise.org

Website: www.education-otherwise.org

Exams Together Limited

Exams Together Limited is a company providing examination centres for private candidates. Further information can be found online.

Exams Together Limited

8 Astley House, Cromwell Business Park, Chipping Norton, OX7 5SR

Tel: 01608 645455

Email: regn@examstogether.com

Website: <http://www.examstogether.com>

Qualifications at key stage 4

Useful sources of further information on the key stage 4 curriculum and types of qualification at key stage 4 can be found online at:

The Department for Education and Skills 14-19 gateway:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?sid=1>

The Department for Education and Skills qualifications website:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/qualifications>

The 'Parent Centre' website:

<http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk/publishContent.cfm?topicAreaId=107>

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website:

<http://www.qca.org.uk/592.html>

ASDAN

ASDAN's Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) has been approved at three levels: Level 1 the ASDAN Silver Award equivalent to a GCSE grade D-G; Level 2 the ASDAN Gold Award equivalent to GCSE grade A*-C and Level 3 Universities Award equivalent to an A/S level. Further information is available at: www.asdan.co.uk

OCN

Further information about the range of qualifications available from OCN can be found at: www.nocn.org.uk

Appendix 3

Access arrangements

	Access Arrangement	Eligibility and/or evidence requirement	Permitted by
1.	1 Hour Early Opening of Question Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hearing/visual impairment Dyslexic photocopy onto coloured paper. 	Awarding Body
2.	Up to a maximum of 25% Extra Time (N.B. for many candidates a smaller allowance, such as 10% may be appropriate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement of Special Education Needs relating to secondary education. Psychological Assessment carried out by a qualified Psychologist, or specialist assessment carried out by a Specialist Teacher. 	Centre
3.	Extra Time above 25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual/Hearing- impairment Physical disability Multiple-disabilities Learning difficulties 	Awarding Body
4.	Additional Tapes/CD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hearing-impairment Candidates requiring extra time. 	Awarding Body
5.	Alternative Accommodation/Venue away from the Centre	Medical/Psychological report	Awarding Body
6.	Amplification Equipment	Normal way of working	Centre
7.	Bilingual dictionary	1st Language is not English, Irish (or Gaelige) or Welsh and the candidate is not being assessed in a Modern Foreign Language.	Centre
8.	Bilingual dictionary & up to a maximum of 25% extra time	1st Language is not English, Irish (or Gaelige) or Welsh has been in the UK for less than 2 years with history of need & provision and the candidate is not entered for a Modern Foreign Language.	Centre
9.	Braille Question Papers	Blind candidate	Awarding Body
10.	BSL to sign Questions	Hearing impairment	Awarding Body
11.	Read Aloud	Normal way of working	Centre
12.	CCTV	Normal way of working	Centre
13.	Colour naming	Normal way of working for colour blind candidates	Awarding Body
14.	Coloured overlays	Normal way of working	Centre

15.	Communicator	Hearing impairment	Awarding Body
16.	Live Speaker	Hearing impairment	Awarding Body
17.	Low Vision Aid	Visual impairment	Centre
18.	Modified enlarged A4(18-point bold)	Visual impairment	Awarding Body
19.	Modified Enlarged A4-A3	Visual impairment	Awarding Body
20.	Modified Language Awarding	Hearing impairment	Awarding Body
21.	OCR scanners	Visual impairment	Centre
22.	Practical Assistant	Physically disabled candidate	Awarding Body
23.	Prompter	Normal way of working	Centre
24.	Reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological Assessment carried out by a qualified Psychologist, or specialist assessment carried out by a Specialist Teacher. • Visual Impairment 	Awarding Body
25.	Scribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical disability • Psychological Assessment carried out by a qualified Psychologist, or specialist assessment carried out by a Specialist Teacher. 	Awarding Body
26.	Separate invigilation	Use of Reader/Scribe/WP/ Medical	Centre
27.	Supervised rest breaks	Medical/ Psychological	Centre
28.	Tactile diagrams Awarding	Visual impairment	Awarding Body
29.	Transcript	Handwriting difficult to decipher	Centre
30.	Transcript of tape Awarding	Hearing impairment	Awarding Body
31.	Unmodified A3 Question Paper	Visual impairment	Awarding Body
32.	Voice Activated computer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical disability • Psychological Assessment carried out by a qualified Psychologist, or specialist assessment carried out by a Specialist Teacher. 	Awarding Body
33.	Word Processor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological Assessment carried out by a qualified Psychologist, or specialist assessment carried out by a Specialist Teacher. • Physical disabilities 	Awarding Body

Source: adapted from JCQ, 2004a

Appendix 4

The National Assessment Agency Exam Cycle

The table below details the stages of the exam cycle as identified by the National Assessment Agency (NAA, 2004). A number of these stages have been identified within the present study as presenting potential challenges or barriers to vulnerable groups and/or those supporting them through the examination process. These common elements are shown in *italic type*, with reference to where discussion of the issue can be found in this report.

NAA Exam Cycle	Reference within this report
Communications with candidates	
<i>Candidate liaison</i>	2.2.1, 2.2.3
<i>Candidate tracking</i>	2.4.3
Entries	
<i>Estimated entries</i>	2.2.2
Final entries	
Keying in entries	
Exam preparation	
Exams Calendar	
Estimated or forecast grades	
<i>Access arrangements</i>	2.2.3
<i>Coursework</i>	2.3.4
<i>Timetables</i>	2.3.2
Managing clashes	
<i>Special consideration</i>	2.2.3
Briefing candidates	2.3.3
<i>Exam rooms and seating plans</i>	2.2.2
<i>Invigilation</i>	2.2.3
<i>Storage of confidential material</i>	2.2.1
Exam time	
Inspections	
Starting an exam	
<i>Late, absent and disruptive candidates</i>	2.3.1
<i>Oral and practical exams</i>	2.2.3, 2.3.4
Malpractice	
Finishing an exam	
Despatching scripts	
Results	
Processing and distributing results	
Enquiries about results and appeals	
Access to scripts	
Declining grades and late aggregations	
<i>Certificates</i>	2.2.4

The NAA guidance is aimed primarily at the ‘majority’ case: registered examination centres who will largely be dealing with a relatively stable cohort of their own pupils. Thus, at times, the interpretation of the terms, and their related issues and implications, may be presented slightly differently in the context of this report. For example, under candidate tracking, the NAA refer to record keeping for candidates *within* an examination centre, whereas in this report, tracking may also refer to candidates who are mobile or transferring between examination centres.

Appendix 5

Small-scale survey regarding pupils with SEN

During the course of the research project, an opportunity arose to carry out a small-scale survey among teachers and support staff working with pupils with special educational needs. A short questionnaire was developed, to which 26 responses were received. Over half of the respondents were school-based SENCOs. Other roles included examinations officers, learning support staff and an LEA-based SENCO. Among the pupils that respondents were supporting, the most common types of special educational need were: (moderate) learning difficulties, dyslexia/SPLD¹³, low literacy, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Aspergers Syndrome, ADHD and Dyspraxia were also noted by a number of respondents.

The survey asked respondents to identify:

- **barriers that they faced in supporting students' access to examinations**
- **barriers faced by their students in accessing examinations**
- **suggestions for improvement.**

Responses to the survey closely mirrored comments from interviewees consulted in the main LEA survey. In terms of the frequency with which issues were noted, the most common barriers for staff supporting students with special educational needs were: communication and information; lack of resources; access to Educational Psychologist/specialist teacher assessments; and time to manage the access arrangements process.

For pupils, key barriers to accessing examinations included: their identified learning difficulties; low self-esteem and negative attitudes to education; and the language of examinations. As in the LEA survey, it was noted that some pupils were disadvantaged by narrowly missing the baseline criteria for access arrangements. Poor ability to cope with the demands of the examination process was also mentioned.

Regarding suggestions for improvement, it was felt that better communication and more time to manage the access arrangements process would be of great benefit. Additionally, it was suggested that the requirements for EP/specialist teacher assessment could be relaxed somewhat, either by removing the stipulation for a specialist qualification, or broadening the range of recognised accreditation.

¹³ Semantic pragmatic language disorder

Appendix 6

Vulnerable children's access to examinations and the 14-19 White Paper

Despite the fact that the 14-19 White Paper was published after the writing of this report, it is notable that many of its proposals concur with recommendations made in the present study. The education system envisioned by the White Paper is 'much more tailored to the talents and aspirations of individual young people, with greater flexibility about what and where to study and when to take qualifications' (p. 4). Key areas of proposed reform, which correspond to issues raised in the present report, are outlined below.

Reforming vocational routes

The present study identified the need for a curriculum that was relevant to the aptitudes and interests of students, and the availability of alternative vocational accreditation for certain groups of young people. The White Paper emphasises the need to reform vocational opportunities, raising the value of vocational accreditation by bringing it into line with what employers are seeking in their workforce. To this end, the specialist Diplomas will be developed in close collaboration with employers and Sector Skills Councils, who will be central to devising and agreeing content. The compulsory elements of in English and maths will ensure that students completing vocational qualifications also have the core skills needed to operate effectively in the workplace. The introduction of specialist Diplomas will be in conjunction with significant rationalisation of the disparate range of vocational qualifications currently available.

Reengaging the disaffected

For a number of the groups considered in the present study, disengagement from education was a risk factor in their vulnerability. The report suggested that personalised support, for example, from a mentor or key worker, could help to prevent pupils 'dropping out' of education at key stage 4. In tackling disaffection, the White Paper proposes to introduce a more relevant curriculum for such pupils, with a range of learning styles and increased breadth in where learning can take place. A pilot scheme, based on the successful post-16 Entry to Employment programme, will be introduced. This will feature tailored programmes with intensive personal support and guidance, involving 'significant work-based learning' of up to two days per week. These programmes will lead to a level 1 Diploma with clear progression routes to higher levels.

Increased opportunities for 'catch-up' on core skills

For some vulnerable groups addressing basic needs in the area of literacy was key to overcoming barriers to examinations – particularly for pupils with English as an additional language. The White Paper strongly emphasises the importance of core skills in English and maths, and attainment in both will be central to all of the proposed Diploma lines. The White Paper also states that greater curriculum flexibility, through reduced prescription, will be introduced at key stages 3 and 4, to

allow for intensive ‘catch-up’ support where young people have not yet attained sufficient skill levels in English and maths.

Greater flexibility regarding when qualifications are taken

The present study noted that, for groups such as asylum seekers and pupils with special educational needs, the option to take slightly longer to complete GCSE course might be an effective strategy in achieving successful outcomes. Along with advocating ‘stretch’ and ‘acceleration to level 2’ for more able students, the White Paper also emphasises that pupils who need a longer time to attain this level should be enabled to do so: ‘We will provide more opportunities and incentives for teenagers who have not achieved level 2 by 16 to do so post-16 and support them in achieving level 1 or entry level qualifications as steps on the way’ (p. 6). To encourage providers to support these students, the White Paper states that schools will be credited for the achievement of students completing key stage 4 beyond the ‘normal’ age.

Reducing the assessment burden

The present study highlighted the challenges which some students faced around coursework. Gaps in education through mobility or prolonged/persistent absence meant that some vulnerable pupils did not complete coursework, jeopardising their chances of attaining GCSE qualifications. Additional barriers were faced where the young person lacked the necessary study skills or where their home environment was not conducive to this type of independent project work. The White Paper recognises the burden which coursework can become, and proposes to reduce the amount demanded of key stage 4 students, particularly ‘where the same knowledge and skills can be tested reliably in other ways’ (p. 62). QCA will be asked to undertake a review of GCSE coursework, with a view to this reduction in the overall amount. The White Paper also sets out plans to explore the potential and make greater use of ‘e-assessment’.

Notably, the White Paper states that there are no plans to make major reforms to the examination system itself. Challenges around the examination process identified by the present research (e.g. access to an examination centre, entry deadlines and late fees, specialist assessment for access arrangements, alternative venues) are largely not addressed by the White Paper. In a separate strand of government-funded work, the National Assessment Agency (NAA) is working to reduce the assessment burden for examination centres and improve the logistics of the system. As is described in Section 2.2 of the present report, the NAA’s activities will address some, though not all, of these concerns.

While the White Paper gives specific attention to the needs of pupils at risk of disengagement, there is no explicit reference to the vulnerable groups considered by the present study. As noted above, many of the proposed reforms have the potential to improve access to examinations at key stage 4 for pupils across the range of vulnerabilities. However, it might be useful to consider in greater detail the specific impacts and opportunities which the 14-19 Education and Skills paper may bring for vulnerable children.

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