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Links to Learning Protocols
Collaborative Arrangements for Community Organisations and Partner Schools

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Foreword

Never Thought
Never thought I would ever know about this
Never thought I would ever care
Never thought I would be such good friends with feelings that were never there
Never thought my true emotions would be shared with total strangers
Never thought my tears would turn into laughter
Never thought by this time I’d be celebrating all the good things we’ve done
Never thought all my thoughts would have been important to anyone
Never thought I’d find anyone to support me through thick and thin
But you’ve taught me to believe in my heart and my self that is within!

Written by
Maja
Participant in YWCA Sydney Links to Learning
about her time in the project.
Introduction to the Collaborative Arrangements

1.1 Purpose

The *Links to Learning Community Grants Program* provides funding to a diverse range of community-based organisations to undertake projects for ‘at-risk’ young people aged between 12 and 24 years. The program targets young people aged 12 to 24 years who experience multiple barriers and significant difficulties accessing and participating in formal learning environments. It helps them access, remain in or return to education or training in order to complete, as a minimum, two years post-compulsory education and training.

There are 2 types of projects – Students at Risk projects for young people within the school population and Early Leavers projects for those young people who have left school and are not in education and training. Funded organisations are approved to operate either a Students at Risk or an Early Leavers Project for up to three years.

The Program is managed by Community Grants Programs within the Aboriginal Education and Equity Programs Directorate, Department of Education and Training (DET).

Community Grants Programs in consultation with DET Regional Offices identifies particular government high schools as partner schools to refer students to Links to Learning Students at Risk projects.

The **Collaborative Arrangements** outlined in this document have been developed as a guide for community organisations, partner schools and other key stakeholders to deliver projects funded under the Links to Learning Community Grants Program (Students at Risk projects) in a collaborative and consistent manner in accordance with the Links to Learning Community Grants Program Guidelines.

The **Collaborative Arrangements** have a number of elements:

- background and policy information on the Links to Learning Community Grants Program
- principles to guide the partnership between community organisations and schools
- detailed protocols and procedures to guide the major phases of action in establishing and running a Links to Learning Students at Risk project
- statements of the roles and responsibilities of key players in terms of the protocols
• an indicative timetable for key activities
• a section on frequently asked questions and answers, and
• contacts for further information.

The Protocols (Section 3) are a resource to assist with processes of establishing operational arrangements, referral, support, monitoring and transition of students participating in Links to Learning projects.

Section 4 describes clear roles and procedures for assisting a student at risk into and from a Links to Learning project, establishing appropriate activities for the student in a community setting and supporting the student during and after project activities.

Who should use this document?

This document is designed to provide detailed advice to project co-ordinators and tutors in community organisations and in-school co-ordinators in partner schools (referred to as the ‘school contact person’ in the 2001 edition of the protocols) in developing and sustaining a successful partnership and project.

Other contributors to the project collaboration need to be familiar with the content of the protocols, and have specific roles and responsibilities that are spelt out in Section 4. These people include:

• principals and deputy principals in partner schools
• the welfare team and learning support team, student counsellors and careers advisers in partner schools
• the executive manager and line manager of the project co-ordinator in the funded community organisation
• regional office staff, including student services officers, home school liaison officers and vocational education consultants, and
• participating students and their parents/guardians/carers.

Other reference documents

The following documents provide further information on the Links to Learning Community Grants Program and concepts referred to in the protocols:

• Links to Learning Community Grants Program Guidelines at www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/
• ANTA/TAFENSW/DET (2001) Successful Outcomes for Youth at Risk: A Resource Kit
About the Links to Learning Community Grants Program

Policy framework

The NSW Government is committed to all young people achieving, as a minimum, the successful completion of Year 12 or a vocational equivalent either through schools, TAFE or other vocational education and training arrangements.

Overview of the program

The Links to Learning Community Grants Program provides funding to a diverse range of community-based organisations to undertake projects for ‘at-risk’ young people aged between 12 and 24 years. The program targets young people aged 12 to 24 years who experience multiple barriers and significant difficulties accessing and participating in formal learning environments. It helps them access, remain in or return to education or training in order to complete, as a minimum, two years post-compulsory education and training.

The program is managed by Community Grants Programs within the Aboriginal Education and Equity Programs Directorate, Department of Education and Training.

Students at Risk Projects

About half the projects are Students at Risk projects that deliver a range of services to specific target groups of young people within the government school population. The remaining projects are targeted at Early Leavers – young people who have left school early and are not in education or training.

Target group

Projects are targeted to a particular population group. This could be:

- general, which may include young people from the two other population groups (below), or
- language background other than English (LOTE), or
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent (ATSI).
The Students at Risk target group is drawn from students who attend a nominated government high school (partner school), and are at risk of leaving school early because they are at a critical transition point and/or have multiple barriers to learning.

Critical transition points for Students at Risk include:

• students’ transition from primary to high school (Years 7 and 8), and
• students reaching the legal school leaving age (Years 9 and 10).

Examples of Students at Risk Target Groups

Students who may face multiple barriers to learning may include:

• young refugees who have suffered trauma and are experiencing literacy difficulties
• young Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who may have experienced grief and loss in their families, separation from their families or transient living arrangements and have a problem with anger
• young people in and out of foster care arrangements and transient homes in different areas, are withdrawn and have low self esteem
• a specific cultural group of students with low literacy skills who are isolated and exclude themselves from participating in classroom activities
• a young homeless person moving between supported accommodation services and who is not a regular school attender
• a student assisted by the regional office behaviour team who is disruptive at school and may be experimenting with substances
• a truanting student who is a victim of bullying and harassment
• a student with a history of regular suspension for different behavioural reasons and is under police notice
• a student without a supportive peer group, who may have severe family problems such as violence, and is waiting to reach school leaving age so he/she can leave school
• a student released from a juvenile justice centre returning to the local area, who cannot return home and is homeless.
Students not in the target group

Students generally unlikely to benefit from Links to Learning Students at Risk projects should not be referred. They include:

- students of limited academic achievement only
- those wanting additional tutoring or tuition to accelerate achievements towards the HSC
- students from non-English speaking backgrounds who only have English-language difficulties, and
- students with unmanaged violent behaviours and active substance abusers.

Early leavers

The Links to Learning Community Grants Program has a separate program stream for young people who have left school early, are 15 – 24 years of age and not in education or training.

Any young person who is not attending school but is younger than the compulsory school leaving age should be referred to a Students at Risk project rather than an Early Leavers project. Students at Risk projects aim to link to students back into school.

Details on local Links to Learning projects funded to assist early leavers are on the Links to Learning website at www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/.

Key concepts in working with students ‘at risk’

There is a wide base of research into the reasons that students become ‘at risk’ educationally and the approaches and strategies that are effective in working with this group.

Some key concepts underpin working with young people who are disengaged from learning and who present challenges to teachers and other staff working in a traditional classroom environment. They are summarised here to inform potential partners and participants in a Students at Risk project. For a fuller discussion, please see the resource: Successful Outcomes for Youth at Risk: A Resource Kit available online at www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/.

...‘at risk’

Young people who are ‘at risk’ are usually regarded as those whose circumstances or experiences have led to them being marginalised from a range of social structures and groups, including educational organisations.

Educational definitions of ‘students at risk’ usually include young people who leave school early (defined as before compulsory school leaving age or before two years of post compulsory education and training) or students who are likely to fail to achieve defined educational outcomes.
Educational risk is rarely experienced by young people as an isolated problem. Young people who are regarded as being at risk often have a wide range of needs and concerns – some may have urgent and immediate concerns about safety and survival which will affect the priority they give to educational programs.

Engagement of the young person in learning is often the first priority. Some young people are not only alienated from educational structures but from learning itself. These young people may have had negative experiences at school, at home and/or community environments. A positive emotional environment is seen as critical to establishing engagement and many young people respond well to an educational environment that is warm and without criticism.

Alienated and discouraged learners usually require alternative educational approaches and models if they are to re-engage with learning.

Program delivery models are likely to have some of the following characteristics:

- focus on real life issues
- indirect approaches which may foreground outcomes having relevance to the young person and address curriculum and learning outcomes in more indirect ways
- integrated approaches which may encompass a number of elements, such as more than one subject area, local community experiences, work experience and intensive support to develop underpinning competencies
- use of activities that allow self expression
- linking young people to key people in their community.

Objectives

The objectives of the Students at Risk projects are to:

- establish and maintain regular attendance and active involvement of students in planned learning and support activities,
- set and achieve individually negotiated student goals related to the development of Key Competencies, and
- negotiate and implement the initial steps of a pathways plan for each student which describes how he/she will access and remain in education or accredited training after their participation.

Project activities aim to develop and assess the Key Competencies and life skills.
Delivery approaches in the Links to Learning Students at Risk projects

Community organisations and local government authorities are funded to implement Links to Learning projects that deliver an intensive, co-ordinated and flexible package of educational and related activities focused on the individual needs of participants using innovative strategies and creative approaches.

Projects are funded to assist an agreed number of students during the project period, with each student receiving a package of activities and further support assistance. Projects are funded on a calendar year basis.

Community organisations:

- utilise their expertise and networks in the community to both motivate young people at risk and to work with community organisations, support services, providers of education and training and parents
- provide direct services to young people at risk, both through individually tailored education, training and related activities focussed on the development of the Key Competencies and life skills, and through referrals to specialist support services, and
- assist young people at risk to engage with a course or set of activities that is linked to recognised education or training pathways.

Projects:

- identify the project’s target group
- develop linkages and outreach activities with other community organisations, government departments and providers of education and training
- develop a process for referrals from partner schools
- identify the needs of each student
- prepare and implement an individually negotiated plan with each student based on the student’s needs
- provide a combination of group and individual support activities that are mapped against the Key Competencies
- record and document the progress of each student against the Key Competencies and life skills
- finalise a ‘next step’ plan related to education and training which specifies the immediate post Links to Learning activity
- monitor the student’s commencement into the ‘next step’ activity, and
- liaise with the ‘next step’ providers and support the student to remain in the activity.
Projects provide activities that build on skills in areas of interest to young people and that take account of their immediate needs.

Projects also use strategies aimed at building protective factors to assist in the development of resilience. Protective factors include social and interpersonal skills, anger management, conflict resolution, problem solving and decision-making skills, recognition of achievements, a strong relationship with a caring adult and a sense of belonging in the community.

**Participant outcomes**

Each student will receive between 100 and 400 contact hours, which will include group and individual activities (including personal support), as outlined in their *Participation and Pathways Plan*.

At least 60% of contact hours with each student must be spent in group activities.

At the end of activities, each student will receive a *Certificate of Achievement* and a *Transition Plan* identifying progress in the development and application of the Key Competencies and improvement in some life skills.

A key outcome is a student’s commencement and continuation in a planned ‘next step’ course or activity that is linked to an education and training pathway. It is hoped that the ‘next step’ will be continued school education with improved attendance and achievement. TAFE may be a realistic ‘next step’ option for some students.

**Project outcomes**

The success of the project as a whole is measured using quantitative performance indicators that form part of the funding agreement. These indicators are:

- percentage of participants in the target group
- number of participants who commenced
- percentage of participants with an individually negotiated plan
- percentage of participants who complete all negotiated activities
- number of contact hours negotiated with participants
- percentage of participants who make progress in all seven Key Competency areas
- percentage of participants who receive a certificate of achievement
- percentage of participants who exit with a ‘next step’ plan
- percentage of participants who commence the ‘next step’ activity, and
- number of post-completion hours delivered to participants.
There are also a number of qualitative indicators used to assess project performance. For example, the quality of the individual participation and pathways plans and the appropriateness of the learning activities for the students are evaluated.

In-school co-ordinators and project co-ordinators are asked to engage in a local project evaluation process (see Protocol 27) to assess the effectiveness of the project’s operation and to plan any improvements for the next year or next cohort of students.

Principles to guide the partnership

Awareness of relative roles

Key players working in partnership to meet the education and support needs of the student need to be aware of:

- their own roles in relation to Links to Learning Community Grants Program Guidelines which include policies and procedures
- the roles of other key players by acquainting themselves with the relevant policies and procedures of other organisations while also acknowledging their constraints
- the Department’s preference for co-ordinated effort rather than unilateral action by a single player or unco-ordinated action by a number of players
- the necessity for a potential student to be given an opportunity to participate at a level appropriate to their age and development in decisions about him or her. Where appropriate, the students’ families, guardians or caregivers will also be involved in making those decisions, and
- the diverse needs of students at risk, necessitating a range of agreed flexible responses from the different sectors - community, school, and other DET stakeholders.

Focus on students who will benefit

A focus on the needs of the student should be maintained in the planning of processes:

- clear arrangements need to be negotiated and implemented in a collaborative manner by key players to ensure ‘at risk’ students in the agreed target group access community projects
- Links to Learning projects are not to be used as a way of removing ‘hard to deal with’ students from the classroom or to create a substitute school, and
- all arrangements must be based around improving opportunities and outcomes which are in the best interest of the student.
Communication arrangements

Good and thorough two-way communication should underpin all the processes for establishing, delivering and evaluating the project and the partnership. The following principles for communication should guide each step:

- agreement between the project co-ordinator and the in-school co-ordinator which states the needs of the student and their desired learning and personal outcomes
- written documentation supporting referral to, and transition from, a project, which details information needed by both partners
- agreement between the project co-ordinator and the in-school co-ordinator on support responsibilities for the student, during and after the project
- agreement by the student about any referrals to and from the project, and how their rights will be respected throughout the process
- liaison with the family or guardians of the student
- compliance with state and federal privacy legislation relating to disclosure of personal and health information
- clear consideration of responsibilities of both the school and the community organisation with regard to duty of care and child protection legislation.

Protocols and procedures to support collaborative arrangements

Many schools will have continuing arrangements in place for students within their schools who are to be involved in a Links to Learning project. Others may be new to the program or be partnering with a new community organisation.

The following protocols should be read carefully by the main parties to the partnership - the school, community organisation and key players who have a role to play in the collaboration. Parents and students may be interested in sections of the protocols, which can be provided for their information.

Where existing local protocols already exist, the project co-ordinator and in-school co-ordinator should review and assess whether they comply with the principles of these protocols.

The roles and responsibilities of key players in implementing these protocols are outlined in Section 4.
The main phases in the partnership are:

- partnership establishment
- identification of students who may benefit and referral
- project delivery
- transition from a Links to Learning project
- evaluation.

Students at Risk Links to Learning protocols – phases of action
Protocols for collaborative arrangements between schools and community organisations

3.1 Partnership establishment

The partnership is based on the approved and funded project proposal, which the community organisation has submitted to DET, as well as the process of identification of partner schools carried out by Community Grants Programs in consultation with DET regional offices.

All of the following Links to Learning forms referred to in this document are available on the website at www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/- News for Funded Projects – Standard Forms.

Protocol 1 Initial Briefing

Prior to the commencement of a Links to Learning project, the following steps should be taken.

...briefing meeting
A briefing meeting should be arranged between the project co-ordinator, partner school(s) and appropriate regional office staff. It should cover the details of the funded project – the approach, the planned participant numbers, organisational information, personnel and contact details – and the priority groups of students who could be referred.

The schools should confirm the nomination of the in-school co-ordinator for the project, having regard to the nature of the target group and the Links to Learning program. This may be the head teacher, welfare; the careers adviser; year adviser or a member of the school executive.

Each school should arrange to brief other relevant school staff and committees involved with students at risk (eg. student welfare committee, learning support team, school counsellor) on the project.

Protocol 2  
Pre-planning

The project co-ordinator should arrange a planning meeting with each partner in-school co-ordinator to confirm project operational arrangements, as well as to go through the Links to Learning program guidelines and protocols and identify where local arrangements need to be developed and documented.

The roles and responsibilities of the following key players should be discussed at this pre-planning meeting:

- project co-ordinator
- tutors
- in-school co-ordinator[s]
- other school support staff
- regional office staff

having regard to the information set out in Section 4 of this document.

In particular, responsibilities in relation to duty of care [Protocol 17], including supervision arrangements for activities both on and off school premises and travel arrangements should be discussed.

The school should provide the project co-ordinator with copies of relevant school policies and procedures, including:

- recording and reporting attendance
- excursion notes
- managing drug-related incidents
- suspension policy, administration of medication, and
- homework policy.
The project co-ordinator should provide the school with copies of relevant organisational procedures, including:

- occupational health and safety
- managing extreme behaviours
- student code of conduct/behavioural contracts, and
- staff absences.

Joint operational procedures should be developed and documented for the following:

- communication mechanisms
- general and emergency strategies for liaison between partners
- schedule of regular meetings
- process for monitoring and reporting individual student progress to school and parents, and
- monitoring of individual support needs.

The project co-ordinator, in-school co-ordinator, other school and regional office staff should meet to discuss the population group approved for the project and the minimum number of students. They should also agree on the types of students to be referred to the Links to Learning project.

Where possible, the target group profile should take into account issues of age, stage of schooling, cultural background and the transition period to ensure a mix of students in a group that will be functional. The inclusion of students with high support needs should be carefully considered and comply with Protocol 7.

The purpose and capacity of the community organisation should be kept in mind at this stage. The Links to Learning program is intended to be an early intervention strategy at critical transition points in schooling, not a program of last resort.

Protocol 3  Project operational planning

Before the project begins there may need to be further meetings or one-on-one liaison and exchange of documentation between the project co-ordinator and the in-school co-ordinator in order to finalise the operational processes.

(A project is deemed to have commenced at the start of the referral and selection process.)

Operational planning should cover the following issues:

- student selection process
- broad content and duration of proposed activity schedule
• activity schedule and start date (conferring with school calendar)
• days, times (in or out of school hours or combination of both)
• main location(s), facilities
• student daily attendance protocols (roll call and adjustments, records, late arrivals, attendance at school prior to collection, wearing of uniforms, etc)
• notification procedures of attendance at project, and follow-up absenteeism – who? when? how?
• notification and permission procedures (excursions, visits, etc)
• transport arrangements (pick up and return location or public transport, supervision provided, etc)
• notification of any changes to planned activities.

This is the time to adopt and confirm specific protocols. The project co-ordinator should confirm with the in-school co-ordinator the following:

• use of employment screening of community organisation staff, tutors, external venue staff under child protection legislation (the Working with Children Check) (Protocol 19)
• arrangements for ensuring privacy of personal information (Protocol 18)
• safety and supervision procedures (eg. staff ratios, activities, excursions, visits, travel) (Protocol 17)
• the nature of prohibited activities (eg. smoking, alcohol, other drug taking or possession, violence) (Protocol 17)
• procedures for handling critical incidents (Protocol 17)

The project co-ordinator and in-school co-ordinator should also agree on local protocols, concerning:

• the status of a student in a Links to Learning project while suspended from school (Protocol 20)
• processes for dispute resolution (Protocol 24).

Protocol 4 Project confirmation

The formal process of project confirmation should occur at this stage. This requires the project co-ordinator, in-school co-ordinator and appropriate regional officer to agree on the operation of the project for the year. All parties sign the Project Confirmation Report showing that major planning issues have been worked through. The project co-ordinator sends the completed report to Community Grants Programs for endorsement before the end of March each year.
Protocol 5  **Identifying potential referrals**

The project co-ordinator, in-school co-ordinator and established school committees such as the learning support team and student welfare committee should meet to agree on:

- the number of students to be referred from each school
- the target years (eg. Year 7 and 8 or 9 and 10) and any special arrangements regarding attendance and other requirements for Year 10 School Certificate students
- individual students to be referred
- students’ needs and
- potential mix of students across partner schools if applicable.

Protocol 6  **Referral of students**

The referral of individual students to a project is the responsibility of the partner school. For efficiency, referral and parental consent should occur at the same time.

The **Referral to Links to Learning form** and the **Referral to Links to Learning – Consent form** detail the range of information required in the referral of prospective students and include provision for release of information to the project co-ordinator by the parents/caregivers.
The project co-ordinator should provide a package of relevant information for prospective students and parents.

Information sessions for prospective students and their parents are highly recommended as part of this process.

Translations of the Links to Learning brochures for both students and parents are available in 11 community languages available on the DET website at www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/publica/.

The referral form contains information on the needs of the student and this forms the basis on which the project co-ordinator can plan to address these needs.

The need for additional support should also be considered during the referral process. The project co-ordinator, in-school co-ordinator and appropriate regional officer may agree on additional support to be provided in conjunction with, and in addition to, the Links to Learning program.

**Protocol 7**

**Referral of students with high support needs**

Schools should consult the regional behaviour team when considering the referral of a student with high behaviour support needs. Discuss the support options prior to referral so that the learning outcomes of the total group of students being referred to Links to Learning can be achieved.

Where behaviour is an issue, negotiations between the in-school co-ordinator, project co-ordinator and appropriate regional office staff such as the behaviour team, are required to ensure the referred student can access appropriate services and an individual support program where necessary.

**Protocol 8**

**Other referrals**

Referrals from other government high schools in the local area can be accepted on an ad hoc basis provided that students from partner schools are given priority.

A project may accept a young person who is isolated from school, self-referred or referred by families, friends or caseworkers and assessed by the project co-ordinator as high need. However every attempt must be made to obtain supporting documentation from the school or DET regional office, and interview nominated key people.

On accepting the referral, the project co-ordinator should confirm participation details with the school, individual student and parent.

If referral is not appropriate and not accepted, discussion is held between key players over further options for that student.
Protocol 9 | Key Competencies and life skills

Project planning by the project co-ordinator should have direct links between the activities offered and the Key Competencies and other life skills. Other elements are focused on personal support.

The Key Competencies are a set of generic capabilities that have been agreed to by education and training Ministers in Australia as being essential for effective participation in work and work organisation. They have been incorporated in all sets of nationally endorsed industry competency standards and in Training Packages. In years K-10 Key Competencies are considered to be embedded in the curriculum and are not directly taught or assessed. They are considered to be addressed in many courses of study.

They represent an excellent structure for the development of lifelong learning, generic and transferable skills, as well as a framework for the development of more specific industry and enterprise competencies.

The Key Competencies are:
- collecting, analysing and organising information
- communicating ideas and information
- planning and organising activities
- working with others and in teams
• using mathematical ideas and techniques
• solving problems, and
• using technology.

Links to Learning project activities can also lead to improvement in some of the following life skills:
• attendance and punctuality
• commitment
• ability to learn
• positive self esteem
• motivation
• reliability
• initiative
• commonsense
• follow directions and instructions
• personal presentation
• honesty and integrity
• balanced home and work life
• enthusiasm
• sense of humour
• ability to deal with pressure
• adaptability
• literacy and numeracy
• safety and use of equipment.

The Plan of Activities and the individual Participation and Pathways Plan have been developed for use by project co-ordinators to map activities against Key Competencies and life skills and assist project planning, assessment and reporting.

Protocol 10 Assessment

The project co-ordinator will conduct an initial assessment of each student to ensure their suitability in the project. The schedule of activities will be explained and codes of conduct/student behaviour contracts negotiated where appropriate.
Protocol 11  Participation and Pathways Plan

An individual Participation and Pathways Plan is developed for each student and outlines what a student will do in the Links to Learning project to achieve specified learning and personal goals. It identifies the personal goals of the student, the steps involved in achieving these goals, support needs, any educational needs or barriers and a plan for the student’s future. It also identifies the student’s progress against the Key Competencies and life skills developed during the course of activities.

The individual Participation and Pathways Plan has provision for establishing an initial profile of the student, a mid and end of activity progress report, the ‘next step’ activity and follow-up on the planned transition back to school.

Protocol 12  ‘Next step’ options

The ‘next step’ activity is discussed at the commencement of a project with the student and parents (if appropriate), during the course of activities, and at the conclusion. It is recorded in the individual Participation and Pathways Plan and may change throughout the period of participation.

The ‘next step’ activity may be:

- return to full-time school
- other education programs to achieve Year 10 or Year 12
- traineeships and apprenticeships
- other accredited training
- other preparatory programs
- work placements, or
- employment.

The ‘next step’ activity is recorded by the project co-ordinator on an electronic Participant Outcome Form (POF) at the point at which the student finishes or leaves the Links to Learning project.

The ‘next step’ should form the basis of transition planning (see Protocol 26) particularly where support is required for successful transition back to full-time school.

Accumulated data on students’ ‘next step’ activities form one of the key performance indicators on which the performance of a particular project, and the program as a whole, is judged.
Protocol 13 Catching up on missed work

Most Links to Learning projects will operate wholly or partially in school hours. The program of activities addresses the Key Competencies for those students who face barriers to learning in the traditional learning environment. Many of these students are not attending school or are school refusers not able to fulfill the requirements of the syllabus. Therefore, requiring students to catch up on missed school work places an additional burden on the students least able to complete additional work.

If the project co-ordinator or in-school co-ordinator believe the completion of school work may arise as an issue during the project they should discuss strategies at the project planning phase, particularly if participating students are undertaking their School Certificate.

The Links to Learning program is part of the educational program experience for that student and provides a range of educational activities based on the Key Competencies, many of which include learning outcomes that can be directly related to cross curriculum syllabus outcomes and vocational learning outcomes. Some Links to Learning activities include accredited outcomes (eg. first aid certificate, Training Package modules) or can demonstrate they meet the requirements of assessment tasks from the mainstream curriculum.

All projects are required to map activities to the Key Competencies and report on the outcomes of the projects, both at the individual student level and as part of planning with partner schools. The use of the DET Employability Skills Logbook to record LTL student outcomes is being trialled in 2004.

Protocol 14 Students with special needs

If students with high behaviour support needs are accepted into a project, both partners will need to develop a consistent approach to behaviour management. This may include, but not be limited to:

- student behaviour contracts
- individual counselling (provided within the Links to Learning program or additional to it)
- protocols for exclusion of a student from participation in certain events and activities of the Links to Learning project, if necessary
- participation in support activities, such as anger management courses.

Students with a mild or moderate intellectual disability may also experience many of the multiple barriers to learning that place them clearly within the target group likely to benefit from participation in the Links to Learning program. The referral from the partner school should provide information on the nature of the student’s learning program and the
level of support, if any, that the student is receiving within the school program. Individual program planning should be consistent with the school's goals for this student.

Protocol 15 Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Links to Learning projects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be run by, or in collaboration with, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation or by employing Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander co-ordinators and tutors to provide a culturally accessible project.

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are involved in a 'General' project, adaptations to the 'General' project including processes of assessment and orientation should be considered to ensure the project meets their specific needs and is culturally inclusive. This may include:

- consideration of the venue for project delivery
- inviting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors to assist individual students through assessment and orientation activities
- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff from the school in identifying and supporting students referred
- the use of specific teaching and assessment resources
- inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community events in the activities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members on the community organisation management committee, or project steering committee.

Protocol 16 Links to vocational learning and employment

Increasingly, Links to Learning projects are incorporating elements of vocational learning in their activities. Many providers are Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

Projects incorporating elements of vocational learning should aim to create pathways with accredited training where possible and be familiar with the range of programs offered by the school either through work experience or structured work placement. The Employment Related Skills Logbook – Links to Learning Supplement has been prepared as part of a joint project between the VET in Schools Directorate and Community Grants Programs. This Links to Learning Supplement is a valuable tool in making connections between the Key Competencies, other employment related skills and vocational learning activities that take place at school within a Links to Learning project. Copies of the Links to Learning Supplement are available through the school or project co-ordinator, if required.
**Processes to guide participation**

Students at Risk Links to Learning protocols – phases of action

Protocols for collaborative arrangements between schools and community organisations

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**Protocol 17 Duty of care**

‘Duty of care’ is a principle established at common law and applies to a broad range of organisations in relation to their dealings with people who come into contact with their services. Schools have duty of care obligations to their students. Community organisations have duty of care obligations to their clients.

**In relation to the Links to Learning program, duty of care rests with the community organisation when the student is in their ‘care and control’.** However, the school’s duty of care responsibilities do not cease at this time, whether or not the project is run on or off school premises or a combination of both. Schools need to satisfy themselves that the activities offered to students are safe and should be alert to foreseeable risks to student safety and welfare that arise from referral of the student to the community organisation. Conversely, when a community organisation is using school premises, the school authority must ensure that the premises and any equipment the community organisation uses are in a safe condition.

A school’s duty of care is non-delegable in the sense that the school must ensure that reasonable care is taken for the welfare of its students.

**The standard of care that a school is required to have is to take those steps that are reasonably necessary to prevent reasonably foreseeable injury.**
The general approach should be that projects operate together with their partner schools to take steps necessary to ensure the safety and welfare of students at all times. Such steps involve detailed and comprehensive processes for parental permission, school permission for leave of absence from regular school programs, advice as to non-attendance, truancy and so on.

Links to Learning projects are funded to allow the provision of activities within a small group environment. The adult: child ratio must not exceed 1:10. The project co-ordinator must ensure that students participating in Links to Learning activities are adequately supervised at all times by either a staff member, tutor or the project co-ordinator.

An attendance record should be kept by the project staff (co-ordinator or tutor) for each planned session or activity. It should record the names of students, a start and finish time for each individual student, and make provision for noting whether the school has been notified if a student fails to arrive or truants from the activity.

Refer to the Group Session Attendance Record, one of the forms on the Links to Learning website.

A school should be notified of student absences from specific activities. The attendance record of students should be reported as part of regular progress meetings with schools.

Where activities are conducted after school hours (weekends and weekdays) parents should be notified as soon as practicable when a student fails to arrive at the planned activity or truants during the activity.

Students should be followed up on the reasons for non-attendance and this should be communicated to both the school and community organisation to plan any remedial action or support if required.

Where students are required to travel independently to scheduled activities, the guiding principle should be that the route and times of independent travel are judged to be safe and within the level of responsibility expected of students at that age and stage of schooling. This should be discussed between the in-school co-ordinator and the project co-ordinator when the activity is scheduled and form part of parental consent. Project staff should further develop risk management and minimisation procedures and protocols.

The students and schools should be given adequate notification of excursions or visits that require transport arrangements that vary from the routine arrangements. This should allow time to receive individual and event specific parental approval for each excursion off site.

It is up to the community organisation to determine what, if any, activities are prohibited while a student is participating in the project. The organisation should develop a list of
prohibited activities in conjunction with its code of conduct for both students and staff and provide a copy to the partner school. Aspects of prohibited activities may also need to be negotiated with schools.

Occupational health and safety laws and standards provide the framework for most activities of staff likely to impact on student participants.

Policies of the community organisation relating to staff should cover the following issues:
- use of drugs and alcohol and intoxication while on duty
- smoking in the workplace and while on duty
- operating equipment
- reporting for duty and advising absences from work.

Policies of the community organisation relating to student participants should cover the following issues:
- use of drugs or alcohol or intoxication while on the project and the consequences of same
- smoking policy
- consequences of non-attendance
- violent or abusive behaviour
- self-harm.

Each excursion should be planned well in advance to allow time for the school to work it in with other planned school activities and travel arrangements, especially where the school manages the issuing and receipt of parental approval forms.

The consent to participate should be event specific, listing the time, purpose, venue, travel arrangements and requirements in relation to food and clothing, if any.

Medication should be administered according to the established protocols used in schools. Where a student requires specific prescribed medications to be administered during school hours, the school would normally hold a record of this requirement and should make a copy of this form (The Administration of Prescribed Medication Form) available to the community organisation. Where it is proposed that the medicine is to be administered by a person employed by the community organisation a new written consent form should be used.

‘Critical incidents’ involve significant harm or injury to a student or staff member or an event that may lead to such significant harm.
The community organisation should have in place a protocol for the management of critical incidents while students are in the care and control of the community organisation.

Such critical incidents may include but not be limited to:

- fire in the premises
- poisoning (accidental or intentional)
- injury arising from vehicle accidents
- aggressive or violent behaviour (threatened or actual) likely to result in harm or injury to a student
- evidence of psychosis (hallucinations, delusions) which may be drug induced.

Other types of incidents may be included if requested by the partner school.

The immediate crisis response will follow appropriate emergency procedures, that is, contact with the NSW Ambulance Service, the police, fire services, a mental health service or the person’s general practitioner, hospital casualty or medical centre.

As soon as practicable, the project co-ordinator should contact the school and parents/caregivers of the student and report on the situation.

This should be followed by a written report to the community organisation’s management committee, and a copy to the school principal which outlines the details of the incident, actions taken at the time, and future actions planned to minimise such risks.

Protocol 18 Confidentiality of information and privacy

Schools and community organisations are bound by privacy legislation. The Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 binds government agencies. The provisions of the Act apply when schools provide project co-ordinators with information concerning students. The general principles are that:

- information provided by students and parents / caregivers is only obtained and disclosed for purposes directly related to the functions and activities of the Department of Education and Training
- an individual’s personal information should only be given to another agency:
  - if the individual gives permission or
  - where disclosure is directly related to the purpose for which it is collected or
  - where disclosure is likely to prevent or lessen serious and imminent threat to someone’s life or health
- personal information is to be securely held
• personal information is collected directly from the individual, or parent/caregiver for those under 16 years
• individuals are told the purpose of the information, and
• the information is relevant and up-to-date.

There are exceptions to these general principles and further information can be obtained from detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/privacy (DET staff only) and www.lawlink.nsw.edu.au/pc.

Protocol 19  Child protection

Child protection refers to services or systems designed to promote and safeguard the safety, welfare and well-being of a child or young person.

Under NSW legislation the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 provides that:

• children and young persons receive such care and protection as is necessary for their safety, welfare and well-being, taking into account the rights, powers and duties of their parents or other persons responsible for them; and

• all institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care and protection of children and young persons provide an environment for them that is free of violence and exploitation and provide services that foster their health, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect and dignity; and

• appropriate assistance is rendered to parents and other persons responsible for children and young persons in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities in order to promote a safe and nurturing environment.

Both schools and community organisations are covered by the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and the Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998.

Through their funding agreement, all Links to Learning providers are required to screen people seeking employment which involves direct contact with children or young people. This is referred to as the Working with Children Check.

Community organisations are also required to clearly state and implement policies and procedures on how they meet their responsibilities under child protection legislation.


Protocol 20  Suspension

From time-to-time students who are participants in Links to Learning projects will be suspended from school. Concurrent suspension from the Links to Learning project should not be automatic.
It is recognised that while students are on suspension there is an increased likelihood that some may engage in risk-taking or anti-social behaviour. Suspension should be viewed as a time to activate school and community support to maintain students within an educational pathway. Continued participation in a Links to Learning project may serve to maintain links with the school and positive learning experiences.

If behaviour at the Links to Learning project contributes to the reasons for suspension, then the community organisation should consult the school and come to a joint decision about continued participation in the project during the period of suspension from school.

Decisions to concurrently suspend a student from a Links to Learning project as well as from school should be taken after consultation with the project co-ordinator and made after consideration of the particular circumstances on a case by case basis.

Protocol 21  Code of conduct for participants
Project co-ordinators should develop a code of conduct for students who agree to participate in a Links to Learning project. This may be in the form of a behaviour contract or a code that participants agree to comply with at their commencement of the project. It should cover such issues as:

- attendance and notification of planned absences
- respect for staff and other participants
- smoking and drug use
- effort and application to activities
- communication with tutors and project co-ordinator.

Protocol 22  Communication
Progress reporting and exchange of information between partner schools and the project co-ordinator should be ongoing and continuous at an informal level, eg. verbally.

As a minimum, the following mechanisms should be in place for ongoing formal communication during the course of the project:

- Progress reporting on individual students at least once per term, preferably in the context of welfare or learning support meetings, to ensure information exchange is two-way

- End-of-project evaluation meeting involving assessment of individual student outcomes as well as the project as a whole.

Protocol 23  Progress reporting
Progress reporting should involve assessment processes and the reporting of progress against goals set in the student’s individual Participation and Pathways Plan.
Protocol 24

Dispute resolution

Disputes and conflicts should generally be resolved by the parties and by reference to the Program Guidelines and these Protocols. Where resolution is not achieved the following procedure is suggested:

- Appropriate regional office staff be involved for issues concerning management of individual students or approaches to educational issues

- A meeting with Community Grants Programs staff on issues concerning the performance of the community organisation in relation to the program guidelines.

The school principal should be made aware of any issues and advised of the outcome.

Reporting of outcomes and transition from a Links to Learning project

Students at Risk Links to Learning protocols – phases of action

Protocols for collaborative arrangements between schools and community organisations

Protocol 25

Outcomes reporting

Towards the end of activities, students will review their pathways plan with the project co-ordinator, as the basis of assessing the progress made and reporting the outcomes. The individual Participation and Pathways Plan will have established the student’s goal at the beginning and may have undergone some revision during the course of their participation. It now forms the basis of planning the transition from the project, the strategies the student will proceed with and the support he or she will need to achieve their goals. This is an essential step if the student is to maximise the gains made in the Links to Learning project.
At the end of Links to Learning activities the project co-ordinator should prepare a package that fulfils the requirements of reporting to the school and the parents. It also acts as a record of achievement for the student. The package should comprise:

- a Certificate of Achievement gained through the Links to Learning program
- any other certificates for accredited training eg. First Aid, and
- a Transition Plan identifying individual progress and outcomes in the areas of Key Competencies and life skills, accredited training if relevant, other learning outcomes, their ‘next step’ activity and recommended support strategies for the ‘next step’ activity.

When reporting on individual student outcomes the use of a standard program reporting tool that links with school reporting is recommended. Two such examples are:

- the DET Employment Related Skills Logbook – Links to Learning Supplement
- the WADU Resource – Vocational Learning for Indigenous Australians, for indigenous students. This includes a logbook identifying culturally-specific activities which contribute to the acquisition of Key Competencies.

Protocol 26 Transition planning

Transition planning focuses on the student’s achievements, their ‘next step’ activity and support strategies at the end of their participation.

If the ‘next step’ is to return to and continue in school to complete the School Certificate or Higher School Certificate, the transition planning should identify the in-school support needed to make the successful transition. This may include, for example, participation in school tutorial programs or other special need programs the school offers, joining a vocational program in school or consultation with the careers adviser or counsellor.

If the ‘next step’ is not to return to school but to vocational training or work the support may include, for example, participation in a Links to Learning project for early leavers for a time before enrolling in TAFE or other accredited training, participation in youth club activities or referral to other community-based support.

It is essential that there is a systematic approach to receiving outcomes reports and transition planning together with an overall review of the project. This will ensure that the gains made by individuals and the project as a whole are consolidated and carried forward.

The Transition Plan with supporting documentation identifying the student’s outcomes should be presented to the school and discussed by the project co-ordinator and relevant school staff at a meeting to discuss the student’s transition plan. This meeting could involve the in-school co-ordinator, the student services officer or vocational education consultant, the learning support team or school counsellor.
This meeting will enable the school to clarify the continuing support needed by the student returning to school and to ensure that it is acted upon. Transition planning is a joint activity. The project co-ordinator provides advice on the areas requiring consolidation or further intervention. The school’s responsibility is to identify and deliver on the support/strategies needed to meet the goals.

Outcomes of this meeting relating to individual support should be recorded in the student’s Transition Plan and copies of this plan provided to the necessary school staff.

This meeting can also cover evaluation processes (Protocol 27), if feasible and efficient for those concerned.

### 3.6 Evaluating the program

Students at Risk Links to Learning protocols – phases of action

Protocols for collaborative arrangements between schools and community organisations

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**Protocol 27**

**Project evaluation**

As a forerunner for planning for the next year, the meeting of the project co-ordinator, in-school co-ordinator other relevant school and appropriate regional office staff should also review the overall progress of the project, considering its successes and weakness.

The *Final Project Report* provides the main tool for evaluating and reporting on the overall project outcomes and is a requirement under the funding agreement.
Roles and responsibilities of key players

Key players in the collaboration have different roles in implementing the protocols.

The key players are:

- the community organisation and project co-ordinator
- the partner school, in particular the principal, deputy principal and in-school co-ordinator
- the appropriate officer in DET regional office
- Community Grants Programs staff
- parents, guardians, carers and students.

Community organisations

The main role of the funded organisation is to coordinate and deliver the activities and services in accordance with the Links to Learning Community Grants Program Guidelines and their Funding Agreement with the Department.

Project Co-ordinator

The community organisation will employ a project co-ordinator. A project co-ordinator is responsible for the co-ordination of all elements and steps of the project’s operation. More specifically, responsibilities are to:

- establish the project and relationship with the partner school
- brief the partner school principal and the appropriate regional officer on details of the approved project prior to its scheduled commencement
- provide schools, regional offices, students and parents with appropriate written materials about the project and/or the organisation
- develop written protocols with schools for working together at a local level
- consult with partner schools and regional offices on the key target group, their needs and suitable referral and monitoring and liaison strategies
- consider referrals based on the information provided by partner schools and select students for participation
- select hours for the operation of the project based on the needs of the group of students - a combination of school hours and after school hours is strongly encouraged
• confirm the agreed communication, referral and support processes on the Project Confirmation Report

• submit the Project Confirmation Report to the Senior Coordinator, Links to Learning, Community Grants Programs prior to activities with students commencing as part of the DET accountability and reporting requirements

• provide a safe, well planned and organised service

• exercise duty of care for students when they are participating in project activities

• provide students with information on the project including:
  - weekly times and hours for attendance at the project
  - proposed length of the project
  - venue(s) and location(s)
  - detailed travel arrangements
  - type of group and individual activities planned
  - explanation of what the project involves
  - what is expected of the student throughout the project
  - project requirements on the personal information to be kept
  - role of the project co-ordinator and in-school co-ordinator
  - orientation

• provide comprehensive informed excursion consent notes, as agreed with the school, for parents/caregivers

• negotiate the length of participation of the student with the partner school staff

• negotiate an individual Participation and Pathways Plan with each student, and monitor the student’s progress throughout the project

• provide activities to students as per the Plan of Activities

• monitor student progress against their individual Participation and Pathways Plan and amend where necessary

• provide ongoing intensive assistance to students to ensure the pathways are appropriate

• report on student progress and attendance with school staff

• negotiate the Transition Plan with school staff to facilitate the transition back to school

• maintain records and data for reports to DET on project and student outcomes
keep the following student records:
- signed *Referral to Links to Learning* and consent documentation
- *Group Session Attendance Records*
- copies of individual *Participation and Pathways Plans* including the *Individual Skills Progress and Outcomes* (step 2) which reports on achievements made towards the student’s desired outcomes
- copies of students’ *Certificate of Achievement* and
- copies of completed *Transition Plans* identifying support strategies for the ‘next step’ activity

provide a report to the school documenting students’ learning outcomes and achievements related to Key Competency and life skills development

develop a *Transition Plan* with students and the partner school

meet with school and regional office staff or other organisations as required to develop strategies for successful transition back to full time school

provide reintegration activities if required, post project support and follow-up

evaluate the procedures for student referral, project activities planning and student support during and after the project with partner school staff

evaluate the success of the project with partner school staff at the completion of the project as indicated in the *Final Project Report*

provide end of project reports and participant data to DET.

**Partner schools**

The main role of partner schools is to identify and refer ‘at risk’ students to Links to Learning projects and support the students during and following completion of the project.

More specifically responsibilities include:

- nominating a suitable in-school co-ordinator (referred to as the ’school contact person’ in the 2001 edition of the protocols), who is aware of the needs of the ‘at risk’ students and other programs operating within the school, and who is available to liaise and communicate with the project co-ordinator and the community organisation, as required
- establishing relationships with project staff and other key players including briefing appropriate school committees on details of the approved project
- providing the school community, regional office staff, students and parents with appropriate written materials
• working with the project co-ordinator to develop written protocols, as outlined in Section 3, for working together at a local level
• identifying the ‘at risk’ target group and their needs
• reaching agreement on the target group, their needs and suitable referral and liaison strategies with the project co-ordinator
• identifying students for immediate referral and completing the project referral forms, including information on other options that have been explored by the school
• if appropriate, prior to referral, discussing additional support options and programs for individual students with regional office staff, eg students with high behaviour support needs
• discussing referral of the student with the project co-ordinator
• gaining student and parental consent for student participation in the project in line with the protocols on privacy and confidentiality
• providing any relevant documentation to the community organisation on the basis of the best interest of the student, in line with the protocols on privacy and confidentiality
• ensuring the students who have accepted the placement have information on the project relating to school issues
• collaborating with the students, their family, and the project co-ordinator in identifying needs, goals and planning pathways
• advising the project co-ordinator on student needs to be considered in the Participation and Pathways Plan
• supporting the procedures developed for on-going monitoring of student progress and any individual support activities during the project
• discussing student progress and attendance with project staff
• meeting with project staff at agreed intervals to discuss other issues as required
• receiving and discussing reports on students learning outcomes and achievements towards Key Competency development and life skills with the project co-ordinator
• participating in the development of the Transition Plan for individual students with the project co-ordinator and regional office staff if appropriate
• guiding the implementation of the Transition Plan for the students’ reintegration back to school
• following-up and supporting students when they return to school
• participating in evaluating the project outcomes as a whole, including both procedures and student outcomes.
DET Regional Offices

In relation to Links to Learning, the main role of the regional office is to provide support to community organisations and partner schools in the delivery of programs to students at risk. This will be achieved through the appropriate regional office staff and could involve student services officers, student welfare consultants, home school liaison officers or behaviour team staff for specific activities.

Student Services Officers and other appropriate Regional Office staff

Specifically, responsibilities include:

- providing an area-wide perspective of options available and a co-ordinated approach to the selection of individual students and groups suitable for referral to a Links to Learning project
- assisting in determining the ‘at risk’ target group profile and their needs amongst partner schools for referral, particularly where projects operate across a number of partner schools
- signing the Project Confirmation Report on agreed referral and support procedures
- participating in the evaluation of the project with project co-ordinator and partner schools.

Regional vocational education consultants may have a specific support role where the Links to Learning project is coordinated by the careers adviser in a school and the project has specific vocational elements.

Community Grants Programs (Aboriginal Education and Equity Programs Directorate)

Community Grants Programs manages the Links to Learning Community Grants Program and is responsible for administering the program and monitoring the progress and accountabilities in relation to funded projects.

Community Grants Programs officers will:

- inform key players of DET policy, administrative and legislative changes
- maintain statewide co-ordination and policy development of the program
- implement program improvements
- report to the department and government on program outcomes
- endorse the Project Confirmation Form agreed by projects and partner schools
- monitor project progress by reviewing reports and a site visit
- receive and process progress reports and participant data
- liaise with key players throughout the project period over meeting the requirements associated with the project funding agreement
- facilitate dispute resolution if required
- monitor project outcomes
- receive and process final report and participant data.

## Support resources

### Indicative timetable for key activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Leading Key Player[s]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>January</strong></td>
<td>Funding agreement between community organisations and DET signed, projects receive first payment</td>
<td>Community Grants Programs, DET Community Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February</strong></td>
<td>Project co-ordinator meets school principal and appropriate DET regional office staff</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner school in-school co-ordinator nominated</td>
<td>School principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local protocols developed</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator, in-school co-ordinator, school staff and/or committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before end March</strong></td>
<td>Project Confirmation Report signed</td>
<td>Principal of partner school staff and/or committees, regional office staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Confirmation Report submitted to Community Grants Programs</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Confirmation Report endorsed and returned</td>
<td>Community Grants Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students identified and referred</td>
<td>Partner schools, project co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March – December</strong></td>
<td>Project participants commence, and develop individual Participation and Pathways Plan</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Activities continue</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeat referral procedures for second or more intakes</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator, As outlined above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing liaison and monitoring of students’ progress and support services</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator, partner school staff and regional office staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students issued with Record of Achievement</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition back to school/alternative Support for ‘next step’ activity</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator, partner school staff and regional office staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May/June</strong></td>
<td>Project Monitoring visits by DET</td>
<td>Community Grants Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ongoing</strong></td>
<td>Participant Outcome Forms to DET</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>December</strong></td>
<td>Final Yearly (evaluation) Report to DET including electronic Participant Outcomes Forms</td>
<td>Project co-ordinator, partner school staff, regional office staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequently asked questions and answers

Contact Hours

Q. How many hours should a young person attend Links to Learning?
A. The program guidelines state that a young person must attend a minimum of 100 and a maximum of 400 hours during the project year. These hours can be delivered flexibly to suit the needs of the young person, the school and community organisation.

Q. Why must group activities make up at least 60% of contact hours?
A. Experience has found that all but a few participants’ needs can be best met through small group activities. Key areas include literacy and numeracy, life skills, communication skills and team skills. Individual issues can be addressed through the balance of individual hours negotiated with each participant.

Target Groups

Q. Can an Early Leaver Project accept a referral of a school student?
A. Yes, as an exception and only if all parties agree this is the best option for the student. While Early Leaver Projects assist participants into education, training or employment Students at Risk Projects are better placed to link young people back into full time and productive schooling.

Duty of Care

Q. How do parents know whether participants are undertaking activities in a safe environment?
A. All workplaces must adhere to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000 which makes provision for the safety of employees and others (not employees) at the premises where persons work. This includes the main location of activities, vehicles, excursion sites, etc.

Organisations should be able to show written policies which support their claim for a safe workplace. This is monitored annually in the organisation’s Management Self Report by Community Grants Program staff.

Q. What is the Links to Learning dress code for students?
A. Links to Learning projects are to provide a non-threatening, informal learning environment. The dress code should not be offensive to other participants, project staff and other users of the project’s premises. It is not a requirement of the Links to Learning program that students wear school uniform but where activities are held at the school it may be a school requirement.
Q. What if a 15 year old participant discloses information which suggests they are in an active sexual relationship with a 19 year old or in another situation which places them at risk?

A. Participants under the age of 16 years should be advised that any disclosure of information to project staff that indicates a participant is at risk of harm as defined by the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 must be reported to the Department of Community Services.

When there is a formal agreement between a community-based organisation and a school for a community-based organisation to conduct courses for school students e.g. Links to Learning project, the responsibility for reporting lies with the principal. However, this should be done in consultation with the principal, executive officer or coordinator of the community-based organisation.

Where the child or young person is enrolled in a community-based organisation completely independent from school, it is the responsibility of the community-based organisation to make the report of risk harm.

Management and employees of community-based organisations have a responsibility to restrict the sharing of information about reports to circumstances when it is absolutely necessary for professional reasons. This respects the child or young person’s right to privacy.

It is appropriate to treat reports about young people (16 and 17 years) differently from reports related to children (under 16 years). A young person should be involved in the decision to report and the process of reporting. The young person should be given the opportunity to express his/her views, unless there would be serious risks in doing so e.g. a possible escalation of self-harming behaviour or creating further risks of harm.

Should you decide to report suspected risk of harm to a young person (16 and 17 years), any views expressed by the young person should be indicated to DoCS in the telephone report made to the DoCS Helpline. If the young person does not wish a report to be made, this information must also be conveyed to DoCS.

DoCS staff will consider the young person’s wishes in undertaking any assessments and investigations.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Q. Do project staff need to know the medical history of a participant?

A. Privacy principles respect the individual’s right to have personal details kept private. Where knowledge of a medical issue is crucial to the participant’s or other people’s health and safety the community organisation needs to be informed.
Re-enrolment In Links to Learning

Q. Can a participant re-enrol in or finish Links to Learning activities in the next calendar year?

A. The current policy is that participants enrol once and receive the assistance they need within a calendar year. There may be some circumstances where a participant did not receive the required assistance and may need to return the following year. These exceptions should be discussed with Community Grants Programs staff.

Missed School Work

Q. Do students have to make up the school work they miss while attending Links to Learning activities?

A. The Links to Learning program is part of the educational experience for participating students. For the majority of participants catching up on missed work will mean an additional burden.

If the project co-ordinator or in-school co-ordinator believes the completion of school work may arise as an issue during the project they should discuss strategies at the project planning phase. This should be discussed particularly if participating students are undertaking their School Certificate.

Q. Do Links to Learning activities count towards attendance requirements for the School Certificate?

A. Schools are encouraged to count Links to Learning activities towards attendance and learning requirements for the School Certificate. It is recommended that this matter be clarified between the school and the community organisation at the project planning stage.

Links to Learning activities are designed around the Key Competencies which are embedded in syllabuses as cross curriculum statements. A student must satisfy the principal that he/she has met the learning requirements to be awarded the School Certificate.

Suspended Students

Q. Can a student suspended from school attend a Links to Learning project?

A. The matter needs to be negotiated between the project and the school principal after considering the needs of the student and the nature of the incident.
Duty of Care
Q. How should travel be arranged for school students participating in or travelling to and from Links to Learning activities?
A. The means of transport to, from and during project activities should be discussed and agreement reached by the school, parents and project staff. Participants use public transport, walk or are transported by the community organisation’s bus. The mode of transport selected may be guided by availability, economic circumstances and participants’ maturity.

Communication Between Projects and Schools
Q. What is the process if there is a dispute between the in-school co-ordinator and project co-ordinator or tutor?
A. Resolution should first be tried at the local level with the school principal. If unresolved the appropriate regional officer should be consulted. If still unresolved the Senior Co-ordinator, Links to Learning, Community Grants Programs can be contacted on telephone 1800 009 129.

Referral of Participants
Q. Can a Students at Risk project allow participation by a young person under the school leaving age who refuses to attend school?
A. Yes. The project should work with the school to reintegrate the student into full participation at school.

Q. What if other schools not connected to Links to Learning ask a project to take on their students?
A. Students at Risk projects are allocated one or more partner schools who will refer students to the project. Non partner government high schools may also refer eligible students however referrals from partner schools must have priority.

Q. Can a Links to Learning project refuse a referral nominated by a school?
A. Unfortunately, there are cases where individuals with significant life issues and resultant behavioural problems will disrupt the group and are not ready to take on the responsibility of attending Links to Learning in a group situation. Referrals must be assessed as being able to benefit from attendance at the Links to Learning project and their effect on the learning outcomes of other participants in the group.

Q. What are the benefits of being a partner school rather than a referring school?
A. Partner schools participate in developing clear procedures for referrals, communication, conduct of activities, consultation regarding improvements, and have priority of student placement into the project.
Contacts for more information

For more information on:
Program Management (Guidelines and Policy Information), Administration and Monitoring Issues

Contact the Senior Coordinator, Links to Learning, Community Grants Programs, Aboriginal Education and Equity Programs Directorate on

Tel: 1800 009 129
Fax: 02 9266 8058
E-mail: youthassist@det.nsw.edu.au
Visit: www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/

Education Support Services Information
Contact the Student Services Officer in your local DET office