



links to learning

**LINKS TO LEARNING  
PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

**2012**



**Education  
& Communities**

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## **1. Links to Learning**

The Program Guidelines for the Links to Learning Program provide information on the scope and parameters of the program. The Guidelines should be used to assist in the development of Links to Learning projects.

### **1.1 Context**

The Department of Education and Communities provides public education and training for the people of New South Wales. The Department of Education and Communities works to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the people of New South Wales through provision of high quality education and training.

Through Links to Learning the Department of Education and Communities works with local communities and non-government organisations to facilitate appropriate access and participation that enables young people to reach their full potential.

Links to Learning is a targeted program implemented by the Department of Education and Communities to improve education, employment and life outcomes for at risk young people.

### **1.2 Introduction**

Links to Learning provides grants to non-government community organisations to assist them in working with young people, who have left or are at risk of leaving school, so that they can reach their full potential. Funded organisations operate creative and innovative projects that assist:

- Early Leavers: young people who have left school before completing Year 12 or its equivalent
- Students at Risk: students in Years 7 to 12, identified as at risk of disengaging from their education

Links to Learning supports young people aged 12 to 24 years who experience barriers to participating in mainstream education or training. Participants are provided with development and support services to assist them remain in or re-engage with education, training or employment. Participants are provided with opportunities and pathways into education, training and employment.

The Department of Education and Communities provides fixed-term funding to approved, not-for-profit, community based organisations and local government authorities to operate Links to Learning projects.

Links to Learning projects deliver group and individual development and support activities in an informal and creative learning environment.

A Funding Agreement between the organisation and the Department of Education and Communities outlines the terms and conditions of the funding and contains agreed negotiated outcomes, service levels and targets.

### **1.3 Objectives**

Links to Learning is designed to assist young people to remain engaged in their education or transition into further education, training or employment. Young people are supported through stages in a project with the following five objectives:

1. Connect – funded organisations identify appropriate young people and connect them with Links to Learning
2. Participate – young people at risk attend and participate in Links to Learning

3. Learn – young people at risk learn and improve education, employment and life skills
4. Plan – young people at risk plan for successful transition from Links to Learning into education, training or employment
5. Transition – young people at risk successfully transition from Links to Learning into their planned education, training or employment destination

## 1.4 Target

### 1.4.1 Target Group

Links to Learning targets two groups of young people.

*Early Leavers* are young people, up to the age of 24 years, who have left school before completing Year 12 or its vocational education and training equivalent. Early school leavers are generally not engaged in education, training or employment and may not have developed the skills to participate in a formal education or training environment.

*Students at Risk* are students enrolled in government high schools, between Years 7 and 12, who are identified by school learning support teams, student welfare committees or regional teams as being disengaged or at risk of disengaging from their school.

An organisation may be funded to support one of the target groups or a combination.

### 1.4.2 Population Group

Links to Learning projects target identified priority young people.

#### *At Risk*

All Links to Learning projects target young people who experience barriers and difficulties to participating in education, training or employment. Barriers may include:

- Enrolled but not attending school or particular classes
- Experiencing difficulties with school learning environment
- Without networks of support
- Geographic isolation
- Offending or at risk of offending
- Not currently participating in community or other programs and services
- Unemployment (not completed Year 12 or equivalent)
- Risk taking behaviour
- Single parenthood
- Substitute or out of home care
- Other significant circumstances that prevent access to remaining in education, training or employment.

Some young people experience other barriers that may prevent them from actively participating in Links to Learning and may need specialist support before commencing.

#### *Population*

Links to Learning projects identify a particular population group to be targeted which is based on the needs of schools and community and the capacity of the project to deliver appropriate targeted activities. The population groups are:

- Young people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent
- Culturally and linguistically diverse young people
- General population that may also include young people from the above groups.

An organisation may be funded to operate more than one project.

## **1.5 Parameters**

This section outlines the parameters for the operation of a Links to Learning project. All projects must work within the parameters when engaging in activities and partnerships.

Project operation within the parameters must be documented so that compliance with the Funding Agreement and Program Guidelines may be verified. Exceptions to the parameters must be approved by the Department of Education and Communities.

### **1.5.1 Age range**

Links to Learning supports young people ranging from 12 to 24 years of age. Early Leavers are young people, up to the age of 24 years, who have left school before completing Year 12 or its recognised vocational equivalent. Students at Risk are those students who are enrolled in a NSW government high school.

### **1.5.2 Leaving school age**

From 1 January 2010, new legislation relating to school leaving age has taken effect in NSW under the Education Amendment Act 2009 No 25. The legislation states that students will not be able to leave school or stop home schooling until:

(a) he or she has completed Year 10 of secondary education, or

(b) turned 17

whichever occurs first.

A student who has completed Year 10 and is below the age of 17 years must continue his or her schooling unless he or she participates on a full-time basis in:

(a) approved education or training, or

(b) paid work or a combination of approved education or training and paid work (the child must be of or above the age of 15 years to be in employment)

Participation in approved education or training would mean the child would be undertaking :

(a) a higher education course,

(b) a vocational course,

(c) an apprenticeship or traineeship, or

(d) any other education or training approved by the Minister.

### **1.5.3 Referrals**

The benefit of Links to Learning is the ability to connect with community organisations to harness their existing networks and referral processes to deliver targeted local solutions for young people at risk.

Early Leaver participants may be self referred, referred by schools, community networks and interagency groups, employment groups, other government agencies, including NSW Department of Juvenile Justice and Centrelink, and the organisation's own partnerships.

Students at Risk participants may be referred by teachers and student support staff in partner government high schools. Referrals from other government high schools may be accepted after partner schools have been given first priority.

Participation in local and regional networks and interagency groups is encouraged to facilitate effective referrals and knowledge sharing.

### **1.5.4 Partner schools**

Funded organisations work in partnership with government secondary schools to identify and work with students who are at risk of disengaging. Organisations are required to consult with the Department of Education and Communities's regional Student Services Officer and the

principal (or their nominee) of each partner school to confirm the target population group, discuss specific needs and to arrange suitable referral and liaison strategies with the in-school co-ordinator. Where students under the age of 17 years attend Links to Learning, funded organisations must liaise closely with the participant's school or other approved education or training provider.

The Links to Learning project co-ordinator liaises with the in-school co-ordinator around referral of students, on-going monitoring of student progress and support strategies for students on return to school full-time.

The *Links to Learning Protocols* document clarifies the roles of all key players involved in the project and is of relevance to organisations, schools, regions, parents/caregivers and students.

Links to Learning is not intended to be a substitute for school and participants are expected to continue productive participation in school activities. Schools and organisations should select mutually convenient hours for the operation of projects, based on the needs of the group of students. Activities held during school hours are strongly encouraged.

#### **1.5.5 Participant hours**

Participant hours for young people attending Links to Learning should comprise of at least 70% group activities. Projects are required to offer young people a minimum of 100 and a maximum of 500 Links to Learning participant hours within a calendar year. Further information is available on the *Information Sheet: Participant Hours* on the Links to Learning website.

##### *Participant Support*

Links to Learning projects offer some individual one-on-one support to young people. This provides the opportunity to identify individual needs, negotiate goals and activities and provides an opportunity for the young person to receive personal and family support if appropriate. Participant support hours may include work experience and individual tutoring for the participant, and any associated planning, administration and any project liaison or network development activities.

##### *Group Work*

Links to Learning projects offer activities based on group work. This provides the opportunity to develop communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, team work and leadership skills in young people so they may cope with challenges and successfully transition to education, training or employment.

Group work hours are negotiated with the young person to reflect agreed goals and project activities. Group activity environments are non-threatening and less formal than school and encourage participation, collaboration and creativity.

##### *Ratio*

To maintain the benefits of Links to Learning, ratios of staff to young people for group activities should be a minimum of 1:5 and a maximum of 1:10.

#### **1.5.6 Work experience**

A young person's goals, skills and interests may be enhanced by participating in work experience relevant to their planned transition destination. Links to Learning participants may take part in supervised work experience with employers who are aware of Links to Learning objectives and outcomes and hold appropriate work experience insurance and indemnity coverage.

Supervised work experience should not exceed 65 hours or comprise more than a third of total participant hours.

### **1.6 Project description**

Links to Learning projects develop and support the skills of young people using creative and innovative strategies and engaging activities.

Links to Learning projects are integrated into the local community and respond to the local needs of young people at risk. Project staff and activities are flexible and motivate young people to work towards goals and successfully transition to education, employment or training.

Each project is unique and project models may vary according to the organisations core business, project staff and community characteristics. Successful project models best suit the cohort of young people, school needs, community partnerships and resources. Further information is available on the *Information Sheet: Project Models* on the Links to Learning website.

Links to Learning is provided free to young people. Each young person completes Links to Learning within a calendar year and generally should not attend the project in successive years. This allows the most number of young people to be supported and ensures that Links to Learning projects provide value for money. Requests for exceptions should be discussed with and approved by the Department of Education and Communities.

### **1.7 Project activities**

Links to Learning project activities should aim to support identified young people to overcome barriers and develop skills that allow them to reach their full potential.

#### *Education and Employment Skills*

Education and employment skills have been identified as important skills for young people to develop the ability for independent learning and to engage in lifelong learning.

Young people who are at risk of leaving school early or who have left school early often require further assistance with these skills so that they remain in or return to education, training or employment.

Skills in education and employment may include, but are not limited to:

- Communication
- Team Work
- Problem Solving
- Initiative and Enterprise
- Planning and Organising
- Self Management
- Learning
- Technology

#### *Life Skills*

Life skills activities aim to improve a young person's personal wellbeing to enable the young person to overcome challenges and reach their full potential. Life skills activities that enhance the well being of young people at risk may include, but are not limited to:

- Activities that develop self esteem, respect, honesty and integrity
- Personal presentation
- Health
- Hygiene
- Budgeting/literacy/numeracy
- Anger management
- Alcohol and other drug awareness
- Body image

- Nutrition

- Coping mechanisms and resilience

Education, employment and life skills may be delivered through a range of creative and innovative activities, for example: video production, food preparation, fashion design, music, performance or recreation.

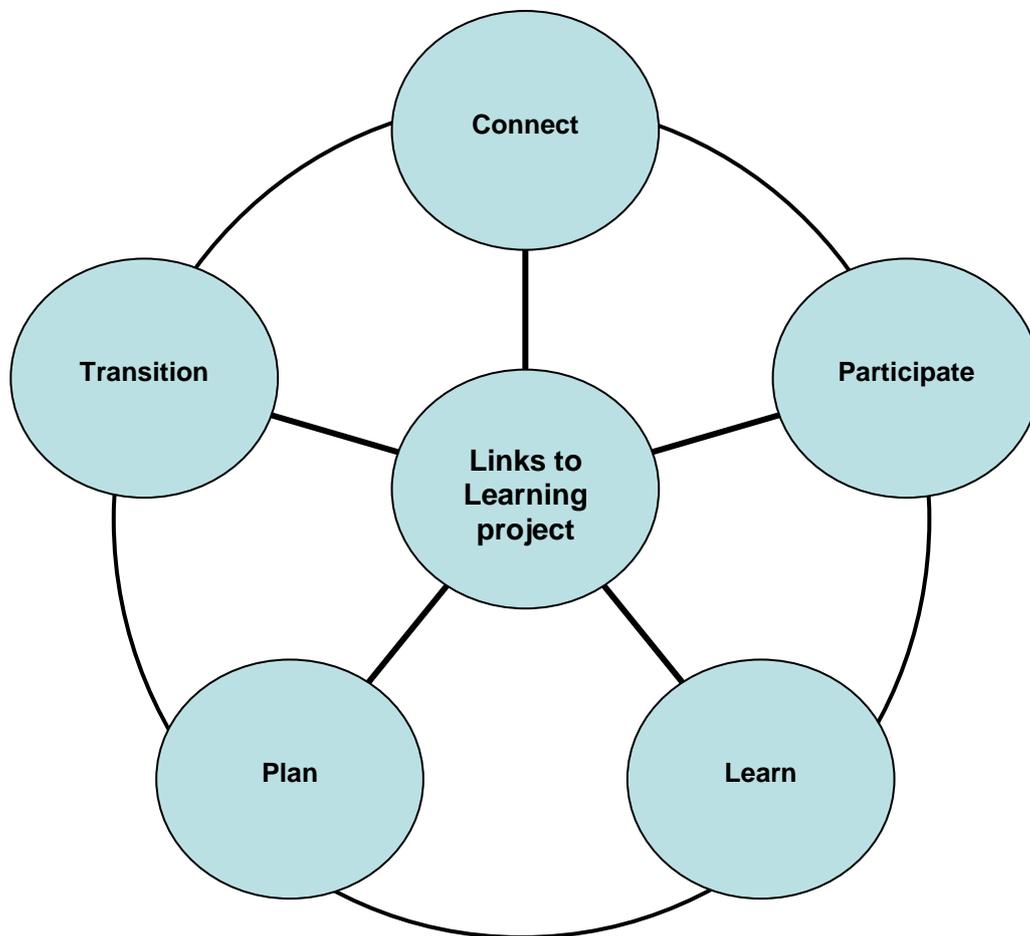
## 2 Project Delivery

Links to Learning outcomes may be delivered through many different project models. Organisations are encouraged to design and develop creative, innovative approaches which are tailored to individual and group needs and local school and community characteristics. Approaches should interest young people and build on education, employment and life skills.

Individual projects deliver to Early Leavers, Students at Risk or both groups. The combination of target groups for an individual project allows for flexible responses to community need and is especially relevant to rural and remote areas where comprehensive services for young people at risk may not be available.

The plan, design and implementation of creative, innovative projects meet the Links to Learning objectives.

*Links to Learning Project Objectives*



## **2.1 Connect (Objective 1)**

Projects identify appropriate young people at risk and connect them with Links to Learning. Young people at risk are connected with Links to Learning through school and community networks. Their needs and interests are assessed and they are encouraged to attend Links to Learning project activities.

Young people are connected by:

- Schools and other education and training providers
- Youth programs within the organisation
- Community organisations, government departments and support services
- Word of mouth (self referred), parents, families and friends
- Identifying their needs, interests and goals
- Activities and agreed hours

## **2.2 Participate (Objective 2)**

Young people at risk attend and participate in Links to Learning. Young people are motivated and encouraged to attend and participate in negotiated activities and hours.

Young people attend and participate in:

- A combination of group and participant support activities
- Projects with a young person to staff ratio minimum of 1:5 and maximum of 1:10
- A minimum of 100 hours and a maximum of 500 hours within the same calendar year (normally at least 70% group activities)
- Activities that are creative, innovative and flexible that incorporate relevant education, employment and life skills
- An informal and alternative learning environment
- External support services, as appropriate

## **2.3 Learn (Objective 3)**

Young people at risk learn and improve education, employment and life skills. Links to Learning projects develop skills and competencies that enable young people to remain in or re-engage with education, training or employment.

Young people learn through:

- Participating in activities that develop and improve education, employment and life skills
- Creative and innovative activities with embedded learning outcomes
- Being in a non-threatening and supportive group

## **2.4 Plan (Objective 4)**

Young people at risk plan for successful transition from Links to Learning into education, training or employment. Projects assist young people to develop an appropriate and considered plan.

Young people plan their transition from Links to Learning and are assisted to:

- Develop a well thought out plan for successful transition to;
  - return to school with ongoing support from the school and staff
  - other education programs to achieve Year 10 or Year 12 equivalent\*
  - traineeships and apprenticeships
  - other accredited training
  - non accredited education and training programs

- voluntary work
- employment
- access to social support services
- Make informed decisions about their future
- Research opportunities and options to make their transition
- Connect with support services to facilitate successful transition

\* Where a young person is participating in Links to Learning their plan should outline the process in which they will transition back into school or an approved alternate education or training program.

## **2.5 Transition (Objective 5)**

Young people at risk successfully transition from Links to Learning into their planned education, training or employment destination.

Young people who transition from Links to Learning into education, training or employment:

- Make the transition as planned
- Are assisted and supported through the transition process
- Are provided with school or community contacts and referral services relevant to their planned transition destination that maintains continuity of support, this may include;
  - in school support
  - youth or community centres
  - short courses
  - employment services
  - health services
  - accommodation services
  - mentors
- Are monitored after they have transitioned to ascertain their progress for a reasonable length of time (based on the individual young person)

Key performance measures and targets will be developed in consultation with Links to Learning stakeholders to determine the outcomes achieved for participants. The aim is to collect meaningful and indicative data that illustrates what results have been achieved. A draft sample of the possible measures, targets and data is provided at Attachment A.

## **3 Funding**

The annual funding commitment for Links to Learning is approximately \$8 million. Links to Learning projects are funded for a three year fixed-term funding cycle, based on a calendar year. The Funding Agreement, project activities and targets are negotiated annually and compliance with the Funding Agreement and Program Guidelines is mandatory.

### **3.1 Eligible Organisations**

Organisations must be non-profit, community based, incorporated operating under one of the following:

- Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 (Cth)
- Associations Incorporation Act 1984 (NSW)
- Cooperatives Act 1992 (NSW)
- Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)
- Local Government Authority operating under Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)
- Special Act of Parliament

Organisations must be financially viable with income and assets greater than expenditure and outgoings.

### **3.2 Payment of Funds**

Payment of funding is made in two instalments in the calendar year, by electronic funds transfer:

- 65% of the approved funding (First Payment) on exchange of co-signed Funding Agreements
- 35% of the approved funding (Second Payment) on receipt of accountability documents and successful assessment of reporting requirements, including compliance with terms of any previous Funding Agreements.

Goods and Services Tax on funds received from the Department of Education and Communities must be paid to the Australian Taxation Office in accordance with the Funding Agreement. The Department of Education and Communities will generate a Recipient Created Tax Invoice in respect of the services made by the funded organisation.

### **3.3 Unexpended Funds**

Unexpended funds must be returned to the Department of Education and Communities within one (1) calendar month of the due date of the annual Audited Financial Statement in compliance with the Funding Agreement. The Department of Education and Communities will notify the amount to be repaid.

## **4 Organisation Responsibilities**

Funded organisations must comply with the Funding Agreement and Links to Learning Program Guidelines.

### **4.1 Project Management**

#### **4.1.1 Staffing**

Organisations are required to:

- Recruit and supervise appropriate staff to operate the project. Project coordinators or tutors delivering Links to Learning project activities must have achieved or have commenced in a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA 40104), or hold an equivalent qualification
- Ensure all Links to Learning staff are provided with Program Guidelines, Funding Agreement and any relevant project documentation
- Provide professional development and ensure that staff are equipped to work with the target group
- Ensure that staff are the sole responsibility of the organisation
- Comply with state and federal child protection and working with children legislation and provide documents for verification when requested
- Accept all legal and other responsibilities as employers of project staff and volunteers, including adherence to industrial awards and conditions where they apply

#### **4.1.2 Administration**

Organisations are required to:

- Ensure all conditions in the Funding Agreement are met
- Have policies and procedures that outline effective operation of the organisation and project including staff supervision, handover, emergency, health and safety procedures
- Have effective management that support the operation of the organisation, the project coordinator and project
- Ensure no undeclared conflict of interest exists

## **4.2 Accountability**

Organisations and projects are accountable for Links to Learning funding, achieving program outcomes and compliance with the Funding Agreement and Program Guidelines.

### **4.2.1 Monitoring**

Projects will be monitored annually as required.

Projects are required to maintain records to monitor attendance, progress and outcomes of young people. Data regarding key performance measures and indicators should be kept. Records should contain, at a minimum, information relating to referral, permission, registration, negotiated goals and project activities, planned transition and outcomes. This information is used in monitoring to illustrate how projects have developed and supported young people at risk to achieve identified outcomes.

Project reports are required at various stages throughout the year. Organisations and projects will be notified when reports and statements are due. This may include:

- Project Delivery Plan
- Project Progress Report
- Participant Data information (ongoing)
- Final Project Report
- Audited Financial Statement

Monitoring and reporting is essential to ensure that outcomes are being achieved. Templates for reporting will be available from Links to Learning.

### **4.2.2 Financial**

Organisations are required to comply with the Funding Agreement and maintain appropriate financial, operational records and registers required by the legislation relevant to the legal structure of the organisation.

## **4.3 Communication**

The Department of Education and Communities will communicate directly with the project coordinator for matters relating to project operation.

The Department of Education and Communities will communicate with the nominated organisation contact for funding, policy, legal or Recipient Created Tax Invoice matters. For any significant performance, funding or Funding Agreement breach, the Department of Education and Communities will liaise directly with the head of the organisation, Management Committee or Board of Directors.

## **4.4 Technical Requirements**

Reports and correspondence from the Department of Education and Communities to organisations and projects will be forwarded electronically. Organisations are required to ensure that projects are supported and have the following minimum technical specifications:

- Intel Pentium processor
- 128 mb of RAM
- Internet browser – Internet Explorer Version 7.0 or greater \*
- Internet and email access

\* Please use Internet Explorer as your browser as the Links to Learning database does not support Firefox or Safari.

## **4.5 Other Responsibilities**

#### **4.5.1 Double Funding**

Young people who are provided with similar development and support services from a community organisation receiving public funding may not participate in Links to Learning at the same time.

#### **4.5.2 Child Protection**

Organisations must comply with the provisions of the following Acts and their relevant amendments:

- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998;
- Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998; and
- Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998

The Department of Education and Communities has policies and procedures to ensure compliance with child protection legislation. Organisations are required to comply with child protection policies and procedures that apply.

It is mandatory for all preferred applicants seeking child-related employment to be checked by an approved NSW screening agency. Where a person has been the subject of a risk assessment and a risk rating of low, medium or higher has been communicated, the applicant is to be rejected for employment in the Links to Learning project.

#### **4.5.3 Privacy**

Organisations should ensure that young people involved in Links to Learning are advised that information is collected about them. They should also be advised of the purpose of this information, who may be granted access to that information and whether or not the information is required by law.

#### **4.5.4 Research**

Organisations are encouraged to participate in research projects and evaluations conducted as part of the program.

### **5 Department of Education and Communities Responsibilities**

The Department of Education and Communities will meet the terms and conditions as set out in the Funding Agreement.

#### **5.1 Project Support**

Links to Learning will provide support to organisations and projects as necessary to achieve stated outcomes for young people at risk. Links to Learning will carry out monitoring and evaluation, assess reports and measure performance.

#### **5.2 Regional Support**

The Department of Education and Communities will also provide additional direct support to schools, projects and organisations through its Regional Office Staff. Regional Staff will be able to advise on schools that would benefit from participating in Links to Learning, and would also liaise with school principals or school co-ordinators to support projects and organisations.

#### **5.3 Professional Development**

Links to Learning will provide the following professional development opportunities to enhance the capacity of projects and project coordinators:

- Online induction for new coordinators and annual meetings across regions
- Opportunity for projects to host and attend regular seminars with other Links to Learning projects within their Department of Education and Communities regional

area. Seminars will facilitate networking and knowledge sharing across a region and may include partner schools and other interagency youth networks or guests

#### **5.4 Links to Learning Website**

The Links to Learning Team operates the Links to Learning website. The website holds information for project coordinators including:

- Standard templates
- Program Guidelines
- Projects and project locations
- Online reporting tools
- Protocols document for schools
- General information
- Frequently asked questions
- Success stories
- Participant data
- Information Sheets

The URL for the Links to Learning website is: <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/>

#### **5.5 Links to Learning Contacts**

Links to Learning is managed by the Student Achievement and Community Partnerships Directorate of the Department of Education and Communities. Links to Learning contact details are:

Email: youthassist@det.nsw.edu.au  
Phone: 1800 009 129  
Fax: (02) 9266 8058  
Website: <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/>  
Mail: Locked Bag 53, DARLINGHURST NSW 1300  
Location: 1 Oxford Street, DARLINGHURST NSW 2010

## 6 Attachment A – Project Results Table

Outcome	Objective	Key performance measures	Performance target	Data
Through participating in Links to Learning, at risk young people have improved education, employment and life skills.	Connect	Number of individual young people connected with Links to Learning in a calendar year	90% of young people who are located and commenced fall within agreed targets	Number of individual young people who connect with Links to Learning in a calendar year
				Number and percentage from agreed negotiated target groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Number by age</li> <li>▪ Number of male and female</li> <li>▪ Number of young people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decent</li> <li>▪ Number of young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse</li> </ul>
			100% of young people connected through identified goals and agreed activities	Number and percentage of young people connected through identified goals and agreed activities
		Types of successful strategies used to connect young people at risk		Case studies that show examples of successful strategies used to connect at risk young people with Links to Learning
		Effectiveness and strength of referral networks and relationships		Case studies that illustrate the effectiveness and strength of referral networks and relationships
	Participate	Number of individual young people participate	100% of young people participate in negotiated activities	Number and percentage of young people participating in negotiated activities

		in negotiated activities	At least 75% of negotiated participant hours are attended	Number and percentage of negotiated participant hours attended
				Effective strategies to motivate and encourage attendance and participation
	Learn	Number of individual young people who have developed or improved their education, employment or life skills	100% of young people provided with activities that improve their learning	Number and percentage of young people provided with effective learning activities that improve their education, employment and life skills
			100% of young people have improved education, employment and life skills	Number and percentage of young people who have improved education, employment and life skills
			100% of young people attained a recognised qualification or record of achievement	Number and percentage of young people who attained a record of achievement or recognised qualification
				Number and type of recognised qualification or certificate attained in calendar year
		Young people are provided with activities that assist them in reaching their agreed negotiated goals		Case studies that illustrate how young people have used the education, employment and life skills learned through Links to Learning activities to assist them in reaching their goals
Plan	Each participant plans for their successful transition from Links to Learning into education, training or employment	90% of young people complete Links to Learning with a transition plan	Number and percentage of young people that develop a considered plan to transition from Links to Learning to education, training or employment	

			100% of plans are appropriate	Number and percentage of young people provided with information, options and referrals to develop a transition plan
				Number and percentage of young people develop planning skills
		Negotiated goals and steps to support successful transition	100% of plans are supported	Case studies that illustrate strategies used to encourage participants to plan for their transition into education, training or employment
	Transition	Number of participants successfully transition into planned education, training or employment	75% of young people transition successfully	Number and percentage of young people successfully transition from Links to Learning into planned education, training or employment
			100% of young people are supported during their transition process	Number and percentage of young people are supported during transition process
		Participants receive support after transition where needed and appropriate		Case studies that demonstrate how participants are supported after their transition from Links to Learning including referrals, monitoring and personal support.