



Title: Against the Odds: Re-engaging Young People in Education, Employment or Training

Authors: Audit Commission

Date published: July 2010

Funding body: Audit Commission

Document available to download at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/againsttheodds/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed September 2011)

SCS topic headings: Safety of Vulnerable Groups; Partnership Working; Evaluation and Monitoring

This document is a REVIEW of approaches that suggest effective interventions.

Summary of the intervention's aim

This report focuses on how councils and their partners can use limited resources to help young people who may be a cost to society to become contributors to it instead. Research for this study was carried out between September 2009 and February 2010.

Government policy affecting young people NEET comes from three different departments: Department for Education, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Department for Work and Pensions. Responsibility for young people NEET changes at the age of 18, with an overlap until age 19.

Support for young people NEET will be under pressure over the next few years. Councils and their partners must ensure they get value for money by concentrating on targeted and preventive interventions.

This report uses the term 'not in education, employment and training' as it is widely recognised and understood by councils and their partners. NEET is the abbreviation used in national indicators and statistics. The term can imply some stigma and it artificially separates people under 19 who are 'NEET' from older young people who are 'unemployed'.

Outcomes

From 2013, under current legislation, young people up to the age of 17 must participate in one of three ways:

- in education
- in training
- in employment with training.

From 2015, this 'participation age' rises to 18 (See Ref. 5 in Appendix 3 for full details). There are four learning pathways:

- GCSEs and A levels
- diplomas
- apprenticeships
- Level 1 and entry-level foundation learning.

Local 14-19 partnerships are responsible for ensuring the four pathways are open from 2013 and that areas prepare to raise the participation age.

Young people who are NEET are likely to feel bored and isolated. They have more chance of long-term unemployment, ill health and criminality than their peers (Bynner and Parsons (2002) see the report's Appendix 3 for a full reference, i.e. Ref. 1). When they do get work, they are more likely to be in low-paid jobs.

Common success factors in getting young people into work or learning are:

- using local information about young people NEET to design responses appropriate to their circumstances;
- targeted pre-16 support for those at risk of becoming NEET; and
- post-16 interventions tailored to individuals.

When overall NEET levels fall, the long-term NEET group become more obvious. Interventions for this group must be flexible, delivered over a longer time, and tailored to young people's individual circumstances. [At the same time] areas should ensure that resources are targeted in response to changing circumstances so that the long-term NEET group can contribute to the economy, rather than becoming a cost to it.

Schools have an important role in preventing future young people becoming NEET. This can start early by using the primary school curriculum to raise the aspirations of young people. Work with children's services to tackle bullying, truancy and exclusions can stop disengagement with school.

Schools should also collaborate to support young people moving from primary to secondary school and those leaving school at 16. Schools and local employers have an important role in ensuring young people and their parents and carers are aware of education and training opportunities.

From April 2010, councils take responsibility for commissioning 16-19 education from the former Learning and Skills Council (level 1 qualifications are equivalent to five GCSEs, grade D-G). This change is a considered opportunity to remove waste and

duplication, to involve schools and academies in partnership and to tailor provision to meet local circumstances. Better links with council economic development and regeneration teams can bring benefits such as:

- up-to-date information on the local labour market;
- extra sources of funding; and
- more local employment opportunities for young people.

Better targeting and collaboration can reduce lifetime cost and increase wellbeing

Early prevention through low-cost interventions can bring large savings. £4,000 of short-term support to a teenage mother can be repaid twenty times over through net lifetime tax contributions. The same successful intervention can reduce public service costs by nearly £200,000 over a lifetime.

Connexions services, schools and colleges, Jobcentre Plus and other youth support services do not collaborate effectively. (See p.10 of the report for a synopsis of Connexions services. The Connexions service (overseen by the Department for Education) works with young people to the age of 19. Jobcentre Plus (an executive agency of DWP) starts working with unemployed young people at the age of 18. Statement correct at time of publication, 2010.) The result can be duplication, wasted effort and wasted money. The extent of this potential waste will vary locally.

The local public sector can take a lead by promoting apprenticeships for young people NEET and encouraging other employers to do so. Councils and other bodies can add training requirements to works and service contracts.

Through their strategic commissioning role, councils and their local partners should:

- use their new responsibilities for commissioning 16-19 education to review and redesign services to achieve further reductions in NEET levels and reduce waste and duplication
- make their response to the circumstances of the most sustained NEET groups a core part of the local 14-19 strategy and funding plans, commissioning individually tailored packages of support where required
- use the local economic assessment to strengthen links between economic development, regeneration and Connexions services in increasing employment and apprenticeship opportunities for young people
- use evaluations of projects for young people NEET to focus on what works and to target services more effectively
- ensure Connexions, schools and colleges, Jobcentre Plus and other youth support services all work together to reduce duplication and save money
- develop a smooth transition from Connexions to adult employment services

- work with academies and local authority-maintained schools, to report on, and improve effectiveness in, supporting young people to make successful transitions at age 16
- take the lead in encouraging the local creation of apprenticeships and raising the demand for young people in the workforce.

Local authority-maintained schools, and academies, can:

- use the primary school curriculum to raise the aspirations of young people and prepare them for future learning and employment
- work together to support young people to make the transition from primary to secondary school
- work with children’s services to reduce bullying, truancy and exclusions that can lead to young people becoming NEET
- work with parents and carers to raise their aspirations and support them in helping their children make decisions about work and learning
- work closely with Connexions to reduce duplication and to support pupils’ transitions to further education, employment or training at age 16.

Following the report’s publication, the Audit Commission have provided a range of supplementary and supporting documentation. These have not been reviewed as part of this SCSN Effective Intervention Review, but are listed here to highlight their availability and purpose.

School and College Briefing Documents

The Briefing for Schools highlights schools’ key roles in preventing young people becoming NEET and ensuring they make successful transitions from primary to secondary school and then on to further learning, work, and training.

The Briefing for Colleges highlights the key role further education colleges, sixth form colleges and school sixth forms play in helping young people make successful transitions from secondary school to post-16 learning or training, preventing young people becoming NEET and ensuring young people who are NEET can re-engage in learning. The messages in this briefing are also relevant to other post-16 learning or training providers such as third sector organisations and independent training providers.

Both briefings include local case-study examples and a set of self-assessment questions that can be used to assess and improve a school’s or college’s performance in preventing young people becoming NEET.

Changes in NEET distribution over time

Since the launch of our report on 7 July 2010 the Department for Education has released updated NEET figures for 2009. We have produced a [series of maps](#) detailing changes in the proportion and numbers of young people not in employment education and training 2007 and 2009.

A guide for councils' overview and scrutiny function

The downloadable scrutiny guide is for members of scrutiny committees or panels and the officers who support them. It provides the framework for a scrutiny review of action taken to reduce the number of teenagers not in education, employment or training.

Benchmarking your council's performance for young people most at risk of being not in education, employment or training

You can use our downloadable benchmarking graphs to benchmark your own performance and highlight areas for improvement. The charts in this document show performance in fieldwork areas for groups of young people most at risk of becoming NEET. Each graph shows the percentage of young people who spend time out of education, employment or training in the two years after they leave secondary education at 16. Performance varies across the areas visited, with areas performing differently depending on the at-risk group.

Technical paper: creating a predictive model of the characteristics of young people not in education, employment or training

Our technical paper explains the methodology used to quantify the relationship between the characteristics of young people and their risk of being not in education, employment or training for six months or more. The results of this analysis are referred to in the main report.

Targeted Briefings

Targeted briefings for practitioners are available on:

- young offenders;
- teenage parents;
- young people with special educational needs;
- young carers; and
- care leavers.

Summary of evaluation conclusions

Young people become NEET for different reasons. Councils must understand the nature of their local NEET population and respond appropriately. Councils and their partners can make a difference to NEET levels – even in areas of economic decline. Action to reduce NEET levels often means little or no extra cost. Councils need to understand the nature of their local NEET cohort and tailor their response suitably. Better use of existing information and improved project evaluation is essential to give councils the evidence needed to make tough decisions. Local 14-19 strategic partnerships should use their combined information sources.

No single local organisation can reduce NEET levels. The costs of young people NEET fall, in the short and long term, on many different services. Collaboration among agencies can ensure that scarce resources are used effectively and more young people are supported. Local collaboration is also necessary to ensure that successful reductions in NEET levels will follow through to reductions in 18-24 unemployment. The transfer of 16-19 funding to councils brings opportunities to improve outcomes for young people, and save money through better use of information and planning for all agencies to make the most appropriate contribution.

With reductions in government grants and less ring-fencing, councils need to think about how low-cost interventions at age 16-19 can bring large savings in the medium and long term. Financial payback from some interventions is visible at the age of 25 through reduced public finance costs. Payback for most interventions is in the medium term, when young people have been in employment for longer and made tax and national insurance contributions.

Schools play an important role in preventing the problems that can lead to young people becoming NEET, working with families to raise aspirations and giving young people the skills needed in the local labour market. Plans to diversify school provision should cater for young people at risk of becoming NEET.

The Audit Commission intends to produce guidance and tools to help councils and their partners improve and work with the Department for Education to help Connexions services improve their use of data.

How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions

The research had six main elements, utilising a mixed-methods approach with both qualitative and quantitative data sources:

1. A literature review of what works in reducing NEET levels, combined with analysis of government policy on NEETs.
2. Analysis of local Connexions data from 11 councils.
3. Documentary analysis, interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups with Connexions personal advisers in ten councils. Ten English councils were selected on their current NEET level, previous performance in reducing NEET levels and areas of the country. In addition, Dorset County Council sent data for analysis and Cambridgeshire County Council piloted the interview schedules.
4. Frontline Consultants mapped sources of funding available for working with young people NEET nationally and locally in six fieldwork areas.

5. 'Shared Intelligence' conducted two focus groups with representatives from the voluntary and community sector running projects for young people NEET. Four focus groups were also held with public and private sector employers.
6. The University of York updated earlier research on the lifetime costs of being NEET, and developed costed case studies representing young people from across the NEET cohort.

The research team had an external advisory panel consisting of 18 members. Their professional contributions ranged from backgrounds in national and local government, independent organisations, and universities.

Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request. Please contact info@scsn.org.uk

Date added to the SCS website: September 2011 (DH)