

Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: A review

**Naomi Haywood, Sharon Walker,
Gill O'Toole, Chris Hewitson,
Ellen Pugh and Preethi Sundaram**

Learning and Skills Network (LSN) and Skill:
National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: A review

Naomi Haywood, Sharon Walker, Gill O'Toole, Chris Hewitson,
Ellen Pugh and Preethi Sundaram



© Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009

First published Spring 2009

ISBN 978 1 84206 140 4

Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series
The Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report Series publishes research carried out for the Commission by commissioned researchers

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Commission. The Commission is publishing the report as a contribution to discussion and debate.

Please contact the Research Team for further information about other Commission research reports, or visit our website:

Research Team
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Arndale House
The Arndale Centre
Manchester
M4 3AQ

Email: research@equalityhumanrights.com

Telephone: 0161 829 8500

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

You can download a copy of this report as a PDF from our website:
www.equalityhumanrights.com/researchreports

If you require this publication in an alternative format, please contact the Communications Team to discuss your needs at:
communications@equalityhumanrights.com

Contents

Glossary	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Executive summary	iii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	4
1.2 Aims of the project	4
1.3 Report structure	43
2. Methodology, sources and evidence gaps	4
2.1 Literature review	4
2.2 Stakeholder interviews.....	4
2.3 Sources and evidence gaps	4
3. Policy background	6
3.1 Every Child Matters and The Children’s Plan	6
3.2 14–19 Diplomas	7
3.1 Aimhigher	7
3.2 Education and Skills Act 2008	8
4. What prevents young people from engaging in learning?	10
4.1 Gradual disengagement	10
4.2 Personal factors.....	11
4.3 Institutional barriers	17
4.4 Situational barriers.....	29
4.5 Summary	32
5. Improving engagement in learning after 16	33
5.1 Better communication and focus on achievements.....	33
5.2 Policy-related enablers	34
5.3 Institutional enablers.....	35
5.4 Situational enablers	46
5.5 Summary	50
6. Conclusions and implications	52
6.1 Barriers to engaging in learning	52
6.2 Engaging all young people in learning	55

Appendices	599
Appendix 1 Literature review	599
Appendix 2 Stakeholder interviews.....	6161
Appendix 3 Stakeholder interview topic guide	6363
Appendix 4 Statistical information.....	6565
References	6868
Endnotes	78

Glossary

ABC1	Combination of socio-economic groups A, B and C1 (proxy for middle class)
C2DE	Combination of socio-economic groups C2 and DE (proxy for working class)
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
FE	Further education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher education
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSN	Learning and Skills Network
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
Skill	Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
WBL	Work-based learning
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Acknowledgements

LSN and Skill would like to thank Susan Botcherby, Anne Madden and Louise Johansson at the Equality and Human Rights Commission for her help and advice in shaping this report. Special thanks also goes to the following organisations who took part in the stakeholder interviews:

- Refugee Council
- 11 Million (the Children's Commissioner for England)
- Young Women's Christian Association
- Learning and Skills Council
- Rathbone
- Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
- Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills
- Barnardo's
- Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgendered Voluntary and Community Organisations
- Department for Children Schools and Families

Executive summary

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is committed to hearing ‘new voices’, especially those that are not always heard. In 2008, the Commission designed a project for ‘new young voices’ consisting of three new research studies, two young people’s debates and an adult specialist event. The Learning and Skills Network (LSN) were commissioned in November 2008 to undertake a review (including stakeholder interviews) to complement the other two research studies: a quantitative survey and a qualitative study with young people.

The research project is timely and is in response to the Education and Skills Act 2008, which outlines the Government’s aim to raise the leaving learning age to 18 by 2015. The aim of encouraging participation in learning is to ensure that all young people, especially the most vulnerable, will benefit from the opportunities provided by continuing in education and training.

This report is based on a review of relevant literature and a series of key stakeholder interviews that explore the barriers to engagement in learning and enablers for engaging all young people in meaningful learning post 16. The research analyses the factors that influence young people to remain engaged in or to disengage from learning. It seeks to inform policy and practice in the run up to 2015 to ensure that all young people are supported and provided with the opportunity to succeed in learning that is meaningful and relevant to them.

The methodology uncovered a wealth of information, including policy documents, grey literature from charities and campaign organisations, and published academic literature. Over 80 references (predominantly qualitative) were included in the final list.

The majority of the literature identified relates to engagement in learning for young people in general, with a growing body of evidence on young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This is the first review that includes evidence on all young people. It is important to understand how inequality affects engagement in learning. The review considers some evidence on young people from specific groups. This includes young people from ethnic minorities, disabled young people, refugees, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people, young mothers, NEET and young people from diverse religious and socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, and to complement gaps in the literature, relevant stakeholder evidence is considered.

Summary

The review suggests that young people face a range of personal, institutional and situational barriers to participating and remaining engaged in learning post 16. How they interact is complex. Some groups of young people, like those who are persistently NEET, are more likely to face multiple risks and barriers. Engagement is not a simple choice for all young people. Young people can feel disengaged from learning for various reasons, and this can be mild or severe. Some young people experience a gradual process of disengagement that becomes entrenched.

The primary personal barriers appear to be motivation to learn, developing an ingrained sense of failure, poor reading skills, unrealistic perceptions of futures and making a positive choice to follow an alternative route.

The primary institutional barriers appear to be insufficient funding on offer, irrelevant curriculum provision, over testing, insufficient English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, inadequate information advice and guidance, and bullying.

The primary situational barriers appear to be living in a deprived geo-demographic area, coming from a lower socio-economic group, and experiencing home or community cultures and values that conflict with those in schools.

Strategies aimed at re-engaging young people in learning are aimed at overcoming the barriers to learning. The literature indicates that institutional and situational barriers are easier to address than the personal factors, and therefore policy and institutional initiatives to engage young people in learning generally focus on these. Policy-related solutions include financing for learning, institutional solutions include flexibility in learning provision, and situational solutions include supportive families and teachers. At the heart of these solutions is the overriding need to communicate with young people, to listen to them and to value them as individuals. Equally, it is important to focus upon the achievements of young people and how they can make progress.

Barriers to remaining engaged in learning

Gradual disengagement

The literature indicates that young people's decisions to participate in learning after 16 are heavily influenced by their prior experience of education, and poor experiences are linked to lower participation rates. Engagement is not a simple choice for all young people. Young people can feel disengaged from learning for various reasons, and this can be mild or severe. It is suggested that severe

disengagement from learning is a cumulative process that starts in primary school and becomes more entrenched in secondary school. For some young people, this is a process that they feel powerless to stop. The concept of a 'moment of truth' is helpful, whereby young people arrive at the end of this process and the reality of their situation sinks in. However, disengagement at Key Stage 4 does not necessarily equate to disengagement post 16. Post-16 options could offer young people the chance to re-engage in education and training.

Personal barriers

The findings highlight four broad areas of concern, interpreted as personal barriers:

Motivational barriers

Findings show that motivation to learn is one of the most important personal factors influencing engagement. The importance of motivation in order for meaningful learning to occur is well documented in the literature. Distinctions are made between learners who are not motivated to learn and those who may be motivated but who have many factors working against them. Both result in the same outcome, namely, disengagement.

It is also important to note that young people's motivation for learning may change with time, depending on the re-evaluation of the costs and benefits of continuing in learning. For example, a young person may weigh up the immediate financial rewards associated with working against the longer-term financial rewards of continuing in education.

However, when considering motivational barriers, it has been recognised that young people are more comfortable about citing situational barriers as potential reasons for disengagement as these are perhaps easier to frame than more personal reasons such as motivation.

The positive choice to follow an alternative trajectory

The constant re-evaluation of the costs and benefits associated with learning may lead some young people to see the decision to leave learning as a positive choice to follow an alternative life trajectory. The main factors in young people choosing to follow a non-learning trajectory are money, or wanting to engage in employment sooner rather than later.

The ability to read

Findings show that the ability to read plays an important role in learners remaining engaged in learning. It was found that poor reading and writing scores normally

translate into low achievement during adolescence with a subsequent lack of motivation. Low ability in reading is identified as one of the key reasons for disengagement; some learners cited this as one of the key factors behind their experience of being bullied and becoming disengaged.

Young people's self-beliefs

The evidence suggests that young people can develop unrealistic aspirations fuelled by a focus on the lifestyle of celebrities, such as those portrayed in magazines and TV shows. The belief that becoming a celebrity is a realisable ambition can prevent young people from engaging in learning because they neglect to focus upon academic goals or developing life skills.

Some young people develop an ingrained sense of failure. This can be due to the emphasis schools place on academic achievement and measuring success by test results and levels of qualification. Findings show that this can result in feelings of anxiety and fear, which can be managed by dropping out of the education system. Jackson and Hudson (2009) indicate that fear of failure is palpable with a substantial minority – 37 per cent or approximately 1.2 million young people – worried about failing at school. Almost half (46 per cent) of C2DE ('working class') white girls fear failure, compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of ABC1 ('middle class') white boys.

Institutional barriers

These occur within large systems or organisations, such as establishments for learning, funding systems and asylum processes. These barriers may be divided into:

Funding

The inability to secure sufficient funding for learning is a significant barrier to young people seeking to continue in learning after 16 who do not have adequate financial resources. Young people who live in their own accommodation and young mothers have to contend with housing and childcare costs. The cost of travel to post-16 learning establishments can be prohibitive: there can be course fees to meet and equipment to buy.

A key area of concern is that funding arrangements are often inflexible, and can discriminate – albeit inadvertently – against certain groups such as refugees and asylum seekers, teenage mothers and those whose families have low incomes. The inflexibility of the funding system relates to funding not covering all courses, which means that young people may have to make a choice based on the availability of

funding, rather than aspiration. Young refugees and asylum seekers are not entitled to the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) designed to support young people aged 16–19 in low-income families as they participate in learning. Funding systems are also found to be complex, making it difficult for both learners and parents to understand and access their entitlements.

Curriculum and testing

The evidence indicates that content of the curriculum and the range of subjects/ courses on offer fail to adequately reflect the diversity of learners and their needs. The relevance of curriculum content is a factor in engagement in learning. There is evidence that some young people find the curriculum boring and irrelevant to their lives. For example, young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities may fail to see their culture and experiences valued and reflected in the curriculum. In addition, young LGBT people may not experience any positive representations of their identity.

There is evidence that the testing culture in schools impacts upon engagement in learning. Young people can become demotivated as a result of the emphasis on examination performance. Schools may perceive that some young people affect the overall examination results in a negative direction.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Some groups of learners whose second language is English may not get the support they require to participate and engage in learning. Without sufficient English language support, young people find it harder to demonstrate and develop other skills, such as mathematics. Without a translator or interpreter, the skills of these young people can be undervalued and underdeveloped.

Bullying

There is increasing awareness of how bullying at school can have a detrimental impact on young people's engagement with learning (DCSF, 2008b), and 'many young people' (Hayward et al, 2008, p 45) note bullying as a key feature in their disengagement from learning. Stone et al (2000) argue that educational disadvantage in the form of having been bullied is one key determinant, along with other factors, in young people becoming NEET. The literature indicates that bullying can affect any young person, but that some young people may be targeted more than others. According to Jackson and Hudson (2009), a significant minority of young people do not, or did, not feel physically (seven per cent or approaching a quarter of a million) or emotionally safe (five per cent or approximately 160,000) at school. Socio-economic status plays an important part in how safe a young person

feels about school. Those belonging to socio-economic groups ABC1 ('middle class') are more likely than young people from socio-economic groups C2DE ('working class') to feel both physically and emotionally safe at school. NEET young people and those who have a disability are considerably less likely than average to feel physically and emotionally safe. The literature also specifically notes the common occurrence of bullying of young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgendered (Ellis and High, 2004; Stonewall, 2009). Bullying has a direct negative impact for the young person, and influences their perceptions of schools and college, which may lead to disengagement from learning later in the young person's life.

Information, advice and guidance

It is evident that some young people do not receive the right information, advice and guidance (IAG) needed to make the right choices after 16, or when re-engaging in learning. Eight in 10 young people feel they have had enough information and advice to make the right choices about their future. However, two in 10 (18 per cent or approximately 700,000 young people in England) say they have not had enough information and advice, rising to 23 per cent of young people with a disability and a quarter of those from ethnic minorities. The majority of young people aged 14–18 have had a one-to-one interview with a careers or Connexions adviser at school, although a quarter have not (27 per cent or approximately 900,000) rising to almost four in 10 (37 per cent) of young people with a disability. Although some of this figure can be accounted for by 14 and 15 year olds who have yet to see an adviser, two in 10 (18 per cent) 16–18 year olds have not had a one-to-one interview with a careers or Connexions adviser (Jackson and Hudson, 2009). Careers advice and work experience placement opportunities have been subject to criticism, in that they can potentially constrain young people's options and aspirations if managed badly and stereotypically, according to the beliefs of those responsible. Barnardo's (2008) argue that a primary means of helping young people to re-engage with learning when they are ready is by providing young people with appropriate IAG when they ask for it.

Situational barriers

These are linked to the family and social circumstances of young people, such as living in areas where incomes are generally low. Findings show that situational barriers can be broadly described under the following headings:

Socially deprived geo-demographical area

There has been a long-standing concern by Government that young people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds have low rates of participation in Higher

Education. Young people from deprived neighbourhoods are less likely to develop ambitious and achievable aspirations, such as goals they set themselves for the future and their motivation to work towards these goals. This does not mean that all young people from these backgrounds have low aspirations.

Socio-economic class

The literature indicates that young people from lower socio-economic groups face increased barriers to participation and engagement in learning compared to those from higher socio-economic groups. Socio-economic status has a considerable impact upon how a young person feels about school and engagement. Those belonging to socio-economic group ABC1 ('middle class') are more likely than young people from socio-economic group C2DE ('working class') to feel both physically and emotionally safe at school, to find subjects relevant, to feel able to achieve their potential and to find it easy to learn, and are less likely to worry about failure. ABC1 white boys, in particular, show a higher level of confidence than any other white group. C2DE young people are much more likely than their ABC1 peers to worry about failure, believe they will always find it hard to find a job and will have to accept any job they can get. This indicates a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed (Jackson and Hudson, 2009). There are growing concerns about white working-class boys, who appear to have the lowest aspirations, are not showing improvements in educational attainment, and are most likely to leave school at 16 compared to boys and girls from other ethnic groups (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2008).

Cultural and family values

Some young people's home and community culture values may conflict with the culture and values of their school, affecting engagement in learning. The influence of cultural values on young people's engagement with learning may be particularly relevant for certain young people. For example, some young Gypsy and Muslim women can experience conflict between their aspirations, their family's wishes and school expectations, resulting in feelings of dislocation and anxiety.

What works in engaging all young people in learning?

Strategies for re-engaging young people in learning are aimed at overcoming the barriers to learning. The solutions to overcoming the barriers and other factors (that is, factors that may motivate young people to remain in or return to learning) can be grouped into policy-related solutions, institutional solutions and situational solutions.

Communication and a focus upon achievements

At the heart of all of these solutions is the overriding need to communicate with young people, to listen to them and to value them as individuals. This includes

developing trusting relationships with young people and ensuring they are actively involved in determining their future choices. While drawing attention to issues that prevent young people engaging with learning, it is also important to remember that the majority of young people enjoy their school experiences and want their schools and learning environments to be places that they are proud of. Although there remains a great deal of work to be done to ensure that all young people are reaching their potential, it is important to express those changes through a 'discourse of improvement' rather than one of crisis. This means focusing on the positive achievements that young people have already made and how they can progress, rather than focusing on the negative aspects of young people's past educational experiences.

Policy-related solutions

Financing learning

Adequate finance for engagement in learning post-16 is recognised as a powerful incentive. It seems that funding for vocationally-based courses and support for more informal pathways to learning are particularly important for learners who may otherwise disengage from learning. A consensus on the positive impact of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in supporting many young people to remain in learning is also noted, indicating that this form of funding has been effective in supporting young people from low-income backgrounds to remain engaged in learning post 16. However, it is important to ensure that eligible young people like refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to claim it and mechanisms for claims, along with other funding provision, are not too complex. In addition, it is important that young people and their parents are provided with sufficient and accessible information, advice and guidance about available funding and how to apply for it.

Activity Agreements

Activity Agreements are agreements made with young people who are NEET. The agreement involves three As: an allowance, adviser and activities. The allowance of £30 aims to grab the attention of young people NEET and get them involved initially. The adviser then supports young people to get involved in learning by identifying their particular needs, finding suitable activities and providing continued support. In return young people take part in activities involving personal development, skill development and work-related activities. This flexible and tailored approach to learning appears to be effective in engaging young people NEET in learning. It therefore seems that Activity Agreements could be used more widely to encourage others to remain in or re-enter education or training.

Institutional enablers

Early intervention

Severed disengagement from learning has been identified as a cumulative process that can start in primary school. This young age at which learners can begin to disengage indicates the need for early intervention during the primary school years. This is particularly important given that young people tend to form ideas about their future between the ages of 11 and 14.

Flexibility in learning provision

Improving flexibility in provision post 16 to attract new learners and encourage previously disengaged young people to re-engage is important. Flexible provision can include part-time, evening and weekend courses, and allowing young people to start courses, take some time out and rejoin the course when they are ready, without losing course credits. This kind of provision has proved valuable when supporting groups such as teenage mothers to re-engage.

Alternative curriculum/alternative provision

The importance of providing learning opportunities beyond formal schooling emerges from the review. It is recognised that the existing curriculum may not respond to all learners' needs, thus alienating individuals from learning. Alternative curriculum models, such as learning models that allow young people to learn on the job, are seen as positive in re-engaging young people who are disaffected and excluded from school. An emphasis on life skills or 'soft' skills is an important element of this provision because these they are essential for helping young people to enter employment and become independent in life.

Creating 'learning spaces', where young people are able to explore and develop their own learning styles and learning potential emerge as important in the review. They work well with diverse young people and provide space for them to consider different educational and personal opportunities and aspirations. For example, 'women-only learning spaces' may encourage young women to engage in learning.

Informal learning

'Informal learning' occurs beyond formal learning, for example, through leisure activities. This form of learning, with the opportunity for young people to gain qualifications, may increase young people's confidence to re-engage in learning. Youth clubs and centres providing leisure activities provide potential for helping young people to develop new skills.

Holistic approach to learning

It is important for different agencies working with young people, such as teachers, youth workers, and Connexions personal advisers to co-ordinate their activities so that young people do not experience fragmented provision and learning.

Linking learning to employment

Increased opportunities for work-based and practical learning may improve young people's engagement with more formal learning. The solution of creating pre-apprenticeships and bite-sized vocational qualifications was advocated by several stakeholders.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

The importance of providing young people with relevant and accessible IAG is identified. Accessible IAG is easy to comprehend for young people and their parents, and is tailored to local provision and the needs of the young person. This is particularly important during the transitional periods from primary to secondary school and between compulsory and post-compulsory education. Currently, provision during transitional periods is not sufficient. There is also a need to provide IAG to young people who are in informal learning, in order to encourage them to re-engage with learning. It is noted that the introduction of the September Guaranteeⁱ and the roll out of the National Apprenticeship Serviceⁱⁱ is a catalyst for the improvement of IAG. IAG could be more closely attuned to community needs, for example, by emphasising local post-16 provision and employment opportunities. It is important that young people from minority groups are given appropriate and un-stereotypical IAG that supports them to realise their potential, for example, promoting the inclusion of young ethnic minority people in higher education and supporting young disabled people to access work-based learning and apprenticeships.

Tackling bullying

The long-term impact of bullying has been described as a 'corrosive thread' running through the lives of young people. It is clear that bullying has a negative impact on the general wellbeing of young people who experience it and this affects learning and engagement. Spielhofer et al (2009) recommend that young people who are averse to education or training due to negative experiences at school need schools to implement more effective anti-bullying strategies. An increase in the drive towards tackling all forms of bullying in schools and college environments is supported by the review.

Situational enablers

Supportive family

The review suggests that strong bonds among family members, ‘bonding social capital’, can influence the aspirations of young people from lower socio-economic groups. Findings show that parents are a key influence in affecting their children’s aspirations. It is therefore important to include parents in the provision of IAG and to encourage them to support their children’s choices. Foster carers and support workers have a key role in providing appropriate support for young people leaving care. It is important that they are provided with adequate IAG.

Teachers

The influence of teachers in encouraging young people’s engagement in learning is important. It is suggested that this can sometimes have an even greater impact than that of parents and family. This indicates the importance of teachers’ ability to relate to and understand learners, and teachers taking the abilities and aspirations of all young people into account.

Role models

While a positive relationship between teachers and young people can be a strong catalyst, the importance of other adult and peer role models is also noted. Connexions workers and project workers who work on a one-to-one basis with young people providing support, advice, motivation and modelling a variety of skills (including soft skills, such as communication) are recognised as valuable.

Implications

The review and stakeholder interviews raise a number of critical issues for further consideration.

The evidence base on engagement in learning could be strengthened by new research. This would systematically identify where disengagement in learning occurs for young people and how it impacts more widely upon achievement. In addition, more systematic studies are required for those groups of young people who are known to suffer disadvantage and inequality in the labour market and have poor economic outcomes. The relationship between engagement at school and inequality of economic outcomes for a wide range of groups of young people requires further investigation.

Improving engagement of all young people in learning after 16 could be achieved by the following:

- Increasing strategies for listening to the needs and aspirations of young people for the future, in schools and home settings.
- Focusing upon the achievements of all young people and how they can make progress.
- Developing a flexible and tailored approach to engagement in learning post-16, that takes into account each individual young person's interests, needs and other important factors.
- The most significant area for policy review is finance for learning post 16, to deliver greater entitlement and flexibility.
- Flexibility of learning provision is key, especially for certain groups of young people who may need additional support, or cannot commit to full-time options for a range of reasons. Lessons from the flexibility offered in adult learning more generally can be drawn from in improving post-16 learning.
- Alternative and informal pathways can provide opportunities to ignite interest in learning and could be developed further. Consideration should be given to linking informal, alternative and formal pathways to provide a holistic approach to post-16 learning.
- Linking learning to employment is a key principle for improving engagement in learning post 16 and should be reviewed. Along with the development of Diplomas, this could include more practical learning, pre-apprenticeships and bite-sized vocational qualifications.
- More effective anti-bullying strategies in all learning environments would benefit all young people, and especially those young people who are averse to education or training due to negative experiences at school.
- Ensuring that young people do not experience a fragmented learning experience is critically related to providing young people with relevant and accessible information, advice and guidance (IAG). This is particularly important during the transitional periods from primary to secondary school and between compulsory and post-compulsory education. Increasing the engagement of parents/carers in IAG is recommended.
- Parents, teachers, support workers, youth workers and Connexions advisers are significant role models for young people, and the review suggests the requirement for greater guidance regarding how to support and inspire young people to engage in meaningful learning post 16.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The genuine and meaningful engagement of all young people in education is a requirement in order to reduce inequality and improve life chances. Young people are a heterogeneous group and their personal, social and economic circumstances differ widely. However, it is evident that young people who are poor, disabled, from ethnic minorities and teenage mothers are disproportionately likely to be 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) (Tunnard et al, 2008).

The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data for the year 2007/08 indicates that there are a total of 1,435,809 young people aged 14–25 in further education (FE). In addition, there are 549,565 young people aged 14–25 in work-based learning (WBL).

The largest proportion of learners in FE are aged 16 (39.5 per cent) and 17 (37.4 per cent). A smaller proportion is aged 18 (23 per cent). The proportions of male and female learners aged 16–18 are fairly equal across all types of education and training. The variations between males and females in the FE sector are minimal with 50.4 per cent females and 49.6 per cent males. WBL is represented by a slightly higher proportion of males (55.1 per cent) than females (44.9 per cent). The majority of the FE sector is categorised by the ethnic group White British (80.5 per cent).

There are 189,800 16–18 year olds that are NEET (2007): 36,100 are aged 16, 61,300 are aged 17 and 92,400 are aged 18. (See Appendix 4 for a detailed statistical breakdown.)

There are no 'typical' NEET young people; every young person is an individual with a unique set of characteristics and background factors.

DCLG (2008) suggest that the young people who are NEET at some point between the ages of 16–18 are likely to be in one of three categories:

- Core NEET – those experiencing entrenched barriers, including those who come from families where worklessness is the norm.
- Floating NEET – comprising young people who tend to have spells of being NEET in between further education courses or employment with no training. This group contributes to the issue of NEET churn (repeated failure and drop out from education/training/work back into NEET status).
- Transition/gap year NEET – young people who have often chosen to take time out before progressing onto further or higher education, and are likely to return to education, training or employment, but it is not always clear when this will occur.

In the most recent Government strategy document about NEET young people (DCSF, 2008), their group characteristics were described as follows:

- Getting older than before – around 50 per cent of the group are 18 compared to 40 per cent five years before.
- Gender gap is widening – at age 16, boys are twice as likely as girls to be NEET.
- A higher proportion of the girls are ‘inactive’ – that is not looking for work or learning (this description is used to include those who are mothers or carers).
- Thirty-nine per cent of those with no GCSEs are NEET at 16, compared with two per cent of those young people who achieved five or more A* results.
- Persistent absentees from school are seven times more likely to be NEET at the age of 16.
- Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are twice as likely to be NEET as those without.
- An estimated 20,000 teenage mothers are NEET.

In addition, a recent Equality and Human Rights Commission publication (2008) (discussing the introduction of the Education and Skills Act) suggests that the 16–18 NEET population includes 12 per cent Black Caribbean compared to eight per cent white and three per cent Indian young people.

Among all 16 year olds nationally, 11 per cent from the lowest social class groups, 13 per cent with a disability, 22 per cent excluded from school, 32 per cent of persistent truants and 74 per cent of teenage mothers are NEET.

The question of how to engage all young people in meaningful learning becomes more urgent with the implementation of the 2008 Education and Skills Act. This act is a landmark piece of legislation and specifies that from 2013, young people will remain in education or training until they are 18 years old. The main responsibility for participating in education or training will rest with the young person, with a duty to participate. Young people will be required to work towards accredited qualifications at school, in a college or in ‘on-the-job’ training or day release.

1.2 Aims of the project

The Commission is committed to hearing ‘new voices’, especially those that are not always heard. In 2008, the Commission designed a project for ‘new young voices’ consisting of three new research studies, two young people’s debates and an adult specialist event. LSN were commissioned in November 2008 to undertake a review (including stakeholder interviews) to complement the other two research studies: a quantitative survey and qualitative study with young people.

The review aims to understand more about the barriers, costs, benefits and risks involved in order to establish how young people engage or disengage.

The aims of this project are to consider:

- What barriers exist to participation and engagement in learning after 16.
- How young people talk and think about costs, benefits, returns and risks in making decisions about participating in learning after 16.
- The extent to which young people are able to discuss and negotiate their educational experiences, needs and aspirations and whether this makes a difference to participation and engagement in learning after 16.
- What young people think about the quality of education and training options on offer to them post 16.
- How young people see their life trajectories and what their aspirations are.

This is the first review that includes evidence on all young people. It is important to understand how inequality affects engagement in learning. The review considers evidence (where it exists) on young people from specific groups. This includes young people who are from ethnic minorities, disabled, refugees, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, young mothers, NEET and from diverse religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

1.3 Report structure

The report is structured in the following way:

- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the methodology for the literature review and stakeholder interviews.
- Chapter 3 outlines the relevant policy context of the report. This includes consideration of Every Child Matters, an introduction to the 14–19 Diplomas, Aimhigher and the raising of the education leaving age to 18.
- Chapter 4 analyses what prevents young people from engaging in meaningful learning. This includes a consideration of personal factors, such as motivation and the ability to read; institutional barriers, such as funding for learning and the curriculum; and situational barriers, such as living in a socio-economically deprived area.
- Chapter 5 of the report explores what works in engaging all young people in meaningful learning. This includes a consideration of policy-related enablers, such as financing for learning; institutional enablers, like early interventions and flexible learning provision; and situational enablers, such as a supportive family and the impact of teachers.
- Chapter 6 highlights the conclusions emerging from the review.

2. Methodology, sources and evidence gaps

The methodology for this project consisted of two elements: a literature review of published and grey literature and interviews with 10 stakeholders.

2.1 Literature review

The literature review was conducted in several stages to ensure a systematic approach to the available literature. This involved searching for literature using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, developing and reviewing search terms, initial screening and quality assurance. Literature searches were not limited by a date of publication, and additional searches using terms relating to the equality strands and for key people and projects were then carried out. The resulting literature was then categorised into themes. This categorisation allowed for gaps to be identified, which were filled by making additional searches (See Appendix 1 for detailed information on the methodology).

2.2 Stakeholder interviews

Ten stakeholders were interviewed from key organisations selected and agreed in conjunction with the Commission. Senior representatives from these organisations were identified as a result of their national reach and their expertise working with young people from a range of backgrounds and minority groups. (See Appendix 2 for more information).

Although the sample group of stakeholders is small, they and their organisations are an invaluable source of knowledge and expertise regarding specific groups of young people/young people in general and engagement in learning. Although their views may not be representative of all organisations operating in similar areas of work, or indeed reflect the full range of experiences of the young people they represent, they provide valuable insights. Their contributions have been included, either as direct quotes or embedded within the text of this report as a means of illuminating many of the issues that arise at a strategic and field level rather than as definitive comments.

2.3 Sources and evidence gaps

The methodology used for the literature search uncovered a wealth of information, including policy documents, grey literature from charities and campaign organisations, and published academic literature. Over 80 references were included in the final reference list, on which this literature review is based. The overwhelming majority of these references were based on qualitative methodologies, such as case studies, small scale focus groups, interviews and examples of good practice. In addition, much of the grey literature is based on expert opinions and experience.

This means that detailed information from a variety of sources and involving a wide range of diverse young people was used for this review. However, quantitative evidence, such as statistical findings regarding why young people may engage or disengage in learning is severely limited.

The literature refers overwhelmingly to young people overall, with few insights into young people from specific equality groups, such as disabled young people, teenage mothers, and young refugees and asylum seekers. There is a growing body of evidence on NEET young people. Stakeholder interviews were utilised to explore some of the gaps in evidence on specific equality groups.

3. Policy background

There are four core Government programmes that provide the context for the review. These are: Every Child Matters, the introduction of Diplomas, Aimhigher and raising the leaving age to 18. These policies indicate the Government's general commitment towards ensuring that all young people are engaged in meaningful learning.

3.1 Every Child Matters and The Children's Plan

Every Child Matters is a Government initiative that was launched in 2003 to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. The Government's aim is for every child and young person to have the support they need to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic wellbeing

This means that the organisations involved in providing services to children and young people will collaborate and share information to support them in achieving what they want in life. The aim is for children and young people to contribute more towards issues that affect them.

Every Child Matters specifically notes the importance of gathering and putting forward the views of the most vulnerable children and young people in society. This focuses on education as the most effective route out of poverty and as a means to narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. The Government aims to improve outcomes for looked-after children and children with special educational needs and disabilities, and on reducing teenage pregnancy and the number of young people NEET. The Every Disabled Child Matters campaign was launched by disability organisations as a result of their concern that Every Child Matters did not sufficiently consider disabled children.

The progress report of The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2008a) similarly notes the need to further improve support for children and young people. The Children's Plan specifically recognises the importance of young people wanting to learn rather than merely changing the law to require participation in education until the age of 18. The Government therefore suggests the need to make learning more engaging, more relevant and more attractive. According to The Children's Plan, this necessitates reforming the curriculum and qualifications systems to provide additional routes to further learning.

3.2 14–19 Diplomas

In order to improve vocational education, the Government introduced specialised lines of learning leading to diplomas in 14 sector areas. Employers were involved in establishing the diplomas, and higher education institutions play an important role. The aim of the diplomas is to provide an alternative gateway for young people to access higher education and skilled employment. The subject areas that each Diploma will cover are as follows:

First teaching September 2008

- construction and the built environment
- creative and media
- engineering
- information technology
- society, health and development

First teaching September 2009

- business, administration and finance
- environmental and land-based studies
- hair and beauty studies
- hospitality
- manufacturing and product design

First teaching September 2010

- public services
- retail
- sport and leisure
- travel and tourism

First teaching September 2011

- Humanities
- Languages
- Science

3.1 Aimhigher

Aimhigher, created in 2004 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, is responsible for shaping and influencing both policy and practice and brokering dialogue between policy-makers and practitioners with the aim of widening higher education, particularly among young people from under-represented backgrounds. Morris and Rutt (2005) found that the Aimhigher programme is key to the successful

transition between secondary school and higher education, and in encouraging more young people to aspire to participate in higher education. However, it is important to note that not all young people benefit from it, for example if the Aimhigher programme may not operate in their area. In addition, Morris and Rutt (2005) identified that there are several barriers to aspiring to a university education. The most important of these barriers are a lack of motivation and a concern about financing higher education. Financing for learning may be a particularly important consideration since the Government has delayed the review of fees due in 2009 until it has developed its Framework for the Future of Higher Education.

3.2 Education and Skills Act 2008

The Education and Skills Act 2008 introduces a requirement to remain in education or training beyond the current statutory leaving age, and implements the recommendations of the Leitch Review on adult skills. This Act contains measures so that by 2013, all 17 year olds, and by 2015, all 18 year olds, are participating in some form of education or training. The aim of raising participation is to ensure that all young people – especially the most vulnerable – will benefit from the opportunities provided by continuing in learning.

The Education and Skills Act also intends to regulate and promote the availability of Apprenticeships as part of a drive to provide more workplace skills. In step with plans to keep all young people in education or training until the age of 18, by 2013 all school leavers will be entitled to an apprenticeship place. By 2020, there is a target of providing 500,000 apprenticeships in the UK.

The Government's plans note the importance of making sure that all young people are fully supported in remaining in education. This includes the transfer of the responsibility for delivering Connexions services to local authorities, strengthening careers education in schools and changes to transport provision. Local authorities will be required to promote young people's participation and to support them to find appropriate education and training opportunities.

In addition, the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill (2008–09) introduces a variety of measures covering apprenticeships, learning and skills, and educational provision.

The key areas of the bill are that it:

- Provides for a statutory framework for apprenticeships and creates a right to an apprenticeship for suitably qualified 16–18 year olds.

- Introduces a right for employees to request time away from their duties to undertake training, and places a corresponding duty on employers to consider such requests seriously and to be able to refuse them only for specified business reasons.
- Dissolves the Learning and Skills Council.
- Transfers the responsibility for funding education and training for 16–18 year olds to local authorities, and up to the age of 25 years for young people with a learning difficulty assessment.
- Makes provisions with respect to the education of offenders.
- Creates the Young Person’s Learning Agency, the Skills Funding Agency, a new regulatory body for qualifications (Ofqual), and a new agency to carry out the non-regulatory functions currently performed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.
- Strengthens the accountability of children’s services.
- Amends intervention powers in respect of schools which are causing concern.
- Establishes a new parental complaints service.
- Changes the school inspection arrangements.
- Creates a new negotiating body for pay and conditions for school support staff.
- Makes provisions in respect of pupil and student behaviour. ⁱⁱⁱ

4. What prevents young people from engaging in learning?

Findings from the literature and stakeholder interviews were analysed to determine the most important risk factors that prevent young people from engaging in learning. There are a variety of policies aimed at engaging young people in meaningful learning post 16, such as the Diplomas, Aimhigher and the raising of the leaving age to 18. However, it is evident from the review that there are a wide range of factors that may prevent young people from participating and engaging in learning. These factors do not impact in isolation and may interact with each other, and their relative importance may change over time (LSDA, 2003). Young people may feel less engaged at different times, and for different reasons, though severe disengagement appears to be a cumulative process beginning in primary school.

The barriers are analysed into three categories: personal factors, institutional barriers and situational barriers. Personal factors are those that are individual to the young person; institutional barriers are those that are associated with learning institutions, such as schools or colleges; and situational barriers are those that are linked to the socio-demographic situation of the young person. It must be acknowledged that it is difficult to isolate which factors are the most important in influencing young people's engagement in learning.

While there are factors that may prevent all young people from engaging in learning, there are also issues that appear to affect different groups of young people. Where appropriate, these insights have been included in the review.

4.1 Gradual disengagement

The literature indicates that young people's decisions to participate in learning are heavily influenced by their prior experience of education, and poor experiences are linked to lower participation rates (DCSF, 2008b). Engagement is not a simple choice for all young people. Young people can feel disengaged from learning for various reasons, and this can be mild or severe. It is suggested that severe disengagement from learning is a cumulative process that starts in primary school and becomes more entrenched in secondary school. Ravet's (2007) research with primary school children found that some had already started to disengage from learning, for example by saying that they were bored and disrupting their classmates.

Gottfredson (2002) notes that the crucial age at which young people form more realistic ambitions about their future is between 11–14. It is at this age that the influence of peers and wider society increases in importance and disengagement from learning is likely to develop.

The Assistant Director for Policy and Research at Barnardo's highlighted their findings that the decision of young people to disengage from learning, far from being active and taken at a certain point in time, is passive and cumulative:

'We did a short piece of work on disengagement a year ago. We spoke to 30 young people in semi-structured discussions. Leaving school did not appear to have been a conscious decision or the result of a logical thought process. It was more something that happened to them and they were fairly passive agents in this pathway. It was a gradual and passive process of dropping out; they hadn't really felt included, they had been excluded quite often, or suddenly moving, getting in with the wrong set of friends. They couldn't single out a moment when they left; it was a gradual process.'

(Assistant Director for Policy and Research)

The argument presented here is one which views the process of disengagement as something that begins at a young age, even as far back as primary school, and builds over time as a result of a collection of experiences. This moves away from what the interviewee described as a 'policy assumption' that young people make a choice to either engage or disengage. Rather, the focus here was on a sense of powerlessness on the part of many young people to prevent a longer-term process. However, it is also important to remember that those disengaged can become re-engaged. Callenan et al (2009) found that disengagement at Key Stage 4, did not necessarily equate to disengagement post 16. Post-16 options could offer young people the chance to re-engage in education and training.

4.2 Personal factors

There are several factors related to young people not engaging in meaningful learning that are linked to young people themselves. These personal factors may be influenced by other 'outside' factors.

Motivation

The most important personal factor is lack of motivation to learn. The importance of motivation in order for meaningful learning to occur is well documented in the literature (for example, Pintrich, 1999; Tremblay and Gardner, 1995; Dweck, 1986). In addition, a recent report by Callanan et al (2009) defines disengagement as 'a set of attitudes relating to a young person's motivation, the value they see in school and the importance attributed to the impact of school attainment on later options' (p 9). The review indicates that the absence of motivation is linked to an individual's ability to read and young people's perceived identities. It is important to distinguish

between those young people who are not motivated to learn and those young people who might be motivated, but who feel impeded by institutional or situational barriers (LSDA, 2003).

In addition, it is evident that learner motivation is a highly complex phenomenon and occurs over a period of time rather than at discrete points during a young person's life. Hodkinson and Bloomer (2001) suggest that individuals constantly re-evaluate the costs and benefits of participating in learning. Examples of costs include reduced immediate income. On the other hand, examples of benefits include increased job prospects and increased future earning.

As a part of their Inclusive Secondary Schools Project, the Refugee Council provide evidence that young asylum seekers and refugees tend to be very motivated about participating and continuing in learning (Doyle and McCorrison, 2008). However, they experience barriers which may impact on their learning and ability to progress.

'Although motivated to continue and do well in education, young refugees and asylum seekers come up against multiple barriers such as assumptions being made about their abilities as a result of not being able to speak English. They also come up against problems caused by a drawn-out schools admission process and a complex asylum process.'

(Policy Adviser and Research Manager, Refugee Council)

Misconceptions of the abilities of young asylum seekers and refugees and difficulties in negotiating complex asylum procedures are obstacles to this group. The general message here is that young people's motivation to engage can be compromised by experiencing multiple barriers.

Positive choice to follow alternative life trajectory

The constant re-evaluation of the costs and benefits associated with learning may lead some young people to see the decision to leave as a positive choice to follow an alternative life trajectory (LSDA, 2003).

Several authors (for example, Fuller and Paton, 2007; Marczak et al, 2006; Quinn et al, 2008) have suggested that young people may choose not to engage in learning; not because they have low aspirations and achievement, but rather because they have made a positive choice to follow an alternative trajectory. The balance of evidence suggests that this choice is based on a young person's perception of their present situation and the employment and education options available to them.

Whilst being in JWT (Jobs Without Training) is seen negatively by policy-makers, for young people themselves, such jobs can be a lifeline, providing an upward trajectory. What others disparage as dead-end jobs can be a route out of a dead-end existence shaped by drug addiction, depression and poverty. (Quinn et al, 2008, p 31)

Lamb et al (2000) suggest that young people leave education for self-defined 'positive' reasons, such as finding a job and earning money. It is important not to assume that all young people who are not engaging in learning after 16 are disengaged or have faced barriers to remaining in learning.

The Chief Executive of the Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgendered Voluntary and Community Organisations (LGBT Consortium) suggests that some young LGBT people make a positive decision not to continue in learning post 16. This can include the importance of formulating and expressing identity in order to fulfil other goals that are relevant to them at this stage in their lives:

'Young people often make the positive choice to leave education and find an easy job as a means of broadening their opportunities for social networking. The need to find a partner and make contact with other lesbian, gay and bisexual young people is an important factor in leaving school with the aim of earning money. For many lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, the focus is on formulating and expressing their identity, which could be achieved through having the financial means to go clubbing and to the pub. The focus is not on training but on getting a job and meeting people.'
(Chief Executive, the LGBT Consortium)

The '*Statistical Bulletin Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 16 year olds*' (DCSF, 2008b) indicates that substantially more young people want to stay on in full-time education than eventually do so (84 per cent versus 72), and the gap is largest for those from lower socio-economic groups.

Although over four-fifths of young people wanted to stay on, fewer than three-quarters actually did so. The gap between intention and out-turn varies widely, from two percentage points for young people of Indian ethnic origin up to 22 percentage points for those whose parents' occupations were not classified. (DCSF, 2008b, p 22)

This indicates that motivation does not necessarily translate into formal learning pathways and the positive choice to follow an alternative life trajectory may be a reason for some young people to disengage from learning after 16.

Ability to read

The inability to read appears to be a fundamental risk factor associated with disengagement from learning.

Cassen and Kingdon (2007) argue that poor reading and writing scores during primary school are significantly associated with low achievement during the teenage years.

Poor reading and writing scores at primary school are significantly associated with later low achievement.

(Cassen and Kingdon, 2007, p 1)

It seems that low achievement is one reason for young people disengaging from learning and this starts at primary school. Cassen and Kingdon (2007) suggest that children with reading difficulties need to be better identified at an early age so that they can be adequately supported. This would enable them to remain engaged with learning.

Echoing the above findings, recent research by Barnardo's^{iv} draws attention to the relationship between low achievement in literacy and the impact on an individual's vulnerability to being bullied. Young people from areas of industrial decline accessing their services around the UK talked about being bullied as a result of having poor reading and writing skills. The link between low literacy abilities and being bullied was described as a key determinant of disengagement. The importance of a focus on improving basic skills to prevent bullying and disengagement will be discussed further.

Young people's self-beliefs

The literature and stakeholder interviews indicate that young people have self-beliefs that may prevent them from engaging in learning. For example, Atkins (2008) notes that young people are influenced by the lifestyle of celebrities, as portrayed in magazines and TV shows. According to Atkins, this leads to young people having unreal, dream-like aspirations and a lack of awareness of the trajectories that they would need to follow to achieve these ambitions. Atkins argues that this focus on a 'celebrity culture' prevents young people from engaging in learning since it

prevents them from considering realistic ambitions and the actions necessary to achieve them.

Another important personal risk factor is what Hayward et al (2008) call an 'ingrained sense of failure' (p 44). Jackson and Hudson (2009) indicate that fear of failure is palpable with a substantial minority – 37 per cent or approximately 1.2 million young people – worried about failing at school. Almost half (46 per cent) of C2DE ('working class') white girls fear failure, compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of ABC1 ('middle class') white boys.

Hayward et al (2008) note that fear of failure is linked to the emphasis in schools on academic attainment and qualifications, building from primary school. Reay and William (1999) draw on data from focus groups and interviews with Year 6 pupils and, similar to Hayward et al (2008), found that there are 'strong currents of fear and anxiety' (p 349) permeating children's relations with tests and exams. In addition, Reay and William found that they viewed the testing process as a definite statement about what sort of learner they are. This indicates that children who do not achieve good results in tests can have negative views about themselves as learners in general, which may lead to them disengaging.

Hannah: I'm really scared about the SATs (standard assessment tasks).

Mrs O'Brien (a teacher at the school) came and talked to us about our spelling and I'm no good at spelling and David (the class teacher) is giving us times tables tests every morning and I'm hopeless at times tables so I'm frightened I'll do the SATs and I'll be a nothing.

Diane: I don't understand, Hannah. You can't be a nothing.

Hannah: Yes, you can 'cause you have to get a level like a level 4 or a level 5 and if you're no good at spelling and times tables you don't get those levels and so you're a nothing.

Diane: I'm sure that's not right.

Hannah: Yes it is 'cause that's what Mrs O'Brien was saying.

(Reay and William, 1999, p 345)

The review reveals that developing a sense of ingrained failure is complicated by a range of other factors. For boys, the ingrained sense of failure described by Hayward et al (2008) and Reay and William (1999) may be linked to the concept of 'laddishness' at school. One aspect of 'laddishness' is the overt rejection of academic work as 'feminine', which protects the self-worth and social worth of boys. The overt rejection of academic work may be linked to fear of academic failure in boys. The rejection of academic work could protect a young boy from being seen as

failing based on a lack of ability, and may also be perceived to prevent them from being bullied (Jackson, 2003; Shepherd et al, 2009).

In accordance with avoiding anything 'feminine', not being seen to work hard was also integral to a cool 'laddish' image ... As a consequence, there were many examples in the interviews of boys who talked about the ways in which they hid their work and effort in order to avoid being picked on and bullied. (Jackson, 2003, p 588)

The Policy Development Officer at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) revealed that many of the girls and young women that they work with often come to the service 'feeling like failures'. One possible reason for this is the emphasis on the status of academic skills. This means that if a young person drops out for any reason, they can feel like a failure. YWCA seeks to counterbalance such internalised negative self-perceptions by focusing on a wide range of strengths and skills that a young woman may have. For them, the most important are soft skills, such as being a good friend. This approach is seen as essential since 'if a young woman does not feel good about herself now, how will she be able to really think about the future?' Hard skills, such as numeracy and literacy are also considered to be important.

The stakeholder interview with the Chief Executive of the LGBT Consortium suggests that young LGBT people can feel like failures because their developing sexual identity may not match the expectations of their parents. Preoccupation with being judged may affect engagement in learning.

'Fear of failure amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people, may be the result of young people coming to terms with the decision "to come out" rather than as a result of any links to academic achievement. As a result of being concerned about what their parents would judge as being a success, young people may be conscious of being viewed as a failure in the eyes of their parents due to disclosing a sexual orientation that does not match up to parental expectations.

'In terms of academic achievement, the experience of "coming out" may result in two possible outcomes: high achievement as a means of counterbalancing parental disappointment; or underachievement as a result of being preoccupied with issues of sexual identity and parental acceptance.'

(Chief Executive, LGBT Consortium)

The interview reveals the possibility of young people who continue to achieve well as a result of a desire to ‘pass under the radar’; in other words they keep their heads down with the aim of remaining unnoticed. It was suggested that many young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning^v people may feel more motivated to work towards attending university as a safe space to develop their identities away from home. This assertion is confirmed by Valentine et al (2009), who conducted research into the experiences of LGBT students in higher education.

4.3 Institutional barriers

Funding

Whereas finance for learning may not in its own right engage all young people in learning, financial support has been shown to be an incentive, and lack of it a disincentive (LSDA, 2003).

The introduction of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), a financial scheme applicable to young people aged between 16–19 in low-income families and who are in education or unpaid work-based learning, was an important act of legislation by the Government in 2004.

The Refugee Council, while recognising the general benefits of the EMA, argues that young refugees and asylum seekers remain on the outside of these benefits as those with discretionary leave and who claim asylum post 16 have no entitlement to EMA. The inability of this group of young people to access the EMA represents an example of financial incentives to keep young people in education, which fails to impact upon all groups of young people.

Tunnard et al (2008) point out that there can be delays in the authorisation of the EMA payment, which may lead vulnerable young people to disillusionment and a risk of long-term disengagement.

Evidence before and after the introduction of the EMA indicates that funding can be a significant barrier to engagement in learning. For example, Halsall et al (1998), Callender (1999), Fletcher (2002) and Alakeson (2005) found that while most young people wanted further education and training, many faced financial barriers, such as not being able to cover their cost of living while in full-time education. Fletcher (2002) notes that inflexibilities in the funding system make it difficult for learners to access funding. For example, information, advice and guidance (IAG) regarding funding is mainly provided to young people while they are at school and not once they have left school. A further example is funding only being available for certain courses, which may force young people to base their choice of course on the availability of funding

rather than on interest. However, the review notes that financial barriers can be cited as a socially acceptable reason for non-participation in learning, which may mask other issues.

The inflexibility of existing funding systems and the way in which this can inadvertently discriminate against the most vulnerable young people, was a concern expressed in the stakeholder interviews. The eligibility and entitlement to funding for young refugee and asylum seekers was raised. Uncertainty over entitlement was identified as a key issue, with recent changes in Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding for adult asylum seekers cited as an example^{vi}. Confusion over the impact of changes on learners (16–18) led to a period of ambiguity for young asylum seekers; a situation which could possibly have been avoided. In addition, concerns were raised about what could be described as systemic discrimination in the funding system:

‘There are also more systematic things as well like access to funds ... I’m using discrimination in a systematic institutional state discrimination kind of way in that if you’re an asylum seeker then there are only particular types of resources that you can get. Most asylum seekers are not allowed to work, therefore it affects parents’ ability to support their children both in curricular in terms of buying their books, participating in field trips, oversees visits, uniforms ... you don’t have the extra money to do that. If you have very little money, then there are issues around transport and accessing more things for their child.’
(Research Manager, Refugee Council)

The above suggests that the possibility to manage funding and financing is taken out of the hands of young refugees and asylum seekers, and their families, as a result of a system that does not work in their favour.

The Chief Executive of Skill: National Bureau for Disabled Students notes how decisions about finance and funding are also taken out of their hands. She argues that young people often remain powerless with regard to financial decisions and access to funding. Funding is crucial as a means of supporting young people to progress and engage in learning after 16 and becoming increasingly independent. Benefits and funding are often tied up in family budgets and expenditure aimed at supporting the young person (for example, a credit agreement for a car), making it difficult for young people to make choices about their lives when they reach 16.

Skill also points out the complexities inherent in the funding system, arguing that the variable and mixed experiences of young people and the confusion experienced

by parents is a barrier in itself. Therefore, anything that can be done to smooth these problems out and to ease transition at 16 from a financial perspective can only be welcomed.

The YWCA highlighted ways in which funding arrangements impact upon teenage mothers. With reference to the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), the YWCA's Policy Development Officer notes that there is a 'presumption that young women have other means of support' to supplement the fund, which is often not the case. Many young women have also found themselves in situations of debt when problems arise in the provision of funding such as a crash in the system, resulting in a gap in provision.

Barnardo's, although recognising the achievements of EMA, argues that learners from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are disadvantaged by the need to have parental involvement to open a bank account in order to receive funding, since not all young people have the support of their parents.

The need for flexibility of funding to support an entitlement to learning provision is summarised by the YWCA:

'There's no flexibility around caring for children or coping with problematic lifestyles; the funding should be seen as an entitlement to a certain amount of education – for example the equivalent of seven academic years that can be taken from the ages of 11–25 (but ideally straight through 11–18). But if you take a year off for homelessness, pregnancy etc, you should be able to come back in. The cut-off point shouldn't be 19 years of age; it does not allow for those who have very troubled teenage lives.'

(Policy Development Officer, YWCA)

Rathbone supports the call for funding systems that better reflect the 'different starting points and barriers that different young people face'. The Director for Youth Engagement argues:

'Funding for young people between the ages of 16–18 is weighted towards achievement and progression to the next level. Disadvantaged young people are being measured against more motivated and higher-achieving young people. The funding needs to be differentiated in favour of young people for whom the school system has failed. These young people need more intensive support.'

His comments sit within a wider argument that views the education and training system as biased towards high achievement and achievers. He argues that young people from disadvantaged starting points need more intensive support and that funding should reflect this need.

The need for improved flexibility of funding systems, reviewing age entitlement to funding, and increased co-ordination between funding arrangements and course provision is necessary if the move to widen participation and engagement is to be successful.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

It is evident that some young people do not receive the right IAG that they need to make the right choices after 16, or when re-engaging in learning. Eight in 10 young people feel they have had enough information and advice to make the right choices about their future. However, two in 10 (18 per cent or approximately 700,000 young people in England) say they have not had enough information and advice, rising to 23 per cent of young people with a disability and a quarter of those from ethnic minorities (Jackson and Hudson, 2009).

The majority of young people aged 14–18 have had a one-to-one interview with a careers or Connexions adviser at school although a quarter have not (27 per cent or approximately 900,000) rising to almost four in 10 (37 per cent) of young people with a disability. Although some of this figure can be accounted for by 14 and 15 year olds who have yet to see an adviser, two in 10 (18 per cent) 16–18 year olds have not had a one-to-one interview with a careers or Connexions adviser (Jackson and Hudson, 2009).

Careers advice and work experience placement opportunities have been subject to criticism, in that they can potentially constrain young people's options and aspirations if managed badly and stereotypically, according to the beliefs of those responsible (see Francis et al, 2005).

Existing evidence suggests that some young ethnic minority people are less likely to get the advice and information they need about jobs and careers from their schools. In one survey, 28 per cent of white girls, compared to 31 per cent Bangladeshi, 43 per cent Indian and 47 per cent Black Caribbean girls, said they had not been able to get the advice and information they needed from their schools (Bhavnani, 2006).

Gender stereotyping in the provision of IAG has been well documented (Francis et al, 2002; Francis et al, 2005; Bhavnani, 2006). According to Bhavnani, around three

in 10 Bangladeshi and white girls, and around four in 10 Indian and Black Caribbean girls said the careers advice from their school had not opened their eyes to a wide range of possible jobs and careers.

This was raised by the Policy Development Officer of the YWCA and is a key area of their work:

‘We lobbied centrally on the education and skills bill and worked with DCSF so that the guidelines to schools on IAG include addressing equality and stereotypes. We’ve also done work with JIVE, the Women into Science, Engineering and Technology and VT careers on challenging stereotypes and careers advice.’

The organisation has found that young people already have ‘strong gender steers’ at a young age which need to be challenged. They also found that these gender steers were compounded on the one hand by a general lack of knowledge among young people of certain job roles and by jobs which only command basic pay, as this was the example that young people saw around them in their immediate environments.

Burchardt (2004), Aston et al (2005) and Winn and Hay (2009) provide evidence that may suggest that young disabled people feel less well served by advice and guidance services. The Chief Executive of Skill noted that disabled learners are not receiving information about opportunities in work-based learning and apprenticeships, and that the information received on further education options is often negative. This was attributed to professionals viewing disability through a medical model, and believing that young people could not cope with certain choices, or even work at all, resulting in a ‘damage limitation exercise’.

‘All the young people we interviewed wanted to work, even those with complex difficulties for whom work may mean supported employment or volunteering, all wanted to do activities that were of value to society.’
(Chief Executive, Skill)

The Director for Rathbone’s youth engagement expressed concerns that young people were receiving IAG with an emphasis on placing them in training rather than ‘choosing the most suitable and appropriate provision for them’. He argued that young people were being encouraged into their third and second choice training placements to respond to future skill demands, rather than into training that reflected their aspirations.

Curriculum and testing

There are repeated accounts of the negative impact of frequent testing of children and young people throughout the education system, and there are indications of how the curriculum can be irrelevant to young people's lives (for example, Callanan, 2009; Cassidy, 2008; Reay and Wiliam, 1999). This irrelevance stems from the curriculum not relating to the everyday lives of young people and, therefore, not feeling it is important to their lives. The literature indicates that the curriculum can be a source of boredom for some young people, which is a reason for their disengagement with learning. Casson and Kingdon (2007) found that the low-achieving young people that they studied considered the content of lessons to be boring and the National Curriculum to be irrelevant to their future lives. A Senior Policy Officer at 11 Million stated that through their work they had noted that 'young people want more variety and more evidence of the practical impact of learning'.

The need for young people to identify their own culture and experiences in the curriculum was evident in the literature (for example, Ramsey and Williams, 2003). This is paramount as it helps to build their sense of belonging and feeling valued in their learning environment. The Refugee Council and LGBT Consortium raised this with specific reference to the young people that they work with:

'It's not necessarily about a refugee-specific curriculum – although those issues are really important – but having it so that children understand what diversity brings and the positive values, and don't see people as different "bad" but different in a way that's interesting and enriching in an educational context. Myth-busting type activities on the importance of refugee issues being raised in the teaching to counter all the negative press; it's about safety and raising awareness among peers ... (it's about) ... diversity going through right the way across which then helps with integration in general.'

(Research Manager, Refugee Council)

'From a perspective of young people (14–16) reporting back on their experiences, there is nothing there that includes them and their lifestyles; for example, there are no role models, but this is not unusual. Even in PHSE [Personal, Social and Health Education], schools don't want to talk about it. For LGB and T and questioning (that is, they may not identify as being LGB or T), there is nothing for them to measure their experience against; there is definitely nothing for them to refer to in school. Young people are starting to challenge this ... The core curriculum text and learning requirements are neutral but there are opportunities for this to be raised. This is a gap in practice.'

(Chief Executive, LGBT Consortium)

The point that the National Curriculum does not provide sufficient reference to the lives of young LGBT people has also been raised in the literature (Grew, 2009).

The Chief Executive of Skill expressed concerns that consideration of the diversity of learners is not at the heart of curriculum design. She notes:

‘There is not an inclusive curriculum in the subject-based areas; (curriculum designers) are still trying to adjust curricula to people’s disabilities rather than designing curricula accessible to all, including people with disabilities. I think that this is probably true for race and gender as well. The designers are not thinking “diversity”.’

She also notes that disabled young people may face restricted choice in specialist settings, with some only achieving ‘on average six GCSEs not only linked to their disabilities but to the fact that there (isn’t) the range of subjects on offer’. It was suggested that the 14–19 Diplomas may be a positive way of encouraging improved choice for disabled learners, allowing them the opportunity of achieving the same UCAS points as their peers and preventing them from ‘falling at first base.’ For this group of learners, the emphasis is therefore not only on quality of provision, but also on the breadth of choice.

In addition to the format, content and provision of the curriculum in schools, there are numerous accounts of how the testing culture in schools may prevent children and young people from engaging with learning. For example, in 2007, the General Teaching Council noted that schoolchildren in England are now the most tested in the world, facing an average of 70 tests and examinations before the age of 16. There is no convincing evidence that this degree of testing and examinations is improving standards. A recurrent theme in the stakeholder interviews was their experiences of stressed and bored learners. The Council called for a ‘fundamental and urgent review of the testing regime’ (Asthana, 2007). The recent scrapping of SATs for 14 year olds may have improved matters somewhat, but it is nonetheless likely that testing and examinations will still remain a barrier for positively engaging with learning for some young people (Acting General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, Christine Blower, as reported in BBC News Online, 14 October 2008).

The negative impact of the examination culture on the lives of young people was particularly emphasised by the Refugee Council and Skill. Both organisations felt that the pressure on schools to protect their position on league tables was a barrier to inclusion. The Refugee Council suggests that:

'The big problem in terms of the system is actually at that point of 14–16. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that schools were more and more reluctant to take in new arrivals at that stage because that affects their school league table positions ... If you go in at Year 10 and you have to learn English, my understanding is that it is harder to place children at that age.'

(Research Manager, Refugee Council)

This suggests that an emphasis on league table success may mean that it is harder to place young refugee and asylum seekers in schools in Key Stage 4. The Chief Executive of Skill suggests that the needs of some disabled learners can come second to the desire for examination success.

'It will be interesting to see what happens with the removal of the 14 year old SATs because I think that one of the reasons why young people with disabilities get parked is because teachers are so busy focusing on league tables for the others. League tables are counterproductive for inclusive education and I feel that this is one of the biggest barriers for this group of young people.'

(Chief Executive, Skill)

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

An important aspect of the curriculum is the ability of learners to access its content and participate confidently in learning. Many schools have populations of learners who come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, where English may be spoken as an additional language. This is the case for many children and young people newly arrived in the UK, whether with their families as economic migrants or as refugees and asylum seekers.

A key issue raised by the Refugee Council was the need for improved language support for young refugee and asylum seekers when they first arrive in the UK in order to make the curriculum more accessible. The need for young people to have appropriate language support to enable them to participate is highlighted in the following example:

'One school and organisation produced an induction DVD, in which there was a guy who was talking about his experiences when he first arrived. He couldn't speak English and he only knew he was in a maths class or science class because there was equipment and numbers on the board.'

(Research Manager, Refugee Council)

Language support for this group of learners also goes beyond their own needs to those of their parents. The ability of parents to provide a supportive home environment relevant to the children's learning is often hampered by their own inability to learn the language fluently; a situation which was exacerbated by recent cuts in the provision of further and adult education, including ESOL classes^{vii}.

In addition and relevant to the above point, is a gap in understanding of how low English language skills among adult refugees and asylum seekers may be impacting on their children and young people. The negative impact of not being able to secure work, provide for their children and participate in wider society as a result of poor abilities in English and/or difficulties arising from a complex asylum process may be impacting on the self-esteem and sense of security of young people. As noted in discussions with the Refugee Council, difficulties may arise as children's English language skills surpass those of their parents. Parents may also find it difficult to support children in their learning as they are unable to engage with texts and letters from school. In addition, tensions may be caused as a result of parents, who may be well educated but who now find themselves faced with inactivity and a loss of status. Young refugees and asylum seekers may be internalising these issues in ways that are yet to be fully understood and which may inadvertently or directly impact on their school experience.

Bullying

'Bullying impacts on children's and young people's ability to achieve, their mental health and community engagement.'

(Senior Policy Officer, 11 Million)

There is increasing awareness of how bullying at school can have a detrimental impact on young people's engagement with learning (DCSF, 2008b), and 'many young people' (Hayward et al, 2008, p 45) note bullying as a key feature in their disengagement from learning. These findings are based on 36 young people workshops (Hayward et al, 2008). The literature indicates that bullying can affect any young person, but that some young people may be targeted more than others. For example, evidence provided by Mencap (2007) indicates that eight out of 10 (82 per cent) children with a learning disability are bullied. Mencap believes this 'disablist bullying' wrecks children's lives, leading to social exclusion in childhood and adulthood.

According to Jackson and Hudson (2009) a significant minority of young people do not, or did not feel physically (seven per cent or approaching a quarter of a million) or emotionally safe (five per cent or approximately 160,000) at school. Socio-economic

status plays an important part in how safe a young person feels at school. Those belonging to socio-economic groups ABC1 ('middle class') are more likely than young people from socio-economic groups C2DE 'working class') to feel both physically and emotionally safe at school. NEET young people and those who have a disability are considerably less likely than average to feel physically and emotionally safe.

Stone et al (2000) argue that educational disadvantage in the form of having been bullied is one key determinant, along with other factors, in young people becoming NEET. According to Spielhofer et al. (2009) in their study of young people who do not participate in education or training at 16 and 17, 'many interviewees had negative experiences of school and faced issues such as bullying, exclusion, behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties and stress' (p 3).

The review reveals the common occurrence of bullying of young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgendered (Ellis and High, 2004; Stonewall, 2009). For example, Hunt and Jesen (2007) found that, of 1,145 young lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who responded to a Stonewall survey, 65 per cent had experienced direct bullying in school and noted that they commonly heard the term 'gay' being used in a derogatory way, such as in 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay'.

Whittle et al (2007) report similar problems in schools from their survey of trans people. They collected data on whether respondents had experienced bullying and, if so, what forms it took. They report a marked difference between male to female people and female to male people: 64 per cent of female to male people had experienced harassment or bullying and 44 per cent of male to female people had experienced harassment or bullying from staff or pupils.

Parle et al (2008) found that homophobic bullying, such as that documented by Hunt and Jesen, has a negative impact on young people's personal development and may lead to disengagement from learning.

'The experience and realisation of being gay is particularly difficult for young people. In today's highly competitive and isolating society, understanding and accepting who you are is not easy, and being attacked by your peers for being different makes the experience even more difficult. Due to homophobic bullying in schools, young people who identify as LGB are more likely to quit their education early.'

(Parle et al, 2008, p 6)

The use and continued acceptance of derogatory language in school was also highlighted by the Chief Executive of the LGBT Consortium, who states:

‘It is also the culture of playground language which still uses derogatory language around gender identity. We may have picked up on wrong racial terms but terms like “It’s gay” are still acceptable in the playground. You also hear comments like this in the general media. We are sensitive to it but it is so much the norm. It is hard for gay young people to challenge this but this is influenced by their own confidence, the support of schools, peers and teachers.’

(Chief Executive of the LGBT Consortium)

Valentine et al (2009) highlight that LGBT young people experience bullying in higher education. LGB students reported significant levels of negative treatment on the grounds of their sexual orientation, from fellow students (49.5 per cent), tutors/lecturers (10.4 per cent) and those who work in other areas of higher education (10.6 per cent). Valentine et al note that trans students experienced even higher levels of negative treatment than LGB students, with almost a quarter (22.6 per cent) of trans students being bullied or discriminated against since starting university, and much of this bullying occurring from other students.

‘Trans students have encountered higher levels of negative treatment than LGB students, and disturbingly high levels of threatening behaviour, physical abuse and sexual abuse – particularly from other students.’

(Valentine et al, 2009, p 28)

The link between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people opting out of learning as a result of bullying is captured in the literature (for example, Grew, 2008) and in the following observation:

‘In terms of discrimination, we know from meetings that we’ve had that a major concern of some lesbian and gay young people and staying in education until 18, was simply that they would be trapped in situations that are unsupportive. Some LGBT young people had chosen to leave education because they felt unsafe, victimised and unsupported.’

(Senior Policy Officer, 11 Million)

However, while homophobic and transphobic bullying remains a serious issue, it is important also to note that on balance the literature (for example, Ellis and High,

2004; Parle et al, 2008) suggests that many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people (as is the case with the general population of learners) have not been victims of bullying and their school experiences are positive.

Other groups of learners in minority groups face racist bullying (Doyle and McCorrison, 2008). This point was highlighted in the stakeholder interview with the Refugee Council:

'I think all of the young people mentioned racism and bullying whether it was towards them or they witnessed it. What was then quite interesting was when we asked the young people whether they told their peers they were refugees or asylum seekers; there was a massive reluctance not to. The reason why was because people aren't very nice when you tell them so it was almost like an added thing ... they talked about people not (being) very nice to me "because I was a Muslim" or "because I came from Iraq" and "no, I don't tell them I'm an asylum seeker" because they are rude when you do that. That certainly would have an impact on young people's identity if they feel that they can't reveal that about themselves ... they are aware that they have a negative label attached to themselves. I don't know how that would impact their learning but it would impact on their social interaction in school and their overall feelings of belonging and integration.'

(Research Manager, Refugee Council)

An increased awareness of the detrimental effects of bullying can only go some way towards supporting young people affected by this reality and in challenging some of the cultures which allow bullying to continue. The Director of Youth Engagement at Rathbone described the long-term impact on young people, referring to bullying as a 'corrosive thread' running through their lives. The impact on learning, engagement and, more broadly, on the overall experience of being in schools and college environments should ensure a continued drive towards tackling these issues.

In conclusion, while drawing attention to issues that prevent young people engaging with learning, it is also important to remember that the majority of young people enjoy their school experiences and want their schools and learning environments to be places that they are proud of. Although there remains a great deal of work to be done to ensure that all young people are reaching their potential, it is important to express those changes through a 'discourse of improvement' rather than one of crisis. This means focusing on the positive achievements that young people have already made and how they can progress, rather than focusing on the negative aspects of young people's past educational experiences.

'From talking with young people, we recognise the importance of not overstressing the negatives around education. For example, GCSE and general "standards" debates can come across to children and young people as dismissive of their efforts. We need to be wary of making education all about crisis. Young people want to be proud of their schools and 11 Million wants to be a part of a conversation about improvement. We need to make this the focus rather than crisis and failure.'

(Senior Policy Officer, 11 Million)

4.4 Situational barriers

In addition to the personal and institutional barriers, the literature suggests that there are several situational barriers that prevent some young people from engaging in learning (Spielhofer et al, 2009). Situational barriers are linked to the socio-demographic situation of young people, such as living in a socially deprived geo-demographical area.

Socially deprived geo-demographical area

The Government have highlighted long-standing concerns regarding the low rates of participation of young people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds in higher education (for example, Knowles, 1997; Brook, 2008; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003).

'This research confirmed that disadvantaged young people are not enjoying an equal level of participation in higher education to their more advantaged peers.'
(Forsyth and Furlong, 2003, p 223)

A recent report by the Social Exclusion Task Force (December 2008) notes that young people from deprived neighbourhoods are less likely to develop ambitious and achievable aspirations, such as goals they set themselves for the future and their motivation to work towards these goals. This occurs through indirect factors, such as young people's pre-school environment, parents' and children's values and beliefs, as well as the characteristics of children's schools. However, it is important not to generalise across all deprived neighbourhoods since some young people from deprived neighbourhoods may have very high aspirations.

'Young people in certain types of neighbourhoods are less likely to develop ambitious, achievable aspirations. These neighbourhoods tend to have high levels of deprivation. However deprived communities are not all the same. Young people in some very deprived communities have high aspirations.'
(Social Exclusion Task Force, December 2008)

The review indicates that young people from deprived neighbourhoods are likely to have high aspirations if high levels of bonding social capital exist, rather than high levels of bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is characterised by strong bonds among group members such as close family and friends. On the other hand, bridging social capital is characterised by weaker, less dense but more cross-cutting ties (Putnam, 1995; Social Exclusion Task Force, December 2008).

There are related issues, such as poor transport infrastructure associated with these neighbourhoods (Social Exclusion Task Force, December 2008).

Socio-economic class

The literature indicates that young people from a low socio-economic class face increased barriers to participation in learning compared to other young people. The lower rates of participation of these young people in higher education have been widely documented (for example, DIUS, 2008). In addition, recent research by Thompson (2009) indicates that contrary to commonly held perceptions, middle-class young people are represented in further education (FE) colleges. These middle-class young people were generally low achievers in school. In contrast, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are low achievers are more likely to leave education entirely rather than enrol in FE.

Socio-economic status has a considerable impact upon how a young person feels about school and engagement. Those belonging to socio-economic group ABC1 ('middle class') are more likely than young people from socio-economic group C2DE ('working class') to feel both physically and emotionally safe at school, to find subjects relevant, to feel able to achieve their potential and to find it easy to learn, and are less likely to worry about failure. ABC1 ('middle class') white boys, in particular, show a higher level of confidence than any other white group. C2DE ('working class') young people are much more likely than their ABC1 ('middle class') peers to worry about failure, believe they will always find it hard to find a job and will have to accept any job they can get. This indicates a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed.

A recent report by the Social Exclusion Task Force (December 2008) suggests that white working-class boys have the lowest aspirations, are not showing improvements in educational attainment and are most likely to leave school at 16 compared to boys and girls from other ethnic groups. Gibb (2008, as cited in Curtis, 2008), notes that a culture of low expectations is holding white working-class boys back. This comes from the social environment these boys inhabit, where they are not expected to do

well in school and continue in education after 16. It is also suggested that some white working-class boys require particular rigour in teaching, with high standards set and firm discipline (Gibb, 2008, as cited in Curtis, 2008). Gibb notes that it is necessary to ensure that schools in the most deprived areas use high-quality academic teaching, which is likely to increase standards, with a focus on setting by ability and a strong behavioural policy.

Cultural and family values

The influence of cultural values on young people's engagement with learning may be particularly relevant for certain young people who experience a conflict between their families' values and learning environments. For example, Levinson and Sparkes (2006) explored the experiences and attitudes of young Gypsy women in primary and secondary schools regarding the home-school interface. They found that for many young Gypsy women, the different demands of home and school can lead to feelings of cultural dislocation and anxiety. The school environment is perceived by Gypsy children and their parents as very different from the home environment, and many parents fear that their children may be exposed to value systems that are incongruent with their personal values. The roles of home and work, family relationships and sexual morals were of particular importance.

'The evidence of this research suggests that, in the view of some parents, schools encourage patterns which conflict with expectations within Gypsy communities ... Of particular salience here are roles at home and work, family relationships and sexual morals.'

(Levinson and Sparkes, 2006)

These differences between the home environment and the school environment may be one reason for the low average attendance rate for Traveller pupils, and their achievement being sharply below that of all other groups (Cemlyn et al, 2009).

Archer and Yamashita (2003) studied data collected from 20 working-class inner-city pupils in London in Year 11 (aged 15–16), exploring the ways in which young people understand their options and identities. Archer and Yamashita (2003) highlight that these young people used class-based values and concepts like 'not good enough' and 'knew their limits' in relation to post-compulsory educational routes.

On a note of caution, some authors confirm that it is easier for individuals to cite situational factors as barriers to engaging in learning, rather than personal factors like lack of interest or motivation (Herbert and Callender, 1997).

4.5 Summary

It is evident that there are a wide range of personal, institutional and situational barriers associated with disengagement from learning that can be mild or severe. It is important to note that most young people facing any of these barriers are engaged in meaningful learning. However, some young people, especially those young people facing multiple risks, struggle to engage in learning. From the literature or stakeholder interviews, it is not possible to determine the relationship between demand for learning and institutional and situational barriers. Nor is it possible to determine how personal factors interact with external barriers. The review reveals the importance of considering each young person as an individual learner with their own needs. The literature indicates that institutional and situational barriers are easier to address than the personal factors, and therefore policy and institutional initiatives to engage young people in learning generally focus on these (McGivney, 2001).

5. Improving engagement in learning after 16

The review reveals the importance of strategies to overcome barriers to engagement in learning for all young people. This chapter outlines strategies that appear to work in engaging young people in learning. It also includes insights from the review that suggest ways forward if learning is to be engaging for all young people.

Solutions can be grouped into: policy, institutional and situational approaches. The literature indicates that institutional and situational barriers are easier to address than the personal factors, and therefore policy and institutional initiatives to engage young people in learning generally focus on these (McGivney, 2001).

5.1 Better communication and focus on achievements

At the heart of all enablers to engagement in learning lies the importance of actually listening to what young people say. It is important that this communication involves an unbiased and non-judgemental exchange in which young people are valued as individuals (MacBeath et al, 2008). This communication necessitates that trust is built up between young people and professionals working to support them (Hayward et al, 2008; Tiffany et al, 2007). As pointed out by Slack (2003), it is also essential that communication with young people ensures that that young people are encouraged to choose options regarding their learning that are most appropriate to their needs and aspirations, rather than those which may be perceived to be the wishes of teachers, parents or policy-makers. Callanan et al (2009) also note the importance of effective communication between staff, staff and young people, and staff and parents or guardians.

While drawing attention to issues that prevent young people engaging with learning, it is also important to remember that the majority of young people enjoy their school experiences and want their schools and learning environments to be places that they are proud of. Although there remains a great deal of work to be done to ensure that all young people are reaching their potential, it is important to express those changes through a 'discourse of improvement' rather than one of crisis. This means focusing on the positive achievements that young people have already made and how they can progress, rather than focusing on the negative aspects of young people's past educational experiences.

'From talking with young people, we recognise the importance of not overstressing the negatives around education. For example, GCSE and general "standards" debates can come across to children and young people as dismissive of their efforts. We need to be wary of making education all about

crisis. Young people want to be proud of their schools and 11 Million wants to be a part of a conversation about improvement. We need to make this the focus rather than crisis and failure.'

(Senior Policy Officer, 11 Million)

5.2 Policy-related enablers

Financing learning

The review reveals that financing learning effectively and improving the provision and flexibility of funding are likely to improve engagement in learning after 16. Government legislation can have a profound impact by increasing public funding of certain types of learning (such as informal learning), which may be more attractive to some learners (LSDA, 2003).

The importance of funding as an incentive is highlighted in the review, including the positive impact of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The Director of Young People's Participation at the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) argued that evaluations of the EMA suggest that its introduction has had a significant impact on participation in learning of 16–18 year olds:

'There is evidence that demonstrates that the introduction of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has helped young people participate in education by showing them and their families that it does not need to be a [financial] drain to participate in education and/or training.'

The review found that financial incentives for participating were successful in encouraging young people from ethnic minorities to continue to engage in education, and this was particularly successful for Asian young people. Similar findings have also been found in other longitudinal research, such as that by Strand (2007, 2008).

The review suggests that more attention should be paid to removing discrimination regarding who is entitled to the EMA (for example, young refugee and asylum seekers) if greater engagement of all young people is to be achieved. Simplifying funding systems would make it easier for both learners and parents to understand their entitlements.

Increasing the flexibility of funding systems post 16 so that they cover all courses would mean that young people can make wider choices. Barnardo's (2008) argue that a primary means of helping young people to re-engage with learning when they are ready is by allowing them to access funding at any point. Funding systems are

also found to be complex, making it difficult for both learners and parents to understand their entitlements.

The review suggests a move towards supporting young disabled learners to have more control over the financial aspect of their lives, which is supported by social enterprises like the In Control Partnership.^{viii} Work by the partnership to direct funds directly to young people at the age of 16 so that they have increased autonomy is viewed by the Chief Executive as a step in the right direction. The next step would be to understand the impact of this approach on young people's lives.

Activity Agreements

The literature clearly indicates that merely raising the education leaving age to 18 is insufficient to engage all young people in learning. However, Hillage et al (2008) note that by using Activity Agreements as part of the process of raising the leaving age, young people may be encouraged to engage in learning. Activity Agreements are agreements made with young people who are NEET. The agreement involves three As: an allowance, an adviser and activities. The allowance of £30 aims to grab the attention of young people NEET and get them involved initially. The adviser then supports young people to get involved in learning by identifying their particular needs, finding suitable activities and providing continued support. In return, young people take part in activities involving personal development, skill development and work-related activities. Evaluation of the Activity Agreements indicates that this flexible, tailored programme helps engage young people NEET in learning (Hillage et al, 2008).

5.3 Institutional enablers

Early interventions

The young age at which disengagement may start indicates the importance of early interventions. The literature suggests measures aimed at preventing young people from disengaging in learning are therefore more effective in the long run than measures aimed at re-engaging particular groups. This is because once young people have disengaged from learning more resources and a more individualised approach are needed to re-engage young people, such as a personal mentor or coach who works with the young person over an extended period of time (LSDA, 2003).

Gottfredson (2002) notes that the crucial age at which young people form more realistic ambitions about their future is between 11–14. It is at this age that the influence of peers and wider society increase in importance and at which disengagement from learning is likely to develop. This indicates the importance

of early interventions in terms of engaging young people in learning and ensuring educational progression (Knowles, 1997).

Stakeholders interviewed such as 11 Million, Barnardo's, and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), refer to the need to work with young people as early as the primary age range; that is as soon as they show signs of disengagement. Indeed, the transition from primary to secondary school was seen as problematic by a range of stakeholders, with young people identifying this as the time at which they felt the most vulnerable because of a sudden move to larger spaces and populations and the exposure to being isolated and bullied.

Callanan et al (2009) highlight that the patterns, causes and extent of disengagement are complex and varied, which makes identification of disengagement at an early stage challenging for schools and school staff. They note that schools face a range of barriers in identifying disengagement, not least a gap between the wealth of data collected and the use made of it.

Barnardo's continues the discussion of how to identify disengagement by what they refer to as 'the moment of truth' and the need for policy-makers to maximise on this 'moment':

'Again, drawing on this earlier research, the young people had a moment of truth when they were out of education, away from friends, being told to look for work or being kicked out of their house. There were lots who spoke quite eloquently about their regrets and how they would go back and do it differently; it was quite moving. That is something they realised themselves through dropping out and realising that they were in a vulnerable position. That moment is something you can really work with on the re-engagement agenda.'
(Assistant Director for Policy and Research)

It was suggested that this moment of truth is key for re-engaging young people and valuing their maturity, as many of them were living 'quite adult lives' as a result of being mothers, caring for sick relatives and coping with experiences of homelessness. Policy-makers and funding providers can respond to the maturity in young people and build on their self-realisation of the need to re-engage.

Flexibility in learning provision

Hillage and Aston (2001) note the importance of flexible provision in order to attract new learners. It is also important to consider that flexible provision encourages young people and adults to re-engage in learning after they have initially

disengaged, which may be due to flexibility in learning provision giving young people a sense of control over their learning (Tunnard et al, 2008). Barnardo's (2008) argues that a primary means of helping young people to re-engage with learning when they are ready is by providing them with more flexible learning provision, such as more part-time, evening and weekend courses.

Some colleges, such as Newham College in London, provide flexible provision by using a 'roll-on-roll-off' system whereby young people can leave a course and rejoin when they are ready to do so. This ensures that young people do not drop out of college merely because they are not able to commit to a course for a period of time, such as because of caring responsibilities. It has also been noted that flexibility in the classroom can be increased by the use of support staff (Blatchford et al, 2008). Flexibility in learning may be especially important for specific groups of young people, such as Gypsy and Traveller young people, because interrupted and nomadic learning is common among their communities (Bhopal, 2004).

With reference to the experiences of the YWCA in working with young women and the need for flexibility, the Policy Development Officer describes one way in which the service is flexible:

'We have support groups ... youth workers available for one-to-ones and we are very flexible – for example, if a young woman cannot face doing something on a certain day (which would trigger a whole issue of absenteeism), we – although we are not suggesting that it is good for a young woman to want to opt out on any given day – are able to make space for that, in other words, "OK, come in tomorrow and start again". At the same time we have to balance this with funders needs.'

The need for flexibility in learning provision was highlighted by the YWCA as a key issue for teenage mothers, particularly in light of the forthcoming increase in the compulsory participation age. Although many achievements have been made in recent years in supporting this group, a realistic approach suggests that the teenage pregnancy rate is unlikely to drop drastically in the near future. The YWCA provides services such as on-site crèches that give young mothers the flexibility they need to engage in learning.

Stakeholder interviews also highlighted the need for increased collaboration and partnership working between colleges, local authorities and third-sector organisations to support flexible provision. One example was how this approach could work towards supporting young people NEET living in rural areas. Young

people could be supported in finding training that is not necessarily provided in their local area. Links across localities and flexible funding may support them in breaking with negative experiences and embarking on new possibilities.

Alternative curriculum/alternative provision

It is important to remember that young people who have disengaged from the education system may still be keen to learn (Hayward et al, 2008; Foskett et al, 2008). This indicates the importance of providing learning opportunities beyond formal schooling. Further, it is recognised in the literature that the current curriculum may not respond adequately to the needs of all young people (Merton, 1997; Hayward et al, 2008). Since 1997 there have been several initiatives to relax the structures of the National Curriculum to consider alternative modes of participation. These alternative modes of participation largely focus on providing more opportunities for vocational learning. The link between vocational learning and future employment opportunities is important to young people. As a consequence, young people are more willing to engage in learning (Hayward et al, 2008).

Alternative curricula are frequently successful in helping young people who are disaffected and excluded from school to re-engage with learning. Barnardo's (2008) promotes the importance of alternative education to ensure that vulnerable young people who are excluded from schools continue to engage in learning. It is noted that alternative provision should not only focus on young people gaining academic and vocational qualifications, but also on gaining life skills, such as those needed to gain employment and continue in education.

Rathbone's Director for Youth Engagement drew attention to the need to place a greater emphasis on learning in the wider community and promote alternative approaches for children of school age, including a move away from large school populations. Attention was drawn to existing requirements in the education and training system, such as the pressures of league tables, minimum performance levels and the emphasis on classroom-based learning, and the way in which they detract from the possibility of introducing alternative provision. He argued that such requirements prevent the exploration of different pedagogies for engaging learners, allowing for limited 'adaptation of courses and training to accommodate different levels and circumstances of young people'. Rathbone argues that the Government could support a move to alternative provision through providing funding to the third sector, equal to the unit cost of a young person being in school. Such a move would allow the third sector (which is more likely to pick up young people NEET) to develop courses relevant to learners.

Jankowska and Atlay (2008) considered the use of a 'creative learning space' for learners to engage in their own learning process and become more active, autonomous learners. They note that this 'creative learning space' is especially important considering the increasingly diverse student body. It is difficult to measure the impact of creative learning spaces on young people's learning outcomes, though they suggest it improves the learners' creative capacity and therefore their ability to learn.

The YWCA provides what it refers to as 'women-only spaces'. As explained by the Policy Development Officer during stakeholder discussions, following an in-depth evaluation of their women-only spaces, the organisation found that this approach allowed young women to 'step outside of what society may expect of them and to try different things such as physical activities'. They found that women-only spaces contributed towards tackling gender stereotypes and laying the foundation for allowing young women to consider 'atypical' job roles^{ix}.

Hallam et al (2007) describe the development of an alternative curriculum for Key Stage 4 to help young people who are disaffected and excluded from school to re-engage with learning. This alternative curriculum is based on Skill Force, a youth initiative that offers 14–16 year olds a skills-focused vocational alternative to the traditional curriculum. They found that the students taking part in the programme increased their motivation, confidence, communication and social skills. In addition, exclusions were reduced, and attendance and behaviour improved. The students noted that the reasons for these positive changes were due to the curriculum being practical and the required written work being meaningful to them. Students responded to the opportunity to gain qualifications, such as a first aid qualification. Hallam et al note that for some students, this was the first formal educational success that they had achieved.

A key feature of the alternative curriculum described is the use of rewards and consequences. Students were made aware that if their behaviour was good and they had completed their work, they would be rewarded. If not, then the consequence would be no reward. The rewards described by Hallam et al are simple, such as being able to take part in sporting activities. However they were powerful in motivating students.

Students were made aware that if their behaviour was good and they completed their work a reward would follow. If they did not, there would be no reward. The rewards were simple, perhaps undertaking a sporting activity or going for a walk. This contrasts with most current school regimes where

there are few rewards for low-attaining students and consequences are seen in terms of punishment.

(Hallam et al, 2007, p 61)

Informal learning

Hayward et al (2008) indicate that even if young people have disengaged from learning in a formal learning environment, they may continue to engage with learning in youth clubs. This indicates the important role that youth workers play in supporting learning. Informal learning, with the opportunity for young people to gain qualifications, may re-engage them in learning more broadly.

Atkins (2008) notes that considering young people's leisure activities is of paramount importance when considering learning. Atkins notes that leisure activities serve as an escape for young people from low-paid or low-skilled work. This indicates that enthusiasm for leisure activities could be harnessed and used for engaging young people in learning.

Holistic approach to learning

Hayward et al (2008) note the importance of ensuring that various agencies related to young people's learning and wellbeing are co-ordinated to ensure that young people do not experience fragmentation in their learning. They provide an example of a growing partnership between Wolverhampton's 14–19 Development Team and the city's Youth Service. This partnership has allowed for learning options for 14–19 year olds to be transformed to include more information opportunities available through the Youth Service. All learning opportunities for young people, including formal education and learning activities provided by informal providers, are outlined in the City's online 14–19 prospectus. Each young person's learning activities are recorded in a web-based programme called my-iPlan (www.my-iplan.com). This ensures a co-ordinated approach to learning where young people themselves, as well as those who work with young people (including teachers, youth workers, and Connexions personal advisers), can record all learning that the young person has taken part in.

A recent report by the Social Exclusion Task Force (December 2008) notes that the wide range of learning initiatives that influence young people's aspirations may be a barrier to engaging in learning if they are not co-ordinated in an inclusive and integrated approach.

However, Hayward et al (2008) note that while integrated forms of learning are desirable, it may also be important for professionals (such as teachers and youth

workers) and organisations (such as schools and youth groups) to remain distinct. Over-integration may result in young people withdrawing from youth work provision and youth workers. This point has also been raised by other authors (for example, Tiffany, 2007; Shepherd, 2008).

Tunnard et al (2008) note that there are also promising approaches to engage young parents, such as specialist Connexions advisers who provide support and guidance and break down barriers to learning, such as housing, accessing benefits and affordable child care.

A report by the University of Cambridge (Arnot and Pinson, 2005) indicates that refugees and asylum seeker children in schools can be supported if Local Education Authorities provide a holistic model of education, such as by encouraging parental involvement, building community links and engaging in a multi-agency approach.

Doyle and McCorriston (2008) found that a holistic learning environment is an important feature in engaging young asylum seekers and refugees in primary and secondary school education. This holistic approach includes schools employing home-school and community link workers who provide important links between communities and schools.

In discussing the holistic approach of the YWCA in working with girls and young women, the Policy Development Officer drew attention to the multiple needs of some of the young women who they are working with and the inability of schools to respond to these needs due to a lack of resources:

‘Schools are working with many pupils who have a wide range of needs, and the girls that we work with have very complex needs, that is, living in poverty, family breakdown, bereavement, homelessness, mental health issues ... the girls we work with don’t tend to get on with school very well and they may also become involved in other things like drugs, offending, as well as having anger management/aggression issues. There are all of these layers and schools don’t have the capacity to provide intensive support of this nature. Many schools contact us to say that they are unable to deliver this support and so ask us.’

The need for a holistic response as provided by organisations such as the YWCA is perhaps recognised by schools, but remains beyond their ability to respond. This reinforces the need for schools to work in partnership with other organisations and the need for the Government to fund and improve on-site school resources and provision.

Linking learning to employment

Several authors (for example, Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Hayward et al, 2008) have noted that young people are more likely to become disengaged with school if their aptitudes are more practical than academic. This indicates that increased opportunities for work-based and practical learning may improve young people's engagement with learning. Hall and Raffo (2004) analysed longitudinal research data from a study on young people in a work-related learning programme for 14–16 year olds. They found that there are several types of learning occurring within these programmes that are unlikely to occur in schools, such as skills-based learning, learning within a new peer group and 'being treated like an adult' (p 73).

Hall and Raffo note that these types of learning may engage in learning some young people who may otherwise disengage from learning. However, they also note that the engagement in learning experienced by these young people in work-related learning may not readily transfer to engagement in school-based learning. This indicates the importance of alternative educational provision beyond traditional school settings.

Alternative provision and increased opportunities can also be framed within a focus on 'different pathways of learning' which do not only concentrate on academic routes. As pointed out during the stakeholder interview by the Director of Young People's Participation at the Learning and Skills Council (LSC):

'There is a need for more emphasis on different learning styles and environments which recognise that young people learn in different ways and do not only achieve in more traditional routes of learning. Offering young people alternative forms of provision and experiences through, for example, young apprenticeships, work experience placements and increased flexibility programmes, will help keep the interest in learning of some young people who might otherwise not participate in education and training.'

In addition, it is important to consider that many young people are motivated to engage in learning if it is linked to increased job prospects (LSDA, 2003). Motivation related to employment seems to be especially important between the ages of 15–19 years. The linkage between learning and jobs can be established by encouraging learning providers to include workplace learning in courses offered. Furthermore, as pointed out by Rathbone during stakeholder interviews, the Government can do more to support employers in developing work-based vocational learning by

introducing policies such as tax breaks to encourage employers to give jobs to young people.

The Director of Young People's Participation at the LSC considered work-based learning environments to be better for supporting some young people in learning. For example, the Young Apprenticeship programme was highlighted as a highly successful initiative in keeping young people engaged in learning and progression post 16, and from preventing them becoming NEET.

Some stakeholders highlighted the need to review the entry requirements for obtaining apprenticeships as they are beyond the reach of learners with basic skills in literacy and numeracy. The suggestion of pre-apprenticeships and bite-sized vocational qualifications was advocated by several stakeholders.

The importance of connecting learning to employment has also been highlighted by Smith (2004), who considered Australian apprenticeship and traineeship policies and found that a contract of training is a strong influence on young people regarding the workplace as a learning environment. With the increase in the learning leaving age, this finding may be especially important because it ensures that young people continue their learning even if they are engaged in employment.

However, some authors warn against assuming that the desire to gain employment motivates all young people to engage in learning (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 1999). This indicates that while policy initiatives that link learning to employment prospects may encourage some young people to engage in learning, this may not be the case for all young people.

In order for learning to be linked to employment, it has been noted that partnerships between learning providers, organisations and employers are important. These partnerships allow for young people to be guided towards finding the right support and learning opportunities.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

The literature indicates the importance of providing young people with relevant and accessible IAG. It seems that this is particularly important during transitional periods, such as between primary and secondary school, and between compulsory and post-compulsory education (Hayward et al, 2008; Callanan et al, 2009).

Some young people are at greater risk of becoming detached from education,

employment and training during their transition between primary and secondary school, between compulsory and post-compulsory education, and between education and the labour market. Some young people simply drift away, for example because they obtained poorer exam results than they had expected at 16.

(Hayward et al, 2008, p 46)

Barnardo's (2008) argues that a primary means of helping young people to re-engage with learning when they are ready is by providing young people with appropriate IAG when they ask for it.

Government initiatives, notably the September Guarantee^x may support young people in engaging in learning. The extension of the September Guarantee to 17 year olds in 2008 to capture, among others, those who may have made a wrong decision and dropped out during Year 12 is also of relevance. This indicates the importance of providing IAG to young people who are not in formal education (Fostkett, 2004). Hayward et al (2008) suggest providing this IAG outside the formal educational context because this is a context that young people do not associate with failure.

In addition to changes such as the September Guarantee, the Director of Young People's Participation at the LSC noted the need for young people to receive a high quality of IAG to support the development and roll-out of the National Apprenticeships Service. It was suggested that the introduction of the two initiatives should result in harnessing IAG to ensure that appropriate provision is available for young people.

Furthermore, a recent report by the Social Exclusion Task Force (December 2008) indicates the importance of ensuring that information provided to young people on education and employment opportunities is tailored to the immediate local community and geo-demographical area in which individual young people live. For example, young people could be made aware of partnerships between local education providers and local employers. It seems that this locally tailored approach may allow a reduction in the negative effects that living in a deprived neighbourhood may have on young people's aspirations. This tailored approach is one of the key features of the Government's new IAG standards, which outline that from April 2008 Local Authorities assumed overall accountability for the quality of young people's IAG. The aim of these new IAG standards is to help Local Authorities secure IAG provision for young people in their area as part of an integrated youth support service, which includes Connexions services, schools and colleges^{xi}.

Tunnard et al (2008) note the pressing need to ensure that young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families receive appropriate IAG. In addition, they argue that it is essential for these young people to have fair access to the opportunities enjoyed by their peers, which includes providing IAG to ensure that young people with disabilities are able to choose from a wide range of educational options. It was noted that disabled learners are not receiving information about opportunities in work-based learning and apprenticeships and that the information received on further education options is often negative. Reasons for this lack of information and inadequate guidance were attributed to professionals not believing that young people could cope with certain choices as a result of viewing disability through a medical model resulting in a 'damage limitation exercise'. This is opposite to an approach which looks at 'disabilities, rights and entitlements'. The Chief Executive continued by highlighting the Aimhigher initiative as a potential means of developing improved IAG for disabled learners:

'The Aimhigher programme, which includes disability and widening participation, means that the widening participation individual who goes into schools is also working with disabled young people and that is working really well. I would really like to see the programme being extended to vocational options.'

It was noted by the Chief Executive that the direct engagement of Aimhigher staff with disabled learners was proving to be positive for this group in terms of IAG. The extension of the programme with this continued focus was therefore applauded.

In addition, Walker and Faraday (2008) note that blind and partially sighted young people may become NEET as a result of being stuck in a cycle of courses that do not lead to positive destinations, such as a job or further education. Reasons given were having a sense of security in their present situation and uncertainty over what to do next. This indicates the need to ensure that blind and partially sighted young people have high-quality advice to support them in mapping out clear pathways in order to avoid the 'course cycle' phenomenon and the deferring of a situation where they become NEET.

Francis (2002) notes that there is a gender bias in terms of young people's career ambitions for the future, with more girls than boys choosing jobs with a predominately creative or caring component, and boys opting for jobs that are predominately technical, scientific or business oriented. Francis therefore notes that in order to overcome this gender bias, it is important to provide both sexes with

better IAG regarding career choices and employment trends. Considering the importance of linking learning to employment, this improved IAG may engage more young people in meaningful learning.

Burchardt (2004), Aston et al (2005) and Winn and Hay (2009) provide evidence that suggests young disabled people feel less well served by advice and guidance services. Burchardt (2004) notes that while young disabled people generally have similar aspirations to other young people, they are aware that they may face more barriers to their learning and employment. Burchardt suggests that special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinators in secondary schools and Connexions advisers need to ensure that they encourage positive aspirations, while offering practical support in overcoming barriers for young disabled people. Referring to Australia, Winn and Hay (2009) note the difficulty of transition from school for young disabled people due to a disparate and fragmented group of service agencies providing a range of diverse services.

Tackling bullying

The Director of Youth engagement at Rathbone described the long-term impact of bullying as a 'corrosive thread' running through the lives of young people. It is clear that bullying has a negative impact on young people who experience it and this impacts on learning and engagement and more broadly. Spielhofer et al (2009) recommend that young people who are averse to education or training due to negative experiences at school need schools to implement more effective anti-bullying strategies. The review suggests increasing the drive towards tackling all forms of bullying in schools and college environments.

5.4 Situational enablers

It is evident from the literature that young people's socio-demographic and living situations have an important impact on their engagement with learning. The literature indicates the importance of a supportive family and role models.

Supportive family

'Support from one's family is the biggest contributor to young people staying in education and/or training post 16.'

(Director of Youth Engagement, Rathbone)

The literature indicates that a young person's family, and especially their parents, may be an enabling factor in engagement in learning (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005; Marc Zack et al, 2006; Hayward et al, 2008).

‘ ... both parents and youth consistently reported that either parents are the sole decision-makers, youth get to make their own decisions but parents still have the final say (“Mostly we ask him what he wants to do, but we have the ultimate decision”) ... ’

(Marczack et al, 2006, p 49)

‘ ... it was noticeable in the young people’s workshops that many of the participants identified their parents, and particularly their mothers, as a key source of support.’

(Hayward et al, 2008, p 63)

The review suggests that strong bonds among family members, ‘bonding capital’, can influence the aspirations of young people from lower socio-economic groups.

A recent report by the Social Exclusion Task Force (December 2008) notes that parents are the most important influence on children’s aspirations. It is noted that schools can encourage parents to engage in their child’s learning by providing parents with frequent information about their child’s progress, providing general information about parenting and information about how to deal with bullying (Owen et al, 2008). For parents of young refugees and asylum seekers, stakeholder discussions showed that parental support, including induction programmes for new arrivals to the UK, ‘is key for making parents and family aware of the culture of learning and what the National Curriculum means’ (Policy Adviser – Employment and Training, Refugee Council).

Tunnard et al (2008) note that young people leaving care face particular challenges in terms of engaging in learning because they generally lack family support. They suggest that it is therefore important for foster carers and residential staff to provide young people in care with support regarding their options in respect of further education. In addition, they recommend that young people leaving care who are NEET should be provided with a personal adviser up to the age of 25 who is responsible for supporting and guiding them through their education.

Member organisations of the LGBT Consortium have support groups for the parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people:

‘We are very clear that this has to be the most fundamental support system; we have to help parents not to be hostile, as young people may already be facing hostilities from schools.’

Parental support and understanding is essential as there are very few support mechanisms in the existing school structure to respond to this group of young people because of the anxieties that remain over sexual identities.

‘There is a gap around support because it’s not understood and not accepted; that would be the same for Trans and LGB and questioning (as we also say). There is no information at school about it. You don’t talk about it in our education system and teachers are afraid of talking about it in case they get accused of child molestation. This is a problem for young people.’
(Chief Executive, LGBT Consortium)

Teachers

It is evident that teachers are highly important in engaging young people in learning. Rowe (2003) notes that young people’s achievements, attitudes and experiences of schooling are influenced by a variety of factors, such as family background, though the most significant effect is that of the teacher. This indicates that the quality of teaching and learning provision are the most salient influences on young people’s cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes of schooling, regardless of other factors. Rowe (2003) concludes that the most important feature in engaging young people in learning is quality teachers and teaching, supported by strategic professional development.

It is evident that the absence of sympathetic and supportive teachers can have detrimental effects on young people engaging with learning. For example, Hosie (2007, cited in Evans et al, 2009) considered a group of 93 young women who experienced pregnancy at school in England. Hosie found that antipathy towards them at school, pre-pregnancy, was often the root of disengagement from learning. This disengagement is then exacerbated when the news of pregnancy is met with negative attitudes from teachers. Hosie describes how, once those young women were pregnant, educational alternatives to school frequently provide a route back into, and a changed perception of education. In Hosie’s study, the young women themselves also stated that their disengagement from learning was associated with difficulties with particular teachers, being bullied, feeling bored, dislike of some subjects and struggling with their homework. This research suggests that teachers’ attitudes had the strongest influence on young women’s experience of school. Complaints by these young women included ‘being shouted at, being spoken to like children or being humiliated’ (Hosie, 2007, cited in Evans et al, 2009, p 22).

In relation to teacher influence, stakeholder interviews drew on a range of insights. Stakeholders drew on examples of young people influenced into choosing

unexpected learning pathways, such as learners with little knowledge of career paths outside their general family/community environment (that is, with poor skills or long-term unemployment) investigating academic paths due to the impact of an excellent and committed teacher. It was also noted by another stakeholder that young people are aware of the labels that teachers may give them, such as learners who may be deemed as good, disruptive or lacking potential, and the impact that this has on their self-belief, self-worth and capacity to remain engaged.

Role models

It is evident from the literature that other role models are also important. For example, Connexions advisers who work on a one-to-one basis with young people seem to be important role models (Hayward et al, 2008). Keep et al (2004) therefore note that it is beneficial for professionals to consider young people on an individual, case-by-case basis. Barnardo's highlights the importance of the individual role-model approach to positively impact upon young people's lives:

'The role of a personalised project worker is important for building the confidence of young people. Project workers take every opportunity to challenge the ingrained sense of failure that many young people have gained from their school experience. Working on a one-to-one basis with young people, they help to build confidence through developing soft skills, social skills and working on those areas where young people display strengths. This personal approach has greatly eased individuals' transition back into learning, with young people saying that they appreciated having somebody who believed in and cared for them.'

(Assistant Director for Policy and Research and Research and Policy Officer, Barnardo's)

Rathbone also highlighted a similar personalised approach to working with young people. Commenting on the lack of pastoral care available to support young people who are not high achievers, the Director of the Youth Service drew attention to Rathbone's commitment to offer every young person pastoral care to support their motivation, retention, achievement and wellbeing. He argued that the costs of offering pastoral care are low in comparison to the significant returns in terms of the impact on young people's lives. A further stakeholder commented on the need for either an approach that encompasses a one-to-one mentor or pastoral care which aims to support every learner as being of particular need in large college institutions. It was argued that it is perhaps easier for young people to become lost and overlooked in these environments compared to the smaller Sixth Form environment. This in turn could put them at risk of dropping out of the system.

The literature also indicates that peer-to-peer mentoring may be useful in providing positive role models (Newburn and Shiner, 2005). For example, Colley (2003, 2006) provides examples of how young people who had disengaged from learning were encouraged to re-engage with learning based on mentoring. This mentor was trained for four full days in how to consider the purpose of education and training with the mentee. A variety of outcomes are described associated with mentoring, some of which indicate a positive re-engagement with learning, but some of which also indicate that mentoring may fail to bring about the expected transformation of the mentee. In conclusion, mentoring may not always be able to uncover the underlying patterns of non-engagement.

Taking the benefits of peer mentoring into account, the Government announced in December 2008 that it is rolling out pilots in schools across England. The aim of these pilots is to train young people to support their peers and listen to their problems, resolve disputes and encourage friendships. The Government notes that most advice and guidance is provided by adults, and peer mentoring may therefore provide young people with a different angle of support, which is hoped to increase their engagement in learning.

Doyle and McCorriston (2008) note that peer mentoring may be an effective means to support young refugees/asylum seekers at secondary school. They note that mentoring may help support these young people to better engage with their education and their peers. The mentors described by Doyle and McCorriston do not work solely with refugee and asylum-seeking young people, but also serve as valuable support staff and foster links with the local community, such as by supporting the families of young people to engage in learning.

Tunnard et al (2008) note that only around one third of young people in the youth justice system are in full-time education, employment or training. There are also serious concerns about the low level of educational attainment of young people in custody. This is exemplified by two-thirds of young people in custody being at NVQ level 1 or below for reading, and over three-quarters for writing and numeracy. While there have been initiatives to improve the educational attainment and participation of young offenders, such as by using mentors and personal advisers, these initiatives have failed to significantly improve the levels of engagement in learning.

5.5 Summary

As with the factors that prevent young people from engaging in meaningful learning, those that enable young people to engage in meaningful learning are varied and

complex. As outlined in this chapter, at the heart of all enabling factors lies actually listening to young people. It is important that this communication involves an unbiased and non-judgemental exchange, in which young people are valued as individuals and involved in all decision-making about their future. The other enablers to engaging all young people in meaningful learning can be divided into policy-related enablers, institutional enablers and situational enablers. These enablers indicate the need to consider all aspects of a young person's life and ensure that policy-makers, educational providers and organisations involved in working with young people collaborate to ensure that young people do not experience fragmentation in their learning, know where to receive support and are valued and supported in the decisions they make. The important role of including the young person's families and considering the individual living situation of the young person is also highlighted as essential in enabling all young people to engage in meaningful learning.

6. Conclusions and implications

The premise of this review is that the genuine and meaningful engagement of all young people in learning is necessary in order to reduce inequality and improve life chances. Considering both the factors that prevent young people from engaging in learning, and the factors that enable young people to engage in learning, it is evident that engaging all young people in meaningful learning is vastly complex. While there are numerous policies aimed at engaging young people in meaningful learning post 16, such as the introduction of the 14–19 Diplomas, many young people remain disengaged. The literature indicates that young people's decisions to participate in learning after 16 are heavily influenced by their prior experience of education, and poor experiences are linked to lower participation rates. Engagement is not a simple choice for all young people. Young people can feel disengaged from learning for various reasons, and this can be mild or severe. It is suggested that severe disengagement from learning is a cumulative process that starts in primary school and then becomes more entrenched in secondary school. For some young people this is a process that they feel powerless to arrest. The concept of a 'moment of truth' is helpful, whereby young people arrive at the end of this process and the reality of their situation sinks in. The conclusions summarise what affects engagement in learning and what can be done to improve the engagement in learning of all young people, based on the literature review and the stakeholder interviews.

6.1 Barriers to engaging in learning

There are a wide range of factors that may prevent young people from engaging in meaningful learning. These factors include personal, institutional and situational barriers.

Personal barriers

Personal barriers are individual to the learner but can also be influenced by 'outside' factors, and findings show that it is possible to sub-categorise these into four broad areas: motivational barriers, the positive choice to follow an alternative trajectory, the ability to read and young people's self-beliefs.

Motivation to learn is one of the most important personal factors to influence engagement. While a distinction can be made between learners who are not motivated to learn and those who may be motivated but have many factors working against them, both result in disengagement. It is also recognised that young people are more comfortable about citing situational barriers as potential reasons for disengagement rather than more personal reasons, such as motivation, since these

reasons are less socially acceptable. This indicates the need to be cautious about how to support young people and ensure that barriers to engagement are carefully evaluated. In addition, it must also be recognised that young people may make the positive decision to follow an alternative trajectory based on their individual perception of their current circumstances and needs, indicating the need to consider what is best for each individual young person rather than assuming that being engaged in learning is automatically beneficial for all young people.

While motivation as an independent barrier may be important for some young people, it is also evident that motivation interacts with, and is influenced by, other barriers. Importantly, poor reading and writing skills frequently translate into low achievement during adolescence with a subsequent lack of motivation and disengagement.

A further important personal barrier to learning is related to young people's self-beliefs. These beliefs may include ideas of becoming a celebrity, which may lead young people to develop unreal and dream-like aspirations that fail to translate into realistic and realisable ambitions. An absence of the latter may prevent young people from engaging in learning as they neglect to focus on achievable goals. This indicates the importance of supporting young people to form realistic and achievable aspirations that are not heavily influenced by celebrity culture.

In opposition to a focus on celebrity culture, some young people may develop an ingrained sense of failure due to the emphasis schools place on academic achievement. This may lead young people to measure success in terms of qualifications and tests, which can result in anxiety, fear and disengagement. It therefore seems important to ensure that schools make the broader aims of learning evident to learners, extending beyond qualifications and test results.

Factors associated with young people's identities, such as gender and sexual orientation, are also relevant to fear of failure. These findings indicate the importance of carefully considering gender stereotypes to ensure that young people feel safe, valued and able to 'be themselves' while learning.

While these personal barriers are important, it is evident that 'real' barriers to young people engaging in learning do exist: that is, although there may be a degree of latent demand for learning, this is undermined by institutional and situational barriers.

Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers occur within large systems or organisations, such as establishments for learning, funding systems and asylum processes. The inability to secure sufficient funding for learning is viewed as a significant and often the most important barrier to engaging young people in learning. Barriers faced include the cost of travel and child care, as well as course fees and equipment. A key area of concern is that funding arrangements are frequently identified as being inflexible, frequently exhibiting an inherent ability to discriminate – albeit inadvertently – against certain groups such as refugees and asylum seekers, teenage mothers and those whose families have low incomes. Funding systems are also found to be complex, making it difficult for both learners and parents to understand their entitlements. This indicates the need for future legislation to simplify the funding system, making it more transparent and accessible to all young people and their parents.

A further significant institutional barrier is bullying. While over recent years there has been an increased awareness of the impact of bullying on an individual's life and their ability and/or decision to engage in learning, bullying remains a significant factor in young people's disengagement from learning. It is therefore important for educational providers to realise the significance of bullying, how far it influences the lives of young people from many different backgrounds, and to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to prevent and tackle it.

The content of the curriculum is considered to be boring and irrelevant to some young people's lives. Some groups of young people (for example, those from Gypsy and Traveller communities and LGBT young people) fail to see their culture, identities and experiences valued and reflected in the curriculum. Such a lack of identity with the curriculum is a further factor leading to disengagement from learning. This indicates the need to promote inclusion in the curriculum and place diversity at the centre of planning, to ensure that all learners are presented with a range of choices and adequate provision. This adequate provision includes embedded ESOL teaching to support learners in accessing the curriculum and ensuring that their other skills, such as mathematics, are adequately assessed and developed. In addition, it is important to support families to improve their English language skills as this may have an effect on learners' ability to achieve their potential.

It is evident that some young people do not receive the IAG they need to make the right choices after 16, or when re-engaging in learning. Careers advice and work experience placement opportunities have been subject to criticism, in that they can

potentially constrain young people's options and aspirations if managed badly and stereotypically, according to the beliefs of those responsible.

Situational barriers

Situational barriers are linked to the socio-demographic circumstances of young people, such as living in areas where incomes are generally low. Young people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to develop ambitious and achievable aspirations, have lower attainment and have low rates of participation in higher education. However, it is important to note that young people from these backgrounds may also have high aspirations. It appears that low aspirations and achievement are associated with related factors such as a young person's pre-school environment, parents' and children's values, and beliefs and the characteristics of children's schools.

While most young people facing the discussed personal, institutional and situational barriers are engaged in meaningful learning, some young people face multiple barriers and risks which make them more vulnerable to disengagement from learning. The balance of evidence also suggests the significance of considering how various barriers interact. This means for example that personal barriers to engaging in learning, such as lack of motivation, can also be influenced by institutional barriers; a young person who has low motivation for learning and is faced with insufficient funding for learning, is more likely to drop out of education. This complex combination and interplay of barriers means that it is essential to consider young people on an individual basis.

6.2 Engaging all young people in learning

Strategies aimed at re-engaging young people in learning are aimed at overcoming the barriers to learning. The most important enabler to engaging in meaningful learning is communication; young people value having adults listen to their needs and aspirations for the future. This indicates the importance of young people being treated as adults and providing young people with a high degree of choice and control over their learning. Equally, it is important to focus upon the achievements of young people and how they can make progress.

Further solutions to engaging all young people in learning (that is, factors that may motivate young people to remain or return to learning) can be grouped into policy-related solutions, institutional solutions and situational solutions.

Policy-related solutions

The most significant area for policy review, as mentioned throughout the literature and by stakeholders, is financing for learning. Appropriate financing for learning is an incentive for engagement, and lack of it a disincentive. While many of the policy initiatives related to funding, such as the introduction of the EMA, are positively received, some young people, such as many asylum seekers and refugees, are excluded from these initiatives. Ways in which funding arrangements inadvertently discriminate against and exclude groups of learners needs to be addressed. Failure to do so could be understood as a lack of commitment by the Government to support young people from *all* backgrounds to be successful in learning. The raising of the participation age provides a strong background against which to review funding mechanisms and to ensure that young people are not excluded.

In addition to the importance of financing for learning, it is evident that policy-related solutions must include a careful consideration of how to introduce the raising of the education leaving age to 18 in order to ensure that young people are given a choice and take part in the decisions related to their education. It is suggested that this should include a flexible and tailored approach to each young person's interests, needs and living situation. It is also important to avoid potential negative outcomes such as the criminalisation of young people, with the focus being on providing meaningful learning experiences to support them in building dignified lives.

Institutional enablers

It is evident that barriers to learning are most successfully addressed at an early age. Although findings have acknowledged the need to work with some learners when they are at primary school, it has been noted that the crucial age of initial (or visible) disengagement is between the ages of 11–14. This is at a stage in a young person's life when the influence of peers and the wider society becomes more pronounced. If left unchallenged, this initial disengagement gradually builds up over time, indicating that disengagement is not a conscious choice of young people.

In terms of re-engaging young people, it is suggested that there is a 'moment of truth' for many young people in which they realise that they are in a dead-end situation and are willing to re-engage with learning. This re-engagement is likely to occur if young people are provided with flexible provision, such as roll-on-roll-off courses, courses that are directly related to their vocational interests and funding systems which support flexibility. This is likely to engage a range of equality groups, such as teenage mothers and Gypsy and Traveller young people. It has also been suggested that the introduction of pre-apprenticeships and 'bite-sized' qualifications would support learners who may have lower abilities in literacy and numeracy. In

addition, young people may learn in informal situations such as in alternative education provision, youth clubs and during leisure activities. Through harnessing young people's enthusiasm in these informal situations, stakeholders have witnessed that it is possible to re-engage young people in more formal learning pathways.

Furthermore, increased opportunities for work-based and practical learning may improve young people's engagement with more formal learning. Some young people have preferences for more practical forms of learning, others prefer academic learning and others are happy with both. The need to couple provision with other alternative curriculum pathways is important as an engagement in a work-based or practical learning path may not translate into engagement in school- or college-based learning. This ensures that young people do not experience fragmented provision and learning.

It is clear that bullying has a negative impact on young people who experience it and this impacts on learning and engagement more broadly. More effective anti-bullying strategies in schools and college environments would benefit all, and those are averse to education or training due to negative experiences at school.

Situational enablers

Ensuring that young people do not experience a fragmented learning experience is critically related to providing young people with relevant and accessible IAG. This is particularly important during the transitional periods from primary to secondary school and between compulsory and post-compulsory education. Currently many young people may also experience difficulties with accessing appropriate funding because they face grave challenges with understanding the often confusing systems and procedures associated with applying for funding, and do not receive appropriate IAG. This demonstrates the importance of various agencies related to a young person's learning and wellbeing working together to provide a holistic approach. This would allow young people to know where to turn to for IAG and would ensure that IAG is tailored to the specific needs of the young person and provides them with a wide range of well-informed and targeted options.

There is also mounting evidence regarding the importance of including parents in the provision of IAG since parents are the first port of call for many young people and are the most significant influence on a young person's learning. However, it is important to note that some young people, such as young people leaving care cannot rely on a supportive family background. As a result, other significant adults become crucially important as role models and guides. This includes teachers and

project workers who can have a profoundly positive effect on young people by developing their confidence, providing IAG and being positive role models. Evidence shows that peer support is also influential in this respect. The influence of positive role models building confidence allows many young people to engage or to re-engage in meaningful learning, despite many odds being stacked against them.

Appendix 1 Literature review

The literature review was based on several stages to ensure a systematic approach to the available literature:

Development of inclusion and exclusion criteria

Initially the focus of the review and the parameters were agreed. This included identifying and agreeing the inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine the selection of literature.

Identification of relevant websites/databases to review for published and grey literature

Database searches (DIALOG, IDOX, Ingenta) and web searches for published literature and web searches for grey literature were conducted using various combinations of search terms. Texts were either downloaded or, where not available electronically, collected from reference libraries.

Identification of relevant search terms from the research questions

A key element of the search term stage was the distinction between the 14–16, 16–19 and life trajectories and aspirations.

Initial screening and quality assurance

As searches progressed, first screenings were made based on research aims and the details of publications selected were entered on an EndNote programme or saved in Word documents. These searches were quality assured for their relevance by two researchers.

Additional searches using specific search criteria

Initial screening and quality assurance indicated that the majority of literature relates to general issues. Additional searches were therefore run using the following specific search criteria:

- barriers
- perceptions
- aspirations
- recommendations/solutions
- needs
- influences
- risks

Additional searches using search terms relating to the equality strands

In addition, searches were conducted using specific equality strands/minority groups.

Additional searches for key people and key projects, based on expert knowledge within the research team of the field

- Universities – research projects completed or in progress
- People – individuals with a strong record of publication and experience in the field

Consideration of emerging research presented at DCSF Research Conference November 2008

The majority of these publications were identified using DataStar. Other search engines include IDOX and Ingenta, as well as universities and key stakeholder web pages.

Based on an initial review, and with consideration of the research questions, the published and grey literature was categorised into the following three main areas:

- enablers/barriers
- aspirations
- other

While the distinction between 14–16 and 16–19 was used during the search stage, it emerged that this distinction was not a useful categorisation of the literature since the overwhelming majority of literature made no age distinction between these age ranges. Similarly the search term ‘trajectories’, although used at the search stage, was subsumed into the aspirations category as it was found to have a very low occurrence.

This categorisation of the literature allowed for emerging themes addressed in the literature and any gaps to be identified. Additional searches were then made to address the gaps in the identified literature.

In addition to the literature searches, relevant policy documents were consulted to serve as a context for the literature review.

Appendix 2 Stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews were carried out with organisations working with young people who have a strong expertise, knowledge and national reach. The range of organisations allowed interview data to explore the experiences of young people from a range of backgrounds and experiences including issues relevant to:

- gender (including transgender young people)
- sexual orientation
- socio-economic background
- race and ethnicity
- refugees and asylum seekers
- learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- age

Stakeholders either worked primarily at a strategic level, with a focus on policy, campaign and lobbying, or at a service and programme level. In some cases a strategic focus was combined with a service provision. Stakeholders were also drawn from Government departments and well-established charitable organisations.

The Learning and Skills Network (LSN) worked with the Equality and Human Rights Commission in identifying 10 stakeholders. The following organisations were selected and senior members of staff approached for interview:

- Refugee Council
- 11 Million (the Children's Commissioner for England)
- Young Women's Christian Association
- Learning and Skills Council
- Rathbone
- Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
- Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills
- Barnardo's
- Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgendered Voluntary and Community Organisations
- Department for Children, Schools and Families

Five face-to face interviews and five telephone interviews were carried out, each interview lasting between one and one and a half hours. Discussions were in depth, allowing participants to respond to a prepared topic guide developed to capture research questions and aims (see Appendix 3 for an example of questions).

Interviews were recorded and partially transcribed, allowing interviewees to review information and provide consent or otherwise for use. Some of the interviewees did not want to be quoted within the text and their comments were therefore embedded within the text.

Appendix 3 Stakeholder interview topic guide

You and your organisation

1. Please give a brief overview of your organisation and your role.
2. How does your organisation work with, or for, young people?
3. How far is the participation and engagement of young people in learning post 16 a priority for you/your organisation?

We're particularly interested in the 14–16 school age group and the 16–18, post-compulsory education age group.

Topics relating to the 14–16 school aged group:

4. Do you think young people aged 14–16 have been able to discuss and negotiate their educational experiences, needs and aspirations? Does this make a difference to participation and engagement in learning after 16?
5. What do you think about the effectiveness of the current school experience for young people?

a) Curriculum

- What works/doesn't work for different groups of young people
- Quantity/quality of options available. How different options are working/not working for certain groups – ask about access to apprenticeships, work-based training, FE, etc
- How (perceived) low status of vocational qualifications affects young people
- How different types of learning and curriculum content are encouraging participation for certain groups
- Whether work-related learning/work experience are effective in opening up work options for all young people

b) Discrimination/bullying

- Impact of bullying and discrimination on participation for certain groups

c) Quality/style of teaching

- Different groups, experiences of how teachers treat them (expectations/aspirations, etc)
- Teachers being prepared/trained to respond to different needs

d) Support

- What is your view of the quality and availability of support different groups of young people receive in school to help them make decisions on post-16 choices?
- Do some groups have better access to support and advice than others?

6. If you had to rank them, what do you think are the top three reasons why young people switch off from learning in the 14–16 age group?
7. In your view, is there a relationship between experience of discrimination and inequality, and participation and engagement? If so, what is that relationship? How does it occur? How can it be prevented? How can it be overcome once it is in place?
8. How far do young people weigh up the risks and benefits of participating in learning post 16?
9. How far does fear of failure or expectation of success play a part?
10. Are there specific things that seem to work for 14–16 year olds to keep them engaged in education?

Topics relating to the 16–18 post compulsory education group:

11. What do you think about the quality of the education and training options currently on offer to young people post 16?
12. What are the top three problems young people might face in staying in some type of learning until 18?
13. What kind of learning choices after 16 would be attractive and relevant to more young people?
14. What practical measures would you recommend in order to encourage and support all young people to continue in meaningful learning until 18? Can you point us to any examples of how these have worked?
15. Are you aware of any good practice, pilots and initiatives in this area? Why do you think it is/has been effective?
16. Do you have any other thoughts or comments that you would like to add?

Appendix 4

Statistical information

Further education (FE)

Total count and proportion of 14 to 25-year-old learners in FE by gender, ethnicity and disability – England (2007/08)

		14–15		16–18		19–25	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender	Female	33,842	41.5	400,619	48.7	272,236	51.3
	Male	47,748	58.5	422,600	51.3	258,764	48.7
	Total	81,590	100.0	823,219	100.0	531,000	100.0
Ethnicity	Asian	3,305	4.1	61,384	7.5	46,747	8.8
	Black	3,013	3.7	47,651	5.8	36,079	6.8
	Chinese	398	0.5	5,370	0.7	4,176	0.8
	Mixed	2,272	2.8	25,550	3.1	14,613	2.8
	White	67,842	83.1	655,767	79.7	396,849	74.7
	Other / Unknown	4,760	5.8	27,497	3.3	32,536	6.1
	Total	81,590	100.0	823,219	100.0	531,000	100.0
LLDD*	LLDD	15,552	19.1	125,842	15.3	62,929	11.9
	No LLDD	57,911	71.0	647,233	78.6	423,375	79.7
	No Information Provided	8,127	10.0	50,144	6.1	44,696	8.4
	Total	81,590	100.0	823,219	100.0	531,000	100.0
Disability	Visual Impairment	406	0.5	3,842	0.5	1,879	0.4
	Hearing Impairment	373	0.5	3,336	0.4	2,080	0.4
	Disability Affecting Mobility	145	0.2	1,555	0.2	1,753	0.3
	Other Physical Disability	172	0.2	1,649	0.2	1,185	0.2
	Other Medical Condition (For Example Epilepsy, Asthma, Diabetes)	2,133	2.6	19,783	2.4	6,993	1.3
	Emotional/Behavioural Difficulties	1,063	1.3	4,953	0.6	1,691	0.3
	Mental Ill Health	94	0.1	1,664	0.2	2,866	0.5
	Temporary Disability After Illness (For Example Post-Viral)	33	0.0	397	0.0	205	0.0
	Profound Complex Disabilities	27	0.0	245	0.0	414	0.1
	Multiple Disabilities	318	0.4	2,039	0.2	2,103	0.4
	Other	1,698	2.1	14,510	1.8	7,684	1.4
	No Disability	64,492	79.0	704,226	85.5	449,288	84.6

Not Known/Information Not Provided	10,636	13.0	65,020	7.9	52,859	10.0
Total	81,590	100.0	823,219	100.0	531,000	100.0

ILR (2007/08). *Learners who consider themselves to have a learning difficulty or disability.

Work-based learning (WBL)

Total count and proportion of 14 to 25-year-old learners in WBL by gender, ethnicity and disability – England (2007/08)

		14–15		16–18		19–25	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender	Female	5,209	42.9	103,629	40.7	121,037	42.8
	Male	6,942	57.1	151,109	59.3	161,639	57.2
	Total	12,151	100.0	254,738	100.0	282,676	100.0
Ethnicity	Asian	421	3.5	8,109	3.2	10,627	3.8
	Black	332	2.7	5,088	2.0	7,137	2.5
	Chinese	2	0.0	115	0.0	249	0.1
	Mixed	278	2.3	5,099	2.0	4,126	1.5
	White	10,947	90.1	232,789	91.4	254,194	89.9
	Other / Unknown	171	1.4	3,538	1.4	6,343	2.2
	Total	12,151	100.0	254,738	100.0	282,676	100.0
LLDD*	LLDD	3,336	27.5	41,299	16.2	26,276	9.3
	No LLDD	8,549	70.4	210,128	82.5	251,230	88.9
	No Information Provided	266	2.2	3,311	1.3	5,170	1.8
	Total	12,151	100.0	254,738	100.0	282,676	100.0
Disability	Visual Impairment	136	1.1	1,793	0.7	1,894	0.7
	Hearing Impairment	64	0.5	1,019	0.4	688	0.2
	Disability Affecting Mobility	34	0.3	324	0.1	248	0.1
	Other Physical Disability	39	0.3	647	0.3	398	0.1
	Other Medical Condition (For Example Epilepsy, Asthma, Diabetes)	567	4.7	8,700	3.4	5,729	2.0
	Emotional/Behavioural Difficulties	506	4.2	3,457	1.4	324	0.1
	Mental Ill Health	43	0.4	505	0.2	314	0.1
	Temporary Disability After Illness (For Example Post-Viral)	4	0.0	117	0.0	81	0.0
	Profound Complex Disabilities	13	0.1	101	0.0	35	0.0

Multiple Disabilities	88	0.7	855	0.3	1,050	0.4
Other	320	2.6	3,438	1.3	1,884	0.7
No Disability	9,998	82.3	229,512	90.1	264,140	93.4
Not Known/Information Not Provided	339	2.8	4,270	1.7	5,891	2.1
Total	12,151	100.0	254,738	100.0	282,676	100.0

ILR (2007/08). *Learners who consider themselves to have a learning difficulty or disability.

References

Alakeson, A. (2005). *Too much too late: Life changes and spending on education and training*. London: Social Market Foundation.

Archer, L., Halsall, A. and Hollingworth, S. (2007). Class, gender, (hetero)sexuality and schooling: paradoxes within working-class girls' engagement with education and post-16 aspirations. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28 (2), 165–180.

Archer, L. and Yamashita, H. (2003). 'Knowing their limits'? Identities, inequalities and inner city school leavers' post-16 aspirations, *Journal of Education Policy*, 18, 1, 53–69.

Annot, M. and Pinson, H. (2005). *The Education of Asylum-Seeker and Refugee Children*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

Asthana, A. (2007). Call to ban all school exams for under-16s. *Guardian*, 10 June 2007.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/jun/10/sats.schools> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Aston, J., Dewson, S. and Loukas, G. (2005). Post-16 Transitions: A Longitudinal Study of Young People with Special Educational Needs (Wave Three).

<http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/rr655.pdf> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Atkins, L. (2008). Travelling hopefully: an exploration of the limited possibilities for level 1 students in the English further education system. *Research in post-compulsory education*, 13 (2), 195–204.

Barnado's (2008). *Breaking the cycle*.

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/breaking_the_cycle_report_pdf (Accessed 13 May 2009)

BBC News (Tuesday, 14 October 2008). Tests scrapped for 14-year-olds.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7669254.stm> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Bhavnani, R. (2006). *Ahead of the game: the changing aspirations of young ethnic minority women*. Manchester: EOC

Bhopal, K. (2004). Gypsy Travellers and education: changing needs and changing perceptions. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 52 (1), 18–64.

Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A., Webster, R., Babayigit, S. and Haywood, N. (2008). *Deployment and Impact of Support Staff in Schools and the Impact of the National Agreement*. London: DCSF.

Brook, A. (2008). Raising education achievement and breaking the cycle of inequality in the United Kingdom. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

[http://www.oalis.oecd.org/oalis/2008doc.nsf/LinkTo/NT00003792/\\$FILE/JT03249755.PDF](http://www.oalis.oecd.org/oalis/2008doc.nsf/LinkTo/NT00003792/$FILE/JT03249755.PDF) (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Brooks, R. (2004). 'My mum would be as pleased as punch if I actually went, but my dad seems a bit more particular about it': parental involvement in young people's higher education choices. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30 (4), 495–514.

Burchardt, T. (2004). Aiming high: The educational and occupational aspirations of young disabled people. *Support for learning*, 19 (4), 6–186.

Callender, C. (1999). *The hardship of learning*. London: FEFC.

Cassen, R. and Kingdon, G. (2007). 'Tackling low educational achievement'. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/2063-education-schools-achievement.pdf> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Cassidy, S. (2008). Our children tested to destruction. *The Independent*, 8 September 2008.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/our-children-tested-to-destruction-779790.html>

(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M., Burnett, S., Matthews, Z. and Whitwell, C. (2009). *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*. London: Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Colley, H. (2003). Engagement Mentoring for 'disaffected' youth: a new model of mentoring for social inclusion. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29 (4), 521–542.

Colley, H. (2006). Mentoring for young people not in education, employment or training: a 'NEET' solution, but to whose problems? Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training Working Paper 36.

<http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents121-1.pdf> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Curtis, P. (2008). White working class boys among worst achievers.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/dec/11/white-working-class-boys>
(Accessed 13 May 2009)

DCSF (2008a). *The Children's plan one year on. A progress report*

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/oneyearon/ae/uploads/documents/progress.pdf>
(Accessed 13 May 2009)

DCSF (2008b). *Statistical Bulletin Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 16 year olds.*

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000795/YCS_LSYPE_Bulletin_final.pdf
(Accessed 13 May 2009)

DIUS (2008). *Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) 2008 Update.*

<http://www.dius.gov.uk/~media/publications/F/FYPSEC%20paper%202008>
(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Doyle, L. and McCorrison, M. (2008). Beyond the school gates: supporting refugees and asylum seekers in secondary school. British Refugee Council.

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/researchreports/inclusiveschools_may08.pdf (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Dweck, C.S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. *American psychologist*, 41 (10), 1040–1048.

EPPI-Centre (2007). What are the factors that drive high post-16 participation of many minority ethnic groups, and what strategies are effective in encouraging participation?

<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=HWrnRePBMpk%3d&tabid=2302&mid=4252&language=en-US> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Ellis, V. and High, S. (2004). Something more to tell you: gay, lesbian or bisexual young people's experiences of secondary schooling. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30 (2), 213–225.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (March 2009). *EHRC Young Peoples' Voices Survey Results Draft Report*. London: EHRC.

Evans, J., Meyer, D., Pinney, A. and Robinson, B. (2009). Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training. Barnardo's. http://www.barnardos.org.uk/10942_2nd_chances_report.pdf (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Fletcher, M. (2002). *Loans for lifelong learning*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2003). Access to Higher Education and Disadvantaged Young People. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29 (2), 205–225.

Foskett, N. (2004). IAG (information, Advice and Guidance) of Young People's Participation Decisions 14–19. Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training, Working Paper 25.

Foskett, N., Dyke, M. and Maringe, F. (2008). The influence of the school in the decision to participate in learning post-16. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34 (1), 37–61.

Francis, B. (2002). Is the future really female? The impact and implications of gender for 14–16 year olds' career choices. *Journal of Education and Work*, 15 (1), 75–88.

Francis, B., Osgood, J., Dalgety, J. and Archer, L. (2005) *Gender equality in work experience placements for young people*. Manchester: EOC.

Fuller, A. and Paton, K. (2007). 'Barriers' to participation in higher education?: Depends on who you ask and how. http://www.education.soton.ac.uk/files/projects/nphe/Working_Paper_8.pdf (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Galindo-Rueda, F., Marcenaro-Gutierrez, O. and Vignoles, A. (2004). 'The Widening Socio-economic Gap in UK Higher Education', London School of Economics, Centre for the Economics of Education.

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/pressAndInformationOffice/PDF/HigherEducationPaperJuneAmended.pdf> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Gottfredson, L. S. (2002) 'Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise, and self creation' in Brown, D. (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp 85–148). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Grew, T. (2008). Stonewall speaks out about bullying after teen suicide. <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-6529.html> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Hall, D. and Raffo, C. (2004). Re-engaging 14–16 year olds with their schooling through work-related learning. *Journal of Education and Training*, 56 (1), 69–79.

Hallam, S., Rogers, L., Rhamie, J., Shaw, J., Rees, E., Haskins, H., Blackmore, J. and Hallam, J. (2007) Pupils' perceptions of an alternative curriculum: Skill Force. *Research Papers in Education*, 22, (1), 43–63.

Halsall, R., Harrison, I. and Owen, R. (1998). Flexible learning: the needs and perceptions of young people. *Journal of Education and Work*: 11 (1), 57–75.

Hayward, G., Wilde, S. and Williams, R. (2008). Rathbone/Nuffield Review Engaging youth enquiry. <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents196-1.pdf> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Herbert, A. and Callender, C. (1997). *The funding lottery*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Hillage, J. and Aston, J. (2001). *Attracting new learners: a literature review*. Sussex University, Brighton (England). Institute of Employment Studies: 78.

Hillage, J., Johnson, C., Newton, B., Maguire, S., Tanner, E. and Purdon, S. (2008). Activity Agreements Evaluation: Synthesis Report. London: DCSF.

Hodkinson, P. and Bloomer, M. (1999). *College Life: The voice of the Learner*. London: FEDA.

Hodkinson, P. and Bloomer, M. (2001). Dropping out of FE: Complex causes and simplistic policy assumptions. *Research papers in education*, 16 (2), 117–140.

Hunt, R. and Jensen, J. (2007). *The experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools*. Stonewall.

http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/school_report.pdf (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Jackson, C. (2003). Motives for 'laddishness' at school: fear of failure and fear of the 'feminine'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29 (4), 583–598.

Jackson, G. and Hudson, A. (2009) *Engaging all young people in meaningful learning after 16: a survey*. Manchester: EHRC

Jankowska, M. and Atlay, M. (2008). Use of Creative Space in Enhancing Students' Engagement. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 45 (3), 9–279.

Keep, E. (2004). The multiple dimensions of performance – performance as defined by whom, measured in what ways, to what ends? Nuffield Review Working Paper.

www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Kiddle, C. (1999). *Traveller children – a voice for themselves*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Knowles, J. (1997). The influence of socio-economic status on aspirations to enter higher education – School pupils' awareness, understanding and expectations of higher education.

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000350.htm> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Lamb, S., Dwyer, P. and Wyn, J. (2000). *Non-completion of schools in Australia: The changing patterns of participation and outcomes*. Research Report, Australian Council for Educational Research, Victoria: 79.

http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/93/cc.pdf (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Learning and Skills Council (2005). *Through Inclusion to Excellence*. London: Learning and Skills Council.

Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) (2003). *Learner Motivation and Barriers to Participation in Post-16 Learning*. London: LSDA.

Levinson, M. and Sparkes, A. Conflicting value system: Gypsy females and home-school interface. *Research Papers in Education*, 21 (1), 79–97.

MacBeath, J., Frost, D. and Pedder, D. (2008). *The Influence and Participation of Children in the Young People in their Learning project*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.

Marczak, M., Dworkin, J., Skuza, J. and Beyer, J. (2006). 'What's up? What young teens and parents want from youth programs.' *New Directions for Youth Development* 2006 (112): 12–56.

McGivney, V. (2001). *Fixing or changing the pattern? Reflections on adult learning*. London: NIACE.

McIntosh, S. and Houghton, N. (2005). *Disengagement from secondary education: a story retold*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

<https://www.lseducation.org.uk/user/order.aspx?code=052229&src=XOWEB>

(Accessed on 13 May 2009)

Mencap (2007). *Disablist bullying is wrecking children's lives says Mencap*.

<http://www.mencap.org.uk/news.asp?id=2355> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Merton, B. (1997). Still disaffected after all these years. *Adults Learning England*, 8 (6), 153–155.

Morris, M. and Rutt, S. (2005). Evaluation of Aimhigher: excellence challenge – aspirations to higher education. One year on (DCSF research report no 651).

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR651.pdf> (Accessed 13

May 2009)

Newburn, T. and Shiner, M. (2005) *Dealing with Disaffection: young people, mentoring and social inclusion*. Devon: Willan Publishing.

Newman, K.S. (1999). *No shame in my game: The working poor in the Inner City*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf and the Russell Sage Foundation.

Owen, R., Thomas, A. and Joyce, L. (2008). *Engaging parents in their children's learning*. London: General Teaching Council for England.

Parle, L., Sampy, R. and Strudwick, E. (2008). *Homophobic bullying at school: young people speak out*.

<http://www.nooutsiders.sunderland.ac.uk/research/Homophobic%20bullying%20in%20schools,%20young%20people%20speak%20out.pdf/view> (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Pintrich, P. (1999). The role of motivation in promoting and sustaining self-regulated learning. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 31 (6), 459–470.

Putnam, R.D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65–78.

Quinn, J., Lawy, R. and Diment, K. (2008). Young people in jobs without training in south west England: Not just 'dead-end kids in dead-end jobs'. www.swslim.org.uk/downloads/2565.pdf (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Ramsey, P. and William, L. (2003). *Multicultural Education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Ravet, J. (2008). *Are We Listening?: Making Sense of Classroom Behaviour with Pupils and Parents*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books Ltd.

Reay, D. and Wiliam, D. (1999). 'I'll be a nothing': structure, agency and the construction of identity through assessment. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35 (3), 343–354.

Row, K. (2003). *The Importance of Teacher Quality as a Key Determinant of Students' Experiences and Outcomes of Schooling*
http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/Rowe_ACER_Research_Conf_2003_Paper.pdf
(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Shepherd, J. (2008). Park life.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/feb/19/schools.uk>
(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Shepherd, J. (2009). Clever boys dumb down to avoid bullying in school.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/mar/29/education-schools-bullying>
(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Slack, K. (2003). Whose aspirations are they anyway? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 7 (4), 325–335.

Smith, E. (2004). Learning to learn through work? The importance of Australian apprenticeship and traineeship policies in young workers learning careers. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 31 (1), 15–35.

Social Exclusion Task Force. Communities and Local Government, DCSF and Cabinet Office (December 2008). Aspirations and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities.

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/109339/aspirations_evidence_pack.pdf

(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Spielhofer, T., Benton, T., Evans, K., Featherstone, G., Golden, S., Nelson, J. and Paula Smith, P. (2009). *Increasing Participation: Understanding Young People who do not Participate in Education or Training at 16 and 17*. London: DCSF and National Foundation for Educational Research.

<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR072.pdf>

(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Stone, V., Cotton, D. and Thomas, A. (2000) *Mapping Troubled Lives: Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training* (DfEE Research brief 181) London: DfEE.

Stonewall. <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/>. (Accessed 13 May 2009)

Strand, S. (2007). 'Minority ethnic pupils in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England'. DfES Research Report.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR002.pdf>

(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Strand, S. (2008). 'Minority ethnic pupils in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: Extension report on performance in public examinations at age 16'. DCSF Research Report RR-029.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR029.pdf>

(Accessed 13 May 2009)

Thompson, R. (2009). Social class and participation in further education: evidence from the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30 (1), 29–42.

Tiffany, G. (2007). *Reconnecting Detached Youth Work: Guidelines and Standards for Excellence*. Leicester: Federation for Detached Youth Work.

Tremblay, P.F. and Gardner, R.C. (1995). Expanding the motivation construct in language learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79 (4), 505–520.

Tunnard, J., Barnes, T. and Flood, S. (2008). *One in ten – key messages from policy, research and practice about young people who are NEET*. Totnes: Research in Practice.

Valentine, G., Wood, N. and Plummer, P. (2009). *The experience of lesbian, gay bisexual and trans staff and students in higher education*. London: Equality Challenge Unit.

Walker, S. and Faraday, S. (2008). *A review of blind and partially sighted young people who are not in education, employment or training*. London: Royal National Institute of the Blind.

Winn, S. and Hay, I. (2009). Transition from school for youths with a disability: issues and challenges. *Disability and Society*, 24 (1), 103–115.

Endnotes

ⁱ The September Guarantee is defined as ‘the guarantee of the offer of a suitable place in post-16 learning to all young people leaving Year 11. From September 2008 we are extending the September Guarantee to 17 year olds so that young people who have been on a short course, or have dropped out during Year 12, have a change to re-engage in learning. The September Guarantee is a key part of the overall 14–19 strategy and supports the delivery of the NEET target’.

(www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthmatters/connexions/neet)

ⁱⁱ ‘From April 2009 the National Apprenticeship Service will assume end-to-end responsibility for the delivery of Apprenticeships. It will have ultimate accountability for the national delivery of targets, co-ordination of the funding for Apprenticeship places, assessment of providers of Apprenticeships, co-ordinating and leading a national marketing and information service, establishing and maintaining a national matching service for employers and would-be apprentices, ownership of the Apprenticeships blueprint, and development of a model Apprenticeship agreement. In addition it will have responsibility for the administration of the Apprenticeship “credit” initiative and management of a task force initiative to overcome particular barriers to the growth of the programme, along with responsibility for promoting Apprenticeships and their value to employers, learners and the country as a whole.’

(<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/Partners/Partners-FAQs/FAQDetails1.aspx>)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2008-09/apprenticeshipsskillschildrenandlearning.html>

^{iv} Unpublished report by Barnardo’s.

^v The term ‘questioning’ was sometimes used during the interview to describe young people who may be asking questions about their sexual orientation but who at this stage do not identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered.

^{vi} and

^{vii} Changes in the funding of further and adult education, including the funding of ESOL has had an impact on refugees and asylum seekers. Since 2005, two million places have been lost from further and adult education. Among those who have lost out are refugees and asylum seekers who are no longer entitled to free English language classes.

^{viii} In Control was formed in 2003 to reform the existing social care system in England and to define and develop the concept of Self-Directed Support. The partnerships mission is to help create a new welfare system in which everyone is in control of their lives as full citizens.

<http://www.in-control.org.uk/site/INCO/Templates/Home.aspx?pageid=1&cc=GB>

^{ix} More than one Run was a recent YWCA campaign to encourage girls to try trades like carpentry, plumbing, mechanics, bricklaying and decorating, and to realise that the earning potential of these roles is higher than traditional feminine roles. YWCA wanted girls to have the opportunity to consider what they wanted to do based on a wider experience of options.

^x The September Guarantee is defined as ‘the guarantee of the offer of a suitable place in post-16 learning to all young people leaving Year 11. From September 2008 we are extending the September Guarantee to 17 year olds so that young people who have been on a short course, or have dropped out during Year 12, have a change to re-engage in learning. The September Guarantee is a key part of the overall 14–19 strategy and supports the delivery of the NEET target’.
(www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthmatters/connexions/neet)

^{xi} <http://www.cegnet.co.uk/site/cegnet/home>

Contact us

You can find out more or get in touch with us via our website at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com

or by contacting one of our helplines below:

Helpline - England

Telephone: 0845 604 6610

Textphone: 0845 604 6620

Fax: 0845 604 6630

Helpline - Scotland

Telephone: 0845 604 5510

Textphone: 0845 604 5520

Fax: 0845 604 5530

Helpline - Wales

Telephone: 0845 604 8810

Textphone: 0845 604 8820

Fax: 0845 604 8830

9am–5pm Monday to Friday except Wednesday 9am–8pm.

Calls from BT landlines are charged at local rates, but calls from mobiles and other providers may vary.

Calls may be monitored for training and quality purposes.

Interpreting service available through Language Line, when you call our helplines.

This report is available for downloading from our website.

If you require it in an alternative format and/or language please contact the relevant helpline to discuss your needs.

This report is based on a literature review and series of key stakeholder interviews, analysing the factors that influence young people to remain engaged in or to disengage from learning.

WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN ON THIS TOPIC

- The literature refers overwhelmingly to young people overall with a growing or training (NEET). There is very little quantitative evidence on young people's perspectives relevant to engagement in learning after 16.
- Young people with learning difficulties, disabilities and teenage mothers are disproportionately likely to be NEET.

WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS

This is the first review that includes evidence on all groups of young people, including young people who are: from ethnic minorities, disabled, refugees, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), young mothers, NEET and from diverse religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

- Young people face a range of personal, institutional and situational barriers to participating and remaining engaged in learning post 16. How they interact is complex. Some groups of young people, like those who are persistently NEET, are more likely to face multiple risks and barriers.
- Engagement is not a simple choice for all young people. Young people can feel disengaged from learning for various reasons, and this can be mild or severe. Some young people experience a gradual process of disengagement that becomes entrenched.
- The primary personal barriers appear to be motivation to learn, developing an ingrained sense of failure, poor reading skills, unrealistic perceptions of futures and making a positive choice to follow an alternative route.
- The primary institutional barriers appear to be insufficient funding on offer, irrelevant curriculum provision, over testing, insufficient ESOL provision, inadequate information advice and guidance, and bullying.
- The primary situational barriers appear to be living in a deprived geo-demographic area, coming from a lower socio-economic group and experiencing home or community cultures and values that conflict with those in schools.
- Policy-related solutions include financing for learning; institutional solutions include flexibility in learning provision, and situational solutions include supportive families and teachers. At the heart of these solutions is the overriding need to communicate with young people, to listen to them and to value them as individuals. Equally, it is important to focus upon the achievements of young people and how they can make progress.