

Tackling the NEETs problem

Supporting Local Authorities
in reducing young people not in
employment, education and training



The context

The number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) has risen by almost 2% year-on-year. New results for the second quarter of 2009 show that 24,000 more 16–24 olds were NEET compared to the same period last year. The figure now stands at 959,000.

Reducing the amount of 16–18 year old NEETs is the most popular national indicator among local authorities' Local Area Agreement targets. Despite this, the percentage of 16–18 year old NEETs rose from 10.6% last year to 11.9%. The picture is likely to get worse during the third quarter when the end of the school year traditionally sees a peak in the figures.

Arun Marsh, LocalGov.co.uk, 19 August 2009

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Contents

Acknowledgements	
Preface	
1 Introduction	1
2 Key Issues from conference proceedings	2
NEETs: Who are they?	2
Current responses 1: e2e and foundation learning	4
Current responses 2: EMA and activity agreements	4
Characteristics of effective provision	5
'From our experience' – participants' contributions	7
3 Research and development into action: three case studies	10
Barnardo's – second chances: re-engaging young people in education and training	10
College of North East London (CoNEL) – supporting the NEET strategy	11
Scotland – young people on the margins: in need of more choices and more chances	12
4 Research digest	14
How we can help	17

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Preface

Too many young people between the ages of 16 and 19 find themselves in the category which is usually referred to as NEET (not in employment, education or training). The figure of 10 per cent of the 16–19 cohort nationally is usually cited, but frequently a further six to seven per cent of young people are unaccounted for and, therefore, the figure might be as high as 17 to 20 per cent in some London boroughs. Recent research on young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) suggests that their number is increasing. Despite 10 years of policy attention and investment, the problems facing disadvantaged groups of young people have not been overcome. Research also suggests that those regarded as NEET comprise several groups, ranging from the most disadvantaged and disengaged to those who become NEET by virtue of dropping out of a course or losing a job. The differentiated nature of those regarded as NEET and the fact that their circumstances are often rooted in local factors requires local authorities and civil society organisations to develop locally sensitive and flexible strategies.

Research shows that disengagement at this age is disastrous in personal terms; causes problems in the community in the form of nuisance and crime; leads to long-term costs in increased criminality, welfare dependency, housing and a wide range of social and economic factors.

The research presented at a recent Institute of Education conference on this issue and presented in this LSN report, reinforces the understanding that the NEET problem is complex, rooted in a rich mix of social networking, alternative life-styles and shadow economic activities available in a locality and the increasingly complicated and hidden lives that young people lead. The range of issues associated with young people in the NEET category comprises low educational attainment, homelessness, gang membership, early criminalisation, drug culture and dependency, care needs, teenage pregnancy, prostitution and, in many or even most cases, multiple and overlapping disadvantage, for example, pregnancy, drug dependency and crime.

Combating this growing problem, which is likely to be exacerbated by the recession, requires thorough research into disengagement in a local area to tease out the particular demands of the locality. This will pave the way for an exploration of the capacity of the locale to respond through creative and targeted provision of individual information, advice and guidance, youth work, more practical and work-based learning, apprenticeships, literacy, ESOL, numeracy and employability programmes and other personalised projects.

The effects of the recession, however, may be dramatically changing the landscape and how we see the issue. An unemployment rate for 16–24 year olds of nearly 20 per cent prompted the Guardian (13 August 2009) to run the headline ‘The lost generation: surge in joblessness hits the young’.

During the last 10 years or so it has been possible to talk about a section of young people as being reluctant to engage in employment, education and training because, while there were never really enough jobs and apprenticeships for all those who wanted them, the state could make up for this with vocational provision and the private sector, particularly retailing and hospitality outlets, was offering a large number of opportunities for casualised and part-time work. The talk was primarily of disengagement, not of a Lost Generation. The latter term takes us back to the beginning of the New Labour administration and the New Deal.

Perhaps it is time to broaden our horizons on this issue. If we look at the wider age group of 16–24 year olds rather than just 16–18 year olds, the NEET issue begins to become much bigger and more differentiated still. While the hard core of NEETs will not disappear, in fact the recession will solidify this group, we should be talking much more about the young unemployed. This means that local and national strategies should not just focus on disengagement, but also on overcoming worklessness. Not to do so risks writing off another generation of young people.

The substance of this LSN report is drawn from the Institute of Education's Conference, *NEETs: what the research says*, held in July 2009, which pooled much of the available research on the issue of NEETs in a single event. Section 3 of this booklet summarizes the proceedings. The Conference clearly and consistently pointed out the multiplicity of factors that give rise to the decision or drift into disengagement post-14. It also spelled out the limitations of many standard institutional responses.



This report attempts to make the case for a more imaginative, supportive and personalised approach to the NEET problem. The report is timely in the light of the Transfer Funding changes, which increase local authorities' responsibility for the 14–19 phase, and because of the present economic situation. Unemployment will impact disproportionately on unskilled young people new to the labour market, although a wider range of young people will find themselves in the NEET category even after university. Poor trading conditions will also limit the capacity of employers to provide suitable training and apprenticeships. The disruption of employment opportunities and, for some young people, a descent into unskilled and unlicensed labour markets is likely to exacerbate the level of disengagement from the education and employability systems. This will require a robust local and regional response based upon evidence regarding the true nature and causes of the problem.

To inform national policy and support effective action LSN and IoE hope to continue examining how more effective responses can be developed to this challenging issue.

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1 Introduction

The Nuffield Review¹, together with the conference proceedings (NEETs: what the research says, Institute of Education, University of London) has played a crucial role in underpinning this report. In seeking to establish what was known about NEETs the Review concluded that this group was not well understood. In some respects it could be seen as a statistical residual. It exhibited a great deal of diversity, for example from those on a gap year to others on the margins of society. Arguably the definition should be expanded to encompass young people in jobs without training and those unemployed up to the age of 25 (which would currently bring much greater numbers given the impact of the recession).

The NEETs category was formally created in 1999, though the phenomenon had existed before this time. The numbers classified as NEETs had declined somewhat in recent years, perhaps in part as a result of Educational Maintenance Allowances. The effective raising of the 'leaving age' to 17 could also remove much of the cohort at the younger end.

The Nuffield Review established the *Engaging Youth* enquiry with Rathbone in 2007, which undertook workshops with young people in the NEETs group and those working with them. The enquiry sought to establish why it was so difficult to get these young people to stay in education and training; why they experienced difficulties in finding and keeping jobs; and why policy initiatives directed at this group have had such limited impact. It was clear there were no easy solutions. Fifty years ago the UK labour market absorbed large numbers of untrained and unqualified young people at the age of 16, but this was no longer possible. The lower skilled service economy jobs that have replaced manual work are unevenly distributed across the country – notably in the south-east – and in some areas (such as former mining communities) a culture of long-term worklessness has developed.

The enquiry indicated that the NEETs group was very heterogeneous. Most did not conform to the media stereotype of the work shy and feckless young person. Common factors were that they were likely to suffer from economic and social disadvantage; to have low levels of attainment; and to have been turned off by the education system, so that they typically saw themselves as failures. However the findings were surprising in three respects:

- The aspirations of those in the NEETs group were similar to those of other young people (albeit that their expectations of achieving these aspirations were lower)
- They did not see their 'failure' as a fault of the curriculum – this was ascribed much more to the authority structure in schools and the nature of their relationships with adults
- They wanted to find a job and for the most part do not want to go on to full time education – this clearly has implications for the raising of the participation age to 17.

¹ Pring, R., Hayward, G., Hodgson, A., Johnson, J., Keep, E., Oancea, A., Rees, G., Spours, K., Wilde, S. (2009) *The Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training: Final report Education for All: the Future of Education and Training for 14–19 year-olds* Routledge

Most young people who find themselves on the NEETs category have left school with no formal qualifications. However such qualifications are not necessary for a number of jobs at entry level, where employers are most interested in attracting candidates with the right attitudes and social skills. Evidence from the enquiry suggests that the young people are realistic about the kind of jobs they aspire to, but their lack of social skills still makes it difficult for them to be successful. They are also often excluded from the social networks that can help secure employment opportunities (for example if their parents are not working). Short-term training initiatives for this group frequently have an adverse impact, by raising the prospects of securing a job, which are subsequently not fulfilled.



Under the present machinery of government changes' responsibility for NEETs is about to revert to local authorities, who will commission services. It will be important to ensure 'intelligent commissioning' of provision, developed in consultation with those working closely with NEETs, rather than the 'blind' open tendering approach to commissioning provision that has typically taken place in recent years. Arguably NEETs should be seen as the priority group among young people, in that they constitute the biggest challenge, and the economic and social returns to successfully meeting their needs will prove greatest.

The following following themes were developed at the London Region Post-14 Network Conference, '*NEETs: what the research says*' held at the Institute of Education, London, on Monday 6 July 2009.

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2 Key issues from conference proceedings

NEETs: who are they?

The NFER analysis of Youth Cohort Study data² has categorised NEETs into three distinct groups in terms of their attitudes to education and future employment and the likelihood of their re-engaging. The groups are characterised as:

- **‘Open to learning’** (41%): typically these are young people who have made what have proven to be poor choices in terms of progression, have dropped out, but would be keen to take up a more suitable opportunity. Many have achieved Level 2 qualifications. They are typically more positive about their educational experiences and optimistic about future job prospects than the other NEET sub-groups.
- **‘Undecided’** (22%): these young people are unable to make up their minds about what they want to do, or are unable to access the type of provision they want to pursue in the area where they live. This group represented the smallest of the three categories. Typically they exhibit negative attitudes to school and the provision now available to them and often they appear to lack the resilience or skills to access suitable opportunities. Some 60% of this group in the Youth Cohort Study were still in the NEETs cohort after a year, compared with around 30% who had re-engaged in education or training, although many could be expected to find their way into jobs over time.
- **‘Sustained’** (38%): these young people could be regarded as having classic characteristics of young people who are NEET, including coming from deprived backgrounds, no recent history of employment; low educational attainment; and very negative experiences of school, including a record of truanting in many cases. Some 60% were still in the NEETs cohort after a year, although some may have short-term experience of jobs without training.

This NFER Youth Cohort Study analysis implies that a maximum of some 60% of those classified as NEETs would be likely to remain in this category for any length of time.

The study shows that the NEETs cohort is far from a homogeneous group. Most of the young people said they were keen to engage in some form of education or training (including many in the ‘sustained’ category), although often the type of provision they aspired to was not available to them.

Arguably one of the main policy challenges was to determine what could be done before the age of 16 to reduce the risk of these young people becoming disillusioned with the education system in the first place.

² Spielhofer, T., Benton, T., Evans, K., Featherstone, G., Golden, S., Nelson, J. and Smith, P. (2009). *Increasing participation: understanding young people who do not participate in education or training at 16 or 17*. NFER

Current responses: e2e and foundation learning

Non-attending at school remains a considerable issue. Regular absence can start from as early as age 12. Some are engaged in the informal economy, participating in gang culture, where they can earn large amounts of money gun running for drug dealers.

A number of education and training providers work with young people who have been chronically failed by the education system. A significant number of these participate in Entry to Employment (e2e) programmes, a number of whom have prior attainment little above Level 1. Most have negative attitudes to school, which has proved to be a deeply humiliating experience at a formative stage of their lives. They need different, innovative structures of schooling, such as studio schools or schools within schools, to make up for disadvantages suffered in their domestic lives.

Debate about provision for these young people frequently focuses too much on the content of courses when it needs to place more emphasis on the context. The Engaging Youth Enquiry pointed up the importance of the 'significant other' in helping re-engage people into education and training. This often came about through the voluntary sector rather than college provision, since the former tends to be smaller in scale and often more flexible. The key to success with disengaged youngsters often lies in finding alternative structures that can allow more individual approaches.

One of the assumptions underlying e2e, which was launched in 2003, has been that a relatively short programme of life and social skills could enable young people to progress into the labour market. The reality for many of those on the programme is that it represents a place of relative safety, where they can readjust and start to sort out their lives. However this provokes tension with the prevailing Learning and Skills Council (LSC) performance management system, with its emphasis on quick outcomes.

However, the new 14–19 approach to Foundation Learning will also introduce a largely performance-driven, qualifications based process to encourage progression among those leaving school without formal qualifications. There are likely to be real issues in reconciling this approach with the need to provide opportunities for young people to readjust their lives. There is a risk of locking young people into qualifications that have little value in terms of direct access to the labour market, and are regarded mainly as providing progression to other training or learning opportunities.

If the transfer of responsibility for the NEETs group to local authorities is to have a positive impact, it will need to bring about a much greater integration of systems and structures to support and engage these vulnerable young people.

Current responses: EMA and activity agreements

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has had a very poor press recently with funding for EMAs being delivered far too late and as a result of delays in making EMA payments there have been corresponding significant levels of dropout. The rules on attendance and entitlement to EMA are seen as too strict, and EMA forms are complicated to fill in. Furthermore many young people have experienced difficulties in opening bank accounts, which are needed to receive EMA (for example because of the requirement to provide ID). Specifically in London young people on e2e have found themselves ineligible for free Oyster cards because they are not on full-time programmes.

Beyond the EMA knowledge about access to hardship funds varies widely within the system whilst the motivations of families often militate against participation in education and learning, because they are keen for young people to be in a job. Young people perceive a clear disparity between employer-based and programme-based provision because of the wages payable to those on the former.

The Activity Agreement pilots started in 2006 and are operating in eight areas of the country. They are aimed at 'longer-term' NEETs, who have remained within this category for more than 20 weeks. The basic approach is to provide young people with small financial incentives to participate in activities designed to encourage them to progress towards taking up a suitable employment or learning programme. Some 10,900 young people have been involved in the programme in the first two years, which is estimated to represent between 20% and 45% of the total cohort of 'long term' NEETs. The original two-year pilot has now been extended to April 2010.

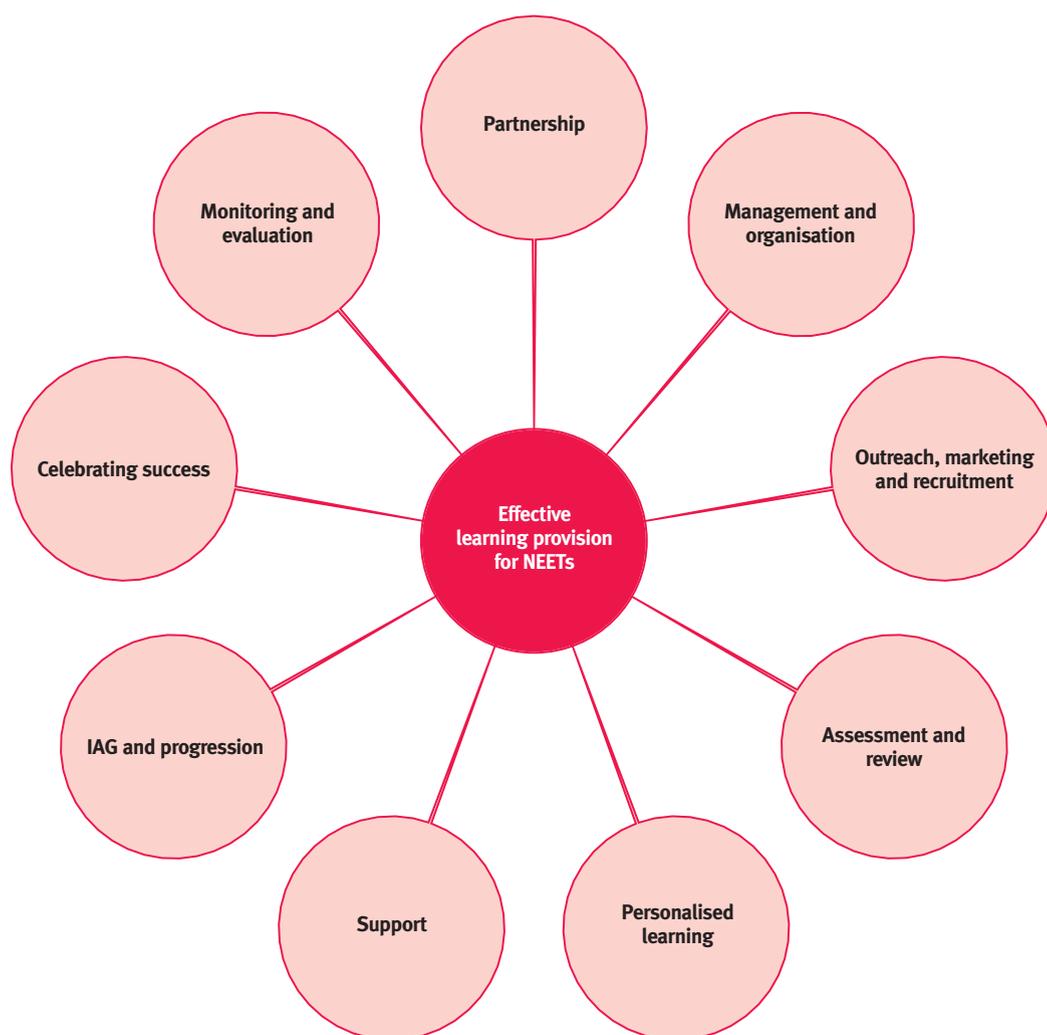
Evaluation of the pilots has examined three aspects of the programme – take-up and engagement; activities; and outcomes. In overall terms this evaluation suggests a modest improvement (of 13 percentage points) in the number of young people positively influenced. However the impact on those who have been affected, in terms of attitudes to jobs and learning and increased skills and confidence, is in most cases very significant. There is some distinction in the nature of the impact, in that those with higher prior attainment are more likely to move into work-based training opportunities, whereas lower attainers typically re-engage via learning towards a qualification.

The allowance itself (around £20–£30 per week) is important in attracting participants at the outset, and often compensates for the loss of EMA. However, as young people become involved in the programme it is the activities that are the key to their continued participation. Having skilled and motivating advisers, who are engaged in 1-to-1 relationships with participants, can also be critical in maintaining their commitment. Case studies demonstrate evidence of progression within the programme, although this is not always along defined pathways or following a regular pattern. The evidence suggests that it is essential to retain flexibility in a programme of this nature. In particular, the most vulnerable young people normally need to progress by means of very small steps, certainly at the outset; and the emphasis has to be on activities that can build their confidence, accompanied by intensive support.

The extent to which Activity Agreements could be seen as representing good value for money would depend on how this was measured. Certainly they represented a good investment compared with the costs of long-term inactivity (and, possibly, the costs of crime or social deprivation). It is unclear at this stage whether the programme will be extended beyond the pilot stage.

Characteristics of effective provision

Recent work in colleges in inner London boroughs sought to identify commonalities in practice between examples of effective provision. In total, nine key elements emerged that characterised the best types of provision, although not all are present in every case.



Model taken from Conference presentation 'Towards Zero NEETs: A model for effective flexible college provision' Chris Heaume, Chief Executive, Bally Sappal, AAP Project Manager, and Julie Conalty, Consultant, Central London Connexions

The four most critical elements are considered to be:

- **Partnership arrangements:** these are seen as essential, for example to ensure breadth of provision, to help individual providers improve, and in commissioning provision. It is also important to have the right people involved, including a proper balance between those at strategic and operational levels (rather than, as can happen, too many of the former). Employers and representatives of young people themselves often act as key partners. Simply having a partnership is not enough; its activities need to be properly evaluated so that it can continue to develop a coherent local strategy.
- **Effective management and organisation:** best practice occurs when the whole of the college management structure had been engaged in NEETs developments, so that this type of provision is planned and funded as an integral part of the curriculum. The main threat to this often came from lack of sufficient funding. Colleges were looking to the new Foundation Learning Tier to provide more secure and continuous funding for NEETs provision, although in most cases they would probably still need to look to 'add-on' sources to supplement resources. Continuous workforce development to support the delivery of NEETs provision also constitutes an important element of effective management.

- **Personalised learning:** the best provision has to be flexible and responsive to individual needs, often involving non-formal learning in the first instance. This is reflected in the design of suitable provision, which should aim to front-load those elements most likely to support retention, peer group development and engagement. One example quoted was a 'skills challenge' course, with three separate points of entry throughout the year and scope for fast-tracking those capable of moving into more mainstream provision.
- **IAG and progression routes:** courses need to have clear destinations that are meaningful to participants, which will normally involve progression to Level 2 or beyond in vocational and functional skills, including elements of personal and social development skills. Progression is best seen in the context of the partnership as a whole rather than the individual institution. Rapid follow-up of those who drop out (for example by notifying details to Connexions) can be crucial in securing their early re-engagement.

The remaining five elements identified through the study are: outreach, marketing and recruitment; assessment and review; student support; celebrating success; and monitoring and evaluation.

'From our experience' – participants' contributions

The following observations were made by conference participants. They are not presented in any particular order but are crucial observations to note by those supporting all colleagues working to reduce the number of young people classified as NEET.

NEETs: who are they? How do we reach them?

- Some young people identify negative attitudes towards school going right back to their time in primary schools
- Some of those classified as NEETs are undoubtedly engaged in jobs in the shadow economy, often on the borders of legality
- Detached youth workers most often work with groups of young men. A different type of approach is probably needed to re-engage hard-to-reach younger women, who are less likely to be found on the streets
- Word of mouth often proves the best form of recruitment to NEET focused programmes

Schooling and the curriculum

- The authority structure in schools acts as a deterrent to many of those at risk of dropping out. The typical response is to place them in separate, detached groups, which in some cases can reinforce the sense of alienation
- Institutions frequently create unnecessary barriers by being too inflexible when there is scope to be more creative as a means of encouraging young people to re-engage, to resist a temptation to drop out, or to progress further
- Vocational learning provides opportunities for more active engagement between students and teachers
- There is often a 'knee-jerk' assertion that disengaged young people need a more vocational and practical curriculum. However the evidence to show that such a curriculum improves their prospects of direct access to the labour market is weak. Arguably people in this position are most in need of support systems that can increase their human and social capital

- Greater scope to tailor provision locally can help ensure it meets the needs of different groups. However this does not fit easily with the requirements of a highly centralised top-down curriculum and qualifications framework
- Support systems in schools for young people at risk of dropping out need to be thought through. The traditional model of a form teacher or tutor providing continuity and stability now appears to be less common
- The evidence of low or negative returns on ‘investment’ in vocational qualifications comes from a series of reports. Male apprentices in traditional occupational areas tend to do relatively well, but in most other cases the returns are poor
- Similarly, too much emphasis on vocational courses can deny young people the opportunity to pursue more traditional subjects, from which many can benefit
- ‘Taster’ courses have proved successful in encouraging course applications
- The type of provision that works best comprises short, sharp and imaginative programmes, building on young people’s interests and popular current themes (e.g. ‘Come dine with me’ and ‘Crime scene investigations’)

Socio-economic issues

- The impact of the recession could mean that we are currently seeking to engage young people in a system that has little immediate value in the current labour market
- Funding for Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) has too often arrived too late, and there have been delays in making EMA payments, both of which have led to significant levels of dropout
- The rules on attendance and entitlement to EMA are seen as too strict, and EMA forms are complicated to fill in
- Many young people have experienced difficulties in opening bank accounts, which are needed to receive EMA (for example because of the requirement to provide self identification)
- Colleges may need to provide support arrangements (e.g. Transport, breakfast clubs) to encourage participation, for which it is often difficult to secure adequate funding
- Young people on eze in London have found themselves ineligible for free Oyster cards because they are not on full-time programmes, which is seen as an anomaly
- Knowledge about access to hardship funds varies widely within the system
- The motivations of families often militate against participation in education and learning, because they are keen for young people to be in a job
- Young people perceive a clear disparity between employer-based and programme-based provision because of the wages payable to those on the former
- The introduction of a ‘passport’ to entitlements for those in need, carried forward between the ages of 16 and 18 (e.g. providing for free meals, free transport) could support young people
- A readily accessible website giving advice on common funding issues would be helpful (e.g. on the Choices website)
- Abolish EMA bonuses for course completion in order to increase the level of EMA payments (and perhaps encourage providers to pay bonuses for achievement of qualifications as an alternative)

- Given the massive costs that can arise from school exclusions (which often lead young people into a life of crime) it would be well worth investing in broadening mainstream provision in schools to accommodate such people. This could take the form of separate sub-groups of activities.

Machinery of government

- There could be scope for local authorities to exercise their new responsibilities along different lines from current arrangements. However, there is a danger that the combination of an essentially top-down performance management system and a centralised qualifications framework will inhibit this. It will be important to press for much greater local discretion if the new arrangements are to have a really positive impact
- It is anticipated that, while some local authorities will continue to commission provision in line with established programmes, others will adopt an approach more directly geared to meeting the needs of specific groups of young people, which is likely to encourage greater creativity at the local level



3 Research and development into action: three case studies

Barnardo's – Second Chances: re-engaging young people in education and training

The Barnardo's *Second Chances* research report focuses on re-engaging young people into education and training. This was based on research carried out by Barnardo's to uncover evidence of what works for, and matters to, young people using their services. The research involved questionnaires on reasons for dropout and interviews with both young people and service managers and workers.

The findings showed that most who had dropped out of education did not like school, which they found boring and irrelevant. They had wanted more help and encouragement from teachers. In many cases they had suffered from bullying. Disengagement was also associated with a range of other factors, such as ill health, pregnancy, unstable family backgrounds and poor social conditions. They faced significant barriers to re-engagement, including poor prior attainment, lack of self-confidence, unsupportive home and local infrastructure and in some cases personal difficulties such as mental health problems or other learning disabilities. The research had led Barnardo's to produce a series of recommendations aimed at improving provision for disengaged young people. These were summarised under three headings:

- **Enabling participation:** through greater emphasis on 1-to-1 support, outreach facilities, more flexible and informal learning programmes, as well as targeted support for those facing particular barriers (e.g. young mothers).
- **Alternative curriculum offers:** in particular more opportunities for vocational and work-based learning for 14–16 year-olds and an expansion in work-based learning opportunities, which can provide a more direct pathway into jobs.
- **Making the system deliver:** recognising that meeting the needs of these young people is likely to be more costly than mainstream provision; that 26 week entitlements will often be insufficient; that there should be more 'intelligent commissioning' of flexible provision with third sector providers; and that a rigid adherence to hard 'outcome' measures as a basis for performance management can be counterproductive.

A common set of values was evident in all services, underpinning their approach in helping young people to get back on track in learning:

- Flexibility – quick starts, open door enrolments, more time to complete courses, second chances
- Positive relationships – 1-to-1 support, small group work
- Belief – building on strengths and interests, persisting.

Jane Evans, Anne Pinney, Deborah Meyer – Barnardo's Research and Policy Unit

College of North East London (CoNEL) – supporting the NEET strategy

The College of North East London is a key member of the Haringey NEET Task Group set up by the Haringey Strategic Partnership. The group meet every three months and is responsible for the development and delivery of the Borough's NEET strategy. The strategy has been successful and currently 10.4% of the Borough's 16–18 year olds are NEET, a drop from 17% in 2007.

The college works closely with the local Connexions Service to provide courses target at the local NEET cohort. In December 2007 the college invited the entire NEET cohort to apply for courses starting in January 2009 i.e. Construction Craft, Music Technology, Fashion Design, Accounting, ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy.

The college works closely with connexions to deliver a 22 week e2e provision in construction targeted at local NEET young people. The programme has been very successful and a high percentage of participants progress to apprenticeships, college course or jobs.

To support the local NEET strategy the college has developed very good data strategy relations with the local Connexions Service. CoNEL provides the local Connexions Service with contact information about all 16–18 learners who leave the college during the academic year on a monthly basis.

Re-engaging young learners

The chief reasons for 16–18 year olds NEET are often given as poor relationships with institutions in general (schools) or their ages (teachers); the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum or social problems, for example: SEN, personal difficulties and bullying.

The proportion of 16-18 year olds who are NEETs has remained broadly level over the last decade, although there are signs of a downward trend. Data produced by Connexions partnership as far back as November 2003 showed a 3% reduction in the proportion of NEET 16–18 year olds, with an 8% reduction in the areas where partnerships had been established the longest. A challenging target to reduce the proportion of NEET 16–18 year olds by two percentage points between 2004 and 2010 is well underway.

The NEET classification is defined by targets laid out by the DfES in the central government *Transforming Youth Work* document published in 2000. The classification is specifically redefined in other local government papers, such as 'respondents who were out of work or looking for a job, looking after children or family members, on unpaid holiday or travelling, sick or disabled, doing voluntary work or engage in another, unspecified, activity'.

DCSF has announced that the proportion of 16–18 year olds in education and training has risen to 78.7%, the highest rate ever, but the proportion of young people participating in work based learning has only 'stabilised' at 6.8%, having steadily fallen from 11.3% since 1994. The proportion of young people aged 16, 17 and 18 in the NEET group has fallen significantly at all three ages. Ministers say that they are determined to reduce the NEET figures further with, for example, a major expansion of Apprenticeships and the use of Flexible New Deal to support NEET 18 year olds into employment.

As of 2004, 7.7% of the age group was classified as NEET. The first large-scale study of the phenomenon, *The Cost of Exclusion*, estimates that up to a million young people cost the UK economy £3.65 billion per year.

Re-engagement with learning

Five ingredients for conquering NEET-ness and achieving success are:

- A quality educational experience
- Employment
- A culture of aspiration
- Community
- Parenting

It is no coincidence that these themes are closely aligned to pre-requisites for re-engaging young people in the process of learning and represent the key quality interventions necessary to combat the wasted lives and untapped potential that so concerns those of us involved with learning and teaching, personalisation of the curriculum and education in general.

Ian Duckett

14–19 Development Adviser, LSN

Scotland – young people on the margins: in need of more choices and more chances

We're not names to the Government, we're just numbers, just statistics.

The term 'NEET' has been less used in Scotland than in England and Wales, since it is seen as having negative connotations. Instead those in this situation have been described as 'young people in need of more choices and more chances'. *Learning and Teaching Scotland* is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) charged with researching the experiences of what are called in England NEETs whilst at school and during the transition from school. The research also explored their aspirations, the barriers they had faced and the support they had received.

The methodological approach adopted for this research was different from that in many studies of the NEET group, in that it sought to gain a deeper understanding of their attitudes and aspirations. To achieve this it used material objects (such as story boards, videos and collages) to encourage the young people to think through and articulate their experiences.

The findings from the research are broadly consistent with those of other similar studies in the UK. Traditional categories into which NEETs are often divided have little use for the purposes of policy development. Although it is tempting to identify sub-groups (for example, drug users, young parents) the studies revealed significant differences in attitudes and experiences within these groups. Many of those involved in the study had been excluded from school. The statistical evidence suggests that school exclusion policies and practices appear to have a significant impact on the level of NEETs. There are marked differences in rates of exclusion both within and between education authorities; however there appears to be a clear correlation between high rates of exclusion and NEET 'hotspots'. Being excluded from school, often on multiple occasions, was a common experience of many (11/19) of the young people in the study. Exclusion often to a vacuum (In Scotland 85% of temporary exclusions and 25% of cases of removal from register are not supported by alternative provision). The five authorities with the highest rates of exclusion per 100 pupils were among the seven identified NEET hotspots. Arguably more can and should be done by local authorities to reduce rates of exclusion where these are high.

Only about 10% of those in the study came from stable family backgrounds. Those who did not have the benefits of a stable background needed something more akin to the family learning unit to provide a basis for effective engagement, but teacher-pupil ratios in schools were much too high to provide this. Young people from such backgrounds were likely to benefit most from smaller groups with caring and committed support workers.

The research had also confirmed the myth of low aspirations among those in the NEETs category. These young people tended to have the same aspirations as most of their peers:

- A steady job
- A stable relationship – possibly including children
- A car
- A home of their own

The difference was that they were likely to have lower expectations, reflecting the reality of their situations.

Ian Finlay

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4 Research digest

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LSN and the Institute of Education NEETs Support service

Expert help in planning your NEETs provision

LSN, in partnership with the Institute of Education, are offering a comprehensive package of support to Local Authorities in meeting the legal obligation to provide for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Benefits

Fulfil the legal requirements

Our support will enable your local authority to plan and implement a coherent, strategic approach to fulfilling the 14-19 entitlement and your obligations to provide for the raising of the participation age to 17 by 2013.

Improve the NEETs scenario in your area

Developing a preventive strategy (as opposed to fire fighting) will reduce the number of young people who are NEET in your area and, accordingly, the long-term burden on your local authority's resources. This needs to include appropriate focus in your 14-19 information, advice and guidance (IAG) strategy.

Enhance your NEETs processes

Co-ordinating resources maximises the efficiency and effectiveness of your NEETs planning and processes and supports the development of a competent workforce.

How it works

Our specialists provide support with:

- situation mapping
- developing your vision and objectives
- analysing your current provision for any gaps
- planning and implementation of your NEETs provision
- meeting your staff development obligations

We'll work with you to establish your requirements and we structure our support into three phases:

- research into the NEETs profile in your local authority
- developing the strategy for inclusivity across your local authority
- focused staff development and research into the NEETs provision required within your local authority

**For further information on this product
or to discuss a custom solution for your organisation,
please email products@lsnlearning.org.uk or call us on +44 (0)20 7492 5000**

Too many young people between the ages of 16 and 19 find themselves in the category which is usually referred to as NEET (not in employment, education or training). Recent research on young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) suggests that their number is increasing. Despite 10 years of policy attention and investment, the problems facing disadvantaged groups of young people have not been overcome. Disengagement at this age is disastrous in personal terms; causes problems in the community in the form of nuisance and crime; leads to long-term costs in increased criminality, welfare dependency, housing and a wide range of social and economic factors.

The research presented at a recent Institute of Education conference on this issue and presented in this LSN report, reinforces the understanding that the NEET problem is complex. As a consequence, LSN and IoE have pooled their expertise to offer support services to Local Authorities in their efforts to tackle the problem at a local level.

Making learning work for:

- Further education & higher education
- Local authorities & schools
- Public services
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